



# SAAPE response to the UN Secretary General's Synthesis Report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

The Synthesis Report prepared by the UN Secretary General on the Post-2015 Agenda was published on 4th December 2014. It has regrouped the 17 goals into six different elements: People, Planet, Partnership, Prosperity, Dignity and Justice.

The Synthesis document is part of a process SAAPE has been involved in and the present document released by the Secretary General reflects the contributions of many concerned and committed civil society actors. We look forward to working with all actors involved in serious transformational social changes. However, the document contains many repetitions, which need to be trimmed. There are also some erroneous statements, which can be empirically challenged; and it is important that, platitudes notwithstanding, this document needs to be serious about stating the problems without fear or favour, e.g., on conflicts having reduced in the world. The UN today stands at the crossroads of being an international institutional space for fostering global justice, reminding all member states of their obligations to humanity at large and at home, and being the moral compass that sets the debate and the content of social change. The partnerships built with national governments and civil society actors require vigilance and at the same time faith that we will all aim for the highest good for the world's poor and disenfranchised.

There has been a failure of the UN on several fronts and we as SAAPE members from South Asia call for the moral stature of the UN for dignity, peace, equality to be restored with integrity and a zero tolerance for self- interested manoeuvres. There are serious crises marking the beginning of the 21st century. We must either decide collectively to place our resources and energies in noble development goals and act on them or else agree to face failures at a large number of levels because we do not act on transforming these precepts into practice.

According to the report, poverty, injustices and fundamentalism are rapidly decreasing since 1990, but in one or another form poverty is increasing, injustice is widespread and religious fundamentalism is increasing globally after Sept. 9/11. Financing for human development has been drastically reduced while there has been an increase in financing for military activities globally. South Asia has not been exempt from these trends. While the overarching objective of the Post-2015 agenda is to eradicate poverty, it is essential to think of poverty outside of income paucity. Since poverty can be induced by economic as well as the social aspects of the society, poverty needs to be viewed as a multifaceted subject. Similarly, it is increasingly important to attend to the gender dimension of poverty. South Asia has a large number of small farmers and climate change is affecting them intensely. Rural to urban migration is huge. About 44 per cent of the total population of the region lives in poverty. Even those who are considered to be middle class are in the danger of falling back into poverty.

Discrimination and economic inequality is largely ignored in the report although the rights based approach is emphasised. Further development should address the issues of underlying inequality.

'Development and growth' have been perceived and projected as a progressive, altruistic and peaceful amelioration of the conditions of people's lives. However, in concrete history they have suffered from increasingly violent contestations for power: The development of a few has been accompanied by the victory of the dominant perception that economic growth is a more worthy goal than substantive equitable access to well- beingness. Focus should be given on development justice, which primarily

interrogates growing inequalities of wealth, of power, of resources, and of opportunities that exist between countries, between rich and poor, and between men and women.

The “No one is left behind concept” can be further developed by underscoring that : marginalised girls should be focused on, their realities should be understood, and their sexual as well as reproductive rights should be safeguarded. Dalits are equally vulnerable and should not be left behind. The dominant development paradigm per se has failed to safeguard the human rights, needs, interests and well-being of “ the most in need” – Dalits, women, peasants, workers, different minority groups, etc. In South Asia we have socio-cultural structures and practices to exploit labour through demeaning means of the caste system such as exploiting the labour of Dalits who have become caste-slaves. This issue has to be addressed as it is of vital importance to end inequality and discrimination.

Poverty, hunger, water, sanitation, education, healthcare etc. require state intervention and active state policies’ with execution-ability and state capability.

Nation states and international regimes should be blamed for the devastating effects of conflict and violence that is part of certain types of development models and anti-people- centred development.

It is extremely important to regulate the distribution of wealth, especially in developing countries to bridge the widening gap between the rich and the poor. It is extremely important to regulate the economic behaviour of wealthy nations and their transnational companies, which have no respect for the internal domestic regulatory policies of so many poorer countries. The economic recession of the 2008 and the collapse of several financial institutions should not be forgotten.

Participation and aspirations of working class, women in poverty and discrimination, and other excluded social groups (who form the vast majority of the world population) are still in question. How they own the new development agenda has not come out in this report. Unequal social relations are no by-products of wealth accumulation. Indeed worldwide there is a silent crackdown on people’s unions which work for the economic, social and political liberty of their citizens.

*We welcome some of the points from the report, which are as follows:*

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“To achieve these ends, all have called for a transformational and universal post-2015 agenda, buttressed by science and evidence, and built on the principles of human rights and the rule of law, equality and sustainability.

All voices have demanded that we leave no one behind, ensuring equality, non- discrimination, equity and inclusion at all levels. We must pay special attention to the people, groups and countries most in need. This is the century of women: we will not realise our full potential if half of humanity continues to be held back. We also need to include the poor, children, adolescents, youth, and the aged, as well as the unemployed, rural populations, slum dwellers, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees and displaced persons, vulnerable groups and minorities. These also include those affected by climate change, those living in LDCs, landlocked countries, small- island developing states, middle-income countries, conflict countries or in areas under occupation, in places struck by complex medical and humanitarian emergencies or in situations affected by terrorism. And they have called for an end to all forms of gender inequality, gender-based discrimination, and violence against women, children and young boys and girls.

As we implement the new agenda, we must:

- commit to a universal approach, and with solutions that address all countries and all groups;
- integrate sustainability in all activities, mindful of economic, environmental and social impacts;

- address inequalities in all areas, agreeing that no goal or target be considered met unless met for all social and economic groups;
- ensure that all actions respect and advance human rights, in full coherence with international standards;
- address the drivers of climate change and its consequences;
- base our analysis in credible data and evidence, enhancing data capacity, availability, disaggregation, literacy and sharing;
- expand our global partnership for means of implementation to maximum effect, and full participation, including multi-stakeholder, issue-based coalitions; and
- anchor the new compact in a renewed commitment to international solidarity, commensurate with the ability of each country to contribute.

The integration of six essential elements provides the basis for economic models that benefit people and the environment; for environmental solutions that contribute to progress; for social approaches that add to economic dynamism and allow for the preservation and sustainable use of the environmental common; and for reinforcing human rights, equality, and sustainability. Responding to all goals as a cohesive and integrated whole will be critical to ensuring the transformations needed at scale.”

*Below are some of the points from the report that caught our attention:*

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## **Chapter 1: A Universal Call to Action to Transform our World beyond 2015**

### **Para 4**

It is important to qualify the word ‘transformation’ each time it is used. We recommend that “equitable, social transformation” be used every time we use the term “transformation.” Many transformations that have happened have been anti-people. The language we use must reflect the political aspirations of all those who have been denied equitable development. We want change that leads to sustainable and inclusive development. Changes in our societies....must include change in the management of our economies leading to fair, equitable economic changes and a socially just society. Change in our relationships with our one and only planet must lead to a world of respect and dignity for the common resources which must not be further privatised.

### **Para 8**

The report claims that the violence has been reduced, which is absolutely untrue. The data shows that the numbers of people killed in state-led violence against countries and within countries are huge. Many parts of the world today are in stages of extreme violence—the reasons include structurally further created poverty, war, violence against women, and the savage conquest of natural resources belonging to forest dwellers etc.

Life expectancy has increased but special MENTION NEEDS TO BE MADE OF THE SILENT GENOCIDE FACED BY WOMEN. Female foeticide alone leads to one million missing women worldwide with China and India leading the rise of risk for women.

### **Para 10**

We appreciate the cautionary comments made which remind all of the unfinished tasks and also the negations of certain models of just development that have been used so far by governments in violation of ratified UN agreements.

### **Para 23**

Regarding transformative agenda, this section should include,

1. Regulatory mechanisms in trade, finance and human development investments that will contribute to sustainable development and the eradication of poverty.
2. Protection of labour rights which are being eroded with greater privatisation by national economies.
3. Eradication of child labour worldwide
4. Food sovereignty and security for all.
5. Prevention of global surveillance by US agencies –strict protocol is required as it compromises on the freedom of the individual and national interests.

### **Para 24**

Mechanisms need to be put in place to enable all national governments to provide resources for local and country level meetings for citizens to place their demands and provide larger civil society responses.

### **Para 25**

UN SG's call for dignity should be specific and mention a comprehensive agenda - economic, social and political dignity of the people.

### **Para 26, 27, 29**

The historical responsibility should be mentioned and implemented. All unfinished agendas need to be placed on a war footing and followed up. The UN and member states need to be committed to the agreements mentioned thereof.

## **Chapter 2: A Synthesis**

### **Para 30**

The use of the term "aging population" is not accurate for all national profiles where some of the countries such as India has a pool of the world's largest demographically youngest set of people.

Increasing urban population has caused rural immiseration given the lowering of investments in agriculture and increasing focus on service sector by many Asian economies leading also to further hunger among the rural peasantry. This entire section omits the realities of these changes and their implications for the poor.

Plant closures, retrenchment and unemployment have resulted in millions of job losses. Subsidy cuts, and mounting debts mark south Asian economies. The growing 'casualisation' and feminisation of labour and an increasing differential between regular and casual wage rates have aggravated the conditions of distress migrations. The report assumes that rapid urbanisation is healthier and progressive. And this is not a solution in South Asia where rural poor outnumber urban poor and investments for food self-sufficiency have considerably declined.

### **Para 31**

Too many incentives have been given to the private sector with no returns for the poor.

The section of Para 31, again provides a ruling elite point of view. The inequality gap has never been more. Even the OECD has revised its policies regarding economic growth being an indicator of social development. They have renounced their faith in the trickle-down theory. This affirmation in globalisation is a fallacious statement and needs to be removed.

### **Para 32**

Again this line (We have already begun to correct our course towards transformation) is doubtful and more a faith expressed rather than scientifically vindicated. **We call for its deletion.**

### **Para 36**

The link between peace, development and human rights should have special focus on gender justice.

### **Para 37 (C)**

This section of Para 37 is important because it is critical for guaranteeing a secular development model to be in place. With the world getting more divided because of religious fundamentalism, caste, genders and ethnicity discrimination we must underscore the role of science and reason along with Rule of Law and Constitutionalist approaches to social problems.

### **Para 40**

We are wary of transfer of environmentally sound technologies from developed countries to developing countries. We worry that without a stringent regulation, developing countries may become sites for dumping unwanted technologies.

The widening gap between the rich and poor is the outcome of economic development policies as it promotes the technological innovation, but the technologies are not value neutral. The technological innovation is driven by the neo-liberal economic policies, which is not poor and marginalised sensitive. Skills and information are not only the root causes of the problems, the exclusionary model of development is the major problem we face in our time.

### **Para 47**

The UN needs to be sceptical of data provided by member nations of MDGs as they tend to exaggerate the situation. There are many instances where the government data are not reflective of the ground reality. There were discrepancies between data provided by the governments and other agencies and Activists.

### **Para 48**

While the report rigorously mentions plans of action for the poor, but the rich are seldom mentioned in the report. In order to achieve an equitable development, the wealthiest population needs to be held accountable and responsible as well.

### **Para 49**

This Para should be reiterated at the beginning of this document and concluded with the same. It reinforces the normative grids on which an equal and sustainable world may be built.

### **Para 53**

Common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) has focused only on climate change but it should be a condition for development as well.

## **Chapter 3: Framing the New Agenda**

### **Para 60**

The 17 goals are well thought out. However the following goals may be added

- Ensure total access to quality education and quality health care for all
- Another goal may make reference to the right of all cultures to thrive and to exist.

### **3.2 Transformational approach should be equitable and socially responsible**

**3.3 The six elements need to be reworded. They are amorphous platitudes and do not reflect the political goal with equal access, equal utilisation and social justice rights.**

### **Para 68**

Climate refugee and their problems should be addressed.

### **Para 79**

We welcome the recognition of reconciliation, peace building and state building as critical elements for rebuilding societies that have undergone wars in recent time.

### **Para 83**

The report recognises the right to development explicitly. We welcome the inclusion of right to development, but entire elements of the right to development need to be highlighted and emphasized for better understanding of the concept. Most of the major international human rights instruments have been ratified by the national governments of South Asia, with few exceptions. However, the human rights situation is not improving in the region as expected. Even though the civil and political rights have been receiving prominence for some long, they are yet not enjoyed as expected. The Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) and right to development that concern most working class people are least attended, if any. Millions of people are reportedly violated of their ESCR, e.g., the right to adequate food, right to shelter, right to energy, right to information, right to development, right to education and health. They are also denied exercising their rights to informed participation and rights to live in a healthy environment. Perpetual poverty and hunger coupled with the impacts of climate change are feared the most serious human rights violations, which are either ignored or least attended.

## **Chapter 4: Mobilising the Means to Implement Our Agenda**

### **Para 91**

The report has indicated the importance of social protection mechanism but seldom speaks about responsible and accountable entity to strengthen the system.

### **Para 98**

We agree with the 0.7% target and the need to maintain the LDC countries investments.

#### **Para 104**

We appreciate the mention of responsible and accountable investment of private finance for sustainable development, but it is inadequate in terms of making private businesses accountable. Economic Environment Social and Governance (EESG) reporting alone are not sufficient.

While inclusive partnership is essential for long term sustainable development goals, we strongly believe that private actions should be aligned to public policies rather than aligning private action and public policies. For further development of Post-2015 agenda, a lucid guideline on partnership between private and public sector will be helpful.

#### **Para 117**

While the report reiterates the need to cut down the remittance transfer cost, 5 per cent transaction cost is still very high. It is confusing as the Open Working Group outcome document states that the cost should be reduced to 3 per cent.

#### **Para 119**

Excessive use of public resources for military expenditure is mentioned in the report. However, it lacks clear vision on a mandatory reduction of military expenditure and diverting it to public sector. The conduct of the Security Council members who also deal with arms sales may need mention here.

#### **Para 123**

A large part of the problem is massive and wasteful consumption habits by the North with no regulatory mechanisms in place.

#### **Para 126**

Regarding sharing of technologies developed countries should be willing to transfer technological know-how to developing countries. There is no level playing field at present. Similarly strengthening knowledge and capacity building for usage, some Open-access journals are free for readers, but they charge authors a publication fee - many of them waive publication charges for authors from developing countries. These have promoted the creation of a level playing field for knowledge sharing and knowledge transfers.

#### **Para 129**

We appreciate the mention of judiciary...in many countries judiciary has played a strong role in sustaining democracy and rule of law.

### **Chapter 5: Delivering Our Agenda: a Shared Responsibility**

#### **Para 149 (i)**

Regarding review process of individual country progress, it is imperative that the national structure is available and the methodology is agreed upon internationally for measure analysis. In India for instance, the Planning Commission ceases to be. What structure will replace it is unknown but autonomy is imperative for serious data analysis.

### **Para 151**

This is a weak section which reduces the UN to a subsidiary service sector delivery organization to a donor/corporate funder/government. What is a right-based institution for global governance doing with this vision?

### **Para 153**

The UN system should continue to pursue the development of more socially committed human development models and the implementation of modern operational practices to gain efficiencies and enhanced impact.

Social movements which have been successful in working with affected communities may be asked to join monitoring committees of the UN to give their advice and evaluate the success of the operations.

### **Para 154**

What do we mean by the adoption of business models in Development? The bureaucrats hired by the UN have failed to meet the social goals of the UN. High salaries have ensured that the UN commands an elite status, unable to understand or work with the disadvantaged.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion: Together in a Universal Compact**

### **Para 159**

We must change old mind-sets, behaviours, and destructive patterns so far exhibited repeatedly by the rich nations against the developing nations and the LDCs.

The UN must not be held hostage by the self-interested behaviour of many wealthy nations as has been the case during the last twenty years of rapid globalisation and the erosion of the UN's role in development and peace efforts.

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Without bringing effective changes in the socio-political spectrum by countervailing the harmful and unsustainable economic policies of globalization, privatization and liberalization responsible for perpetuating poverty, there will be no impact on the lives of poor and marginalized section of the society. It's basic premises are grounded on the reality that the present dominant top-down development paradigm lacking proper dialogue with, and participation of, the primary rights holders - the poor and marginalized - in policy, planning, and decision-making is a major obstacle to eradicate poverty. Moreover, the dominant global economic policy regime grounded on neo-liberalism led financialisation goes against the principle of inclusive and sustainable development blatantly trampling upon the basic human rights of peoples.

As a contribution to the alternative development paradigm, SAAPE publishes its Poverty and Vulnerability Report every 3 years since 2003 in which not only root causes of poverty and proven alternatives at the grassroots are presented but also pertinent issues linked to poverty eradication needing organized voices at the grass root people's level are also covered by the report. Available on our website ([www.saape.org](http://www.saape.org)).