ECOSOC Panel discussion

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"The UN Development Strategy for Transformative Change Beyond 2015",

Report of the 14th Session of the Committee for Development Policy

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Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to share with you the work of the Committee for

Development Policy (CDP). I am particularly pleased to present our findings and

conclusions on "International Development Strategy beyond 2015 - Time for a

Transformative Development Agenda" as this is on a topic that goes to the heart of

the work of the CDP – our "raison d'être". We debated it at length in this year's

session but in addition, in preparation for these discussions we engaged in a special

initiative to undertake research and reflection over the course of 2011 and early

2012. This involved a critical evaluation of recent development trends and the

experience of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It also involved a

rigorous analysis of the different policy alternatives based on a review of the

experience of countries that achieved major development advances, addressing a

wide range of social, economic, environmental and macroeconomic strategies

required to achieve growth with job creation, social equity and environmental

sustainability.   This study will result in a book entitled *Alternative Development Strategies for the Post-2015 Era* to be published later this year.

While the key findings and recommendations of the CDP are summarized in the Report of its 14th session (March 2012), I also refer you to a fuller account of our analysis in the CDP Policy Note available on the CDP website. Moreover, many of the chapters of the book I referred to are now available as DESA working papers.

In April this year, Professor Frances Stewart and I had the occasion to provide a preliminary briefing on our key recommendations. Today, after briefly recalling the main points, I would like to focus on three particular issues: why 'Transformative Agenda'; the challenges of equitable development; and how global goals may be used at national levels.

Key findings and recommendations

The United Nations Millennium Declaration embodied a global consensus on the need for globalization to be a positive force for all, and was a commitment based on ethical principles of solidarity, equality, dignity and respect for nature. The MDGs have been instrumental in galvanizing international attention and support to eradicating poverty as an urgent and compelling objective for the twenty-first century. It has forged consensus on development as an international priority along with peace and security, democracy and human rights. It has moreover focused

attention on people as the central aspect of development – its ultimate end and its major driver.

The CDP also identified a number of shortcomings with the MDGs. They are too narrow and left out many priorities that are particularly critical challenges today – notably employment and growth that creates decent jobs, climate change and environmental sustainability, instability in global markets, and equity and inclusion in development processes. They also excluded the critical aspects of an empowering agenda for equitable development that are central to the vision of the Millennium Declaration. The CDP also identified a number of controversies regarding the process by which they were developed which did not involve adequate participation of civil society and member governments, and the inconsistent methodology by which they were defined. There have been other controversies regarding the manner in which the goals have been used, such as whether they are global goals or should be applied at the national or regional levels, and how progress should be measured.

Concerning the post-2015 agenda, we do not propose a list of priority areas or goals but rather a set of principles that should guide their formulation. These principles are embodied in the Millennium Declaration and can be put to practice in development policies. They include:

- first, the multidimensional and human centered approach to development;
- second, sustainability;

- third, social justice and equality as an overarching consideration;

- fourth, human security, understood in the broad sense to minimize threats posed by economic shocks, violence, armed conflicts, natural disasters, health hazards and seasonal hunger; and

- fifth, participation in the process for establishing the post 2015 agenda and stronger accountability mechanisms in its implementation.

Why a 'transformative' development agenda

We call on a development agenda to be transformative because business as usual will not deliver on the vision of the Millennium Declaration. The MDGs set important goals and targets and much progress has been made. One problem is that progress has been uneven, but a more fundamental gap that we have identified is that the critical issues have been left out and did not stimulate new policy approaches. The MDGs have improved social investments but they have not led to major new thinking and new approaches – especially economic development strategies - to tackling inequality and exclusion, social justice, and sustainability that are at the heart of the vision of the Millennium Declaration. The implementation of the Millennium Declaration is seriously threated by global crises for which the current paradigm offers no response. The MDG framework forged consensus on poverty as an overall priority but did not foster or encourage new policy approaches and the economic policy approaches of the 1980s and 1990s have continued.   What innovation there has been has come from initiatives of individual countries. A coherent development model is required to ensure the achievement of a broad set of

human objectives while at the same time responding to the challenges that have

been afflicting the world economy, namely the need for increased food security,

financial stability, reduced inequality and environmental sustainability. This

requires identifying drivers that will simultaneously advance economic growth,

structural transformation, social development, human security and environmental

security.   Our work on alternative development strategies is an attempt to address

this question that examines economic and social policies including flexible

macroeconomic policies, proactive industrial policies for employment creation, and

technologies for reducing carbon emissions.

A transformative agenda is also called for in another sense, one that will address

fundamental and structural causes of poverty and other development challenges

and governance that is more participatory and accountable. In the global arena,

there is a need to reconsider the characteristics of global partnerships. Activities

that were formerly the exclusive responsibility of nation States must now be tackled

with increasingly international coordination involving not only states but a wider

range of stakeholders.

Equity and social justice

An important issue as we go forward is to ensure that the objective of social justice,

reducing inequality, and realization of human rights are adequately reflected in a

new framework and goals. This should be an overarching consideration for the

entire set of goals. This has been emphasized in the Outcome Document of the

recently held "Rio+20" conference and by the report of the UN Task Team. Not only

are these intrinsically valuable ends but disparities and exclusion can threaten

social peace and ultimately lead to a reversal of development progress. Business as

usual would lead to a continued rise in inequality and needs to be addressed

through rethinking strategies for growth that would create more employment,

social development that would expand human capabilities and freedoms, and

governance that enhances participation and accountability.

Despite this importance, equity and social justice are major gaps in the current list

of MDGs that refers only to gender equality in primary education. These objectives

are difficult to translate into global goals or to monitor by the use of quantitative

indicators. But there are possibilities. One way would be to ensure more consistent

application of human rights standards and norms. The human rights community

has been a source of a particularly pointed criticism of the MDGs. While many of the

MDGs overlap with economic and social rights, they do not reflect some core

principles such as the concern for the most vulnerable and the excluded, the

principles of equality and participation, and the standard of universalism. More

consistent application of human rights norms and principles would require giving

more priority to removing discrimination, achieving universal realization of rights,

and incorporating goals for participation as well as for civil and political rights.

Another way would be through explicit goals on reducing disparities across nations,

genders, social groups and individuals. The absence of an inequality goal has been

one of the persistent criticisms of the MDGs. It could be important not only to include disparity reduction in monitoring progress on goals in specific areas such as health or education, but to include reducing inequality as a goal in itself.

Global goals and national application

One of the most difficult issues with the global goals as a concept or a policy tool is accommodating the global and the national, the universal priorities and local contexts . The goals are set globally but must be implemented nationally, and a single goal must have meaning in a world of huge diversity in the challenges and opportunities that countries face and in the financial and technical capacity they command. The Millennium Declaration and the MDGs were ambiguous about whether the targets were meant to be achieved by each country and this has resulted in a number of controversies.

Global goals are set collectively and by definition are global targets. However, it makes little sense to apply this goal as a one size fits all planning targets for countries without adaptation to national realities. Failure to tailor goals to local conditions can distort priorities: a single goal would be under-ambitious in some countries while over-ambitious for others; some critical national priorities may be left out of global goals; while some less important challenges may be prioritized. They can undermine nationally driven processes; they can undermine demands by citizens as national governments seek to accommodate globally set priorities. Evaluating a country's performance by whether it is on track or off track to

achieving global goals is a treacherous exercise that could lead to misleading assessments of country performance, notably of LDCs. For example, because LDCs by definition start at low points, they have a long way to go in achieving the goals and being 'off track' to achieving the goals is only to be expected. Yet this gives the false impression of stagnation and poor performance when in fact, some of these countries have been improving progress. Indeed, the top performers identified by studies that assess rates of progress are consistently countries of Sub-Saharan Africa.

For all these reasons a consensus is needed on the concept: that global goals identify universal priorities and set specific targets to be achieved global level while countries should adapt the targets appropriate to their contexts. I would add that most previous international declarations that set goals made this clear and encouraged countries to follow up by setting their own nationally specific targets. Moreover, monitoring should focus not only on whether countries are 'on track' to meeting the goals but also on whether progress is being made, disparities are reduced and the poorest of the poor and the most vulnerable are improving their situations.

This leaves the question of how to apply global goals at national levels. This cannot be left open-ended. Moreover, this is not only a technocratic question for statisticians and economists but a process question. Development goals are social objectives that should reflect national consensus over what is important in the

country and result from a process of democratic consultations. In the same perspective, governments are responsible for these commitments to their citizens and accountability mechanisms should be strengthened to enable people to hold their own governments to the commitments made. While a number of approaches may be practical, the Committee suggests considering setting up national commissions to set country specific goals which would invite broad participation of stakeholders in the country. These commissions could also set up monitoring and other accountability processes.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, as we move forward to 2015, it is important to remember one general lesson of the MDGs. While they were powerful in galvanizing support for poverty eradication, the power of numbers has its downside. They communicate the urgency of development challenges in simple and concrete terms but in the process, they can lead to an over-simplification of the policy agenda and neglect important priorities. The vision of the Millennium Declaration can be lost in a short list of quantified goals.   What is important therefore is a consensus on key challenges and new transformative approaches to address the deeply entrenched obstacles. We also need global goals but these should be kept in place as benchmarks for monitoring progress.