

## Post-2015 Development Agenda: Reflections on Purpose, Means and Protagonists

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### NOTES

During this year's CIVICUS World Assembly, the Bahá'í International Community with the support of the Bahá'í Community of Canada brought together representatives of the UN and civil society organizations for an exploratory consultation about the vision of human prosperity, systems of community empowerment, processes of education, core values and principles, and the structure of global institutions. Facilitated by Ms. Kate Higgins of The North-South Institute, participants were invited to consider ways in which spiritual, moral, and ethical dimensions could be more consciously articulated in the post-2015 development agenda. A working paper initiated by the Bahá'í International Community's UN Office was offered to stimulate thinking about these issues.

In attendance were:

- Geoffrey Cameron, Bahá'í Community of Canada
- Ming Hwee Chong, Bahá'í International Community
- Cristina Diez Sagüillo, International Movement ATD Fourth World
- Bernadette Fischler, CAFOD
- Taina Hanhikoski, The Finnish NGDO Platform to the EU
- Kate Higgins, The North-South Institute
- Jeffery Huffines, CIVICUS
- Richard Morgan, UNICEF
- Amy Pollard, Beyond 2015
- Brian Pratt, INTRAC
- Julia Sánchez, Canadian Council for International Co-operation
- Samjhana Shrestha, Asian Development Bank
- Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Stakeholder Forum
- Andreaa-Loredana Tudorache, Trainer and Youth Work Consultant
- Farooq Ullah, Stakeholder Forum
- Iatamze Verulashvili, Women's Center
- Pauline Wanja, Living In a Shanty Town

In small groups, participants were asked to reflect on and discuss the following questions:

- What values and ideals were advanced by the Millennium Declaration?
- In our vision of development, how do we conceive of its “material” and “spiritual” aspects? How would you describe the relationship between the two?
- How do you understand the concept of ‘empowerment,’ its process and goal(s) – at both an individual and collective level?
- What is the role of “the generation, application and diffusion” of knowledge in a process of empowerment?
- The idea of “the oneness of humankind” is deceptively simple, but its implications are profound. How would the application of this principle transform relationships between individuals, communities, and states and institutions?

In plenary, participants discussed the following:

- The Millennium Declaration espoused ideals of freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility, but this vision was imperfectly captured in the Millennium Development Goals, which had a strong focus on aid and social progress. In the post-2015 period, how can we re-balance the discussion between important (but sometimes difficult-to-measure) principles and the recognized value of measurable goals and targets?
- Development outcomes are clearly important, but the processes by which communities achieve such outcomes also matter. How can we ensure that the post-2015 framework accommodates a vision of development whereby people “become protagonists in their own process of development”?
- The work of defining new development goals and translating those goals into viable initiatives will require moral courage, a spirit of cooperation and persistence. As socio-economic challenges and risks are increasingly globalized and collective, such an attitude and orientation is more important than ever. How can moral courage and a spirit of cooperation be nurtured in a time of economic uncertainty and changing geopolitical power shifts? What role can civil society play?

The following is a summary of the results of that conversation.

## **The Concept of Spirituality**

- The word ‘spiritual’ means different things to different people.
  - To some, it connotes moral values and the need to overcome social vices such as greed and corruption.
  - For some, it is synonymous with ‘human virtue,’ ‘higher capacity,’ ‘solidarity,’ ‘ethics,’ aspirations to be a better person.
  - For some, ‘spiritual’ connotes ‘normative’ standards. The latter encompass human rights, which provide the framework by which morals standards can be judged.
  - For those who come from a secular approach, the word ‘spiritual’ is problematic and seems unhelpful when engaging with those outside of religious communities.
  - It would be helpful to be explicit about the meaning of the term ‘spiritual.’
  - Regardless of the definition used, there is often a disconnect between ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ aspects of well-being in the P2015 process.
- For some, ‘moral courage’ is a more useful term.
  - Does civil society have moral courage? If not, how can it be raised at all levels?
  - Moral courage is often inspired by example.
  - Development work tends to be very intellectual, but moral courage is in fact a matter of the heart. Others will be inspired to the extent that it is manifested through the heart, as much as through the mind.
  - What incentives can be given to incline governments to be morally courageous?

## **The Role of Values**

- For many, values are closely tied to ideas of spirituality
  - Different cultures discuss values in different ways: Europeans tend to approach it philosophically; African talk about family, love and community; in the USA, the conversation quickly turns to money.
- As centres of geopolitical power shift, and Asia becomes more dominant, will values shift as well (e.g. individual vs. community, concepts of freedom, etc.)?
- Are some values more important than others? Should some take precedence over others?
  - How do universal values relate to a respect for diversity? How do universal values relate to universal human rights?
  - One possible yardstick for evaluating values is the degree they provide opportunities to make choices and interpret life the way an individual sees is valuable.
- Values are naturally inherited from family, community and culture, but education and maturation allow individuals to change their value systems. We can choose ideals different from the norms and prejudices we were raised with.
- Many values (freedom, democracy, etc.) can be measured, but such values can be a political sore spot, and therefore dangerous to measure. Civil society is therefore sometimes obliged to speak to inconvenient issues such as the dignity of humanity and the forces opposing it.

## **Power, Empowerment, and Participation**

- What does empowerment mean?
  - Ideas include: the possession of information about your life situation and means to change it in desired directions; the opportunity to have choices; autonomy; not being defined by parameters set by someone else; the freedom to take/hold one’s own view; the capacity for discovery, exploration and reflection.
- Empowerment can mean different things when considered within agricultural, industrial, or knowledge-based contexts.
  - What does empowerment mean when rural agriculturalists say empowerment to them means not having to farm anymore?

- Is donor aid inherently disempowering, reducing autonomy because a population relies on aid? If so, are people aware of these linkages?
- The issue of power is often avoided in discussions of empowerment. It will need to be addressed in assessing the impact of MDGs.
  - Detrimental power dynamics can distort conceptions of justice.
  - Hierarchies are an inherent part of human civilization. How can such hierarchies be built to reflect ideas of justice and equity?
- How does participation relate to empowerment? Should participation be compulsory? If you are not an active participant, are you still empowered? Is the emphasis more on responsibility, rather than participation?

### **Knowledge: What and Whose?**

- What is knowledge? What kind of (and whose) knowledge is considered valuable?
  - Indigenous knowledge is typically devalued and, often, not even considered as knowledge. The scientific community doesn't often acknowledge such knowledge.
  - Discussions about knowledge are often reduced to knowledge of technology.
  - There is a growing understanding that truth is contextual and relative, rather than absolute.

### **The Principle of the Oneness of Humanity**

- The oneness of humankind relies on a recognition of oneness in the planet.
  - The concept requires humans to stop viewing themselves as masters of nature. The planet is not something 'below' us that we control.
  - Oneness lies at the heart of sustainable development. Sustainability is not a cause for the environment, but rather a cause for fairness.
- Discussions would need to address the inherent tension between idea of the oneness of humanity and that of nation-state sovereignty.

### **Measurement, Indicators, and Accountability**

- Well known quote: "Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."
- Challenges regarding measurement may be a false dichotomy. Difficulties in measuring freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility can be as much about political inconvenience and reluctance as methodological challenges.
- Concepts of measurement are becoming more holistic and sophisticated. Ideas that were laughed at 10 years ago, such as the Happiness Index, now receive serious consideration.
- What is the difference/intersection between evaluation and quantification? What does non-quantitative evaluation look like?
- Much of the drive for measurement comes from pressure for accountability. How can accountability be assessed without counting and measuring?

### **Change Begins at Home**

- Development practitioners must practice in their personal lives the values they espouse in their professional lives. Otherwise they are fall prey to hypocrisy.
- Practitioners must guard against distinctions between "us" and "them," and remember that many of the faults to be found in "them" are also present in "us."
- Practitioners have a moral requirement to work to change their own home society, not just the regions of the world on which they focus professionally. They cannot forget the lessons they teach elsewhere when they return home. Their own community is where they can make the most difference.