



# Development Justice



*Overcoming poverty is not a task of charity; it is an act of justice.*  
— Nelson Mandela

## I. CALLING FOR A TRANSFORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The current development framework is not working. Despite numerous agreements and conventions which call for international coordination and solidarity to address global problems of poverty, environmental degradation and economic instability, these remain the critical unanswered problems of our time. The prevailing development policies are based on a neoliberal economic framework which emphasizes the importance of reducing the role of the state, liberalizing trade and

open markets and promoting the role of the private sector especially through foreign direct investment. The policies have been justified by the dominant world view of the past decades that wealth would trickle down to the poor and marginalised through higher economic growth. This has not been the case.

Instead, inequalities between countries, within countries and between men and women have increased. Globally, the incomes of the top 1% have increased 60% in twenty years.<sup>1</sup>

Humanity's ecological footprint now exceeds the planet's biocapacity by over 50%, and three of nine planetary boundaries that define the safe operating space for human life on Earth have been breached. Sustainable development priorities to tackle these challenges were enshrined in the Rio Declaration in 1992 and in subsequent follow up meetings but have been neglected as efforts focused on implementing economic liberalization to the detriment of environment and society.

In 2000, governments, emboldened by the potential of a new millennium adopted the Millennium Declaration. This aimed to frame a new vision for global development and 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDG)--drawn from the Millennium Declaration – were championed to guide development priorities. As the target date for the MDGs approaches, a public debate has emerged reflecting on progress needed to meet development goals and address the critical challenges that remain. There is still intense debate about what our aspirations should be when aiming for sustainable development and the path to achieve it.

Throughout the debate so far, there have been repeated calls from governments to multilateral institutions to civil society and academic world for a new and transformative development agenda – recognizing that the current development model is not fit for the purpose. It has failed to support equitable development between countries, peoples, men and women and we are failing to make any progress in stemming environmental degradation and pressing climate change. Several bodies have been expressly created to put forward recommendations for a new development agenda. Four major reports have been released and submitted to the UN Secretary General:

1. The High Level Panel on Post-2015 Report

2. The Global Compact Report

3. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network report

4. The UN Development Group Report

These all take a different approach based on their constituencies and drafting bodies in the recommendations that they make.

**A. The Report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on Post-2015 Development Agenda: A new Global Partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development<sup>2</sup>**

The UN High Level Panel on Post-2015 was comprised of 27 eminent persons from around the world who were tasked to prepare a report on critical challenges to development and to make recommendations to the UN Secretary General for a new development agenda.

The High Level Panel (HLP) Report put forward several concrete recommendations for a new development agenda including the need for recognition of human rights and the right to development as underlying principles to frame development; the recommendations that take us beyond the narrow MDG framework; and calls for accountability mechanisms and a 'data revolution' which would disaggregate data by gender, geography, income, and disability.

In line with the global mood for deep rooted changes in development policy, the HLP report identified five transformative shifts which are intended to achieve the 'transformative development agenda' that all actors are demanding.

These are:

1. **Leave no one behind** (in line with MDGs--end extreme poverty)

2. **Put sustainable development at the core** (integrate social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability – requiring structural change)

3. **Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth** (profound economic transformation to end poverty – diversify economies)

4. **Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions for all** (recognize peace and good governance as core elements for wellbeing)

5. **Forge a new global partnership** (most important transformative shift)

Although there is strong language -- the HLP Report calls for structural change and a profound economic transformation -- hopes have been unmet that the HLP report would take from the many consultations the need to really rethink how we approach development and adopt a transformative development agenda. While taking some hesitating steps towards this with the broad range of topics exceeding the MDGs, the list of 12 targets and goals still feel like the MDGs but a longer version with revamped targets. The HLP framework guides a vision for development limited to those already enumerated by Robert McNamara, President of the World Bank in 1973, who promised to eradicate absolute poverty before the end of the century through elimination of malnutrition, illiteracy, reduction of infant mortality and raising of life expectancy standards to those of developed nations.<sup>3</sup> 40 years later the same promises are being made. This illustrates not a real transformation in current development models but rather a further deepening of existing policies that are currently failing to meet people's needs.

**B. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network Report to the UN Secretary General: An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>4</sup>**

The SDSN report considered the need for four dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social, environmental and governance, including peace and security - to be addressed through a framework based on four normative concepts:

1. **The right to development** (all countries have a right to develop and enjoy the benefits of modern technologies and economic progress)

2. **Human rights and social justice** (all individuals must have equal opportunities and standing before law and access to public services)

3. **Convergence** (living standards of rich and poor countries must narrow substantially and the gap between the rich and poor countries should narrow)

4. **Shared responsibilities and opportunities** (all countries should share in promoting sustainable development which would mean supporting vulnerable Least Developed Countries)

With very positive elements, this framework does recognize the need to address inequalities between and within countries and the basic right of peoples to claim their own development. This framework also positions human rights and social justice as essential elements to achieve sustainable development. Environmental sustainability is a weak and missing element. While it is necessary to recognize shared responsibilities and opportunities for climate change and environmental degradation, it is also important to recognize historical responsibilities for climate change attributing different levels of responsibility accordingly. This framework also does not identify the roles of accountability and governance in bringing together the key objectives of sustainable development.

**C. Corporate Sustainability and the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda: Perspectives from the UN Global Impact Participants on Global Priorities and How to engage Business towards Sustainable Development Goals<sup>5</sup>**

The Global Compact report proposed the building of a new post-2015 agenda around four main issues:

1. **Poverty apex:** aiming to end extreme poverty through economic growth that is inclusive and equitable, jobs and access to credit
2. **Human needs and capacities:** progress to date must be continued to meet unmet challenges of MDGs
3. **The Resource triad:** pillars of sustainable development can be met through water and sanitation; energy and climate; agriculture and food.
4. **Enabling environment:** Good governance and respect for human rights and peace and stability are necessary factors for an enabling environment for business

The Global Compact's framework for development is very limited as it focuses on development as a business model within an economic framework only. Environmental sustainability is treated as managing finite resources without consideration of unsustainable and inequitable consumption and production, while governance is seen as ensuring greater and easier business operations. The entire framework supports a model of development for business which ignores the barriers and extreme challenges that the world is facing today.

**D. The United Nations Secretary General's Report: A Life of Dignity for All The key elements identified by the UNSG report:<sup>6</sup>**

1. **Universality to mobilize all developed and developing countries – leaving no one behind**
2. **Sustainable development to tackle interlinked challenges**
3. **Inclusive , economic transformation ensuring decent jobs**
4. **Peace and governance as key outcomes and enablers for development**
5. **A new global partnership recognizing shared interests and different needs and mutual responsibilities**
6. **Being fit for purpose to ensure that the international community is equipped with the right institutions.**

The UN SG report reiterates – with some new and stronger elements – the current model of development being adopted. Calls for universality expand the notion of sustainable development to include developed countries, which is in line with existing expectations given that climate change affects all countries. Sustainable development is at the core of all current discussions for a new development model, while the call for inclusive economic transformation maintains the current belief that perpetual economic growth is attainable and will ensure trickle down of wealth with some concessions for efforts to help some of those missing out. It reiterates and supports a new global partnership for development without clarifying how to ensure equitable partnerships among unequal actors.

The suggested frameworks each illustrate a particular perspective and focus in how to approach development. All the frameworks echo similar fundamental elements – calls for linking social, economic and environmental elements of development, good governance, making economic growth inclusive. The problem remains that while using ambitious language, none of the frameworks recognize development

as a matter of correcting injustice. None of the models for development address the unspoken knowledge that poverty and marginalization were not accidental but the result of poor programs and policies which have benefitted a tiny fraction of the population at the expense of the vast majority. And none of the current frameworks address the unfettered power of business to exploit society, environment and economy without being held to account. All the frameworks entail continuation of the same economic and social structures which are impediments to sustainable development.

Crucially, the main reports to date continue to view the impoverished and marginalized as passive recipients of development and subtly position business as the key catalyst for sustainable development.

The reports all recognize that the “business-as-usual” approach to development will no longer do, and that targets have to be more ambitious than those originally envisioned in the MDGs. But none dares to challenge the current neoliberal global economic model; in fact, the proposals reinforce it further. The overwhelming sense from these reports is that the new set of goals and targets will only be supplementing and improving on the MDGs, while nevertheless reaffirming the technocratic approach to development that emphasizes finance and technological solutions instead of redressing the disparities in wealth and power that is at the root of global underdevelopment, poverty, patriarchy, insecurity, inequality, and environmental ruin. The aim of inclusive growth, without challenging the neoliberal underpinning of that growth, implies extending the reach of the markets and corporate power over people, communities and ecosystems that are currently not yet fully integrated into the global capitalist system.

## II. A TRULY TRANSFORMATIVE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA MUST BE FRAMED BY DEVELOPMENT JUSTICE

In order to translate calls for a transformative and just development agenda into substance, there is a need for a comprehensive framework which will guide a common approach to concrete recommendations for change. This framework for change should address the pervasive injustice which features in our world today. Our futures are determined by the families and communities we are born into – the opportunities open to the children of the developed world are more than lottery luck but also the result of a long history of one-sided relationships which benefitted the developed world at the expense of the developing world. How can we call for equal opportunities without addressing these historical and very present injustices? Within states, a few enjoy the privileges and common wealth of the country at the expense of everyone else. Within communities, peoples’ rights and opportunities are curtailed on the basis of characteristics of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, age and mobility. We are racing towards (and breaching) planetary boundaries which are changing the landscape of the world as we know it and yet this is not a matter of population size but unfair distribution of resources. Competition for resources is being further encouraged by market-based ‘conservation programs.’ Hunger is persistent and pervasive even in food-exporting countries while obesity is becoming epidemic in many developed countries where food is wasted in excess. Calls for social change - including women’s empowerment - only scratch at the surface without looking at the ugly face of patriarchy and discrimination within ourselves.

People, communities, have a right to be engaged in decision making and accountability for sustainable development. We need to change how we look at development as a gift to be bestowed upon the poorest of the poor. We need to recognize the humanity

and dignity of all people and essentially their right to development – their right to determine their own development as individuals and as a community up to the international level. Long recognized social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights must finally be realized and protected. Development cannot be just nor sustainable if all human rights are not recognised, respected and realized.

We need to reconsider the system we live in and the world we want to live in. We all share one world and we need to reclaim development to make it work for each and every one of us. This is not a vague aspirational or optional choice – but an urgent necessity. We need to create a new system. Development justice provides a framework for development that considers people as the agents for change; a framework that recognizes past injustices in social, environmental and economic spheres which contribute to the current global situation; a framework which aims to substantively address the structural problems tying people down.

Development justice cements the principle of non-regression, and promotes a holistic, rights-based approach to development, and ensures that the human rights principles of right to development, equality, equity, non-discrimination and inclusive participation and decision making underpin all policies and practices. Such an approach ensures that the most marginalized can benefit from development and growth, and become active agents of change.

We can also look at different aspects or dimensions of development justice as redistributive justice, economic justice, climate or environmental justice, social justice, and accountability to the people.

**Redistributive justice** aims to redistribute resources, wealth, power and opportunities to all human beings equitably. The world economy, taken as a whole, has

## Box 1. The Five Foundational Shifts

**Redistributive Justice** aims to redistribute resources, wealth, power and opportunities to all human beings equitably. The new development agenda must dismantle existing systems that channel resources and wealth from developing countries to wealthy countries, also taking into consideration historical obligations of developed countries to developing countries.

**Economic Justice** aims to develop economies that enable dignified lives, accommodate for needs and facilitate capabilities, employment and livelihoods available to all, and is not based on exploitation of people or natural resources or environmental destruction.

**Social Justice** aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination, marginalization, exclusion that pervade our communities.

**Environmental Justice** recognizes the historical responsibility of countries and elites within countries whose production, consumption and extraction patterns have led to human rights violations, global warming and environmental disasters and compels them to alleviate and compensate those with the least culpability but who suffer the most: farmers, fishers, women and marginalized groups of the global south.

**Accountability to Peoples** to realize and protect peoples' demands for democratic and just governments. Transparency, and governance that enables people to make informed decisions over their own lives, communities and futures are prerequisites to realize a just development agenda.

already achieved a level of growth in past decades and a cumulative capacity to meet human needs several times over. What we now need is to institute equitable redistribution of incomes and productive assets and remove the structural barriers that have prevented this in the past.

Redistributive justice means, concretely, raising people's incomes to sufficient levels through decent and secure jobs for all, created because people need jobs and not because companies want to generate more profit; through appropriate livelihoods for communities, enabled by equitable access to land, resources and financing; through innovative, community-driven, and cooperative institutions in which people can exercise self-management; through the state and other institutions ensuring people's universal access to health, education, housing, mass transport, and other aspects of social protection. To adopt and implement such objectives and programs require, generally, a rethinking of state policies and functions vis-a-vis the currently predominant role of markets.

There must be a redistribution of wealth within countries to address the gross inequalities in many countries, ensuring that there is equitable and sustainable access to financial and natural resources between communities and realizing communities and peoples' controls over local and global commons. Prioritizing the development needs and goals of persons and communities most disenfranchised and abused by the hegemonic neoliberal global economic model, redistributive justice seeks to correct and reform the prevailing social setup that allows the obscenely rich but tiny sector to privately appropriate society's resources. Ownership, control and access of land, water and other resources including technology and knowledge must be democratized so that no one is denied the means and opportunity to live a life of dignity and no one has undue power over others because they own too much.

Laws and public policies ensuring that every person, regardless of class, gender orientation, race, ethnicity, religion or political affiliation have an equitable share of society's wealth should be implemented and observed. A progressive fiscal policy to fund universal social protection, public infrastructure and sustainable livelihoods has a crucial redistributive impact, ensuring that the wealthy contribute their fair share and that the poor and the vulnerable benefit from growth and development.

The new development justice agenda must dismantle existing systems that channel resources and wealth from developing countries to wealthy countries, also taking into consideration the historical obligation of developed countries to developing nations. The new development agenda must ensure international financial institutions and multilateral institutions are reformed to rebalance power and resources equitably between states.

**Economic justice** aims to develop economies that enable dignified lives, accommodate for needs and facilitate capabilities, employment and livelihoods available to all, provide opportunities for entrepreneurship democratically, and is not based on exploitation of people or natural resources or environmental destruction.

What we need is a new economic development paradigm that places people's interests at its core. Every person has a right to lead a life of dignity and respect. Economies should work for people, rather than compels people to work for economies. Production and consumption needs to be reoriented to meet social needs within planetary boundaries, not profits. There needs to be social regulation of the economy and markets to meet the demands of the poor. Indices should be able to capture whether or not growth fosters equitable distribution of wealth, well-being of individuals, human rights, and sustainability.

Entrepreneurship and markets are better harnessed for economic growth that truly meets the needs of a country and its people, if these are structured at scales that allow more people to participate in production not just through their labors, but in managing and coordinating production, distribution, and other economic activities. Thus, economic justice requires adoption of innovative programs and policies that encourage individual and cooperative micro-entrepreneurs, small- and medium-scale enterprises, and inclusive planning councils that involve civil society.

Economic justice also means that a country and its people be empowered to shape the economy to meet their comprehensive needs equitably, within the framework of sustainable development. This means achieving a balanced combination of industrial, agricultural, and service sectors of the economy, ensuring that production for urgent consumer needs is balanced with long-range social benefits, thus attaining a level of resilience against onslaughts of external crises and disasters. Again, this requires planning, implementation, and evaluation of development programs and projects with the full participation of civil society.

Current economic indicators used to measure economic progress and welfare have so far only measured monetary market transactions, but failed to take into consideration people's quality of life and overall wellbeing. Economic policies that have been promoted by governments focus exclusively on GNP/ GDP numbers, at the expense of people's democratic rights and needs. The wealth of the 1% has continued to grow even after the global financial crisis of 2008 while unemployment has soared.<sup>7</sup>

Neoliberal globalization has violently integrated diverse communities and histories from all over the world into a homogenous and hegemonic global

economic model that has only benefited the wealthy few. It has particularly impacted local and indigenous communities that have their own economic heritage and tradition. The principle of economic justice seeks to restore the sovereignty of local and indigenous communities in defining and determining the needs of their own population, respecting their economic rights.

**Social justice** aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination, marginalization, exclusion that pervade our communities. It recognizes the need to eliminate patriarchal systems, challenge existing social structures, deliver sexual and reproductive justice and guarantee the human rights of all peoples, particularly women, widows, discriminated castes, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees, children, youth, older persons, people living with disabilities, people living with HIV and other illnesses, sex workers, domestic workers and workers in the informal sector, and those excluded by caste, class, income, sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, or social status.

Violence and conflict are rooted in human insecurity and deprivations. Thus, peace and security are not simply the absence of war and conflict; they are the presence of justice and decency, both within and between countries. A human rights and developmental approach to security requires that we deal the sources of persistent threats of social inequality, gender, imperialism and race. Each person should enjoy a life free from discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. Everyone should be free to make their own life choices without the burden of social stigma. And yet this means changing how we act as communities – challenging patriarchy and prejudice within ourselves and addressing the structures which perpetuate these discriminations.

Communities should be free to enjoy their positive cultural, traditional, religious and



other distinguishing characteristics without fear. A new development agenda should strive to redress the current social injustices pervading our societies by breaking down laws, practices and norms which uphold the structures creating these prejudices.

At a global level, social justice depends on the end of military intervention and interference in other states. The right to self-determination of all peoples and respect of sovereignty for states are necessary to achieve sustainable development.

**Environmental justice** recognizes the historical responsibility of countries and elites within countries whose production, consumption and extraction patterns have led to human rights violations, global warming and environmental disasters and compels them to alleviate and compensate those with the least culpability but who suffer the most: farmers, fishers, women and marginalized groups of the global south.

Each person should enjoy the right to a healthy environment – access to clean water and sanitation, clean air, decent housing and safe and nutritious food. This can be achieved if we redistribute resources equitably so we can live within planetary boundaries and achieve sustainable consumption and production to meet all peoples' basic needs and rights to a healthy environment. Historical and present unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are depleting natural resources and polluting our world. The current mechanisms being promoted to protect the environment are only serving to further drive exploitation as market based mechanisms increase value and incentivize perverse profit-based schemes. If the economic system is led by corporations and is profit-oriented, corporations will always try to externalize social and environmental costs of their actions. The model for a green economy which is based on appealing

to corporations to voluntarily make their business practices sustainable or 'green' will not work. There needs to be a strong regulatory framework that will monitor and hold corporations to account.

Community ownership of the commons should be promoted and protected to safeguard vulnerable communities access, and control of shared resources including water, fish stocks and land. Traditionally communities who are most dependent on securing their natural resources and who have lived in harmony in these ecosystems have proven the best stewards for these ecosystems.

Sustainable consumption and production within the planetary boundaries is possible. But to achieve it resources need to be redistributed more equitably reducing excess and waste through community based systems for environmental sustainability. Private actors should be held to account for their effects on the environment. And traditional and innovative mechanisms for ecologically sound and sustainable systems which realize climate change adaptation and mitigation should be explored. These can be funded by developed countries based on their historical responsibilities for climate change

**Accountability to peoples** to realize and protect peoples' demands for democratic and just governments. Transparency, and governance that enables people to make informed decisions over their own lives, communities and futures are prerequisites to realize a just development agenda. It necessitates empowering all people, but particularly the most marginalized, to be part of free, prior and informed decision making in all stages of development processes at the local, national, regional and international levels and ensuring right of peoples to determine their development priorities. It also requires guaranteeing the right to freedom of information.

Local institutions should be responsive to peoples' needs and priorities. Development policies and programs should be developed in regular and sustained consultation with affected communities and communities should have

recourse to accountability mechanisms to ensure the local institutions and governments meet their obligations.

Corporations and big business are not only responsible to their stakeholders

## Box 2. The People's Goals

1. **Human Rights:** Protect, promote, and realize the full range of civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights of people.
2. **Poverty and Inequality:** End poverty by addressing deep-seated economic and social inequalities through an equitable redistribution of resources, power, and opportunities.
3. **Food Sovereignty:** Ensure food sovereignty by recognizing people's right to define their own food and agriculture systems and by securing people's democratic access to land and other natural resources.
4. **Full Employment and Decent Work:** Generate full and decent work, ensuring productive and sustainable employment based on international labor standards, a living wage and gender equality.
5. **Universal Social Protection:** Establish and maintain universal social protection systems to help redistribute wealth, ensure universal access to social services, and provide security for the most vulnerable from adverse situations.
6. **Gender Justice:** Challenge and breakdown patriarchal structures which limit women's equal access and opportunities in society and ensure the realization and enjoyment of women's rights in all aspects of public and private life.
7. **Climate Justice and Environmental Sustainability:** Take concrete steps to foster sustainable patterns of consumption and production and ensure all countries and development actors work to protect the environment according to the principle of common-but-differentiated-responsibilities.
8. **New Trade, Financial, and Monetary Architecture:** Undertake deep reform the international trade, financial, and monetary architecture, ensuring that poor countries are given the policy space to have ownership of their development and that rules and relations promote equality among partners while upholding the special and differential treatment of developing countries.
9. **Democracy and Governance:** Ensure transparency, accountability, participation, and responsiveness to the needs of the poor and marginalized for both government (at all levels) and the private sector.
10. **Peace and Security:** Effectively address the sources of persistent threats to security and peace such as hunger, disease, poverty, inequality, and repression and promote inclusive and equitable development processes which respect the rights of all socio-cultural groups, minorities, indigenous peoples, and faiths.

but also to the society and communities within which they operate. They should be held accountable for the environmental impacts of their operations and social consequences – whether directly through poor working conditions, human rights violations or indirectly through negative marketing practices.

The shift towards people as agents for accountability on the ground must be linked up to regional and international levels. We need to break down the ivory towers of multilateral institutions and redress the imbalance in power relations between states. Global governance systems are suffering from a democratic deficit. Governance structures of multilateral institutions and international financial institutions need to be reformed to ensure that states have equal decision making power.


### III. DEVELOPMENT JUSTICE UNDERPINS PEOPLE'S GOALS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The Campaign for People's Goals envisions a world in which all people enjoy their economic, social, cultural human rights free from gross inequality and poverty. We envisage a world in which food is produced without sacrifice to the environment or people and in which all people have enough to eat; full employment and decent work regardless of their individual characteristics; and guaranteed access to all basic services including lifelong learning and education, health care, sanitation, decent housing.

This should take place in a world free from patriarchy and discrimination based on our individual characteristics. And this is possible within our planetary limits and while addressing the climate change if we also address the unfair financial, monetary architecture which are driving these, ensuring that we can live in peace and security, free from oppression and conflict.

This vision is expressed in ten thematic goals that the Campaign advocates to be reflected in the new sustainable development agenda to meet the priorities of the most marginalized. Development justice provides a framework for the means to achieve this vision of a world we want. The 5 foundational shifts – redistributive justice, economic justice, social justice, environmental justice and accountability to peoples connect each of the themes and are necessary to realize each of them. It positions development and realization of these goals as a matter of justice which cannot be denied.

Governments must be bold and take ambitious steps to realize a transformative development agenda which centers people as the primary agents for change and recognizes development as a question of justice and not charity. In this way, we can address the critical environmental, economic, social challenges of our time.

An alternative development agenda is possible. 

## Endnotes

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### Photos

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