Key Framing Questions to Guide the UN Post-2015 High-Level Panel's Work and Consultations

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ABSTRACT *Activist and health expert Claudio Schuftan uses a rights-based framework to respond to the questionnaire circulated by the High Level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.*

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The lessons learned and the context¹

1. What have the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) achieved? What lessons can be learned about designing goals to have maximum impact?

The mix of MDGs' achievements/shortcomings is by now well known. The question here is: Do we really want to set goals – in terms of outcomes? Or do we rather want to set (annual) benchmarks – much more related to processes (a central critique of the MDGs). Goals, in the past and in the present, aim at achieving national averages. By design, this leaves half of those affected below the average. To be consistent with the UN-sanctioned Human Rights Framework, setting goals will only make sense if these are applied at the sub-national level, that is, district or municipality, since only this allows focusing national efforts on those territorial units so far most neglected and discriminated. With this being accepted, the concept of maximum impact will have to be redefined in the new framework.

2. How has the world changed since the MDGs were drafted? Which global trends and uncertainties will influence the international development agenda over the next 10–30 years?

The world has changed plenty; but how much of this is due to or despite the MDGs? Let us keep in mind that the selection of MDGs was arbitrary and top-down, with many of us having complained about issues left out and about the lack of consultations when they were set. The global trends that will influence development are, for sure, peace, the progressive realization of human rights and our success in making democracy a more local direct democracy (as opposed to the flawed representative democracy we, at best, have now). But keep in mind that the global trends will be made up of myriad local and regional trends – certainly not forgetting those due to both economic and climate-related migration – which the new framework will have to influence in a positive direction. The

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human rights framework is the most effective tool we have to achieve progress. In the next development phase, let the human rights perspective, then, guide the deployment of human, financial and other resources.

3. Which issues do poor and vulnerable people themselves prioritize?

First of all, 'vulnerable people' I think is a euphemism. [It is the same as speaking of 'people at risk'; we tend to think that people take risks but, beware, risks are also imposed!]. To avoid any sort of victimization, we must talk of marginalized people. Vulnerable has a connotation of 'poor them ...'; marginalized tells us our social arrangements have put them in that situation. Now to the question of which issues claim holders prioritize: The question has not been answered! Why? Mainly because we have not systematically asked them. Let us do that ... and then heed their advice! I have great hope that this time we put this question at the very centre of what we do in the massive consultation that has now been launched. Should I be optimistic? For people to influence priorities, development work cannot only continue focusing on service delivery, on capacity building and on (depoliticized) advocacy; what is needed is a focus on empowerment and social mobilization (the latter also called practical politics). It is not easy to say what is really empowering in community development work. Any attempted operational definition will (always) carry a certain bias depending on the conceptual glasses one is wearing. What is clear is that – in a mostly zero-sum game – the empowerment of some, most of the time, entails the disempowerment of others – usually the current holders of power. Empowerment is not an outcome of a single event; it is a continuous process that enables people to understand, upgrade and use their capacity to better control and gain power over their own lives. It provides people with choices and the ability to choose, as well as to gain more control over resources they need to improve their condition. It expands the 'political space' within which iterative Assessment–Analysis–Action processes operate in any community. That is what we need to pursue.

4. What does a business-as-usual scenario look like?

The business as usual scenario paints quite a grim picture, I'd say. Take, for example, the poverty alleviation discourse in the MDGs: it displaced the poverty debate worldwide from a political discussion about its causes to a technical, risk management scheme.

Bottom line, I am not sure whether MDG achievements will all be sustainable. We have raced for the outcomes neglecting the participatory processes to get there, and what we see does not bode well.

An equally important question is: What does a business-as-usual mode foretell? As another example, take the following: if current trends continue, by 2015, 3.7 million more children in Africa will suffer from malnutrition than today. My crystal ball tells me we will see more fundamentalism, more 'springs', growing frustration, more (understandable) explosive conflicts, perhaps some empowerment in the process, but empowerment in an unpredictable direction, not all of it good, I'd expect. What this tells us is the urgency for the post-2015 agenda to address the real deep structural causes of widespread disempowerment of those who live in poverty or happen to be poor.

Perhaps the most crucial element missing in the MDGs was a conceptual framework of the causes of underdevelopment (or maldevelopment). In the 1990s, the UNICEF pioneered the now widely accepted conceptual framework of the causes of malnutrition identifying its immediate, underlying and basic or structural causes importantly showing that addressing each level of causality is necessary but not sufficient. This omission of the MDGs cannot be repeated by the new framework we are all trying to come up with. An adaptation of the already well-accepted UNICEF framework is perhaps the best way to address this omission.

The shape of a post-2015 development framework

5. How should a new framework address the causes of poverty?

Based on the new conceptual framework on the causes of maldevelopment (which, I have argued, should be arrived at by consensus), the post-2015 framework will have important work to do on

deconstructing neo-liberal globalization – the latest incarnation of raw capitalism. Why? Because the goal is not only about the alleviation of poverty (much less about the chance of eradicating it); it is about a quantum reduction of disparity the world over – among and within countries. It is about working out new mechanisms of redistribution of wealth and power. And such a redistribution will only come through empowerment and social mobilization from below, with people going from having voice to exerting influence. I worry that all the good intentions of the UN to address the structural causes of poverty in the conceptual framework will lead to another ten years of failure if it does not politicize this issue. The rich have no intentions to give up their power and privileges; non-violent counter-power has to be organized and applied. Dialogue has to become a dialogue of equals.

6. How should a new framework address resilience to crises?

Ultimately, the common denominator of most of the man-made crises can be traced back to the excesses of capitalism. Indeed, it is not really the excesses of capitalism but capitalism itself that causes the problems; those excesses are the inevitable result of raw capitalism, more systematically implemented. Decisive steps must be taken by the new framework to foster the social mobilization needed to make sure that effective disparity reduction measures are launched nationally and internationally. The time has come to give accredited NGOs not only a seat and a voice but also a vote in the UN and in government deliberations. Environmental crises have both natural and human-made causes. As Rio and Rio+20 have shown us, we can effectively address the latter. The new framework must take this premise as the point of departure, and thus, as a minimum, incorporate Rio+20 recommendations.

7. How should a new framework address the dimensions of economic growth, equity, social equality and environmental sustainability? Is an overall focus on poverty eradication sufficiently broad to capture the range of sustainable development issues?

The economic growth model has been shown to be unsustainable, mostly (but not only) on

environmental grounds. Does the new framework have an option not to de-emphasize economic growth as the main development goal? It actually needs to denounce it in no uncertain terms.

Reaching equity and social equality inevitably points to the fact that both need the processes of empowerment and social mobilization I mentioned earlier.

For environmental sustainability, the roadmap has already been worked on by the experts in Rio and Rio+20, so the new framework has only to adopt their recommendations.

As said, the focus ought not to be on poverty eradication, but on disparity reduction, which has connotations for urgently needed actions both in rich and poor countries including changes in many, if not most, aspects of overseas development assistance (ODA).

The disparity reduction approach is necessary, but not sufficient to capture the range of sustainable development issues. Rio+20 is clear about this.

8. What should be the architecture of the next framework? What is the role of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in a broader post-2015 framework? How to account for qualitative progress?

The broader architecture of the next framework must absolutely be based on the human rights framework. Enough of lip service. It is time for deeds (related, nothing less than, to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the UN Charter). From now on, we have to look at the development process from the perspective of claim holders and duty bearers in their dialectic relationship. This language must be adopted and both groups have to be made more confident and assertive in their respective roles, that is, claim holders placing concrete demands/staking claims and duty bearers abiding by UN Covenants, Conventions and General Comments. The concept of progressive realization is another one to be given centre stage.

In this regard, the role of the SDGs is key. These should be designed on the rights-based approach. We only have one planet! Heed the recommendations from Rio!

Also related to the architecture, there will have to be a global UN body with executive powers following up on the implementation of the new

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framework. (The MDGs did not really have this; it was left to countries to apply them; there was no global accountability). This body must be endowed with funding. It must have some kind of an executive ombudsperson role on issues of implementation and must work towards influencing international financing mechanisms being made available.

To account for qualitative progress, yearly benchmarks have to be set by each country (especially for the poorest districts/municipalities) based on processes that must be implemented en route to the progressive realization of the different human rights. Civil society organizations can be appointed as watchdogs to monitor the achievement of these benchmarks; they need to receive funds specially earmarked for this purpose.

9. Should (social, economic and environmental) drivers and enablers of poverty reduction and sustainable development, such as components of inclusive growth, also be included as goals?

The word enablers is rather vague, as is inclusive growth. I have already suggested that (a) there is a need to de-emphasize economic growth as the main development goal, (b) outcome goals are likely to be less useful than yearly processes-achievement benchmarks, and (c) disparity reduction, and not poverty reduction should be the goal from now on.

Indeed, the three drivers mentioned in the question need to be tackled – but absolutely not forgetting a fourth one, namely the political driver. Each is necessary, but not sufficient. The UN is non-political and therefore non-partisan, but it needs to act more decisively on issues that it stands for even if they are political in nature.

10. What time horizon should we set for the next phase in the global development agenda (e.g., 10, 15, 25 years, or a combination)?

I am inclined to say five years with yearly interval benchmarks as yardsticks of progressive realization. Yearly achievements/shortcomings can thus be assessed and adjustments made accordingly, as needed, in a participatory manner. With the world changing as fast as it does, I am sure that major adjustments are justified every five years – at least at the country level.

11. What principles and criteria should guide the choice of a new set of goals?

The human rights principles of non-retrogression, universality and inalienability, indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness, equality and non-discrimination, participation and inclusion, and accountability and rule of law are, once and for all, the best guides for the new framework. The assessment of whether these principles are being respected needs to be built in into annual benchmarks.

The main demand that must go with this is that countries should participatorily draw up long-term and annual plans for the progressive realization of human rights. Human rights are all closely related to the development process. (Such plans could be a requirement for ODA as well.) The new framework must demand these progressive realization plans be drawn up.

The themes and content of a new framework

12. To what extent can we capitalize on MDGs achievements and failures in developing our post-2015 development agenda?

To a great extent, and to begin with, the agenda cannot again be drawn up in a top-down manner – a challenge that I still see unresolved. Opening up the consultation to development workers worldwide reading this is only a variance of a top-down model. We not only can, but must capitalize on both the positive and negative lessons learned from the MDGs. Which lessons? Ask the recipients of MDG 'benefits'! This calls for governments and local civil society the world over to jointly open, in the next year, a wide dialogue on post-2015 options. Seed funding is needed if we are serious about this.

13. What is the legacy agenda of the existing MDGs that will be inherited in the next framework? Which elements should be revised in the light of lessons learned, such as the importance of girls' education and gender equality?

Positive points notwithstanding, the legacy of MDGs' shortcomings, as I see them, is that they enabled donor over-influence; had a technical

over-emphasis; paid no attention to the underlying social and economic inequalities; lacked a systematic long-term financial commitment; had a predominant focus on health and education; and overlooked the entire participation and political economy contexts. Furthermore, they did not quantify the obligations of the rich countries (this assumed that poverty is a problem of poor people only); actions to be taken in the rich countries must simply be part of the next framework.

Poverty was defined in the MDGs as a state in which people have to live in the equivalent of less than US\$ 1 a day (adjusted for inflation). In contrast, China, Cuba and Vietnam (where, by the way, I live, so I am in a position to know), which have long focused on structural development concerns, have not labelled them as 'Millennium Development Goals'; that is, they are not wanting to play the MDGs' game.

These are all shortcomings that we do not want to carry over to the next framework. Beware: the elements to be revised, such as the ones insinuated in the question, are *not* for us reading this questionnaire to decide! Additions and revisions must come from consultations with claim holders and duty bearers down below in many little places, and this means giving this process the flexibility needed in terms of the participative selection of contents and the timing of their participative introduction.

14. Which issues were missing from the MDGs and should now be included? How to address inequality, jobs, infrastructure, financial stability and planetary boundaries?

It is not for us to decide these issues. They must come from dialoguing with claim holders and duty bearers at national and sub-national levels, importantly including women and youth organizations, trade unions, social movements, parliamentarians, local civil society organizations, organizations of migrants (who cannot be ostracized as non-citizens!).

Inequalities are a result of power imbalances, so, obviously, the organization of a counter-power is the answer for the next period; rights holders have to become *de facto* claimants through processes of empowerment and social mobilization.

Employment issues must be discussed directly with trade unions for inputs.

Nobody knows better the shortcomings in infrastructure than their daily users, and/or those who need it and do not have it; we have to reach out to get their inputs.

Financial instability is a trademark of the cycles of boom and bust of capitalism and, as we now know better, is caused by the reckless behaviour of greedy megabanks and financial institutions and individuals. Global and national regulation – including people's audits – must keep them under control, making sure that taxpayers have never again to bail them out. A Tobin-type tax is an idea whose time has (belatedly) come. People's audits also must be introduced to look into the issues of odious foreign debt in poor countries.

For planetary boundaries, we should fall back on work done by the UNEP and in Rio; but what is needed for the new framework is to set aside funding to educate the public at large, all over the world, about these boundaries so as to make this an additional topic of their empowerment and mobilization.

All the above notwithstanding, remember, the most crucial element missing in the MDGs was a conceptual framework of the causes of underdevelopment (or maldevelopment) alluded to earlier.

15. How should a new framework incorporate the institutional building blocks of sustained prosperity, such as freedom, justice, peace and effective government? I wish I understood what 'institutional building blocks' are. So I am a bit at a loss here. But anyway, first of all, the concept of sustained prosperity must be de-linked from the concept of economic growth, with the latter having to be seriously questioned.

Freedom, justice and peace are all embedded in the human rights framework, which will have to, once and for all, be the guiding framework for the post-2015 development agenda.

As for effective government, it has always been said that elected officers are as good as the people who elected them; electors deserve those they elect (ed). The problem is that (the often anachronistic and formal) representative democracy is made use of every four, six or eight years. 'You made a bad

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choice? You are stuck till the next election'. Under these circumstances, nothing short of making the accountability/watchdog function a function of civil society (with commensurate funding) will be good enough in the new framework. Actually, the ultimate purpose of social mobilization is the application of local direct democracy to remedy the serious shortcomings of representative democracy.

16. How should a new framework reflect the particular challenges of the poor living in conflict and post-conflict situations?

I assume that by 'the poor' actually the question means 'poor people' (or people living in poverty). I hope I make my point ...

If we are talking about 'particular challenges', can we expect the new framework to have general recommendations here? Is this a contradiction? Would global recommendations have any chance to work?

I strongly feel this is, par excellence, a topic for South-South (S-S) cooperation (with commensurate funding). Countries living in conflict and/or post-conflict can give better advice to others on what to do/not to do. The international community's help should come in the implementation of the recommendations coming from such S-S cooperation – the help firmly based on the principles of their extra-territorial human rights obligations now recognized by the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

17. How can we universalize goals and targets while being consistent with national priorities and targets?

The first question I have here is: Must we again universalize goals and targets? And then: Does the MDGs' experience tell us that universalization of national-level targets was a good thing so as to follow it now? I have said that I personally prefer the setting of benchmarks over the setting of goals and targets (whatever the difference is between these two).

National priorities have to be based on a progressive realization of human rights long-term plan with annual benchmarks. The priorities must be disaggregated to the district/municipality level so as to first concentrate actions on the x percent of the most marginalized ones. (Vietnam has done so

with a hundred thirty some districts). [This applies equally to giving priority to marginalized groups in society; I do not need to name them here since they are well known]. This all is what the human rights-based approach calls for! So, nothing new here. In this case, we are talking about a human rights principle that is not subject to progressive realization, but calls for immediate implementation, namely the principle of non-discrimination.

The only way another set of universal goals is going to get us further in the next phase is to mandate that those goals be achieved in each district/municipality and not as a national average.

Partnership and accountability for development

18. How will a new framework encourage partnerships and coordination between and within countries at all stages of development, and with non-state actors such as business, civil society and foundations?

If the framework is supposed to encourage partnerships, we need to know which partnerships does the question refer to. Partnerships with whom?

'Partnerships' between countries have a very sorry historical past in the realm of neo-colonialism. Partnerships in traditional ODA do not have much to show for either in terms of each partner wielding equal weight in decision-making (this includes partnerships with often non-transparent/non-democratic mega philanthropies and foundations).

South-South partnerships are an upcoming potentially promising avenue the new framework should definitely refer to, explore and foster.

A particularly worrisome 'animal' here is the so-called public-private partnership (PPP), which has been plagued by accusations of devastating conflicts of interest and whitewashing the conscience of participating Transnational Corporations (TNCs). Quite a bit has been written about this and I will not go into details other than to draw attention to seminal work by International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN) and by Judith Richter.

It would be desirable if the new framework calls for greater transparency of mega philanthropies with an opening-up of their internal decision-making processes.

The new framework simply has to put in place mechanisms through which governments together with representatives of civil society have a controlling stake in all partnerships. Governments and civil society organizations have learned (and suffered) from this experience and are now well-equipped to take on this mandate.

At global level, PPPs are also a source of worry at the UN in general (the Global Compact) as well as in UN agencies. The People's Health Movement has been active in denouncing such arrangements in the WHO, and calling for concrete and definitive corrective measure.

The question also calls for coordination between countries and within countries. The latter, I understand well. But does 'between countries' refer to foreign aid? If yes, I have made my point. If not, this coordination will have to be further explained.

19. How specific should the Panel be with recommendations on means of implementation, including development assistance, finance, technology, capacity building, trade and other actions?

I would say the Panel should not be specific on such means, but perhaps propose a range of options. It is for the participatory country and sub-country level to work on them and gain full ownership of the ones finally selected. There should be a specific time period and funding set aside for this.

As regards development assistance, foreign aid has to be made to abide by the human rights framework and by the principles of extra-territorial obligations.

The transfer of technology is a key additional issue. At grassroots level, the technology has to be appropriate, as decided by its direct future users. Otherwise, we have witnessed how TNCs transfer second-hand technology to developing countries – technology they have replaced by a more advanced one in rich countries. This perpetuates underdevelopment and must, therefore, be countered.

Capacity building: my experience is in health. I have seen the proliferation of aid-funded vertical

programmes, be they for TB/HIV/malaria or family planning. They all duplicate in large part the training currently available, and often ask the same service provider at the point of delivery to provide yet another training. Add to this the fact that different donors often repeat the very same training due to a total lack of coordination. Trainees often attend because of the allowances provided, and return home with no intention of applying what has been learned. I call this disease 'workshopitis'. The remedy? In health, we need roving multidisciplinary provincial teams that go facility by facility, stay two to three days in each, observe how services *and* extension/outreach work to the community are provided, correct deficiencies, add new knowledge, leave a list of to-dos and return in three or six months to check on changes only to make yet a new round of recommendations, and so on.

Trade is also a big problem. Rich countries have moved away from using the WTO as a vehicle for their international trade deals and have opted for bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs), where they can better use their muscle to extricate more favourable conditions. The negative human rights consequences of most of these FTAs are nothing short of appalling. The rich in the poor countries may benefit, but not poor people. The new framework cannot possibly ignore this fact at the risk of coming up with a 'robbing Peter to pay (rich) Paul' agenda of development. [Not coincidentally, this also applies to poor countries servicing their odious foreign debt.]

20. How can accountability mechanisms be strengthened? What kind of monitoring process should be established? How can transparency and more inclusive global governance be used to facilitate achievement of the development agenda?

The answer is: Through civil society organizations specifically funded to act as watchdogs.

The monitoring should be based on annual benchmarks so as to check whether the processes set in motion to assure the progressive realization of human rights are on course. This presupposes that each country will prepare a long-term progressive realization plan of action with, say, a ten-year horizon. The new framework must make this explicit.

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If a more inclusive global governance is to be understood as participatory governance, then the issues pertaining to governance transparency are included in the watchdog function.

What this question does not touch upon is the issue of providing accessible redress mechanisms. The obligation of States is to take steps to prevent, investigate, punish and redress any abuse through effective policies, legislation, regulations and adjudication. States must ensure that those affected by business-related abuses or other human rights abuses have access to a prompt, accessible and effective remedy including, where necessary, recourse to judicial redress and non-judicial accountability and grievance mechanisms. The new framework must address this issue.

It is well known that civil society organizations (CSOs) are active in many countries in preparing shadow reports for the UN Human Rights Council. The framework must explicitly encourage CSOs to participate. Once the Council engages in the universal periodic review of the human rights issues of each country, it issues recommendations that, unfortunately, are not binding. Mentioning this fact may help the new framework create greater consciousness about this shortcoming, which could result in some corrective action on this in the future.

Finally, just governance implies accountable governance over all relevant actors at all levels, based on a clear accord regarding who is responsible for what post-2015 commitments. For accountable governance to be universally applicable as well as meaningful and effective over time, interactive systems of accountability need to be put into place as part and parcel of the post-2015 sustainable development framework.

21. How can a new framework tackle the challenge of coherence among the organizations, processes and mechanisms that address issues that are global in scope?

I saw the concept of 'poverty of ambition' being used in these post-2015 discussions; I think it fits nicely here.

Since the Paris process of donor coordination and aid effectiveness has, for all practical purposes, failed, I think the in-country coordination of donors and local organizations should be made

mandatory for multilateral and bilateral agencies and for non-governmental donors both on general aid and aid by sector. Central in the coordination process will be addressing the global issues that the new framework will suggest be prioritized worldwide with the specific mandate to adopt/adapt them to the local realities and priorities. Coordination meetings would be chaired by two government representatives ideally from the ministries of planning and finance and must have a representative participation of CSOs. More human and financial resources have to be specifically allocated by donors for such a coordination function.

The willingness and commitment of all involved agencies to work in a coherent manner will depend, in many cases, on a profound exercise of re-visioning and re-missioning of what they do based on an honest assessment of whether they part of the problem or of the solution. The new framework can no longer condone silo mentality, vertical programmes, each donor for himself in development work. Service delivery work is not enough; technical capacity-building work is not enough; advocacy work is barely enough. Re-missioning is about these institutions funding and engaging in empowerment and social mobilization work in the countries they work in.

Globally, it would be highly desirable if the new framework proposes ways for the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also to get involved in coherence processes and mechanisms.

Furthermore, it seems indisputable that in the post-2015 period the UN special rapporteurs be allocated adequate budgets to allow them to have proper small staffing and more travel funds to do their (excellent) work.

22. How can we judge the affordability and feasibility of proposed goals, given current constraints?

Affordability is strictly a country-by-country matter. Being a cautious optimist, I think the current constraints will be overcome. Therefore, to be prominently kept in mind are the provisions of the extraterritorial obligations of rich countries. This means that countries showing well-justified shortcomings to embark in the progressive realization

of human rights will go to donor agencies for help. Given that the progressive realization is based on yearly progress marked by benchmarks – and countries will have *ad hoc* plans – donors will be able to commit resources long term, in tranches, based on the budgeted official progressive realization plan of each country. Coupling this with CSOs' participation on accountability issues gives us some hope for (cautious) optimism on feasibility.

Affordability/feasibility issues can be and have been addressed successfully in several instances through participatory budgeting initiatives. These ought to have an important place in the post-2015 recommendations.

Qs on shaping global consensus for the goals

23. How can we build and sustain global consensus for a new framework, involving member states, the private sector and civil society?

Global consensus has to be built from the bottom up, that is, starting from the sub-national level up. This is why this consultation period up to 2015 is so crucially in need of going to the level of claim holders and duty bearers at sub-national and district levels. Keep in mind that duty bearers to are claim holders in the community are, in turn, claim holders in relation to duty bearers at the national, often ministerial, level; and those, in turn, are claim holders in relation to duty bearers at the international level; that is, there is a chain of oppressed oppressors. Thinking aloud Can a worldwide one-to-two-week period of national debate be agreed upon and set sometime in 2014? Can we then imagine a global process of some kind of formal ratification of the new framework by parliaments, social movements, CSOs, private sector without conflicts of interest (?) and governments the world over?

Note

1 Suggested responses by Claudio Schuftan in a personal capacity, People's Health Movement, Vietnam.

Sustaining the consensus will depend on progress being made. Annual benchmarks can give us year-to-year reports of progress as perceived by representatives of the wider society. This national annual taking of stock has the additional advantage of giving the new framework flexibility to change tactics within the same strategy (... or change strategy if needed).

24. How can our work be made coherent with the process to be established by the intergovernmental Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals?

All efforts have to be made to secure such a coherence. Moreover, in all issues pertaining the SDGs and pertaining to this post-2015 framework the principle of 'one country one vote' is non-negotiable whenever consultations are necessary. We all are born to live in this planet as equals. In this regard, I see no problem in isolating the rich countries, which often vote en bloc against poor countries and thus formally obstruct coherence. They are already doing so! So what is left for the poor countries is to continue blaming and shaming them, remotely hoping for a future breakthrough. In the meantime, as much as possible, the poor countries ought to act on issues as per their majority vote.

These reflections open only a small additional window that adds to the equally important contributions of many others; they have often been normative and even wishful, that is, there are too many shoulds and woulds in them.

The risk we face in the post-2015 debate is coming up with a more radical new framework than that of the MDGs', only to see it watered down by the powers that be – as has always been the case in end negotiations. Would the reader not agree that 'consensus' always pulls to the side of those who feel they have something to lose in this pathetically unequal and unfair world?