



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

26 February, 2014

Excellency,

Following my letter of 14 January, 2014 informing of the availability of the Concept Notes for the High-level Events and Thematic Debates that I am convening over the next few months, I have the pleasure to inform that the Background Note and the Programme for the High-level Event on "*Women, the Young, and Civil Society*" is now available on my website at <http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/events/>

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John W. Ashe".

John W. Ashe

To All Permanent Representatives
and Permanent Observers
to the United Nations
New York

BACKGROUND PAPER

High-Level Event on the 'The Contributions of Women, the Young and Civil Society to the post-2015 Development Agenda' 6 - 7 March, 2014

Introduction

The full participation of women, the young and civil society in the post-2015 Development Agenda will be essential for its successful implementation and ensuring this participation will depend on overcoming two hitherto well-known barriers: (1) mitigating and ultimately eliminating the persistent *challenges of inequalities, discrimination and marginalization that impede the unleashing of the full potential, capacities and abilities of people of all ages to contribute to inclusive sustainable development, and to share equitably in its outcomes*; and (2) *the degree to which they will truly be allowed to contribute effectively to decision-making, at all levels, on matters which directly (or indirectly) affect them.*

Overcoming these barriers will affect not only the scope for women, the young and others to engage in sustainable development, but also their ability to participate as actors, partners and contributors, including from an early age and through their life span, in a transparent, effective, integrated and coordinated manner. This calls for a two way-process of positive reinforcement between the strengthening of capabilities and the exercise of voice.

This High-level event will address the themes of **equality, inclusiveness and participation**, as they relate to the overarching goal of poverty eradication, including a number of cross-cutting rights-based issues relevant to women and the young, and provide an opportunity to address the contribution of civil society to the shaping and future implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

In its resolution A/RES/67/230, the General Assembly expressed its concerns about *inequality* as a challenge for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and its adverse implications for the promotion of human development. On the issue of *inequality*, discussions during the Eighth Session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) noted that rising inequalities pose a risk to social cohesion and can also hamper growth¹. Therefore, the post-2015 Development Agenda **must** not only take into account the contributions of women, the young and civil society, but should also address the shortfalls of the MDGs and go beyond equality of opportunities to take into account the diverse and intersecting inequalities that challenge sustainable development prospects.

This High-level event will seek to address the following questions:

- How will we, as an international community, reflect the rights of women and the young in the post-2015 Development Agenda?
- How do we ensure their active, full and meaningful engagement in the design, elaboration and subsequent implementation of the post-2015 Development Agenda? and

¹ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/3238summaryallowg.pdf> (para. 190, page 28)

- How do we effectively support efforts, at all levels, to reduce inequality and discrimination?

Main issues and challenges to achieving equality, inclusiveness and participation

Women and Girls:

While there has been significant progress in implementation of the MDGs, for example, with gender parity the closest to being achieved at the primary school level, gender inequality is still pervasive in many areas, particularly among the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, older persons, and minority ethnic groups. Similarly, gender-based violence and sexual abuse against women and girls remains all too pervasive in our societies. Ensuring women's and girls' rights are fundamental for realizing human rights for all; building strong economies; creating and sustaining peaceful and stable societies; and pursuing sustainable development trajectories with equitably shared benefits.

Post-2015 proposals by Member States, and a variety of stakeholders, including women's and other civil society organizations, and the private sector call for a transformative and comprehensive approach to gender equality in a number of priority areas: (i) eliminating gender-based violence against women and girls; (ii) protecting and fulfilling the full spectrum of women rights; (iii) guaranteeing women's equal access to and control over productive resources and assets, such as land and inheritance; (iv) recognizing, reducing and redistributing women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care work; (v) increasing women's access to decent work, closing gender wage gaps, including through provision of quality education and skills training; (vi) ensuring gender-responsive universal social protection over the lifecycle; (vii) ensuring women's access to justice and promoting legal empowerment; and (viii) facilitating women's and girls' right to equally and actively participate in decision-making at all levels. Such an approach to these priority areas for women of all ages and for girls is critical for democratic governance, whether in public institutions, the community or the household, and for achieving the three pillars of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Question

Should there be a stand alone Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment, supplemented by cross-cutting targets under other goals?

The Young:

Today's adolescents and youth² are 1.8 billion strong, make up one quarter of the world's population³ and are a very diverse group. While notable progress has been made in recent decades, many young people — especially girls and starting from an early age — are denied the investments and opportunities that they require to realize their full potential. Improvements in primary school enrolment have not necessarily been followed by equivalent improvements in enrolment in secondary education, vocational training or non-formal education, especially for young women and girls. With an estimated 225 million youth, or 20 per cent of all youth in the developing world, not in education, employment or training (NEET)⁴, their potential to sustain a living through full, productive and decent employment is severely limited, as demonstrated by

²UN definition of adolescents to include persons aged 10-19 years and youth as those between 15-24 years for statistical purposes.

³<http://www.unfpa.org/public/adolescents/>

⁴ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Documents/fs26-2013-literacy-en.pdf>

persistently high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment worldwide. At the same time, the health and wellbeing of adolescents and young people remain a concern. More than 2.6 million young people aged 10-24 years die each year, mostly due to preventable causes⁵. Young people (15-24 years) account for an estimated 780,000 new HIV infections, roughly 39 per cent of new infections among adults; with adolescent girls being particularly vulnerable with an estimated two-thirds of new HIV infections in adolescents occurring among girls⁶. An estimated 15 million out of 135 million live births worldwide occur to girls aged 15-19 years⁷. In addition to HIV and early childbirth, as noted above, mental health, malnutrition, non-communicable diseases, and violence and injuries also undermine the ability of young people to lead healthy and productive lives.

In the case of children and their specific vulnerabilities, their unequal access to parental support services, basic health care, nutritional support, protection from violence and abuse, and participation in early childhood and formal education impairs their cognitive development and physical growth (stunting).

Post-2015 consultations among young people resulted in calls for increased access to quality and affordable education, with particular attention to girls' completion of secondary education and the expansion of pre-school and early learning; better healthcare; better job opportunities through integration of life skills, information technologies and vocational training; protection from all forms of child abuse, violence, sexual exploitation, harmful practices, and trafficking; removal of cultural, social and legal barriers that hinder political and economic inclusion and participation; and open and transparent structure of governance. The provision of such services is central to improving the lives of children, adolescents and youth, and to creating sustainable, peaceful and stable societies.

Question

Should there be a goal or a measurable target to monitor the empowerment of young people at all levels – through education; better health care; and access to better job opportunities?

Widening Space for Civil Society

Civil society plays an indispensable role in advancing the United Nations agenda. The success of the future agenda will depend on enabling the full, active and meaningful participation of all rights-holders in shaping the agenda, setting policy priorities, demanding redresses where abuses occur and monitoring implementation at all levels. The spaces and visibility of collective action by civil society organizations and stakeholders, including the private sector are critical for advancing human rights, reducing inequalities, and building capabilities for sustainable development.

Consultations with civil society organizations resulted in calls in support of greater participation and voice in political decision-making for women and young people; opening of the policy space for debate and information sharing; greater accountability and trust among policy-makers, and public and private institutions; elimination of cultural barriers faced by young people; gender equality; elimination of gender-

⁵ <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs345/en/>

⁶ UNAIDS, unpublished HIV estimates, 2012

⁷ <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/report-2013/mdg-report-2013-english.pdf>

based violence and child abuse; better job opportunities for young people; and more effective social protection programmes, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized groups.

Going forward, it is critical to have guaranteed and continuing space for stakeholders. This will be an essential feature of just and equitable human progress in a people-focused post-2015 era.

Question

How can governments improve the operating space so as to ensure civil society make meaningful contributions to the implementation of the post-2015 Development Agenda?

INTERACTIVE PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Interactive Panel Discussion I: Closing the inequality gap: efforts for addressing inequalities and meeting new and emerging global developing challenges for the eradication of poverty through the meaningful contributions of women, the young and civil society in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Gaps in inequality are a global challenge and have deep consequences for us all: reductions in the pace and sustainability of economic growth; diminished productive potential of all who are harmed and excluded, and the loss of this potential to society; the worsening of existing fragilities and vulnerabilities, including to conflict and disasters; and the weakening of social cohesion and of security for all. Inequalities are often closely associated with and reinforced by specific forms of discrimination, including but not limited to: discrimination related to gender, age, race, religious belief, ethnic and indigenous identity, minority status, disability, HIV status, and sexuality. Inequalities are also deeply entrenched by structural drivers and barriers in the economic, social, political, cultural and environmental domains, which can have cumulative, mutually-reinforcing effects and can lead to the systematic disadvantage of some social groups and to the perpetuation of poverty from generation to generation.

Policies, programmes and interventions which are intended to improve the lives of disadvantaged people often directly address the symptoms of inequalities - such as chronic poverty - but not their root causes. And as a result, patterns of disadvantage and exclusion are often stubbornly persistent over time.

A new development framework should be based on the recognition that all people have rights, and one that incorporates and reflects the human rights principles of universality and non-discrimination, and enables participation and accountability, if the structural drivers of inequalities are to be fully addressed. The new framework must ensure development of appropriate policy and legal frameworks, effective social protection measures; explicit measures to provide for the specific needs of women of all ages, girls, children and young people, persons with disabilities, marginalized, vulnerable groups and minority groups; and measures to increase awareness, widen participation in decision-making and improve the collection, availability and transparency of data and information on inequalities and development progress.

Addressing inequalities will also depend on measures to strengthen the capacity of civil society - including the representatives of women, the young and others - to participate in the setting of priorities, planning, monitoring, data generation and development reviews. These measures will need to track the impact of policies, legislation, budgets and programmes among those most disadvantaged and excluded; allow for

truly participatory assessment; enable much more systematic disaggregation of information for equity-focused targets; and provide mechanisms for civil society feedback on progress and performance.

Questions to stimulate discussion

- What transformative strategies or approaches (in addition to legislation, and including at the household decision-making level) could effectively overcome the deeply-rooted discrimination that prevents women and girls from both enjoying the full spectrum of their human rights, and from living a life free of poverty?
- What barriers exist to the full and effective participation of young people in the development of policies and programmes that affect their lives, including the post-2015 agenda?
- What provisions, policies and measures could most effectively address the high levels of child poverty which are prevalent across many regions and the specific impact of inequalities on children's survival, growth and development from earliest years of life, in the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda?

Interactive Panel Discussion II: Strategies for the effective, inclusive and participatory roles for women, the young and civil society in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: identifying best practices, tools and mechanisms, and exploring opportunities for new, transparent and sustainable outcomes

One of the "lessons learned" from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is that they were not developed in a transparent and inclusive way that was truly reflective of the priorities and needs of all stakeholders. In crafting the Post-2015 Development Agenda, efforts have been made to bring the voices and ideas of a diverse group of stakeholders into the deliberations through a variety of mediums.

Being inclusive of women, the young and civil society in both the *crafting* and the *implementation* of the new framework pays a double dividend. First, inclusion of their ideas will result in a set of goals and a framework that more accurately reflects the needs and priorities of these most critical constituencies. The knowledge from grassroots women's organizations, local and international civil society organizations, girls and boys and other young people brings a different and much needed perspective that might otherwise not emerge through a less inclusive process. Second, inclusion of women, the young and civil society is about *building a movement* of people around the world who see the value in civic engagement and how this engagement positively impacts individual lives –and also communities, social services, the economy and the planet.

The birth of new communication technologies since the establishment of the MDGs – including "smart" phones, Twitter and Facebook, Google, text messaging and even mainstream use of mobile phones - also plays a critical role. Technology has dramatically shaped societies in both positive and negative ways. The power of technology can and should be harnessed for more transparent and responsive governance and as a safe channel for women, the young and civil society to routinely engage with each other and with policy-makers for increasing accountability in the context of the Post-2015 goals and framework. At the same time, ethical collection and use of personal data associated with increased use of ICTs (by whom and for what purpose) is an area of major concern that will need further exploration.

Finally, building the capabilities of these constituencies is critical. For example, for children and young people, engagement around these issues can begin in schools or through clubs and associations. There must also be a conscious effort to include the voices of the most marginalized in each society and those living in poverty and extreme poverty. Participatory research approaches hold promise for how to practically include these people in Post-2015 deliberations. These approaches can serve as a model for more inclusive planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of development initiatives based on inclusion and human rights.

Questions to stimulate discussions

- What can be done to better equip young people to meet the needs of today's labour market, such as the role of ICTs to support their development, inclusion and full participation in societies?
- How can the voices, views, priorities and best interests of children, including adolescents and children from the most marginalized groups, be systematically and fully taken into account in the design and implementation by Member States of the new Development Agenda?
- Where are the important or emerging sites for women and girls to actively participate in local, national, regional and international advocacy; and within these sites, what are the priority areas where new and concerted policy measures and interventions can achieve gender equality through the Post-2015 Development Agenda?

This background paper was developed by the Office of the President of the General Assembly drawing from inputs and contributions provided by the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, UN Entities, and from inputs and comments received from a wide variety of stakeholders through the online request on the website of the President of the General Assembly <http://www.un.org/en/ga/president/68/settingthestage/>

To follow the High-level event, please use the hashtag #UNPGA68WYCS

DRAFT PROGRAMME

**High-level Event
on the
Contributions of Women, the Young and Civil Society
to the Post-2015 Development Agenda
6 – 7 March, 2014, ECOSOC Chamber**

6 March, 2014

Time	Morning
10:00 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.	Opening Session Remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• H.E. Dr. John W. Ashe, President of the General Assembly• Mrs. Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Executive Director of UN Women (speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General)• Mr. Anthony Lake, Executive Director of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)• Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth• Mr. Paul Quintos, Programme Manager, IBON International, Philippines (NGO Major Group Civil Society Representative)
10:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	General Debate
Afternoon	
3:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.	General Debate

7 March, 2014

Time 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Morning Panel Discussion: 1 Topic: Closing the inequality gap: efforts for addressing inequalities and meeting new and emerging global challenges for the eradication of poverty through the meaningful contributions of women, the young and civil society in the post-2015 development agenda Chair: Mrs. Tarja Halonen, former President of Finland Moderator: Ms. Pamela Falk, President, UN Correspondents Association Panelists: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• [Member State] tbc• Ms. Ralien Bekkers, Dutch Youth Representative on Sustainable Development to the United Nations, the Netherlands• Mr. Arjun Karki, International Coordinator, LDC Watch, Nepal (Asia Regional Civil Society Representative) Discussants <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Freda Miriklis – President, International Federation of Business and Professional Women (2011 – 2014)• Mr. Charles Badenoch, Vice-President for Global Advocacy and Justice for Children, World Vision International• Mr. Willice Okoth Onyango, Executive Chairperson, International Youth Council of Kenya (Civil Society Representative of Beyond 2015) Closing remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
3:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Afternoon Panel Discussion: 2 Topic: Strategies for the effective, inclusive and participatory roles for women, the young and civil society in the post-2015 development agenda: identifying best practices, tools and mechanisms, and exploring opportunities for new, transparent and sustainable outcomes

	<p>Chair: H.E. Ismanto Adna, Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, Republic of Suriname</p> <p>Moderator: Mr. Rajiv Joshi, Interim CEO, The B Team and Co-Chair, UN Working Group at Beyond 2015</p> <p><u>Panelists:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Joe Costello, Minister of Trade and Development of Ireland • Ms. Primrose Nanchani Manyalo, Programme Coordinator, Restless Development, Zimbabwe (Major Group on Children and Youth Civil Society Representative) • Ms. Amina Doherty, International Consultant and Board Member of the Global Fund for Women and Just Associates (Civil Society Representative of Women's Networks) <p><u>Discussants</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Jacquelyn Alesi, Programme Director, Uganda Network for Young People Living with HIV • Noelene Nabulivou, Member, Diverse Voices and Action for Equality, Fiji (Civil Society Representative of Women's Networks and the Pacific Region) • Mr. Daniel Florio, Attorney and Advocate for persons with disabilities (International Disabilities Alliance) <p><u>Closing remarks</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)
5:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.	<p>Closing Session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of summaries of Interactive Panel Discussions by Chairs • Remarks by H.E. Dr. John W. Ashe, President of the General Assembly • Remarks by H. E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General