

Presentation by Roberto Bissio, on
behalf of Social Watch

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SOCIAL WATCH

Thematic Session 3: Promoting Good Governance and
Effective Monitoring Mechanisms for Development

Thank you for this opportunity of addressing the United Nations General Assembly on
behalf of Social Watch.

The citizen coalitions of over 70 countries that form part of Social Watch take the commitments and promises made by their governments seriously and we regularly monitor their implementation and report about it. It is with great sadness that we have to report today that in relation with the 48 countries listed as LDCs the commitments included in the Millennium Declaration and the Brussels Program of Action are not being met.

Not only are most LDCs not on track to achieving the Millennium Development Goals by the target year of 2015, but on a careful look at the three most essential social indicators --infant mortality, maternal health and primary school enrolment and survival-- over half of the LDCs for which there are indicators available are either regressing or making no progress at all.

Out of 40 LDC countries for which there are data available, 31 did better in reducing infant mortality in the last decade of the 20th century than in the first ten years of the new millennium, in spite of the MDGs and the BPOA.

And this happened in a decade where, before the global financial and economic crisis, in all regions we witnessed unprecedented high prices for the commodities and agricultural products exported by the LDCs. The favorable circumstances of the first nine years of the last decade did not translate into development, even less so social development, because the developed partners did not meet their part of the deal. An enabling international trade system, technology transfer, long term solutions to the debt problems and more and better aid, all of those were promised as part of Goal 8 of the MDGs, but none were delivered.

And the situation became worse when the crisis erupted in September 2008, not just because of the immediate and obvious consequences of recession in the countries that used to be the locomotive of the world economy, but also because of "collateral damage" created by the anti-crisis measures, with unfavorable conditions for migrants, cuts in the aid budgets and a return to tied aid, subsidies to industries and services that are "too big to fail" without a corresponding compensation for those that are "too poor to fail".

Women usually suffer the impact of the crisis more, in their effort to substitute with unpaid work the absence or deterioration of social services. Children deprived now of adequate nourishment and attention will never recover completely later.

Armed conflict is an obvious major obstacle and too many of the LDCs suffer from violence and its consequences. But development is in itself conflictive and what is needed is non-violent resolution and arbitration mechanism such as only a fair and respected legitimate state can provide. Good governance, democracy, and the right to associate and to express opinions freely, including by gathering in public squares is essential in all countries, irrespective of their level of development. Social Watch was created, precisely, to promote the accountability of governments without which there is no meaningful citizenship. Every year the Social Watch member coalitions report on social policies, on gender, on development and on governance and human rights and we make the link between them. Yet frequently we feel lonely in that task. While we were signaling loud and clear the development obstacles in the Arab world, for example, and our member coalitions are out in the streets demanding justice peacefully and courageously, both the Human Development Report 2010 and the Doing Business Report of the World Bank ranked Tunisia among the best in Africa! We need a development paradigm that does not exclude governance and we cannot claim proper monitoring if we are only making a fetish of the wrong indicators.

Accountability and good governance is to be demanded also, and probably first, of the powerful countries and the international institutions. The ease with which trillions of dollars were mobilized to rescue the financial sector after it ignited the global crisis with irresponsible behavior contrasts with the thrift and sluggishness in assisting the vulnerable.

Few people can grasp what a trillion is, so in our popular education we say that if one second is a dollar, one million is 12 days, one billion is more than 30 years and a trillion brings us back to the times of the Pharaohs in Egypt. "If the poor were a bank, we would have been rescued," concluded one participant.

In practice, the rescue efforts go the other way around. Talking with a high ranking official of the finance ministry of an LDC country a few days ago, I learned how after much sacrifice the country had resumed growth and has now accumulated a solid 1.5 billion dollars in reserves. Those reserves, Mister Chairman, are needed because the world finances are volatile and countries that opened their borders to financial flows need to defend themselves from speculative attacks. Which means that a major proportion of the sacrifice of low paid workers and the devastation of natural resources, instead of resulting in investments or social services, is piled up in unused reserves. The poorest countries accumulate treasury bonds of the richest countries, which is a form of providing them with soft loans that in turn create the financial bubbles that might lead to the next crisis and the unsustainable consumption patterns that are disrupting the global climate.

In addressing the global crises and their impact over those countries and peoples that did the least to create them, the Istanbul conference provides an opportunity to reaffirm the responsibility of States and international institutions over those issues where the markets failed to correct themselves and made the problems worse. Reducing volatility and unpredictability in financial markets and addressing climate change with responsibility and a sense of historic justice will simultaneously free domestic resources, reduce risks and allow to mobilize new energies in such a way that no country and no vulnerable person needs to be left behind.

Thank you.