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IS THE POST-2015 AGENDA A POLITICAL PRIORITY?

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CURRENT POLITICAL CONTEXT FOR INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

The political context in which the post-2015 agenda is being developed has been limited to discussions within international and regional bureaucracies primarily, within international NGOs and among experts and diplomats. The consultations that took place in 2013 in some 50 countries were restricted to civil society leaders, a handful of academics as well as representatives from institutions, specialized for the most part in the 'international development agenda'. In other words, the post-2015 agenda hardly features in the political agenda of our national leaders.

In fact, since the 1990s, when it comes to International Affairs, our national political leaders have allowed three key issues to take precedence.

The rise of 'low scale' conflicts around the world, for example, is of pressing concern for the leading industrialized nations (i.e. the G8 group). And much attention is being devoted to resolving them. As a result, the world order is being shaped by such precarious situations as the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, the continuing instability in Libya, and the recent conflicts in Mali, the Central African Republic and South Sudan. These destabilizing conflicts are not only exacerbating the instability of the Eastern horn of Africa or the Middle East but they risk spreading instability throughout the world. More and more they are being linked to the so-called "war on terror" being fought throughout the sub-Saharan region and also fuelling tensions in Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan. These so-called "local conflicts" are mobilizing leadership from Heads of Government, foreign ministers and armies as well as attention from media.

The second key area preoccupying our leaders today has been the international financial crisis, wreaking havoc for the last six years. This international challenge has led to the first meeting of Heads of States & governments of the G20 in 2008. International leaders have given the International Monetary Fund a reinforced mandate, possibly

instigating a more open form of governance as well. The international community (mainly G20 members) are applying a two-track traditional approach: growth oriented policy coupled with public deficit control (nothing has been proposed to tackle the rise of private debt). Heads of State are supposed to lead the G20 discussions and finance ministers have been intensively engaged in these talks and negotiations. Some experts believe that these international talks (mainly through the G20) have limited or contained the negative impact of the crisis (compared to the 1930s crisis).

The third international priority for our leaders is the growing power struggle between NATO countries and the former 'Eastern blocs' (led respectively by Russia and China). These tensions have culminated in the outbreak of civil strife in Georgia, Syria and the Ukraine. They are the usual geo-political games whose chief objective is to define new regional and international powers by way of diplomacy and military muscle.

These three international priorities leave very little room for other agendas. The climate agenda has more or less disappeared from view, the fight against poverty (Millennium Development Goals – MDGs mainly) remains low profile, an inconvenience leftover for bureaucrats, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and experts.

Even the multilateral trade agenda has been shelved more or less for the past ten years. Instead, the economic heavy-weights (long-standing OECD members & emerging economies) have been advancing their free trade agreement strategies by way of bilateral talks. The current trade negotiations between the US and the European Union are clear illustrations of this trend. Here again, the international community has not succeeded in promoting a truly 'global' agenda.

Furthermore, the international community has not managed to reform or create any new mechanisms with in-

ternational scope, save the “G20” which is a loosely coordinated body for the 20 richest and most powerful nations of the world. At the Rio+20 summit (July 2012), the international community even failed to transform UNEP (the United Nations Program for Environment) into a truly independent UN Agency for the Environment with its own governance and resources.

By contrast, what has been gaining strength and attention from our political leaders has been the consolidation and/or creation of **regional institutions**: African Union, Mercosur, UNASUR, Comunidad Andina, Asia Cooperation Dialogue, ASEAN, Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Arab League, etc.

Countries wishing to collaborate at regional level resort to ‘inter-governmental’ modalities.

Even in Europe, the Lisbon Treaty (2007) reinforced the power of nation-states (through the EU Council of Member States) in the European institutional setting (vis-à-vis the European Parliament or the European Commission). In fact, the council of Member States has increased its prerogatives through new competencies for example on International Affairs with the creation of the EEAS – European External Action Services (which are not European Commission Services but a ‘sui-generi’ new institution led by the Council of Member States (MS) with a majority of national diplomats), or through the broader scope of decisions taken by a majority of MS (instead of unanimity which used in the past to block or limit the real capacity of the Council to take decisions).

The same trend occurred within other regions (UNASUR, African Union, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Community of Independent States, etc.). National government leaders are pushing for agendas – international or regional – that they can control. There is no sign of any competencies or sovereignty being recently transferred to a ‘supra’ regional political space; not even within the European Union!

This is where our leaders’ political priorities stand today! Whether we like it or not, this is the political landscape in which we are living and upon which we are being told to build our future.

IS THE POST-2015 AGENDA CREATING POLITICAL MOMENTUM?

The question, therefore, that I would like to ask is: **Is there another political space to mobilize the international community beyond the three international priorities presented above?**

By international community I mean ‘leadership from governments and political parties’ rather than international institutions which are logically always keen to launch new initiatives and agendas to prove they are still useful and relevant.

We can try to answer this difficult question from two angles:

What ‘international agenda’ are our national leaders around the world discussing today within their political parties and in their national parliaments? Are any issues, any propositions emerging from their deliberations?

A few years ago, Brazil’s Foreign Affairs Minister Celso Amorin was leading an interesting initiative called IBSA (Dialogue Forum India-Brazil-South Africa).¹ This forum which celebrated its tenth anniversary last year could be the basis for new international initiatives led by south-south emerging democracies.

Or let’s have a look at what is happening in European politics, today, 2014, the year of the European Elections. Are our political parties and leaders discussing the role of Europe in the world? Are they promoting a truly international agenda? They may be touching upon those traditional causes for concern like ‘security’, ‘migration’, ‘economy crises’ or the tensions between the EU and Russia on their neighbourhood, but barring these long-standing Eurocentric ‘international’ themes, has there been any debate that might illustrate genuine interest, leadership or political will to tackle the bigger international issues? Or even an appeal, throughout the electoral campaigns, for a new political initiative in 2015?

If so the rallying cry is rather faint. And chances are that at the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2015 there will be little to expect other than the usual international declarations from political leaders to sign up to, pressed by diplomats, NGOs & experts.

The second way to answer the question is to see whether any social movements are taking hold globally or in specific regions that might motivate or even oblige our political leaders to take action. As is the way with politics, political leaders only start listening to their citizens when their voices and their movements are noisy enough or powerful enough to either bolster or bruise their political advantage.

Hard to tell. It's like putting your ears to the railroad to figure out what sort of train is chugging down the track. From my perspective, this exercise of gathering social and political 'intelligence' should be at the heart of NGO & CSO work: we ought to be listening to what is happening in different parts of the world, asking local actors to help us interpret the situations on the ground so that together we can draw on our knowledge and come to a common understanding of what is relevant for the international agenda. Unfortunately this kind of political analysis is almost absent from civil society practices, at least in a systemic and strategic way.

Take the elections in India in spring 2014 as an example. These are important national elections now. But what are we hearing from the world's biggest democracy that should be receiving attention from the global players such as the UN, NGOs and diplomats? What have we been picking up from the protests in Brazil during the World Cup? Do we think the responses offered by the Brazilian government and by FIFA itself appropriate? What have we learnt (collectively) from the Arab springs which were and continue to be more than 'spot-light' revolutions? These are deeply significant, painfully disruptive transitional processes.

Can we CSO actors hear something promising down the track that might signal the sort of collective energy an ambitious political post-2015 agenda would require?

WHAT DO WE/CSOS PROPOSE?

By reading our international CSO propositions for a post-2015 agenda² we seem to be stuck in traditional policy work: we declare things, we call for others, and essentially state principled positions, 'inviting' politicians and institutions to change the focus of their policies. All this, however, is done from within the system, resorting to the same institutional tools and mechanisms.

From my perspective, two dimensions are missing: what do we propose concretely for politicians to buy into and build upon? What are our strategies for achieving the changes we call for?

To illustrate my point (construed I hope as constructive self-criticism for CSOs), I would like to talk about jobs. By 2030, 5 billion people (out of the world's 8 billion) will require employment! What do we say in our post-2015 papers on jobs? Too little! And yet, any politician from any political party, from every part of the world, will tell us that the chief political item on their agenda is jobs and employment! Clearly this issue should be at the top of a new political agenda.

That said, some propositions do exist from certain social and alternative academic movements. But international CSOs don't dare yet take them on board in their policy propositions. Perhaps because they sound too radical. Let me list a few.

Today, in order to provide and safeguard jobs for 2 billion people, researchers show (Henri Rouillé d'Orfeuil³ & Marc Dufumier⁴) that we must stop destroying jobs in the agricultural sector. Today some 3 billion people (including children and older people) work in the field of agriculture. Most of them are living in poverty or at best in precarious conditions. Most of them do not receive support from national or international institutions. They are increasingly asked to compete in open international markets. Therefore, one way to maintain and create decent jobs for almost half the world's working population would be to invest in new technologies and knowledge of organic agriculture (highly specialized and based on new knowledge and sustainable new technologies) in order to increase the productivity of small farm-holders while producing healthy, local food. To do so we would have to stop aping the agricultural model that has been prevalent in the west for the past hundred years and which currently serves as the basis for international, regional and national agriculture policies all around the world. This highly industrialized, chemical-intensive model has 'succeeded' in reducing the agricultural labour force to an average of 5% of the total working population.

It is also linked to the privatization of huge tracts of land (see land grabbing reports led by NGOs)⁵ which not only dismantles agricultural communities around the world but concentrates the profit from these vast agricultural en-

terprises in the hands of a few. To propose a concrete alternative to this world model of food production and consumption flies in the face of almost all current agribusiness' interests and world champion food producers like the European Union, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Russia, etc. But what is also worrying is that the trade unions have not been assessing the impact of these agricultural methods on the international job market. The International Labour Organization (ILO) itself has not yet properly documented the consequences of these massive job-losses in agriculture. Rather, the World Bank runs highly complex data processes, based on the abstract assumption that we are currently looking at 5 % global unemployment, when the reality is that 80 % of the world working population are not enjoying decent jobs, are not protected by formal and enforceable working contracts nor enjoying minimum social nets. Similarly, most farmers' organizations are not calling for change. Agricultural institutes and universities continue to train thousands of technicians and engineers in this "revolutionary" business of "modern" agriculture, focussed exclusively on transforming a sector that employs today half the working-age population of developing countries into a business of huge land-holder firms that will end up employing a minimum number of farmers, amounting to 5 % of the total workforce.

Another way of creating jobs and addressing the systemic problem of unemployment is to change our definition of jobs. Some interesting research (IDS report⁶) shows that a significant part of the work people do today is unpaid. For the most part such unpaid work is performed by women and children, including as it does childcare, housework, family duties and chores. Nevertheless, a significant amount of social work is also carried out by volunteers whose contributions count neither as 'work' nor production (gross domestic product – GDP). The same can be said for all those hidden economies that come about when people recycle, swap, repair, make their own goods, build their own houses, create and exchange their own services: all highly productive activities which eschew national and international statistics.

On these grounds, some other citizens' movements (like the EU campaign on universal basic incomes⁷) are proposing to provide an income to each and every human being from birth until death allowing every individual to live decently and in dignity by covering our basic needs, rights and services. For this to become a reality, approximately 30 % of World GDP would need to be allocated to

this universal wage and would replace the complex, unfair and equally costly systems of social security we have in place today. Another benefit of such an approach is to significantly cheapen the cost of paid work in the market economy, reason why some business organisations are seriously analysing this alternative system too.

Other researchers (like Dominique Meda⁸) agree that the central role paid-jobs play in our lives needs to be reassessed in societies of the 21st century. In fact, paid jobs and the inevitable wage-relationship that results between workers and employers is a relatively recent development in human societies at the scale it exists today (no more than two centuries). Moreover, it is often activities outside 'formal' work, that are more beneficial to oneself, to one's family, and to one's community in so far as these unremunerated activities are based on belonging and sharing and creating networks that are far more resilient and adept at building a common future, building solidarity, strengthening social relations and solving the challenges we face within societies.

Unfortunately, amid all the literature and papers pouring forth on the post-2015 agenda, CSOs say and propose very little on jobs & employment.

To further illustrate my point, let's also look at a second highly political and sensitive issue which is the rise of inequality around the world. We, civil society actors, denounce this reality and increasingly speak out against it. But what do we propose to address it? How do we think societies ought to address this growing and pernicious problem? Here again most international civil society organizations remain 'shy'; steer clear of the taboo that could provide solutions. The taboo of taxes!

And yet studies on wealth redistribution (New Economics Foundation⁹) from the local to international level are being published and have produced some worthwhile findings. Likewise, we should be examining the array of experimental "sharing economies" out there, including the immaterial economy where free software circulates, social media abounds and open source networks proliferate.

But back to the question of taxes; this is a long-standing issue that should never have disappeared from political debate. Here again, hardly any analyses or proposals are being put forward by international CSOs. Odd, given that Official Development Assistance (ODA) is a unique – albeit imperfect – mechanism devised to re-channel re-

sources from 'rich' countries to 'poor'. An official means of redistribution, prey to such contingencies as weak governance, unjust 'conditionalités' and corruption.

Consequently the international community has been experimenting with new mechanisms to mutualize resources for the last decade, such as vertical funds (for environment, HIV/AIDS, etc.). What do we think of this? If these 'funds' are correctly governed might they pave the way for a new international tax system? Should the UN be financed by an international tax for international affairs, human rights and security? Because as long as the UN is resourced by its members it will be financially and above all politically chained.

On climate change, leading experts, economists and politicians like respectively the International Panel on Climate Change¹⁰, Timothy Jackson and Al Gore told the world that 5 % of world GDP should be devoted to changing our unsustainable patterns of production and consumption into sustainable ones. What are we NGOs saying about this? Where do we think these resources should come from? And more importantly what are we doing to mobilize a constituency strong enough to promote a new tax system and a new political will to finance the international challenges of the next thirty years? We all know that without substantial resources, any post-2015 agenda is doomed to fail!

These tax questions ought to be at the core of our political agenda, as should the plea for better international governance and yet we are having difficulty articulating them. Negotiations over the Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) which began ten years ago could have been the springboard for far deeper and far more ambitious thinking.

Despite these limitations in terms of political propositions, a few new scenarios are emerging from civil society:

- Building a post-2015 agenda from 'seeds' experiences that could be fed into new policies for instance. A kind of catalogue of best practices that we consider useful and could promote internationally. But still we must ask ourselves what mechanisms we would put in place to identify and validate these best practices, and any other social, economic or political innovations? Some actors are thinking of a sort of Wikipedia approach (where citizens, academics and organizations could build their own catalogue of best practices). Another approach has been experimented by FACTS¹¹.

It consists of a more traditional 'peer to peer' review mechanism that leads to publications of best practices from and by local actors.

- Other organizations like Smart CSOs¹² or Widening Circles¹³ are proposing that Civil Society develop an alternative narrative/vision of the world we want. Some experiments are being carried out, along with some capacity building, but CSOs are not yet ready to propose a comprehensive and strong vision of what the "Great Transition" we are calling for should look like.
- Some organizations and leaders (like the ones engaging in Building a new international citizens movement¹⁴) believe that building a new vision might not be the first priority (especially if it is top-down) but rather an incitement for people to move (and to change our own behaviours) while developing the self-confidence that we can transform our social, economic and political context. By empowering people, this approach hopes to dispel the fears that control us and our societies and to keep us from going back to old solutions that don't work such as nationalism, racism, and violence... It hopes to show citizens they can make their own future. The recent campaign from CIVICUS "Be the change" is such an initiative¹⁵.

CONCLUSION: FIFTEEN PROPOSITIONS FOR AN AMBITIOUS AND POLITICAL POST-2015 AGENDA

Most of the fifteen initiatives I propose for an ambitious and political post-2015 agenda are linked to civil society organizations. This is because, I don't believe that the old political model based on nations-states and profit-driven market economies is able to respond to the challenges the world is facing now. Nor is it able to meet the rising expectations of the younger generations. In fact in society's current phase of development, this model is becoming increasingly irrelevant and obsolete.

Solutions today must come from the people themselves (and the organisations and movements they create) and it is my conviction that this transformation will not come from traditional institutions and stakeholders. Rather, I foresee a world where societies are much more open, where societies are ruled and regulated by institutions

which are in turn run by citizens. For this reason, over the next twenty years, civil society organizations have a huge responsibility. In my view they are responsible for preparing the ground for a 'Great Transition' within our societies and it is upon this new platform that a post-2015 agenda should be built:

1. To develop **political forums at regional and international levels**, to bring different actors around the table to debate the international agenda in political terms (Jean Rossiaud/Fondation pour le Progrès de l'Homme¹⁶). These actors could include political party representatives, academics, CSO leaders, feminists, social entrepreneurs, cooperative leaders, think-tanks, etc. These forums would offer new political spaces, with international scope and with a diversity of actors paving the way for new institutional settings;
2. To build an **international agenda for CSOs from grass-roots movements and struggles** (Olivier Consolo concept note-Oct 2013¹⁷);
3. Beyond the so-called "1 % slogan" (Occupy Wall Street Movement¹⁸), to acknowledge and assert that the main problem of the modern world is **"We the 20 % of the upper-middle class"**; to acknowledge and assert that this 'narrative' of/on upper-middle class became an aspiration for most of the world's population (and certainly for all the elites) while it is based on unsustainable ways of life¹⁹ which would lead to environmental catastrophe if shared by 50 % (or more) of the world population. The objective of this proposition is to develop and promote truly sustainable ways of life which appeal to the younger generations and could become new models/narratives;
4. Actors of change should have the strategy and the courage to **reconnect with wider social/citizens forums through modern popular education**²⁰ and new tools for cultural change. This investment in human and social capital is strategic if we want to engage in real political struggles with traditional political parties and decision makers;
5. A new agenda for the Great Transition²¹ cannot be built without **incorporating the vision, knowledge and practices of 'native' populations**. For example the concept of 'Buen vivir'²², the Maya vision of change over 20-year periods, the so-called 'cosmovision' (harmony and balance between humans, nature and Earth), different forms of spirituality, alternative approaches on medicine, etc. Such knowledge and visions have been neglected for centuries by the western ideal of progress and need now to be re-appropriated by a wider public;
6. Based on the longstanding experience of cooperatives all over the world and more recently of new social economic actors (social economy, economy of sharing, '*économie solidaire*', social entrepreneurship, etc.), **CSOs should be actively engaging in the democratization of the economic sphere**²³ (at all levels);
7. International and local actors need to engage more actively in the **current reflections and deliberations on the Commons**²⁴. In a few years the commons might be what humanity wants and decides to protect and share during the twentyfirst century. These deliberations must be highly inclusive and accessible to a wider public;
8. There is no agenda for change if societies do not **radically transform the current structures of power and this starts by the relations between men and women**. Women's rights and feminist movements²⁵ must be at the core of the next agenda. Not as a declaration but with robust actions like: real parity in all processes and political representation, specific resources must be mobilized at all levels to advance this agenda, education for women and girls must remain a high priority. The new narratives that will emerge from this Great Transition period must explicitly incorporate gender equality and women rights;
9. CSO and institutions that support them should engage in **leadership development initiatives**. CSO leaders deserve to be supported in their search for new skills like political analysis, popular education, work with new media, inclusiveness, strategic thinking and planning, alliance building, etc.;
10. Based on existing experiments and new mechanisms, international actors (United Nations, CSO, universities) should invest in long term initiatives to validate and scale-up social, economic and political innovations and make this knowledge accessible;
11. Academics and think-tanks still tend to support or advise traditional actors (states and business). With incentives and joint processes, **academics and CSOs should learn how to work together more strategically**;

12. There is an urgent need to create **flexible but permanent (long term) alliances among CSO actors** in order to overcome the current trend of short-term campaigns and coalitions, to build more political weight & capacity and to develop more synergies and economies of scale. CSO networks and alliances must become more inclusive whilst defending our diversity by promoting all around the world the small and medium size actors;
13. The UN system unfortunately does not manage anymore to transform societies.²⁶ More than ever it is resorting to the old system of international relations ruled by governments (the UN is inter-governmental by nature). It is urgent and more strategic to start **building a new international architecture based on citizen/society initiatives** (where national governments are just one of the stakeholders and not the 'central' stakeholder anymore). The 2015 agenda could even symbolically declare the end of the UN system by 2050 as we know it today (setting a transition period for building and experimenting new institutions driven by citizens, political actors and civil society organisations);
14. An ambitious post-2015 agenda must build its objectives and activities on **new forms of citizens' participation and engagement** (driven by citizens, based on renewed local & international solidarities and co-operation, new technologies, collaboration, social media, networks, etc.);
15. Finally and not least, to build an ambitious agenda post-2015 the international community must take **quick decisions on a new international/global tax system that would sustain the transformation of our current economic and social systems** (it should at least aim at mobilizing 5 % of the world's GDP). This demand of substantial additional resources (highlighted in a recent CIDSE report²⁷) should be at the forefront of all our demands to the UN, to the G20, and to our national and local leaders, etc. Without significant resources, this agenda will remain just a packet of words!

An ambitious agenda does not pitch the post-2015 agenda as a one-off initiative for the year 2015 (it seems there is very little in political terms to expect from the international community in 2015) but to use the 2015 momentum to **launch CSOs** (and other like-minded actors) into

a **new decade (2015-2025)** to build the **conditions of change** so that by 2035 there are concrete outcomes toward the Great Transition. To work, in other words, towards a deep transformation of our societies (both in the so-called North & South), through a generational shift which might last a minimum of twenty years.

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- 1 see: <http://www.ibsa-trilateral.org/>
 - 2 see: <http://www.beyond2015.org/content-discussion>
 - 3 see: http://www.agter.asso.fr/article903_en.html
 - 4 see: http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marc_Dufumier
 - 5 see for example: http://www.actionaid.org/sites/files/actionaid/lay_of_the_land_-_improving_land_governance_to_stop_land_grabs_low_res.pdf
 - 6 see: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/pressrelease/new-report-positions-unpaid-care-work-as-a-major-human-rights-issue>
 - 7 see: <http://basicincome2013.eu/en/index.html>
 - 8 see: <http://www.cairn.info/publications-de-M%C3%A9A9da-Dominique--2400.htm>
 - 9 see: <http://www.neweconomics.org/issues/entry/inequality>
 - 10 Siehe : <http://www.ipcc.ch/>
 - 11 see: <http://factsreports.revues.org/>
 - 12 see: <http://www.smart-csos.org/publications>
 - 13 see: <http://www.wideningcircle.org/archive.htm>
 - 14 see: <http://www.globaleducationmagazine.com/building-global-citizens-movement-world-citizens-movement-johannesburg-compass-questions-orientations/>
 - 15 see: <http://www.civicus.org/bethechange/>
 - 16 see: <http://www.world-governance.org/spip.php?auteur276&lang=en>
 - 17 see: <http://olivierconsolo.net/2014/02/13/bring-grassroots-into-the-debate/>
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 - 19 see: Skidelsky, Robert (2013): How Much is Enough? The Love of Money, and the Case for the Good Life. London.
 - 20 see: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bildung_von_unten
 - 21 see: <http://www.smart-csos.org/5leveragepoints>
 - 22 see: <http://editionutopia.wordpress.com/2014/03/30/le-buen-vivir-pour-imaginer-dautres-mondes/>
 - 23 see: <http://www.therules.org/>
 - 24 see: <http://wealthofthecommons.org/>
 - 25 see: <http://www.womenlobby.org/?lang=en>
 - 26 see: <http://antigua.ubuntu.upc.edu/index.php?l=eng&pg=2&ncom=1>
 - 27 see: <http://www.cidse.org/content/articles/finance-and-development/financing-sustainable-development/financing-for-sustainable-development-can-the-international-financial-system-make-the-leap.html>

