

# **People-centred Development - Creating an enabling environment for productive investment and decent jobs**

Side Event to ECOSOC BWI Dialogue  
Date: 1:15 pm – 2:45 pm, Tuesday 13 March, 2012  
Place: United Nations NLB, Conference Room B

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## **Financing people-centred and rights-based development to uphold the internationally agreed human rights standards**

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Distinguished participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to represent the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) today, as one of the co-sponsors of this event, and to share with you some ideas on people-centred and human rights-based development with regards to financing for development.

The United Nations Charter expresses the determination to “promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom” and to “employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples”<sup>1</sup>. It provides that peace and security, development and human rights, as the three pillars of the United Nations Organization, are interlinked and mutually reinforcing<sup>2</sup>.

The mandate of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is grounded in this vision, and set her responsibility to promote, protect and mainstream all human rights, including the right to development. When adhered to, in principle as well as in practice, human rights and development make up a self-reinforcing virtuous circle.

“The central goal of development is to realize the human well-being. Given that human rights define and defend human well-being, a rights-based approach to development provides both the conceptual and

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<sup>1</sup> Para 1 of the Preamble

<sup>2</sup> With a view to creating conditions of stability and well-being which are necessary for peaceful and friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, the United Nations shall promote: *a.* higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development; *b.* solutions of international economic, social, health, and related problems; and international cultural and educational cooperation; and *c.* universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion. Article 55.

practical framework for the realization of human rights through the development process”<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the human person should be placed at the centre of development, and all development actors and partners should look at human rights as an intrinsic part of development, and at development as a means to realizing human rights.

This is even more valid today, when the global financial crisis and its impacts trigger serious threats to realizing a wide range of basic rights, including the rights to work, health, education, housing, food, and even the right to life. In fact, what began as a financial crisis has rapidly turned into a global human rights crisis.

The real consequences and the greatest burden of the impacts has fallen on the poorest and most marginalized communities and the realization of their human rights. Yet states’ responses so far do not appear to be guided by the need to avoid retrogression along with budget cuts, detrimental to human rights. As sources of revenue decline, government budgets are falling, and spending on social programmes is being slashed first. Many governments are cutting on social services, just at the time they are most needed to guarantee minimum levels of economic and social rights, essential for survival and human dignity.

More dramatically, the right to decent work is under threat as wages are ramping down and working conditions are becoming more hazardous. Meanwhile, millions of people are deprived of social safety nets such as social security, under circumstances that are not of their own making.

The rights of women are also particularly at risk, as unemployment and social unrest can translate into greater violence against women. The situation of young people is also critical as they become the human face of unemployment and poverty<sup>4</sup>.

As the international community mobilizes to rethink and rebuild the global economic system, there is a need to shift macroeconomics towards people-centred development. Policy approaches of the recent years were based on an incomplete view of macroeconomic policies. Economic growth and material wealth were mistaken for true development.

Now, “There is an urgent need for an informed understanding of the ways that economic policies conducive to people-centred development can support the realization of human rights, and the ways that a human rights

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<sup>3</sup> Human Development Report (2000) - UNDP.

<sup>4</sup> We need to pull the UN system together like never before to support a new social contract of job-rich economic growth. Let us start with young people – UN Secretary General, World Youth Report 2011.

focus can support progressive economic policies. It is clearly time to assess economic policy using the ethical lens of the human rights standards that all governments have agreed upon”<sup>5</sup>.

By virtue of the international agreed human rights standards, Governments have the obligation to act in certain ways or to refrain from certain acts, in order to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms of individuals or groups. States assume obligations and duties under the international human rights law to respect, to protect and to fulfill human rights.

Governments should not spend in ways that violate the obligation to respect human rights. They should spend in ways that promote and fulfill human rights. Indeed, the obligation to fulfill human rights specifically requires states to take appropriate budgetary measures, and expenditure is a vital budgetary measure.

The starting point should not be the minimization of public expenditure, in the hope of fulfilling economic and social rights through private sector-led economic growth, rather it should be the expansion of well-designed public expenditure, that can fulfill economic and social rights through delivery of public services, income transfers and infrastructure, and through supporting human rights compliant patterns of economic growth.

In short, there is a need to integrate all human rights including the right to development in financing for development, so that it can straddle national and international dimensions of economic policy making, to reinforce the principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination, and to centre development on people.

Any productive investment should not come at the expense of social expenditure. It is essential that even projects geared to generating employment must be subject to a human rights impact assessment or audit.

In conclusion, we should remember and remember all development actors, in the public and private sectors, that development is a human right. The right to development belongs to all. True development is not about economic growth; it is about the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and provide for a fair distribution of benefits, without discrimination.

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<sup>5</sup> Rethinking Macro-Economic Strategies from a Human Rights Perspective, Radhika Balakrishnan 2008

This will not happen when the internationally agreed development goals are being shot down in a world where unbelievable amounts were invested to rescue speculative markets and to strengthen the global military assets, to the detriment of basic rights.

According to the High Commissioner for Human Rights : “Economic growth aligned with the Right to Development could help realize the UN Charter’s vision for a world in larger freedom, founded on peace, development and human rights, and determined to free all people from fear and from want...”. “The Right to Development, which embodies the human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, participation, transparency and accountability as well as international cooperation, can guide our responses to a series of contemporary issues and challenges”.

Participatory development is more inclusive, transparent development is more sustainable, accountable development is more efficient, non-discriminatory development is more equitable, and the empowerment of women, minorities and marginalized communities mobilizes vastly more development resources to the cause.

Let us act now to make the FFD to work towards people-centred development.