

More of the Same, Just Prettier *

Gabriele Köhler

The High-level Panel of Eminent Persons today released its recommendations for the [Post 2015 Development Agenda on the MDGs](#). It incorporates some of the demands of the world's democratic and social movements. Thus, it formulates several universalist, rights-based goals: eradicate absolute poverty and end hunger, end child deaths, provide universal health, ensure universal reproductive rights, universalise primary and lower secondary education and access to water and sanitation. The Report stresses the necessity to change consumption and production patterns and ensure sustainable development. It commits to human rights, gender equality, and freedom from fear feature. It proposes stand-alone and crosscutting targets regarding inequality.

This appears as an improvement over the original MDGs which were satisfied with halving or otherwise reducing hunger, poverty, maternal and child deaths. It is an improvement because the planet's boundaries are recognised as a key constraint, and because social exclusion in its many forms is flagged as unacceptable.

However, the Report remains in the conceptual world of economic growth and market forces, with merely the assuaging attribute that such growth be "inclusive". The Report is oblivious to the requirements for radical change in the functioning of global value chains which re-create poverty and ill-being on a daily basis. The Report does not propose universal access to decent work, nor equitable access to assets such as land, water, IPRs. There is no mention of the falling share of wages in GDP that has characterised the past decade in so many countries. Instead, the Report backs the neoliberal policy of flexible labour markets – as though unemployment were labour's fault by being so inflexible. It recommends business start-ups as a solution to ever increasing numbers of unemployed and working poor. These are market-fundamentalist responses to deep structural faults – and have proved not just wrong, but pernicious for the majority of the world's population.

Moreover, gross GDP growth is not sustainable for the planet, and the issue of shifting growth from North to South is absent from the Report's thinking. And: the universal commitment to end poverty which rings radical is actually mere lip service. It is postponed – to 2030. This

means tolerating yet another generation of 2 billion people living in poverty. And the Report would be satisfied with eradicating only the most extreme form of income poverty – under \$1.25 per day.

Although it is meant to address the development agenda, the dismantling of the welfare state is not subject of the Report. But development is not a spontaneous process. The role of the state for equity, inclusion, for safeguarding the environmental, for providing income and food security and freedom from want, from fear, and from indignity, hardly features.

In sum, the Report remains mired in the neoliberal paradigm. So, ultimately, the improved set of goals and targets are merely cosmetic. Nothing has really changed. It just looks prettier.

*** Originally published in the author's blog www.gabrielekoehler.net on 30 May, 2013.**