



## HLPF 2016 Brief Series

### ISSUE #1: Addressing Systemic Barriers to Achieving Sustainable Development

**Key Message:** Agenda2030 cannot be achieved unless the systems and structures that impede sustainable and equitable development are dismantled. The HLPF and regional follow-up processes should address at least one key barrier to achieving sustainable development annually. Member states should include systemic barriers in their country reports, which includes: (1) land and resource distribution, (2) trade and investment agreement, (3) militarism and conflict, (4) corporate influences and (5) patriarchy and fundamentalism.

**Background:** Agenda2030 cannot be achieved without a shared commitment to addressing the systemic barriers to its implementation. During negotiations member states, particularly G77 countries, drew attention to the need to address systemic and structural imbalances in economic and political governance. Several states also drew attention to the need to address systemic human rights, conflict and justice barriers. Identifying and tackling systemic drivers of inequality must be central to the annual review of Agenda 2030 to ensure the agenda is truly universal. The final text of Agenda2030 and Resolution 67/290 provides space to address 'new and emerging challenges' and 'shared challenges'. This briefer focuses on the importance of institutionalising space within the follow up and review processes to address systemic barriers, particularly those inadequately addressed in Agenda2030 itself.

The theme of 'leaving no-one behind' should have included a review of systemic drivers recognising that exclusion is the result of deliberate policies, practices and decisions designed to enrich and empower a few at the expense of others. Communities are not forgetfully 'left behind'. Instead, some are catapulted ahead through global economic and political systems that depend on the exclusion and exploitation of others, particularly women in economically and politically marginalised communities. This neocolonialism model has its' effects on women's productive and reproductive labour where women continue to be exploited and manipulated by the market force. Systemic drivers of inequality including neoliberalism, fundamentalisms, militarism, racism and patriarchy are largely co-constituent of each other and could form the basis of thematic reviews.

#### **Relevant Language:**

*Res67/290 2. Decides that the high-level political forum, consistent with its universal intergovernmental character, shall provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development, follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments, enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels and have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges;*

Agenda2030 para 73 ... It will mobilize support to overcome **shared challenges** and identify new and emerging issues.

Para8. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met

TWWW para82 - It should ensure that the Agenda remains relevant and ambitious and should focus on the assessment of progress, achievements and **challenges faced by developed and developing countries as well as new and emerging issues.**

TWWW 85(d) Have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging **sustainable development challenges;**

### **EXAMPLES of Structural, systemic barriers**

1. **Land and Resource distribution** - Communities that are directly dependent on land and natural resources are increasingly at risk of being 'left behind' and denied livelihoods. Indigenous peoples, ethnic minorities, rural communities and subsistence farmers (the majority of whom are women) face increasing threats to their land tenure, territorial rights and their livelihoods from land concessions awarded to corporations, large scale 'development' and infrastructure (including those conducted under the guise of 'green growth') and from climate change without respecting the principle of free, prior, informed consent. Finite resources within a global economic structure based on competition and growth exposes land dependent communities and their defenders to gross human rights violations.
2. **Trade and Investment Agreements** - Mounting evidence and awareness that neo-liberal economic policies widen inequalities, impact most negatively on those 'left behind' and pose a threat to the future of the planet has failed to shift government policy in most states. While paragraph 30 of Agenda 2030 strongly urges states to "refrain from promulgating and applying any unilateral economic, financial or trade measures not in accordance with international law and the Charter of the United Nations that impede the full achievement of economic and social development, particularly in developing countries", trade agreements that conflict with both Agenda 2030 and the UN Charter were pursued immediately after the agreement was signed. These agreements give multi-national corporations powers to challenge national policies designed to advance environmental protections, fiscal policies, labour rights, affirmative action policies, public health and public access to basic needs and services and human rights. In doing so they accelerate the power of the wealthiest and leave the vast majority of the population behind. The proposed and concluded agreements include clauses that directly contradict targets within Agenda2030 including on access to medicines, seed availability and sovereign policy space. Trade Agreements magnify existing inequalities and have been found to have a discriminatory impact on women, Indigenous peoples, people living with HIV or other illnesses, people with disabilities, older people, rural communities, workers and those dependent on state support, living in poverty or those already 'left behind'.
3. **Militarism and conflict** - Conflict, the presence of state and non-state armed forces and military spending are systemic drivers of inequality, poverty and human rights violations. The drivers of conflict increasingly intersect with core issues of Agenda2030 - resource scarcity, climate change, inequalities and poverty.

Consequently, reducing militarism is both a driver and an outcome of inclusive, sustainable development. In addition to the immediate devastation of conflict, people, particularly women, displaced by conflict are amongst the communities most likely to be 'left behind' with generational consequences. Stateless people and those who migrate from conflict zones are most likely to be forced into cheap, exploitable labour or trafficked into slavery like conditions. Within these populations, women, people with disabilities, children and the already economically marginalised face deeper risks and less ability to seek safe refuge. Given the recent political responses to conflict and asylum, a thematic focus on militarism is required.

4. **Corporate influence** – It is increasingly evident that the interests of many trans-national corporations and the interests of 'people and planet' conflict. Of the largest economies in the world, 51 are now corporations. The revenue of the top 200 corporations exceeds the value of the economies of 182 countries combined. They have more than twice the economic power of 80% of humanity<sup>14</sup>. The UN Secretary General recognized that "a lack of clarity about additionality; a risk of misalignment of private sector and country priorities; and diminished transparency and accountability" make public-private partnerships a questionable way to advance sustainable development. Corporations are increasingly able to engage in manipulative price transfers, tax evasion and avoidance and avoid environmental and social responsibility. As state sovereignty and policy making power has been diminished and increasingly handed to the private sector, no corresponding system to ensure regulation and accountability of the private sector has emerged. This needs to be addressed to ensure the 2030 agenda is not 'left behind'.

5. **Patriarchy and fundamentalisms** - Ideologies that rigidly limit opportunities, participation and autonomy for some members of the population cause whole groups of people to be 'left behind'. Patriarchy - the belief that power and decision making should reside with some men, permeates lives, relationships and policies at the family, community, national and international levels. Fundamentalisms, whether cultural, religious, political or economic, similarly ascribe rigid beliefs about the roles and value of different groups of people. In doing so fundamentalist beliefs commonly focus on women's bodies, sexuality and decisions, systematically limiting women's participation in every aspect of private and public life. Many countries continue to have high rates of child, early, and forced marriages, which affect all aspects of girls' wellbeing, in addition to other forms of violence against women such as honour-killings, acid burning, systematic rape and political, physical and sexual violence, justified in the name of culture, custom and/or religion with the terms used synonymously, and exercised with rampant impunity. When these ideologies shape policies and laws, women, sexually and gender diverse groups, single or unmarried women, women human rights defenders are 'left behind'. While Goal 5 sets some important targets that measure some of the consequences of patriarchal policies, a more holistic review of the systemic causes of inequality as a review theme would allow the intersectional nature of the Agenda to be interrogated.