

Working with the Most Marginalised to Catalyse Sustainable Change after 2015

"We are trying our best to bring change but we can't do it, and tackle wider social problems, alone. So we want you to work with us." (Mathare slum, Nairobi, Spatial Collective 2013)

The vision of development expressed by people living in greatest poverty and marginalisation should be at the heart of the post-2015 debate. Current participatory research in 29 countries reveals two sets of principles for how development should happen. The first calls for a recognition of the rights of those experiencing extreme poverty and marginalisation to enable all people to flourish. The second centres on collective action for social and policy change. Change must occur through more democratic relationships in families and communities, and mechanisms which allow marginalised citizens to hold governments accountable.

As the call to 'leave no one behind' gains traction, policy responses must go beyond current Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets that incentivise a focus on the easiest to reach. They need to contend with the complexity of poverty and deliver development that concentrates on the hardest to reach, integrating the insights of those most affected by poverty to achieve sustainable change.

Rights and recognition can change social norms

"Our rights of privacy, freedom are not respected ... Society knows that we are not heard. Often the view is that what we say should not be taken at face value." (India Praxis 2013)

People experiencing poverty and marginalisation talk about rights as a crucial means to achieving equality and dignity. The rights they prioritise reflect the deficits that they feel most keenly. Formal recognition of rights in law is a critical milestone, but does not automatically translate into concrete outcomes. The reality for the poorest, experienced through the behaviour and attitudes of government officials, often reflects this. Collective action is needed for rights to become a force for positive change. State support through legislation that challenges discrimination is essential, but must work in conjunction with cultural change and value shifts to reduce stigma and exclusion. The post-2015 development

framework should ensure the inherent dignity of all by fostering global norms that eradicate discriminatory practices and empower people.

Intersecting inequalities make poverty more extreme

"Even when living in extreme poverty, people can have ideas. But if nobody acknowledges their ideas, they sink even deeper into poverty." (Burkina Faso, ATD Fourth World 2013)

Extreme poverty and marginalisation are characterised by multiple intersecting inequalities, including those based on identity, economic status, and geographic location. Addressing these inequalities requires a holistic, comprehensive approach informed by local contexts. This means a shift away from global targets towards nationally defined objectives, supported by processes which promote better accountability through the participation of people experiencing poverty and marginalisation.

Participatory approaches lead to better outcomes

"We know how to organize to improve things, and the authorities should listen to us about support to be given to the communities. We know we have those capabilities." (Mexico, Cortez-Ruiz 2013)

A participatory approach to governance engages with local knowledge, strengthens people's

voices, and enables people to hold decision-makers to account. Participatory research demonstrates capacity to analyse local issues and propose solutions. The meaningful participation of people living in poverty in the creation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes can contribute significantly to their empowerment; improve quality of services; and make governments more accountable and responsive.

Involve people to improve accountability

"If we remove corruption, our country will move ahead because if we elect corrupt leaders, they take our money and this brings poverty in

our community because that money that we were supposed to use in the construction of houses, they use it to sustain their stomachs." (Nairobi, The Seed Institute 2013)

Lack of accountable institutions is a major obstacle to addressing the underlying causes of extreme poverty and marginalisation. Citizens must be able to hold public and private institutions to account without fear of reprisal. For the poorest people, the private sector rarely figures as an enabler of development, as their experience is polarised between small-scale and transnational corporations which often have negative impacts. For the poorest and most marginalised, the state remains central.

Policy recommendations

- Base the post-2015 framework on rights. While 'leave no one behind' is the right aspiration, governments need to provide time, resources and political will to overcome barriers to the inclusion of the poorest and most marginalised.
- Governments must ensure that people experiencing poverty and marginalisation are recognised as key stakeholders in the participatory monitoring framework called for by the UN Secretary General's report, 'A life of dignity for all.' Qualitative indicators within each goal are a route to embedding the participation of the poorest people.
- Goals must reflect the multiple deprivations and exclusions that people face, and not function in silos. They must guide mutually reinforcing actions to embrace flexibility that enables national level ownership against a shared global vision.
- Public service provision, quality, and targeted delivery need to come together in order to ensure access to critical services. Discrimination is often a major barrier that prevents the poorest people from reaching services intended for them; education and health are two areas where this is particularly relevant.
- Greater care should be taken to ensure that representatives of small businesses in developing countries are included in discussions on the post-2015 development framework, as the assumption that policies and regulations that benefit TNCs also work for micro-enterprises is incorrect.



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Further reading

Participate Global Synthesis Report will be available at www.participate2015.org

Kabeer, N., Norton, A. and Shepherd, A. (eds) (Forthcoming) *Addressing intersecting inequalities post-2015*, ODI: London

Civil Society Demands for the Post 2015 Agenda: synthesis report from national deliberations in 39 countries, facilitated by Beyond 2015, the International Forum of NGO Platforms and the Global Call to Action Against Poverty, available at <http://www.beyond2015.org/civil-society-demands-post-2015-agenda>

Authorship

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This policy briefing is based on findings from participatory research contributing to the *Participate* initiative, which aims to provide high quality evidence on the reality of poverty at ground level, bringing the perspectives of the poorest into the post-2015 debate.

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IDS or Beyond 2015.

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