

**Leave no one behind and close  
the gaps **An ACT Alliance**  
equity agenda for the post-2015  
sustainable development goals**



**ACT is an alliance of 146 church and church-related organisations. We work together for sustainable change in the lives of people affected by poverty and injustice through coordinated humanitarian, development and advocacy work.**

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# 146

**members, rooted in the communities we serve**

**76%**  
global  
south

**22%**  
global  
north

**2%**  
global

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# 25,000

**member staff and volunteers in**

# 140

**countries, working together for sustainable change**

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**ACT Alliance is on the frontlines of addressing systemic poverty; supporting survivors of disasters, wars and conflicts; training rural communities in sustainable agricultural techniques; helping people adapt to environmental change; and influencing governments and other key decision makers to safeguard human rights.**



Together, we are working together for an ambitious post-2015 sustainable development agenda, which has the potential to end extreme poverty and address inequality. We will continue to call for the fulfilment of existing commitments, including human rights agreements and legally binding treaties, while recognising the power of goals like the MDGs to inspire and drive action.

## Leave no one behind

As many people have pointed out, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were not focused on the most disadvantaged or the most marginalised. While certain targets will be met by 2015, there are particular countries remain way off-track, and within countries, certain populations who remain stigmatised and/or unable to access services, who have their fundamental rights denied.

- The MDG target to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people globally living in extreme poverty has now been met, but 1.2 billion people still live on less than US \$1.25 a day, many in middle-income countries, and one in eight people worldwide remain chronically undernourished;
- The MDG target to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water, has already been met. However there are certain populations that are being 'left behind'. Eighty three per cent of those without access to an improved drinking water source are in rural areas – 636 million people .
- The MDG target to achieve, by 2010, universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it was missed, and while universal access is within reach, it will be hard to achieve without sustained momentum and political will. Particular attention is needed to prevent mother to child transmission, and to ensure that treatment is provided to most at-risk populations, such as sex workers, men who have sex with men, and intravenous drug users, who are often marginalised;

- A huge amount of progress has been made on Goal two – the achievement of universal primary education. However the completion rates for girls and for some minority groups remain low and unequal. A recent report from India, for example, has highlighted that dalit girls have the highest primary school exclusion rate at 6.1 per cent.

In this context, the concept of leaving no one behind, promoted in the report from the High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Agenda, is incredibly welcome. In particular, the recommendation that no target should be considered met unless achieved for all relevant income and social groups is vital. This will require that countries give **full attention to the inclusion of their most marginalised and poorest populations** – that older people, those with disabilities, rural communities, migrant workers, displaced communities, those from ethnic minorities and from poor households, among others cannot be neglected, either by donors, or within domestic policy.

In response, ACT Alliance would like to promote the concept of universal **social protection** to ensure that no one is left behind. By extending existing social protections and embracing the concept of a universal social protection floor, member states would ensure that there is a both a financial safety net for all – a minimum income – and adequate essential services, often required at a time of crisis.

Leaving no one behind also requires us to address **vulnerability**, and to join the dots with peace and security and risk from natural disasters. For all the progress that has been

made towards the MDGs, many targets are unlikely to be met in fragile or conflict-affected states. In South Sudan, one of the world's poorest countries, the maternal mortality rate is the highest in the world – a woman has a one in seven chance of dying, from pregnancy-related causes. Addressing the root causes of conflict and instability, and strengthening national capacities and institutions, must be a core priority for the post-2015 agenda.

Moreover, we only need to consider the devastating impact of Typhoon Haiyan on the Philippines to see how natural disturbances and disasters can set back development, destroying lives and livelihoods. As the frequency and intensity of disasters increase with the impact of climate change, there is an urgent need to **build the resilience of communities and reduce disaster risk**. Yet this is an area which is often neglected and under-funded. It has been estimated that disaster and risk reduction funding constitutes just 40 cents in every US \$100 spent on international aid, while disaster losses in developing countries equate to US \$862 billion per year – equivalent to a third of all development aid.

## Gender equality

An equity agenda for post-2015 must also deal with the inequality that persists between men and women around the world. The MDG target on gender equality has driven positive progress in the area of primary education but many challenges still remain:

- 35 per cent of women and girls globally will experience physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, or non-partner sexual violence, within their lifetime;
- 14 million girls under the age of 18 marry each year, frequently under force or coercion, and at least 125 million women and girls continue to live with Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C);

- Only 22 per cent of parliamentarians are women, and decision-making at a household level often excludes women;
- Women continue to predominate in precarious, low-paid roles, and also shoulder the burden of unpaid caring responsibilities;
- At least 222 million women who want to use safe and effective family planning methods are unable to do so.

Evidence points to the need to invest in and support women's rights organisations which are stepping out and boldly calling for change. Securing legislation where none exists on issues such as domestic violence remains a priority, but focusing on the implementation of existing laws is also critical.

**In 2006, the Brazilian government passed a law on domestic violence, to punish perpetrators and to provide care and rehabilitation services to victims. However, in Brazilian society violence against women is still considered a private matter, something not to be talked about. ACT Alliance member Christian Aid has worked with SADD – Anglican Service on Diakonia and Development – to support church leaders and produce resources that promote biblical and theological reflections for the church to help focus on their role in the prevention of violence. This helps to ensure they play a positive role in protecting the rights of women in their communities.**

As this example shows, there is also the need to address the deep rooted social and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality, and to work with different actors – the media, faith leaders, teachers, men and boys – to challenge value systems that can often underpin gender injustice.



## Close the gaps

Leaving no one behind, while absolutely critical for a post-2015 agenda, is not the same as addressing fundamental inequality by closing the gap which exists between the advantaged and the disadvantaged. Whether measured using income or wealth as a proxy or through the lens of other opportunities and essential services such as health and education, the point is to reduce disparities, and particularly the impact of inherited advantage or disadvantage. For ACT Alliance this is a core justice issue, a human rights issue, and an issue that speaks to the kind of society that we want to live in – would we be happy in a 2030 world where everyone earns at least US \$1.25-2.00 a day but where the gaps between the haves and have-nots continued to widen?

Increasing income inequality within countries is now common but not inevitable. Indicators such as the 'gini' or the 'palma' (the ratio between the poorest 40 per cent and the richest 10 per cent) show that inequality is on the rise in a large number of African countries, alongside the use of regressive and indirect taxes such as Value Added Tax. Inequality has also become an issue of increasing concern in many developed countries, including the United States. Where inequality is on the decrease, for example in Brazil, social protection programmes have played a significant role, as have more structural policies such as the introduction of a minimum wage.

Closing the gaps will require an intentional policy agenda which draws on the global experience of what works in reducing disparities between rich and poor, rural and urban populations, men and women, etc. It is an agenda which must be negotiated at a national level but which can be incentivised through a post-2015 framework which sets certain norms and standards and keeps equity at its heart. It is an agenda which challenges the dominant narrative of economic growth at all costs and which focuses instead on the human development outcomes.

Examples of policy measures which have been shown to address increasing income inequality in an effective way include:

- **Social Protection & Investment in Essential Services**
- **Labour Market Policies**
- **Progressive Taxation on Income and Wealth – both personal and in the private sector**
- **Efficient Regulation of Natural Resource Management e.g. of Extractive Industries**

ACT Alliance believes that the gaps need to be closed both domestically and globally, and that a revised global partnership for development is therefore essential. The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, set out in the Rio declaration, and the articulation of shared responsibilities with respective capabilities contained within the 2013 Bali Communiqué, both capture this imperative.

Drawing on this evidence, ACT Alliance has a series of recommendations which should ensure that the rhetoric on improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged and promoting equity become fully embedded in the post-2015 goals, targets and indicators. These recommendations sit alongside our proposals on other core values such as environmental sustainability and social protection which are addressed in separate papers.

## Recommendations

### 1 Leave no one behind

- a** A data revolution which will ensure the collection of disaggregated data by income decile, gender and by social group, defined through a participatory process at national level;
- b** Support the principle that no target should be considered met unless met for every income and social group;
- c** Support the principle of 'zero goals' and multi-dimensional poverty measurement – absolute poverty eradication will not be achieved by 2030 by focusing on income alone;
- d** An explicit target on a Universal Social Protection Floor;
- e** Promote the voice and political participation of civil society, particularly those from marginalised communities;
- f** A stand-alone goal which promotes peace and security while ensuring that the principle of resilience is fully embedded throughout the framework including through a target on Disaster Risk Reduction (DDR);

### 2 Gender justice

ACT Alliance's position on gender and post-2015 is set out more fully in a separate briefing paper prepared for the Commission on the Status of Women. In that paper, we call for the following:

- a** A stand-alone goal on gender equality and women's empowerment;
- b** Transformational targets in areas including:
  - i)** Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), including a commitment to end harmful practices such as FGM/C and early and forced marriage;
  - ii)** Leadership and decision-making including at household level;
  - iii)** Economic Justice including equal pay for equal work; ensuring equal access to productive assets and resources; and reducing the burden of unpaid care work;
- c** Integration of gender throughout the new sustainable development goals (SDGs) including health and education

We would also like to see a focus on changing social and cultural norms over the long-term, and a commitment through the SDG framework to engage with faith communities in this endeavour.

### 3 Close the gaps **Inequalities at the national level**

ACT Alliance would like to see a target on economic inequality included within the post-2015 agenda and in addition, we would like to see a framework which promotes policies known to reduce disparities in income and wealth, and which tracks disparities across other SDGs such as those focused on health and education. Specific targets could include:

- a** Reduce economic inequality within countries through enhanced use of progressive taxation on income and wealth;
- b** A target to secure full and productive decent work for all;
- c** Targets and related indicators on secure rights to land, natural resources and other productive assets.

### 4 Global equity

While the geography of poverty and wealth is changing, there is still massive inequality between countries and between the most advantaged and disadvantaged globally. A universal sustainable development agenda needs to strike the right balance between promoting domestic action in every country and promoting a sense of shared responsibility with respective capabilities in relation to global governance issues. A new global partnership for development should therefore be driven by equity and will need to address the following issues:

- a** Embed a new target on illicit financial flows, including cross-border tax avoidance and evasion within the new framework;
- b** Support the principle of environmental equity and Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) within the SDGs;
- c** Ensure that developed countries meet their existing finance commitments, including spending 0.7% of gross national income on official development assistance, and delivering US \$100 billion annually in climate finance;
- d** Promote fair trade policies on both regional and global scales.



**ACT Alliance Secretariat**

150 Route de Ferney  
P.O. Box 2100  
1211 Geneva 2,  
Switzerland

777 United Nations Plaza  
Suite 9D  
New York, NY 10017  
USA

**[www.actalliance.org](http://www.actalliance.org)**

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