



Presentation at seminar on The World Bank and Human Rights

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## Human Rights and Sustainable Development: Reflections in the Light of the 2030 Agenda

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# I. Background and context

# Overview: 4 points

- I. Point of departure
    - Universal Declaration of Human Rights
    - The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda
  - II. Data and monitoring framework for Agenda 2030?
    - 4 data challenges
  - III. The World Bank and human rights
  - IV. Questions and dilemmas
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# The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)

- A milestone document in the history of human rights
- Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on 10 December 1948: General Assembly resolution 217 A
- As a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations that set out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected

# The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

17 goals:



+ 169 targets + 229 indicators

+ Leave no one behind

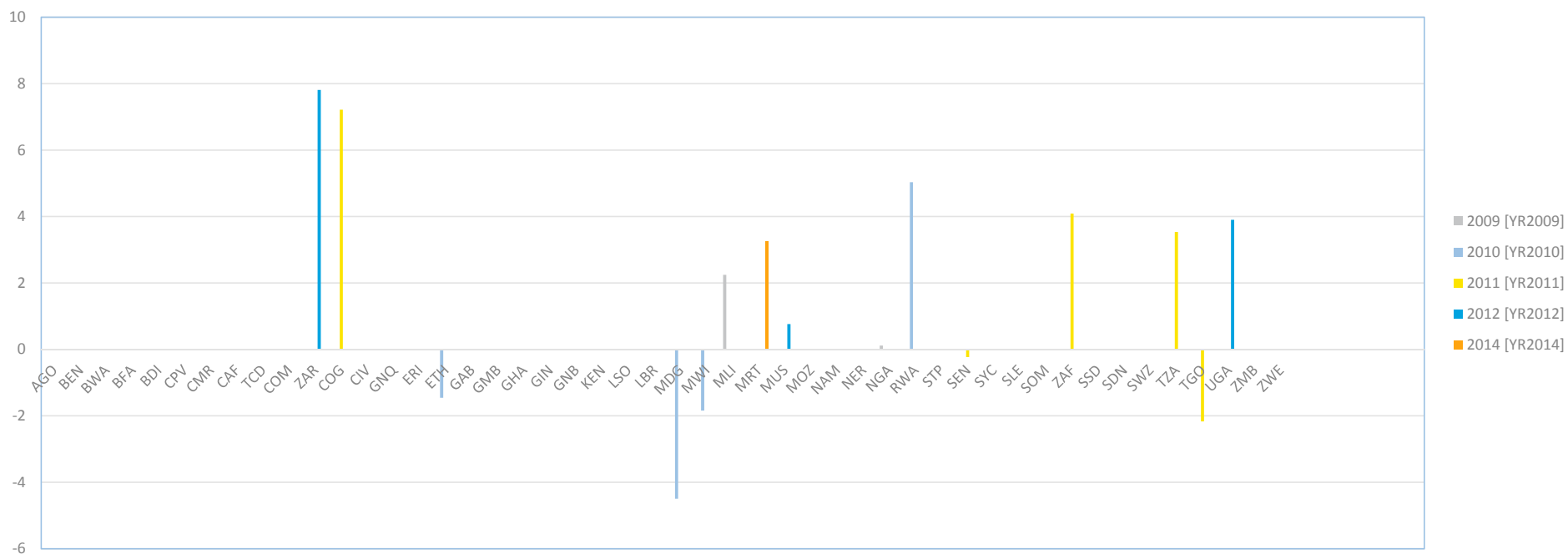
## **II. Data and the Monitoring Framework for Agenda 2030**

# 1. An enormous amount of missing data – especially for the poorest countries

## Goal 10, Target 1:

Growth rate in per capita real mean consumption or income, bottom 40% of population (%)  
In African countries

(Source: WDI. No data available from 1990-2008. No data in 2013 or 2015.)



## 2. Data by gender are especially poor

- When data is collected at individual level, disaggregation by gender is possible.
- However, data are often collected only at household level. In such cases, gender specificity is not always straightforward. For example:
- Asset or land ownership
- Consumption
- Individual-level poverty



### 3. Filling gaps can be (deceptively) difficult for technical reasons

Some instances where targets appear simple but measurement of indicators is difficult:

- Violent injuries and deaths per 100,000 population: official crimes data usually under-reported
- Percentage of women of reproductive age (15-49) with anaemia
- Proportion of persons with severe mental disorder who are using services
- Percentage of girls and boys who achieve proficiency across a broad range of 'learning outcomes'
- Percentage of children (36-59 months) receiving at least one year of 'quality' pre-primary education program

## 4. Filling gaps can also be difficult for political reasons – a point often overlooked

Example:

- 10.2: ‘by 2030 empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status’

- To collect data on indigenous peoples, they need to be recognized as such.
- ILO 169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989) – is ratified by 22 countries:



# III. The World Bank

# The World Bank (1)

- Speaking about the World Bank and a human rights based approach to development is not straightforward: the World Bank has been criticized for not having a human rights approach to development
- Historically, focus on human rights – especially civil and political rights - has been interpreted within the Bank as inconsistent with the Articles of Agreement and the legal mandate against involvement in country politics
- For short discussion see the ReCom Governance & Fragility Position Paper <http://www1.wider.unu.edu/fragilityandaid/article/position-paper-aid-governance-and-fragility>

# The World Bank (2)

- In the last decade or so, however, the Bank has adopted a broader interpretation of its mandate to include consideration of human rights issues:

## *when they have an impact development*

- In 2006, Bank General Counsel Ana Palacio wrote: ‘It is now clear that the Bank can and sometimes should take human rights into consideration as part of its decision-making process’ ( see ‘The Way Forward: Human Rights and the World Bank’, October 2006)
- This shift is also evident for instance when we consider Bank experience and practice in dealing with *de facto* governments following extra-constitutional regime changes (under OP/BP 7.30) (WIDER Research fellow Rachel Gisselquist did review)
- From about the early 2000s, we begin to see the Bank considering government legitimacy, as signaled for instance by the holding of elections, in decisions to continue Bank operations – e.g., Niger 1999, CAR 2003, Mauritania 2005 & 2008, Honduras 2009, etc.
- Following the 2009 coup in Honduras, Bank President Zoellick notably made a public statement condemning the coup
- This more recent practice is in clear contrast with Bank (non-)responses to military coups and human rights records of aid-recipient countries in earlier decades

# IV. Questions and dilemmas

# First

- Since the Bank justifies attention to human rights insofar as they have an impact on development, it is important to the Bank's approach that human rights 'impact' development. But is the research basis for this clear?
  - In terms of civil and political rights (CPR), this links closely to discussion of the relationship between 'good governance' and development
  - ReCom Governance & Fragility: Good democratic governance is a worthy aim in itself, but research is not clear on its relationship to development. There is also strong evidence for the causal arrow running the other way, from development to better governance
- It may be that state capacity – more than 'democratic' governance – that is the most important for development
- Given the breath of the 2030 Agenda, there are many indicators for which data are not available (standards and methodologies) – so we simply don't know
- => Calls for strategic planning and increased resources but ...

# Second

- What does and should this mean for aid and engagement with countries with poor human rights records?
- Countries with poor human rights records can be those with the greatest humanitarian needs. Suspended operations may cause unintended harm to a country's inhabitants and particularly to highly vulnerable populations. On the other hand, continued operations may impact welfare by providing material resources to governments unwilling to respond to the developmental needs of their populations.
- There are significant normative questions related to assessing the welfare impacts of the Bank's human rights approach.
  - An interesting framing of this is in terms of 'technocrats' who prioritize material progress versus 'humanists' who focus on political rights
- A government's failure to meet ESCR rights in particular does not necessarily stem from a lack of political will but may stem from extreme poverty and lack of capacity. Fulfilling all human rights - particularly socio-economic rights such as a right to housing, right to health, right to science and culture etc. – is simply not realistic for many poor countries (and arguably many rich ones too). We should be careful not to punish poor countries for being poor.
- It is worth disaggregating fragility in this sense in considering responses.
- Aid can also help even when the institutional environment is not ideal



# Third

- Can a commitment to local ownership be at odds with a human rights approach?
- We know that aid generally works best when it is 'locally owned'. The importance of local ownership to 'what works' is also evident in UNU-WIDER research
- But a human rights approach may mean donors push an agenda that is not necessarily locally-owned. This may be a good thing – work related to gender and development offers multiple examples. Is it always good?
- The SDGs and conditionality: do we need to worry? Conditionalities might work when political will is the main problem – but other approaches more sensible when poverty and lack of capacity are root causes



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