

<https://www.2030spotlight.org/en/publication/inequality-will-not-be-solved-attention-grabbing-private-sector-initiatives-it-requires>

Inequality will not be solved by attention-grabbing private sector initiatives – it requires serious transformation of power relations and resource distribution

On the last official day of the UN High-Level Political Forum, civil society express concern that ‘vision without implementation is hallucination’.

New York, 19 July 2017

Despite soaring rhetoric, glossy reports and slick presentations, the fact remains that implementation on the ground is “stalled”, as highlighted in a series of civil society national reports as part of the global Spotlight Report initiative.

Increasingly, civil society is expressing concern that the SDGs are being used not as a roadmap for social, economic and environmental transformation, but as a vehicle to entrench inequitable power relations. In particular, as exhibited in many speeches at the HLPF over the last week and official national reports, much energy is invested in high-profile ‘partnerships’ with the private sector. This bias is illustrated by the fact that the UN General Assembly Hall was dedicated to the ‘SDG Business Forum’ on Tuesday, while Voluntary National Reviews were entertained in an overflowing room, and the majority of civil society requests to hold events within the UN were turned down.

As Spotlight on Sustainable Development, a concise report by a broad coalition of civil society organizations around the globe, exposes, many of these partnerships are profoundly problematic concerning transparency, equality and human rights impacts. We are stuck in a cycle of inequality: wealthy elites and rich multinational corporations are able to translate their economic power into political access and influence government decisions, further entrenching their advantage. As Lara Pietricovsky of Brazilian organization INESC stated in a civil society event on Tuesday, “we are living a privatization of our democracy.” Tax breaks, deregulation, and lucrative contracts for public-private partnerships are all symptoms of this corporate capture, at people’s expense. As another example of this phenomenon, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to housing Leilani Farha explains in the Spotlight Report how “the unprecedented dominance of financial corporations in the housing sector” is undermining human rights and SDG 11.

One of the great strengths of the 2030 Agenda, which civil society fought hard for, was the inclusion of pledges to tackle inequalities. But dependence on private sector financing will only exacerbate existing inequalities of all kinds, therefore risking the failure of the whole agenda. As Kate Donald of the Center for Economic and Social Rights writes in the Spotlight Report: “The problem of inequality simply cannot be solved by market-based solutions or attention-grabbing private sector initiatives; it requires serious efforts to transform power relations and resource distribution to stand any chance of success.”

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