COMMENTS ON THE SYNTHESIS REPORT OF THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL ON THE POST 2015 AGENDA
Inputs to Post-2015 Women's Coalition

Submitted by IT for Change
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The Post 2015 Women's Coalition is an international network of feminist, women's rights, women's development, grassroots and social justice organizations working, through advocacy and movement building, to challenge and re-frame the global development agenda. As a member of the Advocacy Committee of the Post-2015 Women's Coalition, IT for Change submitted the following comments in response to the Coalition's call for comments and feedback on the UN Secretary-General's report on 'The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming all Lives and Protecting the Planet'.

The Secretary-General's report on "*The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming all Lives and Protecting the Planet*" makes an important contribution to push the SDG process towards clarity on what is to be achieved and how we can get there. Its proposals for specific initiatives are also commendable. The report however has invisibilised some key concerns without addressing which, the intent of a transformational agenda will not get translated into reality.

This document specifically comments on the elements of the report that pertain to ICTs and data. ***The recommendations are made in bold, italics.***

Overall comments on the Report

In the few instances where ICTs are mentioned in the report, they are included among other technologies. Their specific need and context with regard to sustainable development has not been elaborated, nor is there any clear exhortation or initiative provided, in this regard. ICTs are reshaping and transforming social systems and structures in practically all areas, from media, education, social organizing, governance, business, health, and transportation, to energy conservation, urban planning and community development. They are axiomatic to the paradigm change we see today in how gender related norms and practices are mutating.

As para 49 of the report avers, "a transformational and universal post-2015 agenda, buttressed by science and evidence, and built on the principles of human rights and the rule of law, equality and sustainability" requires the post 2015 framework to take due cognizance of the game-changing role of ICTs in such a transformation.

ICTs must be seen and treated as a 'universal enabler' and should be provided as a universal service. ICTs should be integrated in all development efforts, with due attention to the core principles of openness, decentralization, horizontalisation, transparency and participation. The architecture of the global digital system determines the contours of social justice and equity. The omission of this aspect in the vision of a sustainable future

and a goal around ICTs, is still a yawning gap in the discussions. Women's access to ICTs presupposes an ICT system that can be responsive to gender justice. Access to ICTs is hence not about connectivity alone, but about the right to enjoy the benefits accruing from being connected and networked. The marginalisation of women from the benefits of what the report refers to as an 'interconnected world', needs to be remedied urgently.

Declaration/ Preamble

We recommend that reference to ICTs be added to the early parts of the outcome document in the forthcoming deliberations.

Suggested language:

"In a networked world that ICTs have ushered in, individual and social well being depends on what ends connectivity is put to. Network effects can result in deepening inequalities, but we also know that ICTs can be pathways for transformation."

"Data has become an important resource in the economy today. Its ownership is a key source of private wealth. The exploitation of public data and its proprietisation for private gain, and use of data for mass surveillance and social control seriously undermine human rights and people's right to development."

Actions (using the essential elements proposed by the SG's report)/ **Goals and Targets**
- Dignity: to end poverty and inequalities
    - Inequalities
    - Inequalities among states
    - Decent work

Suggested language:

- *"In an interconnected world, ICTs are becoming universal enablers, transforming social systems and structures. For a just and equitable society that provides dignity for all, ICTs should be made available as a universal service, ICT capabilities should be ensured for all, and the architecture of ICTs should be open and equitable."*

- People: to ensure healthy lives, knowledge, and the inclusion of women and children
    - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
    - Violence against Women
    - Property Rights
    - Education

Suggested language:

- *"Digital technologies have ushered in a new paradigm of information and knowledge. The benefits of connectivity can become an opportunity for*

women's empowerment, if the digital revolution can be steered to serve public good, social justice and gender equality.

- Prosperity: to grow a strong, inclusive, and transformative economy
  - Social security
  - Sustainable livelihoods
  - Extractives
  - Trade policies

Suggested language:

- *"An inclusive and transformational economy is predicated upon the universal availability and accessibility of ICTs."*

- Planet: to protect our ecosystems for all societies and our children
  - Environment
  - Climate change
- Justice: to promote safe and peaceful societies, and strong institutions
  - Peace and security/ Militarism
  - Leadership and participation
- Partnership: to catalyze global solidarity for sustainable development/ Global Partnership
  - Civil society participation
  - Mutual accountability

Suggested language:

- Para 122. Historically, significant technological advances have often resulted from multi-stakeholder, solution-driven initiatives. Achieving our sustainable development goals will similarly require solution-driven ***and sustainability-oriented*** technology partnerships among a variety of actors.
- Financing

Suggested language:

- Para 95. In addition, we must move, seriously and expeditiously, to correct the inequities that have long plagued the international system, to the disadvantage of developing countries. We need a more equitable multilateral trading system, a conclusion of the Doha round, and better access to technology, to medicines, and to long-term investments for developing countries ***and a global digital system that is equitable and fair***. We need a more fair representation of emerging and developing countries in international financial and economic decision-making, better regulation and more stability in the international financial and monetary systems, and sustainable debt solutions. We must continue to remedy the policy incoherence between current modes of international governance in matters of

trade, finance, ***technology (including ICTs)*** and investment on the one hand, and our norms and standards for labour, the environment, human rights, equality, and sustainability on the other.
- Means of implementation
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting/ Delivering our agenda

5.2 Lighting the way – the role of data in the new agenda

<u>Overall comments on the sub-section 5.2</u>

The report rightly recognizes the very important part that big data is set to play in our societies, including for understanding and measuring various social phenomena. We welcome the call for 'data literacy' and the need to strengthen national and international statistical capacities; especially the call for "building of a global consensus, applicable principles and standards for data", which is one of the most urgent tasks if the so-called data revolution has to be harnessed for public good. Also commendable is the setting up of a 'comprehensive programme of action on data' under the UN Statistical Commission along with a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data and the World Forum on Sustainable Development Data. These initiatives directed at harnessing big data for the public good can help redefine the data revolution which has largely ended up putting public data as a commercial resource in private hands.

In this regard, we would like the report to go beyond discussing big data as a kind of neutral resource, to explicitly acknowledge its possible misappropriation for private gain, as well as misuse for mass surveillance and other forms of social control. It must be recognized that the main source of big data today is the digital footprint of private and social exchanges, that take place in privately enclosed digital spaces. The following language needs to be therefore be included in the section of data.

<u>Suggested language:</u>

- Para 143. To these ends, I recommend that, under the auspices of the UN Statistical Commission, a comprehensive programme of action on data be established. This includes the building of a global consensus, applicable principles and standards for data, a web of data innovation networks to advance innovation and analysis, a new innovative financing stream to support national data capacities, and a global data partnership to promote leadership and governance. ***<u>The data revolution must specifically promote public and peer-to-peer platforms for gathering and employing 'big data'.</u>***

- ***"In accordance with the path breaking report <u>A World that Counts: Mobilizing the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development</u> prepared by the Secretary-***

General's Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, a new initiative to develop non-GDP based measurements of progress, employing big data possibilities would constitute one of the most urgent and important requirements for sustainable development today."

- *"In a digitally enabled society, big data is a major opportunity if it is employed for public good. Public data systems should be further strengthened; guidelines and policies developed regarding data collection, use and ownership; and data pertaining to public interest and use safeguarded from proprietisation and abuse. Such data should be subject to appropriate oversight mechanisms as has been called for by the recent resolutions by the Human rights Council on privacy. "*