

“Development Platform of the Americas”: Unions Defining their own Development Model

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Introduction

The deadline to achieve the eight Millennium Development Goals adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2000 is fast approaching. In general terms, these objectives were quite modest when compared to the magnitude of social needs that still affect large portions of humanity. Although some objectives – such as reducing the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by half – have been achieved, it is important to note that this result has been achieved mainly because of the significant contribution of countries like China and Brazil, through income transfer policies as well as other mechanisms. In most low-income countries, extreme poverty remains as serious and abject as ever.

A key problem affecting the fragility of the UN social and environmental goals is that most of the subscribing countries follow neoliberal economic policies, which have brought about a concentration of income and a reduction of social protection coverage. Such policies impede progress in attaining even modest proposals such as the MDGs within a timeframe that spanned a decade and a half.

Surprisingly, even though the MDGs are not fully achieved, they will be replaced by new goals in a process initiated during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development held in 2012 at Rio de Janeiro. This time they are called “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs), to be adopted at the UN General Assembly in September 2015. Despite the laudable integration of the environmental

dimension with social and economic perspectives, it is likely that they will also fail, as neoliberal policies not only persist, but also have been accentuated in many developed countries.

One aspect of this heightened neoliberalism is a deepening of the privatization of “development cooperation.” The rhetoric on the need for private sector engagement in international cooperation, particularly in relation to the post-2015 initiatives, has been promoted on the grounds of insufficient public resources and an abundance of resources controlled by private companies. However, so far there is no commitment from the private sector to allocate significant grant resources to achieve SDGs; rather, it is more likely that scarce public resources for development cooperation will increasingly be appropriated by the private sector and utilized for corporate interests.

In any case, the debate over “development” is, first and foremost, a political debate, one that requires the determination of an appropriate model for implementation, and it is essential that this model subordinates economic and private interests to popular needs and interests, as reflected in related State policies. Only then will a global post-2015 development project promote real change for people.

The Development Platform of the Americas (PLADA)

For the past ten years, the Trade Union Confederation of Americas (TUCA) has been

elaborating a regional proposal for workers' rights and working conditions called the "Labour Platform of the Americas (PLA)." The PLA is a platform of organizations representing workers' struggles in the Americas against neoliberal policies of income distribution, reduced protection for labour rights, lack of decent work, a deterioration of social protection, and precarious working conditions.

This Platform has aimed to bring together the efforts of the American labour movement in each country in the region, through collective proposals for the implementation of a "Decent Work Agenda," as set out by the ILO. However, it was also apparent that the Platform was falling short in not addressing the political and economic factors causing serious deterioration in the conditions facing workers from North America to the Southern Cone of the continent. Likewise, more efforts were needed to facilitate dialogue with progressive governments of different political tendencies, which are looking for new development models as an alternative to neoliberalism.

Therefore, TUCA decided to proceed with a proposal that would maintain the policy interests of the PLA together with a trade union vision of "development," one that ensures the four pillars of sustainability, namely the economic, social, environmental and political pillar. This process has resulted in work since 2012 on a proposal for the Development Platform of the Americas (PLADA).

The most critical point for PLADA is its political pillar, which assigns an essential role to the State to regulate economic relations and ensure economic development with fair income distribution, as well as social protection and respect for the environment for future generations.

PLADA's comprehensive development agenda is also due to the fact that different social actors contributed to its conception: indeed, besides TUCA and its affiliated trade union confederations, many civil society organizations — such as

Friends of the Earth, Via Campesina, the World March of Women — have been contributing to the definition of PLADA pillars. This partnership of organizations is politically crucial, given that the challenges of fighting neoliberalism and implementing a new development model cannot only be the responsibility of the trade union movement. It must also be the responsibility of a wider social alliance consisting of peasants, women, indigenous organizations, and NGOs, among other sectors.

Apart from being an instrument for broader political debate with leaders of international organizations, PLADA and its components can also be used to guide proposals at the national level in the countries within North America, Latin America and the Caribbean.

PLADA was launched in May 2014 in Santiago, Chile, with the presence of the newly elected president Michelle Bachelet. A few weeks later it was presented during a public meeting to the Uruguayan government in the presence of President José Mujica and his ministers, who are implementing several important aspects of the agenda through their various ministries. During the coming months, PLADA will also be discussed with the governments of Costa Rica, Honduras and Peru, while civil society organizations of the region will also be invited to join the process of discussion and national advocacy for sustainable development. On the other hand, TUCA will work closely with its national affiliates, in order for them to take ownership of the proposal and develop discussions on the implementation of PLADA according to their national circumstances and priorities.

Through this ambitious process, the trade union movement of the Americas means to contribute to the debate of the post-2015 Agenda with comprehensive and concrete proposals, which put decent work at the centre and express a coherent vision from workers from Canada to Argentina on how to advance towards social justice and sustainability.