

Statement to Thematic Roundtable D by the Civil Society FfD Group (including the Women's Working Group on FfD)

Delivered by Claudio Fernandes, Gestos, on May 24, 2017

FfD Forum 2017

Excellences, distinguished delegates, civil society colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I speak on behalf of the Global Civil Society group for FfD and the Brazilian civil society Working Group for the 2030 Agenda.

In 2015, after much debate and negotiation, the United Nations produced some of the most transformative agendas coming from a multilateral governance body. But the agendas need to be acted upon to really be transformative. And to transform is to change. Permit me to bring here some Laozi wisdom from the Tao Te Ching: the first step toward change is awareness. The second step is acceptance. Otherwise we risk to continue business as usual, and in this case, fail.

Regarding awareness:

1. Trade has definitely helped to reduce poverty in the world, but by itself it would not have achieved much without specific inclusive public policies, including currency and interest rates risk management, to mitigate the asymmetries related to historical structural systemic issues such as economic dependency, geopolitical imperialisms, and sovereign debt burden;
2. Developing countries, in its vast majority, is a industrial, pharmaceutical and digital technology importer. This is highly asymmetric, supporting the contemporary oligopolistic behemoths of these crucial areas;
3. Innovation needs incentives and resources in research and development, but, most of all, it needs human capital which in its turn requires quality and consistent investment in education and capacity building. Right now we observe the opposite trend coming from normalized austerity policies.
4. As it was shown in the presentation from Sri Lanka, in developing countries, and in developed countries alike, most of science and technology R&D that generates innovation comes out of publicly supported projects in universities and institutes. Nevertheless, most profit that comes out of scaling up such innovations is constantly privatized, and this is the normality.

But, to be able to change, we'll have to accept a few important concrete points:

1. Traditional knowledge might not be the most advanced or innovative solution in the fast-paced present, but many times it is the most sustainable in a context. In this case, I talk particularly of indigenous populations that live in the rainforest. Economic growth in the traditional sense has depleted nature at its core.
2. Not all technology is positive or constructive, many times having quite strong negative externalities. Therefore, proper consideration of impact assessment is needed before scaling up certain innovations that increase inequities and exploitation, such as the challenges upon the labour market by the advancements of robotics and AI. To quote an STI Forum discussion, "we need better jobs in the future than polishing robots." Or more tech products than entertainment to sedate the unemployed. Therefore we need concrete economics beyond the growing trend of financialization of everything.

3. To attract long term capital investment (opposite of current financial behavior) there is need for policies and incentives based upon the fact that the general economy is one of excess not of scarcity. Studies show that there is excess of liquidity in the world. During STI Forum opening remarks, the PGA pointed out to 11 trillion USD in zero sum or negative yield allocation. Where are the SDGs bonds when we need them? Is there any SDG Venture Capitalist in the room?
4. The last point would work very well to create incentives for attracting more women and girls to the STI sector, to reach a better gender balance that most likely will benefit innovation;
5. And finally, there is an urgent need to support the implementation of the TFM and the technological data bank as soon as possible to pragmatically promote a culture of technological cooperation, instead of the current trend of technology monopolization promoted by the TRIPS agreement, and the distortions caused by excess of patent protection, particularly in the health/pharmaceutical sector.

Are we ready to change? Are the governments ready to admit their shortcomings in maintaining neoclassic and faux liberal economics as part of outdated governmentality? If yes, we need concrete policies that point in the direction of change. Otherwise, next year, and the other years ahead, we're going to keep on repeating the same points and watch the well written agendas fail in fact.