



**Globethics.net Principles
on Equality and Inequality
for a Sustainable Economy**

Declaration

A draft for public consultation

Endorsed by the Global Ethics Forum (GEF) Conference

3-5 January 2014, Bangalore, India

Dear Reader,

“Equal in an Unequal World: The Value of Values in Responsible Business” was the theme of the fourth Global Ethics Forum (GEF) Conference that took place from 3-5 January 2014 at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB) in India. More than 50 speakers and 150 participants, who represented a unique mix of diverse stakeholders ranging from governmental institutions, international institutions, private sector, students, NGOs, to academics, etc., from all continents, gathered in Bangalore and joined Globethics.net in a call for more equality in an unequal world. The 2014 GEF Conference was organised by Globethics.net in collaboration with the Centre for Corporate Governance and Citizenship at IIMB in India and the Centre for International Business Ethics (CIBE) in China. The GEF international conference is not just an isolated event – it is part of a sequence of annual conferences combined with customised exchanges during the year, joint practical projects and specific access to documentation and publications for partners.

The [Global Ethics Forum 2014 Conference](#) in Bangalore, India, focused on the challenge of inequality against the background of global economic, financial, environmental, political and leadership crises. At the conference Globethics.net presented the [Principles on Equality and Inequality for a Sustainable Economy](#). The conference participants agreed that the Principles shall undergo further revision based on the inputs collected at the conference and during an open public consultation following the conference. The finalised Principles will be presented in a final declaration and submitted to the United Nations and other institutions by the end of 2014.

This is the first draft declaration of the Principles on Equality and Inequality for a Sustainable Economy proposed by Globethics.net, which has been elaborated and endorsed in plenary sessions and eleven workgroups by the participants of the Global Ethics Forum 2014 Conference. The document is available for comments and input from the general public during a three month public consultation period starting on 30 May 2014 and ending on 31 August 2014.

We encourage you to read through the draft document and to share with us your comments on the text, as well as to provide your suggestions on specific actions that you and your organisation are committed to take in support of the declaration and for its dissemination and uptake worldwide. **Written comments and input on the declaration should be sent to consultation@globethics.net.** Please provide your full name and contact information in order for your input to be eligible for the document review.

Globethics.net will take into account the comments collected during the public consultation and will finalise the declaration for submission to the United Nations Development Group and its Advisory Group on Addressing Inequalities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda (responsible for the UN Global Thematic Consultation on Addressing Inequalities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda that took place from September 2012 to January 2013) and for dissemination through the Globethics.net +100,000 members network and through its partners' networks.

We look forward to receiving your input.

Thank you!

Geneva, May 2014

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1. Introduction

11 We, the participants and speakers at the Global Ethics Forum 2014 Conference:

12 Noting the need for action to enable people who are disadvantaged to realise their full potential, and contribute to their full participation in economic, social, political, cultural, religious and civil life;

13 Recognising the importance of conserving nature and preserving intact ecosystems as the basis of our life-support systems and the foundation of a prosperous economy;

14 Recognising the importance of combating every form of discrimination;

15 Understanding that business, government and various stakeholders may need guidance and assistance in combatting discrimination and inequality in all its dimensions – economic, social, environmental political and religious;

16 Aiming to eliminate unjust inequalities and to promote sustainable development and an economy based on fundamental ethical values;

17 Recognising the efforts to overcome inequalities and increase equality of many institutions and multilateral processes such as the “Global Thematic Consultation on Addressing Inequalities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda” with its Synthesis report (see Annex)

18 Submit the following “Globethics.net Principles on Equality and Inequality for a Sustainable Economy” to all concerned.

2. Challenges and Questions

21 Equality of all human beings is a core ethical value and the centre of human rights and obligations.

22 Human rights include an adequate standard of living, health and education, freedom of association and participation in social and political organisation, protection from discrimination, exploitation and violence, and equality in law. A range of international human rights covenants and treaties, adopted by nations in the second half of the twentieth century, provide a comprehensive set of social, economic, civil, cultural, religious and political rights. Together, they describe collective aspirations for the value, dignity and equality of human life. They reflect the areas where countries have agreed that overcoming inequalities should be a key concern.

23 The victims of inequalities are systematically deprived of their rights to food, health, safe drinking water, education, and other rights such as credit, livelihood resources etc. This means that they are marginalised and excluded from their rightful access to resources, opportunities and power. Thus, it is essentially a denial of justice, equity and dignity of life.

24 Economic, political and social development can reduce many inequalities through access to resources, education, gender awareness, etc. However, many inequalities still exist or new forms have arisen which lead to social unrest, protests, revolutions, physical and mental suffering and disease, etc. Concern around inequalities has become more prominent and since the millennium there has been greater recognition that the transition to a more sustainable society and economy can only be possible on the basis of addressing the persistent high levels of inequalities for the realisation of human development goals, human rights, economic stability and protection of non-human beings and the environment.

25 The Global Ethics Forum GEF has made the theme “Equal in an Unequal World” the focus of its 2013 Conference from 27-28 June in Geneva, Switzerland and of the 2014 Conference from 3-5 January in Bangalore, India. One of the goals of the conferences was to look at the diverse issues resulting from the various forms and dimensions of equality and inequality from the perspective of GEF’s workgroups on ethics and sustainability.

26 The conference participants addressed various questions such as:

What are the current and future dimensions of inequality on national and global levels, and how are they interrelated with the various aspects of sustainable development?

How much unequal treatment is needed before equality is improved? And from a private sector perspective, in a free market economy, how much inequality resulting from the freedom of a free market and from competition is unavoidable and to what extent can it be accepted or rejected?

What role do business, government and other stakeholders play in addressing inequality in its various dimensions – social (health, education, etc.), economic (access to jobs, wealth distribution, etc.), environmental, and other? What is the role and responsibility of “old” and “new” superpowers such as the USA, European Union and the BRICS countries for equality related to weaker countries and populations?

What changes in the current political, social and economic agenda are necessary and what ethical principles are needed as a platform for such changes to be implemented successfully?

How can technical and cultural innovation and how can social media contribute to overcoming inequalities?

How can more transparency in religious organisations contribute to reduced corruption and more fair and equal access to the resources of these organisations?

3. Ethical Values for Equality

31 The principles on equality are based on the fundamental ethical values and sustainability principles promoted by Globethics.net, and incorporate the key principles recommended by the Synthesis Report (annex), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Charter of the United Nations and other global initiatives.

32 Justice is based on the inalienable human dignity of every human being and their equality. Justice grows when people cultivate a deep respect towards each other. This is expressed in the golden rule of mutuality and reciprocity as the basic norm of equity: ‘Do to others as you would have them do to you’.

33 Care and compassion is the ability for empathy, respect and support of the other. It leads to solidarity.

34 Participation is the right and ability to participate in societal life and in taking decisions that are of concern to the whole of society. For example in decision-making, is an expression of respecting human dignity and strengthening communities in an inclusive way. Sharing values in dialogue is a participatory process.

35 Freedom of access to information, of expression, of belief and of decision is core for human dignity and human development.

36 Sharing leads to, enables, and sustains relationships between human beings and strengthens communities.

37 Responsibility is accountability for one’s own actions. The level of responsibility has to correspond to the level of power, capacity and capability. Those with more resources bear greater responsibility.

All these values are interconnected, need each other and balance each other.

4. Seven Principles of Equality

41 Equality is a key human right and an obligation. The right to equality is the right of all human beings to be equal in dignity, to be treated with respect and consideration and to participate on an equal basis with others in any area of economic, social, political, cultural, religious or civil life. All human beings are equal before the law and have the right to equal protection and benefit of the law. According to the Synthesis Report 2013, “Equality can be said to mean that everyone can lead productive lives, with dignity, and realise their rights; it also means that we fulfil our obligations to relate fairly and respectfully to others, and that we share planetary resources responsibly.”

42 Non-discrimination as an expression of equality is a key human right and an obligation. The right to non-discrimination is a free-standing, fundamental right, subsumed in the right to equality. Discrimination is prohibited whether it is on grounds of race, colour, ethnicity, descent, sex, pregnancy, maternity, civil, family or career status, language, religion or belief, political or other opinion, birth, national or social origin, nationality, economic status, association with a national minority, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, disability, health status, genetic or other predisposition toward illness or a combination of any of these grounds, or on the basis of characteristics associated with any of these grounds. Discrimination based on any other ground must be prohibited where such discrimination (i) causes or perpetuates systemic disadvantage; (ii) undermines human dignity; or (iii) adversely affects the equal enjoyment of a person's rights and freedoms.

43 Equality means equal treatment of equals and unequal treatment of those who are not equal. There is nothing as unequal as the unequal treatment of those who are not equal. Equality rather means equal treatment of equals and unequal, differentiated treatment of those who are not equal. Equal treatment, as an aspect of equality, is not equivalent to identical treatment. Preferential treatment of weaker and vulnerable members of society e.g. by preferential trade rules are fair and an expression of the equality principle. To realise full and effective equality it is necessary to treat people differently and in a differentiated way according to their different circumstances to assert their equal worth and to enhance their capabilities to participate in society as equals.

44 Equality includes respect for diversity. Diversity of gender, culture, religions, languages, communities as well as economic and political systems and biodiversity are an expression of the beauty of the world. Diversity is needed for identity, freedom, contextualisation and sustainability. Struggling for equality therefore includes also respect for diversity.

45 Equality and freedom balance each other through open transparent dialogue and collaboration. Absolute equality would lead to uniformity, equalisation and loss of freedom. Freedom of expression, decision and action is a core human right and key for human dignity. However, freedom tends to increase inequalities and the rights of the stronger. Therefore, only when freedom and equality (including fairness and justice) balance and limit each other, can humane development and life in dignity be possible. The balance between freedom and equality requires ongoing open dialogue and collaboration among all stakeholders, across all sectors of society and economy, regional and national borders, knowledge and fields of expertise, cultures and religions.

46 Societies with fewer inequalities are more prosperous and have greater social peace. There is no absolute benchmark for inequality which can be justified or denied and is ethically acceptable or unacceptable. There are, however relative ratios of equality and inequality such as: a) the vertical ratio between the poorest and richest (e.g. income in a company/organisation); b) the horizontal ratio between sectors of society (e.g. wealth in urban and rural areas or financial and agricultural sector); c) the resource ratio in access to resources including natural resources, education, information, goods and services; d) the geographical ratio within countries and continents and between countries and continents; e) the generational ratio between young, middle and aged generations; f) the migration ratio between citizens and foreigners. Societies in which such inequalities are reasonably limited and the middle class is strong are more peaceful, harmonious, prosperous and sustainable in their development and transformation processes.

47 Equality of present and future generations leads to sustainability. Equality is not only an issue of present generations and human and non-human beings, but even more between present and future generations. Future generations have the same rights (and obligations) for a life in dignity as the present generations have and inherited from former generations. For this reason, principles of equality and of sustainability are interconnected.

5 Principles on Sustainability

51 Preserve the ecosystem balance of the Earth. The planet is in our care and we must act as good stewards and maintain the sustainable state of the planetary ecosystem. Individuals and organisations must secure respect towards the Earth and the future generations by refraining from overexploiting nat-

ural resources, limiting environmental damage, managing public and private goods prudently, and looking for reasonable trade-offs between immediate, long-term and Earth-wide interests.

52 *Adopt and support sustainable living.* Preserve individual health, ensure safe economic activities, and eliminate toxicity and pollution at home and in all aspects of your life. In your enterprise, preserve equity and justice, and provide decent working conditions and pay. Live a simple happy life filled with love and passion, be a servant of your community and a leader for positive change.

53 *Commit to sustainable business performance.* The enterprise must adopt optimum resource productivity and innovation for increased efficiency, based on the 4 'R's (Recycle, Reuse, Replenish, Recover) as the way to address such threats as climate change and loss of ecosystems. In its operations, supply chain activities, and product utilisation must be addressed.

54 *The sustainability of nature, ecosystems and of society are interconnected.* Conserve nature and preserve intact ecosystems as the basis of our life-support systems and the foundation of a prosperous economy. This applies to such planetary systems as a stable climate and the ability of the oceans to support life, as well as to the ability of regions to assimilate waste. Caring for climate, water, air and natural resources and for equality in society are interconnected. Society must be built upon peace and human rights, dignity and democracy, employment and social integration, security and safety, the constructive integration of female and male attitudes in order to become a sustainable society which meets basic human needs.

6 General Recommendations and Actions to Overcome Inequalities

61 *Positive action.* To be effective, the right to equality requires effective positive action involving coordinated efforts by governments, business and civil society, backed up by a range of legislative, administrative and policy measures to overcome past disadvantage and to accelerate progress towards the equality of particular groups, is a necessary element within efforts made to safeguard and promote the right to equality.

62 *The Synthesis Report* recommends that the actions for tackling inequalities take place on four levels. The four levels of action are drawn from the human rights framework, reflecting the obligation of duty bearers (primarily the State), to respect, protect and fulfil human rights, and the concurrent need for rights holders to have increased capacity to claim rights. All four levels of action *must be applied in combination, together* in order to achieve transformative change:

Entitlements to equality and non-discrimination need to be established in law, guided by the human rights framework, and implemented through non-discriminatory and pro-equality economic and social policy. These actions taken to respect people's human rights are the primary responsibility of the State. Actions on this level include for example: establishment of inclusive economic, environmental and social policies; equality in constitutional and legal frameworks; etc.

States also need to take action to *protect citizens and others from discrimination, violence, exploitation and harm by others*. Safeguards are needed against threats at the family and community levels, at work, from gender-based violence, environmental hazards, and harmful impacts of business activity and from unfair economic and financial systems. Actions on this level include for example: protection at work; protection from violence and abuse; global action against climate change; climate change resilience and adaptation;

Levelling up measures are needed to offer progressive support to individuals and groups whose capabilities have been diminished or constrained by inequalities. Actions on this level include for example: tackling discrimination against people with HIV/AIDS; etc.

Strengthening the capacity of *rights holders to make valid claims on others* is integral to all actions to tackle inequalities. Actions on this level include for example: changing social attitudes; engaging with communities; climate change resilience and participation; improved data systems on inequality issues; decentralisation and participation in government of marginalized and discriminated groups; etc.

63 Measures against poverty. As poverty may be both a cause and a consequence of discrimination, measures to alleviate poverty should be coordinated with measures to combat discrimination, and other various forms and dimensions of inequality.

64 Participation. All persons, particularly those who have experienced or who are vulnerable to discrimination, should be consulted and involved in the development and implementation of laws and policies implementing the right to equality.

65 Accommodation. Public and private sector organisations must provide the necessary and appropriate modifications and adjustments, including anticipatory measures, to facilitate the ability of every individual to participate in any area of economic, social, political, cultural or civil life on an equal basis with others. It should not be an obligation to accommodate difference where this would impose a disproportionate or undue burden on the provider.

66 Education on equality. States have a duty to work with public and private organisations on raising public awareness about equality, and on ensuring that all educational establishments, including private, religious and military schools, provide suitable education on equality as a fundamental right.

67 Collaboration. Tackling inequality issues requires ongoing open collaboration among all stakeholders, across all sectors of society and economy, regional and national borders, knowledge and fields of expertise, cultures and religions.

68 Integrated approach. Equality, human rights, and sustainability are interlinked. It is necessary to ensure that equality, human rights and sustainability are fully integrated into the process for the development and implementation of a new globally accepted and adopted development agenda addressing the structural causes of inequalities, seeking change towards fair and sustainable human development.

69 Accountability. Accountability is vital as a means of holding governments and other stakeholders (duty bearers) to account for the implementation of their commitments concerning equality, human rights and sustainability, and to report openly on their progress towards these commitments. Systems for national accountability can include parliamentary oversight and national institutions, in interaction with civil society and community based monitoring, and should include appropriate reliable reporting frameworks and procedures. Regional bodies are one level at which governments can hold each other to account, feeding into global systems of accountability. Besides national governments, accountability is expected from all other actors, including the private sector, international organisations, and social and civic leadership.

610 Responsibility. Responsibility is accountability by individuals and/or by institutions for their own actions and impacts, backed up by the commitment and readiness to address the potential negative impacts of these actions. The level of responsibility has to correspond to levels of power, capacity and capability. Those with more resources bear greater responsibility.

611 Transparency. Transparency means making information available about an organisation's decisions and activities regarding the relevant social, economic, financial, environmental and spiritual aspects of its operations. Business is expected to provide a regular flow of reliable information to their clients, partners, employees or other people and organisations in their networks. Equally, governmental institutions, religious and civil society organisations, and any other type of organisations are expected to act and provide their stakeholders with consistent and reliable information. Communication and collaboration with stakeholders - individuals, groups, organisations, and communities that affect and are affected by an organisation's operations and products - are essential to sustainable decision-making.

Sources

- Globethics.net: *Principles of Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions*. Geneva 2012, www.globethics.net/web/ge/texts-series (accessed 25 December 2013)
- Addressing Inequalities, Synthesis Report of Global Thematic Consultation on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, February 2013, www.worldwewant2015.org/inequalities
- M. King, Teodorina Lessidrenska: *Transient Caretakers*. Pan Macmillan SA, Johannesburg 2009

Annex

From September 2012 to January 2013, an on-line Global Thematic Consultation on Addressing Inequalities in the Post-2015 Development Agenda (also referred to as The Global Consultation) was held under the auspices of the United Nations Development Group under the on-going guidance of an Advisory Group, drawn from civil society organisations, UN agencies and academic institutions. Co-led and facilitated by UNICEF and UN Women, and supported by the Government of Denmark and the Government of Ghana, the Consultation provided an open and inclusive process resulting in more than 175 written submissions (as of the end of January 2013) covering in detail a wide range of issues related to inequalities and a large number of additional written inputs and comments from members of the public and organisations worldwide in response to a series of 10 moderated “e-discussions” on key themes that emerged from the written submissions. In February 2013, the *Synthesis Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Addressing Inequalities* (also referred to as *The Synthesis Report*) was released, that draws for its analysis and conclusions on the many written submissions, the e-discussions, the inputs and contributions of the Advisory Group, and on comments made by members of the public on the draft Report directly through the website.

According to the *Synthesis Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Addressing Inequalities*, “Inequalities are reproduced through the interaction of discriminatory structures in four domains:

In the *economic* domain, distributive inequalities create disparities in accessing the resources necessary to participate in society. This can apply to wealth, and to other assets and opportunities.

In the *social* domain, status inequalities deny some people or groups equal standing with others. Social stratification is based on a range of characteristics in different contexts, often providing a powerful basis for discrimination and exclusion.

In the *environmental* domain, environmental inequalities expose some people or groups to a disproportionate share of environmental hazard, and/or discrimination in securing reasonable access to the natural resources they need to lead a healthy life.

In the *political* domain, representational inequalities create disparities in access to opportunities to express claims or to seek resolution of injustices. This happens when discriminatory laws and policies are in place, or when the institutions of Government operate unfairly.”

Among the Key Messages that emerged from the Global Consultation are the following:

“Equality was identified as a *fundamental value* in the Millennium Declaration, adopted by the Member States of the United Nations at the turn of the century in 2000.

The obligation to address inequalities is born from the principles and standards of the international *human rights treaties* which have been widely adopted in the last several decades, as well as from *human values* shared across continents and cultures.

Translating equality and the other fundamental values of the Millennium Declaration more systematically and effectively *into practice* will be crucial to sustaining progress and improving the wellbeing of both today’s and all future generations.

Inequalities are a global challenge. They persist both within all countries and between them.

Similar kinds of inequalities are faced in common by people across the world.

Inequalities are not just problems for the people whose lives are most directly affected – those most disadvantaged and excluded. They have deep consequences for everyone in society. *Inequalities harm us all*. Among these consequences are: reductions in the pace and sustainability of economic growth; diminishment of the productive potential of all who are harmed and excluded, and the loss of this potential to society; the worsening of existing fragilities and vulnerabilities, including to conflict and disasters; and the weakening of social cohesion and of security for all. Addressing inequalities is not only the right thing in principle, but also vital in ensuring that we have a sustainable and peaceful world.”
