

The Post-2015 Development Agenda: Reflections from the High-level Panel Secretariat

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by

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Introduction

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been a central reference point for aid and international cooperation since their inception in 2000. As their 2015 end date approaches, the world is asking, what comes next?

To help answer this question, in 2012 the Secretary-General of the United Nations appointed a High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Co-chaired by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, and Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom, and including leaders from civil society, the private sector and government, the 27-member Panel was tasked with advising the Secretary General on a bold but practical development post-2015 agenda to succeed the MDGs. On 30 May 2013, the Panel released its report, [*A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*](#).

To learn more about the report, and discuss its implications for global and Canadian engagement on international development, on 25 July 2013 NSI invited Dr. Homi Kharas, Executive Secretary and Lead Author of the High-level Panel Secretariat, and Molly Elgin-Cossart, Chief of Staff of the High-level Panel Secretariat, to speak with leaders from the Canadian civil society, business and research communities.

Participants in the roundtable included representatives from the following organizations:

[Aga Khan Foundation Canada](#)

[Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives](#)

[Canadian Council for International Cooperation](#)

[Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and International Development](#)

[Oxfam Canada](#)

[The North-South Institute](#)

[Parliamentary Centre](#)

[Pearson Centre](#)

[Unilever Canada](#)

[United Nations Association in Canada](#)

[World University Service of Canada](#)

This report provides an overview of the roundtable discussion.

The Panel's Report

Dr. Kharas provided an overview of the High-level Panel's report and recommendations. Below are the highlights from this presentation.

Vision: The report calls for an agenda that tackles extreme poverty and supports sustainable development. Indeed, the report states, "Our vision and our responsibility are to end extreme poverty in all its forms in the context of sustainable development and to have in place the building blocks of sustained prosperity for all." The Panel's recommendations reflect great optimism that ending extreme poverty through sustainable development is possible within one generation.

Consultations: The Panel consulted thousands of people around the world to inform their report. This included: 5000 civil society organizations in 120 countries in every region; 250 companies in 30 countries, with annual revenues exceeding \$8 trillion; and survey results from over half a million individuals on priorities.

Framework: The Panel proposes the pursuit of a universal post-2015 framework that is relevant to and actionable by all countries. The post-2015 goals and targets should be embedded within national plans, and national targets should be developed through a national consultative process.

Changing global context: The report is clear that given the changing global context, business-as-usual is not an option. Indeed, the framework needs to take into account that:

- 8 billion people will live on the planet by 2030 and 9 billion by 2050 – and the world's population will be more urban, more middle class, older, more connected, more interdependent and more constrained in its resources.
- Half the world's poor live in conflict-affected countries that need responsive and capable institutions.
- Natural disasters have cost \$2.5 trillion since 2000.
- Carbon emissions must be reduced below today's voluntary pledges or else we are on a path to at least a 4-degree Celsius rise in temperatures.

Five Transformative Shifts: The report proposes five transformational shifts to drive the post-2015 development agenda.

1. *Leave no one behind:* The post-2015 agenda needs to reach everyone, and be a radical commitment to equality and non-discrimination. The report recommends placing equality of opportunity at the heart of the post-2015 agenda by “hardwiring” it into the goals: indicators to track progress against the achievement of the goals should be disaggregated and tracked with respect to income (especially for the bottom 20 per cent), gender, location, age, people living with disabilities, and other relevant social groups. Targets will only be considered “achieved” if they are met for all relevant income and social groups.
2. *Put sustainable development at the core:* We must achieve patterns of consumption and production that can sustain global prosperity, and slow the alarming pace of climate change and environmental degradation, which pose unprecedented threats to humanity.
3. *Transform economies for jobs and inclusive growth:* The report suggests that a “quantum leap” in providing economic opportunities is necessary, and conditions for good and decent jobs must be created through education, skills, training, better policies and inclusive and sustainable business practices. A stable and simple regulatory environment must be in place with accountabilities for businesses to pay fair taxes and account for the social, financial and environmental impact of their activities.
4. *Build peace and effective, open and accountable institutions:* Freedom from conflict and violence is the foundation for building peaceful and prosperous societies. Peace and good governance must be recognized as core elements of well-being, and both transparency and accountability need to be embodied in public institutions.
5. *Forge a new global partnership:* Stakeholders need to look beyond aid, establish multi-sectoral partnerships for implementation and accountability, and ensure more and better long-term finance. We need to adopt new mind-sets to merge environmental and development agendas and recognize different solutions for different contexts – national and sub-national – in a country owned agenda.

Illustrative goals: While it is too early to set out a prescriptive blueprint on post-2015, the Panel wanted to demonstrate that the agenda is practical and actionable. Acknowledging that it is ultimately up to Member States to set the post-2015 agenda, including specific goals, the Panel identifies illustrative goals in its report, which can be translated into compelling and measurable targets. The goals are outlined below.

Illustrative Goals for the Post-2015 Agenda

1. End poverty.
2. Empower girls and women and achieve gender equality.
3. Provide quality education and lifelong learning.
4. Ensure healthy lives.
5. Ensure food security and good nutrition.
6. Achieve universal access to water and sanitation.
7. Secure sustainable energy.
8. Create jobs, sustainable livelihoods and equitable growth.
9. Manage natural resource assets sustainably.
10. Ensure good governance and effective institutions.
11. Ensure stable and peaceful societies.
12. Create a global enabling environment and catalyse long-term finance.

Implementation and accountability: The Panel proposes that a global Sustainable Development Outlook be produced every one or two years, jointly written by a consortium of international agencies. They also propose that periodically, a Global Forum at a high political level be convened to review progress and challenges ahead. They suggest that a reporting and peer-review process at the regional level could complement global monitoring.

Data revolution: The Panel calls for the launch of a data revolution, through a Global Partnership on Development Data, to improve the quality of statistics and information available to track sustainable development progress.

Key Issues

Discussion following Dr. Kharas' presentation covered a number of important issues.

Transformational change in the face of uncertainty: The report calls for an agenda that is considerably broader and more transformational than the MDGs. The post-2015 agenda needs to be about much more than aid. It needs to be an agenda that requires action by and has impact on everyone, everywhere – not just the chronically poor in developing countries. This requires globally coordinated agreement and action. But this comes at a time when the world is increasingly fragmented, economies are under stress, the demand for natural resources is rising, political tensions – within and between countries – are escalating, and the world is more vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. How can the processes of establishing and then delivering the post-2015 agenda stay on track in the face of this uncertainty? How can we ensure that the inter-governmental process surrounding post-2015 does not go down the same path as the climate change and international trade negotiations? How can we construct a nationally and globally compelling vision? How can lessons from successful global agreements inform the post-2015 process?

Reasons for optimism: Despite the scale of the challenges the world faces, there are reasons to be optimistic that an ambitious post-2015 agenda can be realized. More countries have the resources to solve their own problems than ever before. For example, almost every country in Africa is now considered resource rich, and the potential development impact of this resource wealth is huge. In the past, development agendas were about North-South flows of aid resources. Today, these flows are not uni-directional, and sources of finance for developing countries go far beyond aid. Technology has played a huge role in accelerating development and can support the scale-up of initiatives to better deliver services and opportunities that are critical for sustainable development.

The potential of the data revolution: The data revolution that the report calls for has the potential to have enormous impact. What is critical, however, is ensuring that the data generated through these efforts reaches people at the local level, who can then use this information to advocate for change and hold decision makers to account. Collecting data about the most marginalized and vulnerable groups is essential – but giving this data back to them in useable ways is also critical. The Panel's report proposes indicators on access to information, which is welcomed.

Localizing the agenda and strengthening institutions: The report recommends a heightened focus on governance and institutions in the post-2015 agenda – but what of local institutions? The most effective programs – the ones that lead to lasting change – occur when local institutions are empowered. Measuring progress towards the post-2015 goals through disaggregated data, which includes data disaggregated by geography, will enable more localized insights into development progress. This has the potential to support enhanced accountability at the sub-national level.

Universality in practice: The Panel's report recommends that the post-2015 development agenda is universal in nature. This means that development progress should be monitored in all countries – not just countries of the developing world. Today, all countries face sustainable development challenges – for example, transitioning to a low-carbon economy, reducing vast inequalities in economic and social outcomes, addressing violence against women. Characterizing the world in a bipolar way no longer makes sense – there are significant overlaps between the challenges that countries across the globe face, and risks to development and prosperity are increasingly global and transboundary in nature. Many private sector stakeholders have already transformed their business practices to respond to this, and the role of the sovereign nation state in this context will continue to be challenged. Building coalitions and partnerships across diverse stakeholder groups is necessary to keep the post-2015 agenda on track, to advocate for the universal nature of the post-2015 framework, and to ensure that Member States realize the significance and importance of the agenda.

Political buy-in: The post-2015 agenda is ambitious, and strong leadership will be required to realize it. Many non-state stakeholders – including businesses, civil society, philanthropy, international organizations – have already demonstrated strong leadership on this agenda, and much of what the Panel proposes in its report will move forward with or without governments. For example, businesses now understand that supporting sustainable modes of development needs to go far beyond corporate social responsibility. For reputational, sustainability and growth reasons it needs to be part of their core business strategy. The scale and depth of impact that the post-2015 agenda can have will be greatly enhanced by government commitment, however. Governments need to realize that focusing on this agenda is in the best interest of all countries. Some governments are clearly recognizing that development and self-interest are increasingly aligned. For example, the United States is more engaged on the post-2015 development agenda than they were on the MDGs.

Next steps: The Panel's report will inform a report by the Secretary-General, which will be submitted for consideration by the 68th General Assembly in September 2013. Roundtable participants acknowledged the need to continue collaborating to raise the profile of the post-2015 agenda in Canada, and find innovative ways of partnering to move this important agenda forward.

To find out more about the Post-2015 Development Agenda and what comes next after the Millennium Development Goals, you can read [Reflecting on the MDGs and Making Sense of the Post-2015 Development Agenda](#) by NSI Senior Researcher Kate Higgins.

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