

**A Review of the Report of the High Level Panel of
Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda,
Appointed by the UN Secretary General (HLP):
*A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform
Economies through Sustainable Development*¹**

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INTRODUCTION

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were picked by experts, sidestepping the guiding principles outlined in the Millennium Declaration. It may be recalled that the Millennium Declaration in fact has proposed an overall framework for pursuing human progress, in terms of: freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature, and shared responsibility of managing world economic and social development as well as threats to international peace and security. The programme contents it has outlined also talks about peace, security and disarmament, development and poverty eradication, protecting our common environment, human rights, democracy and governance, protecting the vulnerable, and so on. Not only that the MDG agenda has ignored these overarching issues, except for poverty eradication, but has also not addressed certain major development and climate change related issues such as the following: equitable economic growth, energy, climate change, and production and consumption patterns.

Given that the MDG agenda remains bereft of a framework for people-centred, equitable, and inclusive sustainable development, even substantial progress in relation to MDG targets would not and has not generated a momentum to that end. Yet, the MDGs have been sought to be implemented around the world with much gusto, the like of which has not so far happened in relation to any other globally agreed agenda.

The main reason may not be far to seek. Seven of the 8 MDGs, excluding Goal 8, as formulated are easily understandable and the targets identified under them are quantitatively measurable. Perhaps largely because of this, the MDG agenda has caught the imagination of the governments, civil societies, and other stakeholders around the world.

As of today (20 July 2013), only 894 days remain for further attainment of MDG targets. Enhanced efforts are encouraged and are pursued in many countries to achieve more (where there are still shortfalls) or beyond (where targets have already been achieved) in relation to the targets under different MDGs. Further MDG achievements will certainly be welcome, as the post-2015 agenda comes into force.

The notable achievements in respect of many MDG targets in many countries including Bangladesh which is in fact a star performer, and the enthusiasm and experiences engendered by the MDG agenda as well as the absence of a broad framework and non-inclusion of certain key issues in the MDGs can be and are generally considered as points of departure in the discourse towards formulating the post-2015 agenda.

FORMULATING THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

While the UN initiated work on **post-2015 development agenda** ahead of the June 2012 Rio+20 Conference, **the post-2015 sustainable development goals (SDGs)** formulation process owes its origin to the outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference. A mandate was set that between Rio+20 and end of 2015 an inclusive and transparent intergovernmental process open to all stakeholders with a view to developing global SDGs to be agreed by the General Assembly would be conducted. It is expected that the final outcome will be on the basis of an orchestrated convergence of the UN initiated post-2015 development agenda and the Rio+20 conference initiated SDG formulation processes. Henceforth, we shall refer to the post-2015 development framework and action programme as the post-2015 agenda.

The post-2015 agenda formulation process is a global multi-dimensional and multi-stakeholder exercise. The overall purpose is to create a framework that is inclusive of all countries, developed and developing, and all populations regardless of who and where they are. There would be a broad common work programme, with country specifics to be worked out by respective countries within that broad framework. It will be people-centred and take into consideration all key aspects of sustainable development under its three pillars (economic, social, and environmental). All UN agencies, governments of all countries, the parliamentarians, civil societies, people with disabilities and other specially disadvantaged groups and all UN major groups (business and industry, children and youth, farmers, indigenous peoples, local authorities, NGOs, scientific and technological communities, women, and workers and trade unions) are encouraged to participate in the debates and in providing their own views on what the realities are as perceived by them and what needs to be included in the agenda. Many of these groups are quite active, while others are perhaps not. But, space exists for all; even so, certain disadvantaged groups are also disadvantaged in terms of access and facilities for them to make their contributions and even to the information that they may participate. Despite this limitation, the post-2015 agenda formulation process is open and participatory, as opposed to the closed door manner of the selection of the MDGs.

There are multiple processes feeding into the UN coordinating facility that is working to bring the myriad recommendations into an overall framework and a set of goals and associated targets and indicators applicable all countries, reflecting the key concerns and the best possible ways forward, emanating from all those recommendations, which the UN General Assembly can agree and adopt.

While national, parliamentarian, civil society, and other stakeholder consultations have been generating and submitting their contributions, the UN actors dedicated to the process include the following:

- UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, appointed in January 2012
- A Special Advisor to the UN Secretary General on Post-2015 Development Agenda, appointed in June 2012
- The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP), appointed in July 2012
- UN General Assembly (UNGA) Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals, established in January 2013

The UN System Task Team has submitted its first report, *Realizing the Future We Want for All*, in June 2012 and is working to further develop various relevant aspects. The UN OWG

has been working to formulate its proposals. The fourth OWG session was held in June 2013 and more sessions are planned this year and beyond before concluding its work. The Secretary General's Special Advisor supports the process of development of a sustainable framework with appropriate goals, targets, and indicators for the post-2015 development process and works in consultation with member states, the UN stakeholders and key external constituencies and advises the Secretary General on all matters relating to post-2015 agenda. The HLP has submitted its Final Report to the UN Secretary General on 30 May 2013.

So far we have tried to give a brief on how the global efforts towards the formulation of the post-2015 agenda are being conducted and the progress up to now. In this paper, the specific purpose is, however, to review the Final Report of the HLP.

REVIEWING THE HLP REPORT

It is clear that both the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs have importantly informed the HLP exercise. The forward looking sustainable development framework outlined by the HLP can be traced in a major way to the Millennium Declaration, and the 12 Goals chosen appear to have broadly followed the nature and pattern of the MDGs, of course with some new ones added. The dovetailing of the proposed framework with the proposed goals and targets has been done in an appreciable manner, to the extent the formulation of the goals and targets goes.

There was not much expectation, which was at least my impression, that the HLP would produce a Report that would help galvanize the debates on post-2015 development process. But, it is to be acknowledged up front that, in this context, the Report is a significant boost.

The Proposed Five Shifts

First of all, the Report has called for transformative shifts, five of them, to drive the post-2015 development. These are:

- 1. Leave No One Behind.** This means that regardless of ethnicity, gender, geography, disability, race or other status, everybody should be included, with their universal human rights and socio-economic opportunities ensured.
- 2. Put Sustainable Development at the Core.** The integration of social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability, that has been much talked about but remains unachieved by any country, should be realized by mobilizing social, economic and environmental action together by all countries, given their respective responsibilities and capacities.
- 3. Transform Economies for Jobs and Inclusive Growth.** This requires people-centred diversification of economies, creating equal opportunities for all, specially focusing on women, youth, people with disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups. For the created opportunities to be taken up by those for whom these are intended, particularly the various disadvantaged groups, access to quality education, skill training, healthcare, clean water, electricity, telecommunication and transport facilities should be ensured.

4. Build Peace and Effective, Open and Accountable Institutions for All. Recognizing that freedom from fear, conflict and violence as the most fundamental human right, it is called for that international and national institutions be geared in terms of their mandates, abilities, effectiveness, transparency and accountability towards ensuring fundamental rights for everybody anywhere in the world. The shift called for, therefore, is the recognition and establishment of peace and good governance as core elements of wellbeing, not optional extras.

5. Forge a New Global Partnership. This is a call for shared responsibility in promoting sustainable development world-wide, each partner playing its role on the basis of their respective responsibilities and capabilities. In the process of partnership building for different areas of action, the voices of all stakeholders, particularly those of the disadvantaged populations, must be properly represented. The partnerships built must be transparent and everyone (countries, institutions, individuals) must be accountable.

The Report also calls for a **data revolution** for sustainable development, which would mean disaggregated reliable data, covering all relevant aspects, for all sectors of the economy and all segments of population everywhere. A very tall order, but this is a critically important need for purposeful and effective policy making, programme designing and monitoring of the outcomes.

Indicating that the goals and targets being put forward are to be driven by the five shifts outlined, the HLP has proposed 12 Goals and 54 associated targets, which have been indicated as illustrative. It has been mentioned that the targets listed require further technical work towards improving their appropriateness. To be sure, the targets would be national, which can be aggregated at the global level for the global picture. Very importantly it has been proposed that “Targets will only be considered ‘achieved’ if they are met for all relevant income and social groups” (p. 29).²

The Proposed 12 Goals

The Goals proposed are:

1. End Poverty (poverty considered is income poverty and has been defined with reference to the poverty line of PPP \$1.25, national poverty lines are also recognized)
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 Sustainability
10. Ensure Good Governance and Effective Institutions
11. Ensure Stable and Peaceful Societies
12. Create a Global Environment and Catalyze Long-term Finance

Obviously these are worthy Goals reflecting a vast improvement on MDGs, although they appear to be patterned on MDGs with broadly similar sequencing (poverty, gender and education, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, and Goal 12 being on global

partnership). The innovation, in keeping with some of the dynamics of the proposed five shifts, lies in the choice of Goals 7 to 11, which take on board the issues relating to energy, jobs, sustainable livelihoods, equitable growth, sustainable natural resource management, good governance and effective institutions, and stable and peaceful societies.

The 54 targets shown under the 12 Goals spell out many different concerns to be addressed in the post-2015 development period, which is conceived to be up to 2030.

The Key Issues Ignored or Inadequately Reflected in the Goals and Targets Proposed

Let me now turn to the key issues which the HLP Report has failed to include in goals and targets addressed, either totally or in a proper manner.

- **Poverty.** Poverty is multidimensional, and it has been so recognized in the HLP Report. Hence, a meaningful poverty eradication strategy must address the multiple deprivations, which include not only economic, social, and environmental constraints but also structural constraints such as discrimination, violence, and conflicts. Although some of these issues are included in other Goals, poverty measurement has been proposed to be made mainly with reference to income, and a poverty line income of \$1.25 (PPP) per person per day has been suggested.

The national poverty line has also been included as an additional yardstick. But, that is often based on the cost of basic needs, which is also a narrow concept in view of the wide-scale multidimensionality of poverty. Having recognized the multidimensionality of poverty, the Report has failed to take it into account in proposing the methods of poverty measurement.

It may be noted here that one way of measuring multidimensional poverty is to specify a poverty line for each key dimension and a person may be defined to be poor if he/she is poor with reference to any one of those dimensions. But, there are methodologies available for combining the dimensions and associated one-dimensional gaps into a multidimensional poverty measure.³

- **Hunger.** Hunger is in fact higher now at around 925 million compared to around 780 million in the mid-1990s, for various reasons including conflicts and climate change impacts. Understandably, hunger is pervasive among the disadvantaged groups. In this backdrop, more prominence should be given to ending hunger by including it in Goal 5, although ending hunger and protecting the rights of everyone to have access to sufficient, affordable and nutritious food is a target under this Goal.

- **Inequality.** Inequality has been recognized as an overarching problem but it has not been frontally attacked, either as a Goal or part of a Goal or even as a target under any Goal. The inclusion of equitable growth in Goal 8 is a step in the right direction, which if implemented properly may improve the prospects of those at the wrong end of inequality. But, no redistribution through, for example, progressive taxation and social protection via transfer payments and other means has been proposed as a target.

Also, the emphasis of the HLP on inequality seems to be posited with reference to nation states. Regarding global inequality, it has been suggested that “Low and middle-income

countries are now growing faster than high income ones, which helps to reduce global inequality” (p. 4). The burden is placed on the low and middle-income countries, and nothing has been specifically asked of the developed countries to do to reduce global inequality.

Tackling inequality, nationally and internationally, is very important for sustainable development so that it must not be ignored in goal and target setting. It may be incorporated in Goal 8 with appropriately designed targets.

- **International Governance and Financial Infrastructure.** Under Goal 12, a target has been included relating to the implementation of reforms towards ensuring stability of the global financial system. But, what reforms? International governance in terms of management and functioning and decision-making processes of international institutions, including UN, particularly the Bretton Woods Institutions, is highly inequitable, because of contribution-based voting rights or the clout of the global power structure. This issue has been basically ignored. In order to promote an equitable global system, it is essential that both global governance and global financial architecture are so reformed as to allow the currently voiceless countries and populations to have their perspectives and voices reflected in the international governance and in the management and operations of international financial architecture.

- **Job Creation.** Job creation as part of Goal 8 and the focus on young people in a target under it recognize important aspects of sustainable development. While it is to be recognized that market create jobs, there is a problem in the present ruling paradigm of neo-liberalism that promotes the interests of the empowered while further disempowers the powerless. Therefore, in order to create jobs for the disadvantaged groups, indeed for people at large, it is essential to introduce market reforms and reorientation of economic policies towards a participatory framework to enable the ordinary people, particularly the disadvantaged segments of the population, to participate meaningfully in the market, be it in the realm of production or of distribution or of providing various services. There is nothing said, either in the Report or in the Goals and targets, relating to promoting such an enabling environment for an equitable and participatory economic system.

- **International Movement of People.** The HLP Report recognizes that international movement of people along with goods and services would enable more people and more countries to benefit fully from globalization (p. 54). But, neither in the Goals nor in any of the targets international movement of people has been included.

International migration of workers is indeed an important contributor to growth in both sending and receiving countries. To facilitate worker migration from the sending countries so that the migrating workers are not exploited by unscrupulous recruiting agencies and other middle-people and to ensure their labour and human rights in the receiving countries are very important.

At the same time, the number of climate change induced displaced people in the highly climate-vulnerable countries is sharply increasing. The Cancun Agreement (CoP 16) recognizes this and states that such displaced people should be rehabilitated within their countries, regionally, and internationally. This is something that needs to be given emphasis in any process of sustainable development.

One would, therefore, find it essential that migration of all types would find a place in a post-2015 agenda. I strongly suggest that it be incorporated in the agenda, perhaps in HLP-proposed Goal 12 as a major target.

- **Climate Change.** It has been recognized in the Report that poverty and climate change are intricately related. Indeed, increasing climate change impacts widen and deepen poverty. But, despite recognizing the intensifying threat from climate change, this issue has not been frontally addressed. It remains neglected in the HLP proposals, just as it was in the MDG agenda. However, aspects of it have been introduced in the HLP Report as targets under different goals such as the vision of keeping global average temperature below 2°C by the end of this century compared to the pre-industrial level under Goal 12 and aspects of clean energy promotion under Goal 7. But, there is no mention of adaptation to the climate change impacts already faced by many countries, particularly the highly climate vulnerable countries. Financing, technology transfer, and capacity enhancement support from international community to the vulnerable countries are crucially important in this context. At the same time, of course, drastic reduction of GHG emissions commensurate with below 2°C global warming is the other crucial aspect of climate change management. It is also the case that environmental degradation is accelerating in many countries around the world.

In the context of climate change management, disaster risk reduction (DRR) is a particularly important issue. An effective DRR programme can help reduce adverse impacts of natural disasters which are increasing in both frequency and devastation as climate change intensifies. Hence, DRR should be given due emphasis in the Post-2015 Agenda.

In order to give due emphasis to the urgency of environment and climate change management, a separate Goal should be introduced with such wording as: **Environmental Protection and Climate Change Management.** Targets relating to environment and climate change included under other Goals and other pertinent targets such as DRR can make up the targets under this Goal. Of course, appropriate indicators under the chosen targets will need to be formulated.

- **Urbanization.** One other emerging major issue is rapid urbanization largely due to rural-urban migration. Urbanization offers both opportunities and challenges. Unless the challenges in relation to urban services and infrastructure can be addressed effectively in the face of rapid and unplanned urbanization, any opportunities arising is likely to remain unrealized and urban centres are eventually likely to become, by and large, unlivable and a drag on national socio-economic progress instead of remaining or becoming stronger drivers thereof.

This issue has not been taken on board by the HLP. But, it is important enough to find a place at least in terms of a properly defined target, perhaps under Goal 9 which has to do with sustainable management of natural resource assets.

- **Goal 12.** Goal 12 and the targets under it remain rather porous. However, it has been pointed out in the Report itself that more work is needed to further clarify the issues and concretize the proposals under this Goal. This is a crucial task and must be treated as such and addressed purposefully by all concerned. In this context, the following comments may be pertinent.

On the financing of post-2015 agenda, most of it, as the HLP suggests, is to come from domestic sources (p. 12). Regarding international financing, a target under Goal 12 states that

developed countries should make concrete efforts to fulfill their long-standing commitment of providing 0.7% of their respective GDPs as official development assistance (ODA) to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20% of their GDPs to the least developed countries (LDCs). But, in respect of further long-term international financing, the most important source, as suggested by the HLP, is the private sector which consists of various funding mechanisms (p.12). These private sources are sure to be too difficult for the LDCs, small island developing states (SIDS) and lower-middle income countries to access. The whole issue of financing needs to be carefully thought through and discussed by all concerned along with other components (such as technology and capacity enhancement support) of means of implementation. It is important that means of implementation issues are outlined in relation to the responsibility of both developed and developing countries in concrete terms so that performance of the Parties can be monitored in a meaningful manner.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Our purpose in this paper has been to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the HLP Report. The Report provides a major building block, particularly in proposing the five transformative shifts, an overall sustainability framework, and a set of relevant Goals and targets for sustainable development in post-2015 period. But, there remain critical gaps, particularly from the point of view of developing countries, specially the LDCs. Most of the gaps identified in this paper must receive adequate emphasis in the final agenda, if it is to be capable of delivering the desired results in relation to people-centred, equitable, and inclusive sustainable development nationally and globally.

Endnotes

¹ Somewhat revised version of the Keynote paper originally prepared for the seminar on the same subject, organized by Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), Dhaka, 20 July 2013.

² Page references throughout the paper relate to the HLP Report.

³ Sabine Alkire and James Fester, "Counting and Multi-dimensional Poverty Measurement", *Journal of Public Economics*, Vol. 95, Issues 7-8, August 2011.