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A Global Journey to 2030 – Reviewing the First Steps

Lessons learned from the UN's High-level Panel on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Molly Elgin-Cossart

Introduction

The UN Secretary-General's High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP) – a group of 27 eminent world leaders including a Nobel Peace Prize-winning Yemeni journalist, a Nigerian Minister of Finance, a Brazilian Minister of Environment, the CEO of Unilever, and three Heads of State/Government from Indonesia, Liberia, and the United Kingdom – came together a few months ago to make a deceptively simple statement at the United Nations: we can end extreme poverty by 2030.

For the first time in history, we have the knowledge, tools, and resources to Leave No One Behind. Not only that, we can do it as part of a broader economic transformation that will lead to sustained prosperity for all, and in a way that preserves our planet, for this generation and those to come.

This is an extraordinary moment. Never before has the opportunity to share prosperity been more within reach. To say that not a single person need live in the most desperate circumstances may sound innocuous. It may sound as if it is inevitable. But that is not the case. Continued growth will continue to reduce poverty, but it will not end it.

Cycles of poverty, perpetuated by injustice and inequality, trap the most vulnerable individuals and prevent them from fulfilling their potential. Often the poor are subject to overlapping forms of discrimination. For example, women who live with disabilities in isolated rural areas face a fight even to survive, let alone prosper, due to the discrimination, lack of mobility, and social exclusion they face.

Only through a transformational approach can we hope to give every person on this planet the chance she deserves. The members of the HLP agreed that we can – and we must – transform the way we approach development, to

About The Center on International Cooperation

The NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC) works to enhance multilateral responses to global problems, including: conflict, humanitarian crises, and recovery; international security challenges, including weapons proliferation and the changing balance of power; and resource scarcity and climate change. Through innovative applied research and direct engagement with policy actors, CIC has been at the forefront of policy decision-making in each of its core areas of research.

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tackle global challenges through a new global partnership to end extreme poverty and put the world squarely on the path to sustainable development.

Crucially, though, the HLP report, A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development, is not the final word on the post-2015 development agenda. The world's next development agenda will be decided at a summit of Heads of State in September 2015. Between now and then, global leaders will discuss the future of poverty and sustainable development. Will they rise to the challenge? Or will they let the chance pass them by, distracted by problems at home and the frustrations of international negotiation?

It will be a difficult journey to agreement in 2015. But the stakes are too high to allow leaders to shirk their responsibility to get serious about taking action to confront the challenges we face, from poverty to inequality to environmental degradation. Because the deliberations of the HLP provide a preview of the debates to come, reviewing some of the lessons of the Panel's experience may provide insight into the next two years of negotiations.

The Panel's journey from London to Monrovia to Bali - through debates, discussions, and consultations, led them to a worthwhile destination: a coherent, effective and sustainable roadmap to tackle global challenges. Yet more than the destination, it is the Panel's journey that offers insight on navigating the rough waters ahead to 2015.

What follows are a few key observations from my experience as Chief of Staff of the Panel secretariat that I think are worth highlighting as we head into two years of intense multilateral negotiations.

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A bold, yet practical, development agenda

The UN Secretary-General appointed the HLP to advise him on a bold yet practical development agenda beyond 2015. It was tasked with putting forth "recommendations regarding the vision and shape of a Post-2015 development agenda that will help respond to the global challenges of the 21st century, building on the MDGs and with a view to ending poverty."

UN High-level Panels are a mechanism used by the UN to generate high-level, independent advice on key questions facing the international system. At their best, Panels can provide breakthroughs in conceptualizing issues or presenting proposals which catalyze important political deals; at their worst, they reinforce UN member state divisions and produce reports that are thrown into the dustbin. With this mixed history, the post-2015 HLP faced skepticism from the beginning. Many questioned whether the Panel would be able to say anything new or compelling about development. Its report is therefore a triumph against cynicism, lauded by Oxfam's Duncan Green and Stephen Hale as "a manifesto for a (much) better world, taking the best of the MDGs and adding what we have learned in the intervening years."

Several key distinctions of this particular Panel made a difference in its ultimate success, and are worth mentioning. Its leadership comprised President Yudhoyono of Indonesia, President Sirleaf of Liberia, and Prime Minister Cameron of the United Kingdom. This was only the second panel in history to be chaired by three co-Chairs, with one each from a low, middle, and high-income country, and one of the few to be chaired by currently serving Heads of State and/or government.

The post-2015 Panel was uniquely diverse – not only did its members come from every region and from countries of every income level, but they also came from very different professional backgrounds and perspectives. The plurality of Panel members hailed from Middle Income Countries, but there was also substantial representation from Least Developed Countries and High Income Countries, and Panel members from government, civil society, academia, and private sector backgrounds. It was the first Panel in UN history with equal representation from men and women.

The Panel's task was enormous – not unusual in the history of UN Panels – but its members were given the shortest amount of time of any Panel with which

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to grapple with a universe of incredibly complex issues. Though the timeline added to the already severe pressure on the Panel and secretariat, it also focused efforts and spurred intense engagement, both from Panel members themselves and from external stakeholders.

Each and every member went to great efforts to attend as many meetings as possible, juggling national budget meetings, corporate board meetings, deteriorating security in their homelands, and other major events to join the other 26 Panelists for five meetings throughout the year, and an additional interim meeting.

Panel members were explicitly tasked by the Secretary-General to ensure a consultative process, and they reaffirmed their commitment to this responsibility in the Bali communiqué, which emphasized the "importance of an open, transparent, and inclusive process." Unlike the MDGs (and indeed, too many policy-making processes), the process to produce the post-2015 development agenda was intentionally open from the outset, drawing upon unprecedented local, national, regional, and global consultations.

The world's next development agenda will be decided at a summit of Heads of State in September 2015

These factors were critical in the production of recommendations that met the Secretary General's call for "an ambitious yet achievable Post-2015 development agenda around the three dimensions of economic growth, social equality and environmental sustainability."

Five Transformative Shifts

The Panel submitted to the Secretary-General a concise – 28 pages – report, and several substantive annexes, including indicative goals and targets, definitions, and select stakeholder inputs. Though the Panel focused mainly on the shape and vision for post-2015, goals loomed large in all conversations, and members thought it was important to outline, in an annex, illustrative goals to show that the vision articulated in the report and underpinned by the five transformations is actionable through a goal framework.

The extensive consultations and discussions from around the world are captured in five transformative shifts, which form the backbone of the report. These five shifts capture the components of a transformative development agenda.

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The five transformative shifts are:

1. **Leave No One Behind:** To end extreme poverty in a generation, and for all time, inequality of opportunity must be tackled head on. Averages are not sufficient; we must ensure that every single person is able to realize her rights and fulfill her potential.

2. **Put Sustainable Development at the Core:** We must integrate the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability in a way that no country has as yet done. This will require structural change with new solutions and will offer new opportunities.

3. **Transform Economies for Jobs and Inclusive Growth:** Growth is necessary to end poverty and create sustained prosperity, but not sufficient. Growth must benefit everyone, and create good and decent jobs broadly, not just for the select few.

4. **Build Peace and Effective, Open and Accountable Institutions:** Without peace, children cannot go to school, farmers cannot work their fields, patients cannot visit clinics- in short, without peace and effective institutions, development is not possible.

5. **Forge a New Global Partnership:** Underpinning these transformations is a new global partnership to make it happen –a new spirit of solidarity and equality, as well as a means to implement this ambitious agenda, by bringing together the UN, governments of all countries, local and community leaders, civil society, private sector, academics, people all over the world.

In generating this bold vision, the Panel synthesized what it heard from all over the world, highlighted key themes, drew upon evidence, and proposed a vision for what the post-2015 agenda might look like. Accompanying this vision are several practical suggestions to carry it forward, including:

• A data revolution to ensure there is timely, relevant, and accurate data to help ensure evidence-based decision-making and monitor progress on goals, and to empower people to hold leaders accountable for their promises. An accountability revolution, therefore, is part and parcel of the data revolution.

• To hardwire equality into the goals through **data disaggregation** – one component of the data revolution. To make this concrete, no target should be

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considered achieved until every social and/or income group achieves it. The Panel called for every achievement to be shared equally by women and men, rural and urban dwellers, people living with disabilities, people living in poverty, …every single person on this planet.

- A **joint 2015 report**, to establish a baseline for 2015 that can serve as the foundation of progress to 2030. Work on this is underway with the UN, World Bank, and other partners.

- A **financing conference** to ensure that the single, sustainable development agenda for post-2015 is supported by appropriate, streamlined resources.

- **Criteria for goals** – To focus a very broad agenda down to a limited list of priorities required the Panel to have a shared understanding of how to make difficult decisions. It was decided that the goals themselves would not be comprehensive of everything that is important to development, but a distilled set of key priorities to galvanize global action, and a set of criteria was agreed as a foundation for decision-making (a more detailed explanation of terminology and decisions on goals/targets can be found in Annex III of the Panel's report).

The report was launched May 30, and has been, by and large, remarkably well received (see, for example, the July 9 joint letter from the multilateral development banks endorsing the Panel's vision; or the press release from civil society group Beyond 2015). The HLP report was featured in several international media outlets, and has been the basis of discussion for meetings from the UN to the World Bank to the Social Good Summit, to conversations happening on the ground in countries all over the world. Over a hundred official responses from various civil society groups point to the power of the report in helping to shape the discourse on post-2015.

There were criticisms, of course. By and large, civil society objections were more substantive than political or technical, while government objections tended to be more political, in particular concerned with the fact that the report was not the result of an intergovernmental process. For the most part, civil society groups tended to be of the opinion that the report did not go far enough, especially in their respective areas of focus. Unsurprisingly, many of the unofficial government reactions received indicated the report was too ambitious, going too far beyond the MDGs and outlining too many goals.

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As one Panelist said, "If everyone is a little bit uncomfortable, that's probably the right place to be. It means you've found a compromise between many different viewpoints, but are still pushing people out of their own comfort zone."

Dealing with Disagreement

The process was not, of course, completely smooth.

The secretariat drafted a new version of the report nearly every day of the last month of the Panel, going through countless versions of the goal framework, answering concerns on the text, fending off attempts by external stakeholders to either obtain or react to leaked documents.

From the outset, the Panel – and its secretariat – faced overwhelming pressure. The number of stakeholders wanting to influence the process was overwhelming, and many went to extreme lengths to make themselves heard. Balancing the need for external engagement with the need to avoid capture or fragmentation wasn't easy. The independence of the Panel, the leadership of the co-Chairs, the engagement of Panel members and their ownership over the process, and the creation of systematic channels for input all helped direct the pressure constructively, and avoid being caught up in the whirlwind of divergent opinions and interests.

While diversity and openness strengthened the Panel and its report in the end, these characteristics equally could have weakened its impact. Diversity is crucial – but it is not easy. In the same way, the engagement from people all over the world lent necessary perspective and kept the Panel members intent on success, but such mass engagement can also be a risk, overwhelming the decision-making process with sheer volume.

Through trial and error, the Panel meeting structure evolved to become both more conversational and more inclusive. The introductory meeting structure followed that of a typical intergovernmental meeting, with a formal session where participants read from prepared statements in a closed room, a few presentations from external experts, and a short, Town Hall-style gathering with civil society and others.

For the remaining meetings, it was decided that the substantive meetings would be held in the countries of the co-Chairs, rather than in New York. This helped to change the dynamic. In addition to bringing more weight to diverse regional perspectives and fostering a more grounded dialogue, the different locations made panelists

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feel like they were on a shared journey. Full days of small, informal roundtable discussions were held with a vast array of external stakeholders, providing not only fresh perspectives and experiences, but also a chance for frank exchange and much more specific conversations.

Beginning with London, meetings comprised:

• A day of public engagement (listening to perspectives from children and youth, women, farmers, Parliamentarians, trade union members, academics, and many others on how they envision a post-2015 agenda making a difference in their lives);

• A day of less formal Panel discussions around a series of substantive and issue-specific presentations prepared by Panel members themselves;

• And a more formal day, presided over by the co-Chairs, to discuss inter-linkages and broader topics, and to make key decisions.

As the process evolved, a day was added for advisers to meet ahead of time and work through some of the substance, to identify areas of consensus, as well as areas where further discussion among principals was needed. Having advisers added another layer of interests, lobbies, and views to an already complex process, but ultimately helped move the process to consensus.

We found that in confronting difficult issues, it was most effective to (i) frame the issues in a way that was easily understandable and not only presented the relevant evidence but explicitly outlined trade-offs, and then (ii) ask the Panel members direct questions to compel decisions.

Between meetings a huge amount of work went on behind the scenes. The secretariat was appointed to support the Panel in every way, from the substantive to the administrative. We provided substantive inputs for discussion, channeled and synthesized various Panelist viewpoints, and ultimately penned the final report. We had a team of 12, comprised of research, outreach and communications, and operations sub-teams, and led by an executive team – Homi Kharas, Lead Author and Executive Secretary; Karina Gerlach, Deputy Executive Secretary; and myself, as Chief of Staff.

The secretariat convened a teleconference every week to provide an opportunity for the three co-Chair teams (with members in their respective capitals, and in New

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York), the secretariat, and the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning, to discuss, and make decisions. In the final week of report drafting, a senior-level representative of each co-Chair came to New York to work with the secretariat, to review all Panel contributions and comments, track changes, and suggestions, to make final decisions on content. Continuous communication and close collaboration between the co-Chair teams and secretariat proved to be invaluable to the process.

With such a large Panel, it was also necessary to keep in frequent contact with Panel teams, to make sure Panel members were fully briefed, and that their views and concerns were understood and addressed. For that purpose, each Panelist and team was assigned a focal point in the secretariat – one of the three members of the secretariat's executive team – with whom they liaised frequently.

The Panel overcame many potential challenges and managed to come together to navigate a multitude of obstacles and produce a clear and compelling report that presents a five-point plan for transformational change in global development, and 12 illustrative goals to move the agenda to action.

What We Learned

Drawing on the High-level Panel's experience, here are a few lessons learned. The following is not a comprehensive list, but some highlights I gleaned through conversations with Panelists, watching their discussions, and spending long nights trying to capture their efforts on paper.

Composition

1. Build in diverse perspectives.

Not only was the Panel itself diverse – hailing from all regions of the globe, from different professions and backgrounds – but it was also the first Panel in history to have as many women as men. The depth, strength, and thoughtfulness the women on the Panel lent to the discussions is representative of what gender parity - and, indeed, broader inclusion - can bring to the world. For example, it was often the women" and then keep the rest as is. It was often the women of the Panel who pushed back against what they saw as the imposition of certain interests; they also played roles in bridging differences, and bringing the group to consensus. After one of the Panel's most difficult meetings, it was a woman who forced the agenda change that allowed more time for deliberation, at

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the same time outlining a pathway forward, framing the conversation in a way that brought Panel members together rather than emphasizing divisions. Gender equity isn't just the right thing to do – it's the smart thing to do.

The consultation process ensured that diversity went even further, aiming to reflect an increasingly diverse and complex world. Panelists listened to people from all over the globe. Such diversity and outreach brought a new level of understanding and depth to conversations, and influenced the decision-making process.

2. Personalities - and relationships - matter.

It is tempting to believe that political processes are linear, that one party wanted A and another wanted B and they negotiated and got to C. The reality is much more complicated, and defies straightforward explanation. There are certainly interests. But personalities matter – good ideas are only as powerful as the coalitions built to support the ideas, and building those coalitions with many different perspectives is challenging. To assume that one's expertise or position can build a coalition is a mistake – and it became clear early on that with so many eminent persons, genuine listening and discussion had to take place. No single individual could impose a viewpoint.

Panel members were appointed by the Secretary-General in their individual capacities, which gave them more room to look beyond official positions for creative solutions and approaches than they would in a typical negotiation. Some Panel members were more independent and could provide innovative suggestions, and some were more attentive to their governments, previewing some of the debates that will be seen in intergovernmental negotiations. Both viewpoints were valuable. The balance between fresh perspectives and insights on the one hand, and an awareness of the political landscape on the other, enabled the Panel to present bold but practical suggestions for consideration in the intergovernmental process.

Many positions developed and shifted over the course of the process, as Panel members listened to each other, but also pushed back when they thought it was necessary to do so. The respect and trust Panel members developed for each other mattered greatly to their collective success. To create a climate of respect and trust required sustained interactions, especially in less formal settings, to establish and cultivate relationships.

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3. Decision-making requires clear leadership.

The co-Chairs' leadership was a critical ingredient to the Panel's success. The co-Chairs were engaged and committed; and they were willing to take responsibility for making tough decisions. Reporting directly to the co-Chairs allowed the secretariat to be truly independent, instead of being captured by various interest groups. When it came to the final days, the co-Chairs made the very last and most difficult decisions regarding the content of the report – based upon the input from Panel members, of course. But the co-Chairs absorbed the responsibility for the thankless task of narrowing a very broad agenda into a simple and cogent message and set of 12 illustrative goals. Demonstrating leadership is not always easy and doesn't always make everyone happy, but the willingness to stand firm ensured a successful final product.

Process

4. Evidence is crucial, but so is a healthy dose of political reality.

As in any decision-making process, the report was the result of navigating and balancing trade-offs. The Panel report – at the SG's instruction – is grounded in evidence. In discussions, pragmatism was prized. Over and over again conversations came back to: what will have an impact? What works? What will allow people to fulfill their potential?[1]

Research and political arguments are both essential to reaching consensus. The politicians in the group were keenly aware that the success of the post-2015 agenda hinges on implementation – and implementation requires people to get behind it. Evidence is not the only factor. Taking a moral stance on key issues– even where the empirical studies may not reveal much impact – is important to creating a shared vision for a better world and gaining support from people. And in the end, development, as stated in the Monrovia communiqué, is all about "people – the lives they are able to lead, the education they can benefit from, the families they can raise, the health they can enjoy and the prospects they can look forward to as they live their lives and look to the future."

Endnotes

[1] An example of the interaction between evidence and political appeal was in the controversial area of health care targets. The academics favored an outcome known as Healthy Life Expectancy, based on a complex formula. The politicians argued for universal health care. For targets in general, there was a preference for outcome-based targets compared to input-based targets like universal health care coverage. The evidence shows that effectiveness is mixed, and that too often, countries with universal health care coverage have the infrastructure, i.e. free clinics, but they are underutilized and/or poorly managed and may shift focus away from higher-impact interventions. In the end, the Panel settled on a few outcome-based targets that were easy to understand, such as infant and maternal mortality and reductions in the incidence of some specific diseases, even though they recognized this fell short of the systemic improvements that are needed.

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The importance of an empirical foundation for proper discussion also implies the importance of technical advice. Without proper technical capacity and understanding of the empirical base, there is a danger of being sidelined during the more technical debates.

The tension between evidence and generating a compelling political narrative can create trade-offs, but balancing both is vital. Without an empirical spine, the agenda is likely to be laden with an overabundance of demands, a list of 'good things' that we all agree would be wonderful if properly enacted, but which may not make a difference in empowering people to improve their lives, or which may lead to a diffusion of efforts. But bereft of solid grounding in political realities, the agenda will fail.

5. Listen carefully to the sound of silence.

What is not said in open discussions is just as important as what is said. For many controversial issues, formal discussions do not reveal the full range of viewpoints. This is another reason why one-on-one conversations and creating space for real dialogue are essential. Official positions and prepared statements will never capture the full picture. Smaller, private conversations can allow parties to start from interests and objectives rather than redlines. And the more trust and relationship-building that goes into the behind-the-scenes conversations, the more likely it is that solutions can be found and negotiations brokered.

6. Spend time crafting a narrative.

Given a limited timeline, there was a desire to move ahead quickly. But crafting a compelling narrative is the central plank of any agenda. If there is no central argument, things quite quickly degenerate into a list. In the Panel, there was a push to adopt a vision, craft a report outline, and decide targets quite early on in the process. Quite rightly, there was a fair amount of pushback. Even with a tight deadline for report delivery, delaying these important decisions was the right call. Creating shared understandings and building common language is crucial to fostering genuine discussion, and better decision-making. A little flexibility early on in the process allows relationship building to take place, viewpoints to evolve and more sophisticated proposals to be put forward. Following the first couple of meetings, then, the Panel agreed a vision and made

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decisions about how to move forward with the process, including outlining criteria for goals. These common reference points reinforced the Panel's commitment and focus when the details of goals were being debated and discussion became heated.

7. Don't be afraid to have a real conversation.

Too many international meetings become an opportunity for high-level officials to read from prepared statements in turn, without listening to each other or having any interaction to question, support, or challenge each other. After a few false starts (and complaints from Panelists about too many external speakers), Panel meetings evolved to become more conversational.

The diversity of the Panel helped the conversation remain rooted in the real world and avoid grandstanding. Panel members, especially those who were not from government backgrounds, were willing to ask difficult questions and challenge common assumptions. "Can we really claim [bad governance] is the root cause of poverty? Poverty is too complex and has many causes. What about colonialism? What about different starting points?" was one important moment where a Panelist challenged a proposal. Panel discussions ranged from violence against women to health care to jobs, debating ways to measure, ways to affect outcomes, and the role of a goal framework in changing behavior. An open and honest conversation with the freedom to challenge platitudes and dig into complexities – and often, unanswered questions – is essential to setting a transformational agenda.

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Impact

8. Be ambitious, but have the courage to be practical, too.

One Panel member, overwhelmed by a laundry list of demands including at least 43 goals presented by civil society representatives in London, finally burst out: "No, we can't promise you all of these things! All I can promise you is that we will disappoint you. If this is the standard you are setting, then we are bound to fail." This simple and honest moment did what so many post-2015 conversations fail to do: it interjected a sense of reality. Though the inclination is often to say what people want to

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hear, when you are tasked with decision-making, that mode of engagement just doesn't work. Shaping a more realistic conversation with stakeholders was essential to the report's reception, and ultimate success.

After all, a global framework comprising a limited set of measurable goals can do some things well – it can provide a high bar for achievement, a vision towards which countries and localities can reach, and focus global energy and resources on some of the world's most pressing problems. But it cannot solve the multitude of global challenges we face, nor should it. It is an agreement that is not legally binding – it is merely a set of shared goals to remind us, as a global community, of the awesome achievements of which we are capable when we work together to make them happen.

9. Cultivate dialogue with external stakeholders.

The Panel and secretariat dedicated time to building and maintaining relationships with external stakeholders, and especially key thought leaders. This engagement influenced not only the substance, but also lay the groundwork to launch the report to favorable – or at least fair and balanced – reviews.

External stakeholders also create an important mechanism for accountability. For the Panel, the high profile nature of consultations created positive pressure for an agreement. Coming back without an agreement would rightly have been seen as a failure.

Early on, there was some debate about whether to brief the member states of the UN on the process, especially as the Panel was intended to be entirely independent of the UN, and serve as an independent advisory group to the Secretary-General. It was decided, however, that since the member states will determine the post-2015 agenda, and there were high levels of engagement and interest from them, that they should be well briefed on all discussions. After every meeting, a few Panelists briefed a large gathering of member states, and a summary of meeting highlights was circulated. At the same time, communiqués and summaries were also made available publicly, and to civil society and other groups who were interested in the process. There was a dedicated effort to meet with as many different people as possible, as Panelists and teams met with thousands upon thousands of different stakeholders. This proved crucial to impact, as groups were aware of inside

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discussions and debates, and were able to receive the report with a better understanding of the discussions and trade-offs that went into its finalization.

10. Be Relevant to a global audience.

The HLP explicitly wanted to write a report for the larger public, to convey that this is truly a global and universal agenda. Practically, this meant avoiding UN jargon, and putting effort into global outreach. Once the Panel unanimously endorsed the report, the real work began: members had to take a deep breath, step back from the debates and efforts that went into final negotiations, and begin explaining how they got to where they did in the report.

First priority was outreach to a broad group of stakeholders. The Panel report became the first UN report in history to make versions available for those living with disabilities – there are now braille, audio, and large-print versions of the report, in addition to translations in all six official languages of the UN as well as Bahasa, a digital version of the report, and a forthcoming children's version.

Second was supporting Panelists in a unified outreach effort. Calendars were shared, gaps identified and filled, and opportunities for outreach highlighted. The secretariat drafted and shared with all Panelists a note highlighting the key messages and take-aways from the frantic few weeks of report writing and negotiation. The communications and outreach focal points in the secretariat facilitated many in-person interviews, articles, and meetings to ensure that the release of the report was part of the ongoing conversation with stakeholders. The Panelists then spent the summer months speaking with people – in their own countries and elsewhere - about the discussions that fed into the report, and where the process is headed next.

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Now the real work begins

Where do we go from here? The process is headed into intergovernmental negotiations, in which the member states of the UN will decide the future development agenda.

The HLP report was just one input into the Secretary-General's report, *A Life of Dignity for All*, which was presented to member states at the opening of the General Assembly in September. Now the real work of post-2015 begins.

For post-2015, the road ahead will be challenging. Right now, the process is in a golden moment – things are going well, and there is a surprising amount of consensus, as shown in the outcome document from the Special Event towards achieving the MDGs during the opening week of the General Assembly, where member states agreed a sensible set of principles and roadmap moving forward.

But the current consensus may be broad rather than deep. And there are plenty of challenges ahead. Some challenges will arise in New York; others in capitals. The extent to which political and other developments at home will affect the decisions that global leaders can make should not be underestimated– it can limit their options, or create opportunities for reasonable compromise. Some of the toughest issues in post-2015 will come down to the domestic contexts within which leaders operate. With upcoming elections in several countries – Brazil, India, South Africa, the US in the medium term, just to name a few– there is enough uncertainty in the domestic political landscape to shift the prospects for global agreement considerably between now and 2015.

So the journey has begun. It seems wise to take step back, to reflect on lessons that can be learned from the past year, take stock of where the post-2015 discussion is, and look forward to consider where it needs to go over the next two years. And then recommit to working together to bring about an international agreement on an ambitious yet practical agenda for sustainable development. The road to 2030 is in our hands.

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A GLOBAL JOURNEY TO 2030 – REVIEWING THE FIRST STEPS

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