

**To:** Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, David Cameron  
**From:** Alex Evans and David Steven  
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Congratulations on your appointment as co-chairs of the UN's new High Level Panel of Eminent Persons to advise on the design of a framework to replace the Millennium Development Goals after 2015. The Panel has a major opportunity to build a vision for global development over the next generation, at a time when most governments are primarily focused on much shorter term fire-fighting and crisis management.

Your task, however, will not be easy. The Panel will start work after the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) – an event that is likely to be a disappointment at best, and could yet prove an abject failure.

You will have to demonstrate that the Panel can avoid the many mistakes made in the run up to Rio. On the one hand, this means working patiently to rebuild consensus, at a point when the development agenda is showing signs of becoming dangerously polarised. On the other hand, you will also need to inject a sense of urgency into the process, if a new framework is to be in place in time for 2015.

In this memo, we set out eight steps that will help ensure the Panel asks the right questions in the right order, in a way that encourages your fellow leaders to move towards a clear and coherent strategy over the next couple of years.

1. **Beware the curse of the sequel.** Most targets are quickly forgotten, but the MDGs have become a 'universal language' for international development. They will not be improved without creative thinking, a hard-headed approach, careful political management – and recognition of how much the world has changed since they were agreed. Many have badly underestimated how much work needs to be done. Your first job will be to jolt them out of this complacency.
2. **Focus on the poor first and foremost.** Rio +20 will put Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the international agenda – but the obstacles to such ambitious goals are substantial. Developing countries are right to worry that the poor would be the first casualties of a bitter, and possibly fruitless, fight to agree SDGs. You will need to reassure them by making it clear that you will make recommendations on poverty first – in an interim report – before moving on to consider broader goals.

3. **We have halved poverty. Now let's end it.** Poverty rates are falling at unprecedented rates – a success that you should celebrate – with fewer than 900 million people likely to be living on less than \$1.25 a day in 2015, comfortably exceeding the MDGs' headline target. This provides the world with an historic opportunity to set goals for 'getting to zero' on absolute poverty – achievement of which would be a truly epochal shift.
4. **'Getting to zero' will radically change the development mission.** Every success in the fight to end poverty makes the remaining task a little harder: the 'last poor' will be the hardest to reach. The Panel must challenge development organizations to explain how they will react as the 'geography of poverty' shifts to fragile states, or unstable regions of otherwise prosperous countries, where results will not come easily. It should also provide a platform to the g7+, a group which represents some of the world's most fragile countries, to tell the international community what help they need to build societies able to deliver better lives to their citizens.
5. **But emphasise the opportunities too.** Many African countries are beginning to surf a demographic wave, as growing numbers of young people enter the workforce and dependency ratios fall. During the global economic crisis, many of them maintained high growth even as the rest of the world slowed down. Their future looks hopeful – as long as they are connected to global markets, and as long as national institutions are strong enough to generate jobs, and support inclusive and sustainable growth.
6. **Rather than a grand design, aim for a loose family of SDGs.** The Sustainable Energy for All initiative has shown the potential for sustainability goals to be developed by a disparate alliance of actors who have the will and the capacity to implement them. Instead of attempting to build a rigid SDG framework, you should explore the potential for building on this foundation, with different partnerships all bringing their own approach to achieving significant improvements in one or more aspects of sustainability.
7. **Provide space for innovation.** The world is changing rapidly, but the international system moves at glacial pace. Provocative questions are needed to open up space for new thinking and approaches. What will a post-2015 framework do for the half of the world's people who will be under 30 in 2015, for instance? What can be done to help the world's towns and cities provide decent lives for a billion additional residents between 2015 and 2030? How will poverty reduction evolve in a world where we have the name, address and mobile phone number of growing numbers of poor families? And what types of partnership can deliver impact in a world where governments often hold only few of the cards?
8. **Get people arguing about concrete options as soon as possible.** The international system is capable of debating vague generalities for the next two years, without ever bringing to the surface important areas of disagreement. Even if, as a Panel, you don't find the definitive answer for what a post-2015 framework should look like, you will have made a huge contribution if you move quickly to define the choices the world faces, set out the benefits, costs, and risks of each option, and catalyse a genuine global debate.

The goal of ending absolute poverty is within reach for the first time. With skill and luck, you can prise open the space to begin building a new consensus on development that lasts for the long term. You will be at the forefront of helping the world seize these opportunities. We cannot imagine a more significant political legacy. We wish you luck in your endeavour.