

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
At Post-2015 Global Development Framework: Is There a Role for a Next Generation
Of Millennium Development Goals Seminar
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Liberia's experience and efforts of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Let me say how pleased I am to be here on the panel and with such a great audience as one of the co-Chairs of the High-Level Eminent Panel. Before I talk about Liberia, let me make a few general points.

At its conception, the MDG Framework was an attempt by the global community to expand global attention beyond the narrow domain of economic growth to bring in the human development dimension and also to create a broad and effective coalition of stakeholders at the global, regional and country levels to address these dimensions.

I think it is also important to note that no matter what the personal opinions of MDGs, they had an incredible staying power because they had indicators that are clear, concise and measurable.

The experience of Liberia, as in many other countries, is that the MDGs have been a useful framework instrumental in building a focused and development agenda inducing government and their partners to take concrete actions, improve coordination and monitor progress.

As a result, many of our countries, Liberia particularly, though it started late in 2000 when we were having a conflict; but we've been able to design specific national and sector development strategies explicitly aimed at achieving the MDGs. The MDGs have also been successful in building shared understanding of how to effectively address key dimensions of extreme poverty.

For many of us, like Liberia coming out of conflict, we were able to target, in our case, child mortality and today we can say we've been successful in reducing the level of child mortality. Sierra Leone, our neighboring country, the same way; they focused on maternal health and have made tremendous progress in this regard.

We also believe, and experience shows, that academic and development practitioners are able to look at these best practices and to use this wealth of knowledge and prepare for eminent programs consistent with their own development agenda.

Today in Liberia, as in other countries, political leaders, civil organizations now focus the MDGs, focus on government's performance in the achievement of these MDGs and thereby keep us more accountable and more transparent in what we do.

There have been some shortcomings, our experience shows. The MDGs perhaps did not take into account the full economic, social and environmental dimension of sustainable development. They perhaps were short on social inclusion, including peace and security so vital to some of our countries that have been conflict prone. Equity and environmental sustainability were at that time not sufficiently addressed.

Also, the MDGs positioned themselves as if the global trend of the 1980s and 1990s for each of the dimensions focused on could be sustained and the goals achieved if every country, despite its particular circumstances, would use, for their specific development purpose, the same benchmarks that were being proposed in the global framework.

There are some who maintain that the targets of the MDGs were too minimalistic and applied only to poor countries. Despite this, our experience has shown that tremendous progress has been made as a result of these indicators and the fight against poverty has been successful. I think, in the case of Asia, they have been able to achieve the reduction of 50 percent as envisioned under those Goals.

As we now approach 2015, it's time to go beyond and bring in those dimensions – sustainable development, climate change, youth unemployment – those areas where, at that time, the MDGs did not cover. But at the same time, let us be very clear that the MDGs have enabled us to focus our development agenda to make progress, and can now be built upon as we try to identify all of the key elements of a new post-2015 agenda. Thank you.

Moving on to the future, should we continue to aim for the set of development goals or focus on a new theme with greater relevance for the next decade – say sustainable theme or equity? Should the goals be truly universal insofar as 70 percent of the poor live in middle-income countries on this small planet?

I think we need to look at the continuing gaps – poverty, hunger, gender equality, water and sanitation; they will all need to have attention after 2015. The more we can achieve now, the faster we will be able to achieve some of the objectives that will be set for the future. Accelerating the MDGs progress as we prepare for the Post-2015 Development Framework should be part of the same effort. We also must realize that we cannot divorce the issues of sustainability and equity.

In Liberia, if I may use my country's example, we have a legacy of conflict, increasing youth unemployment and rising numbers of mostly urban working poor. Any new global agenda must address these issues.

We may need universal goals and universal responsibilities because they are interconnected. These goals need to be universally shared because without that frame of common understanding, it will be very difficult to get the global political will that is required to move to the next era.

We need balance in responsibility as they apply across countries. It would be unfair to ask the poor countries to report on outcomes and actions if the rich countries are unwilling to do so. We need to focus on implementation and accountability issues.

While a uniform set of global goals would be ideal, they may not be practical because it's difficult to reach a consensus on all of them unless one creates a catalogue of targets and indicators to accommodate a majority. This would deprive any Post-2015 Agenda of its greatest potential which is to inspire and mobilize billions of people.

Second, it would be difficult to think of goals that are global and still address the specificity of the economic, social and environmental changes faced by each country. I think it would be impractical to have all the goals at the national level, done by them at that level.

Just imagine if we were to ask 194 countries to develop local goals. I think that would be a very complex undertaking. So one possibility seems to me is to have at least some of the Post-2015 Goals as national goals flow from the collective and universal goals and targets and incorporate internationally agreed basic principles relating to sustainability, inclusion, equity, full employment and decent work for all. Wherever possible, we need to build this global consensus around quantitative goals that are measurable. This again, I come back to it, we need to start with the MDGs. Build upon what has been achieved and what has been successful and then bring in the new dimensions for the new agenda.

Given that development takes place at the country level, would it not be more appropriate to have country specific goals and targets that can be compared and monitored globally, or are globally defined goals and targets still most relevant?

Countries should be encouraged to develop local goals as long as they are supported by evidence-based models that accurately reflect the human condition and minimize or eliminate efforts to politicize measurements. We must, however, build consensus around some universal core goals from which these local goals can flow.

As I mentioned before about how difficult it would be if one were to ask 194 countries to develop local goals. The way to address that is to make sure that we all adopt, in the new agenda, broad principles that are compatible with this high level of ambition set but that lack the specificity that would make their adoption politically difficult at the global level.

Some way we must find how we can blend the two – of encouraging local goals because they have the country's specificity, but at the same time that they conform to the broader universal goals to which all countries can aspire.

It's a big task for us, but I think if we take the cue and instructions from the Secretary-General, we are ready to go out there and do a lot of consultations so that we can draw from best practices and we can have the basis upon which a global consensus can be reached.

Looking into the future, what are the next steps we ought and need to take?

The High-Level Panel has already had a successful meeting in New York and will be meeting again in London in about two weeks' time. The Panel, I'm sure you all know, has members from all regions, from the business community, from civil society, from academia.

The Panel is committed to a broad outreach, to dialogue with all groups, to take into account all views. It will be a big job to look at implementation and that's why it's necessary that the Member States be fully involved and be full participants in this process.

Given the specific nature of African countries, I will be working with relevant regional institutions; some of them are already at work – the Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union, and UNDP-Africa – to convene a series of events working with other Panel members from Africa just to ensure that we bring to the table a truly pan-African perspective. I'm sure the same will apply to other regions.

Through this rigorous consultation process, we seek to validate the growing consensus that the Post-2013 Framework should be bold, ambitious and universal. It must constitute global transformational change for people and planet, with shared responsibilities for all countries.

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