



This Analysis received additional input from ACPF, ACP Focal Point in Ethiopia

A second look Poverty: An ACP¹ Response to the UN High Level Panel Report on Post 2015²

Summary

Key Beacons

- In Principle ACP agrees that the composition of the Panel is a lesson for the United Nations, Governments and Civil Society. The diversity of voices within the Panel has led to a bold and yet realistic set of proposals on development.
- ACP believes that the panel did indeed show real commitment to development, has attempted to give clear pointers to commitments by various actors.
- The clarity on the place of stability as an anchor to democracy and development, and the central place of society is commendable.
- ACP believes that the Report offers some radical statements of intent that if taken in utmost good faith, will gratky transform dialogue within the Open Working Group, the High Level Summit on MDGs and the final Post 2015 and SDG discussions by the General Assembly.
- The emphasis on society as not just the object but the reason for development is commendable. Appreciating that all actors-business, government and civil society, ultimately owe their existence and legitimacy in society is a central to realizing development .However the Panel and many other actors need broaden participatory governance to voices of broader society, and not just civil society organizations.

Key Concerns

- ACP finds several overlaps and lack of reference to other Global development processes, especially the Global Partnership on Effective Development Cooperation and the key building blocks that came out of Busan in 2011, and are of the view that the panel should have provided clarity on areas of synergy.

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Africa CSO Platform on Principled Partnership (ACP) works through focal points in 26 countries across Africa to promote state-society relations through principled partnership and respectful dialogue among CSOs and with governments, with a primary focus on emerging democracies and Conflict Affected and Fragile States. Secretariat: Fort Granite, Bishop Road Tel: Nairobi (+254-20) 2055003: Email info@africacsoplatform.org, website www.africacsoplatform.org

² ACP has taken a decision to move away from a thematic response to the HLP Report, because our role on Principled Partnership requires that we focus on key fundamental building blocks of development , and how far these advances state-society relations.

- The Key weakness of the HLP Panel Report, in our view is that it has stretched itself too thin in an attempt to appeal to all. While this is typical of political negotiated documents, we believe that this has diluted some of its strong recommendations, making the High Level Panel Report open to cherry picking by business, Civil Society, the United Nations and various Governments.
- The High Level Panel has demonstrated that we should be more careful moving forward with the Universal approach to the Post 2015 Agenda. Its definition of poverty is still patronizing and philanthropic, and it seems to have no clear definition of development from a universal rather than the minimalist poverty concept.
- It is interesting that while this is a Panel appointed by the United Nations Secretary General, it makes very little reference to existing UN instruments, some as old as the UN itself. Instead the report has relied heavily on recent self regulation mechanisms that by themselves have no place in the UN dialogue. Key among this is the false belief in the Self Regulation of Business and the self accountability of governments.

Exclusion

ACP feels that the Indicators and targets needed greater reflection and has therefore opted not to give comments on this section of the Report.

1. Introduction

*We have a choice to make: to muddle through as we have done,
making progress on some fronts but suffering setbacks elsewhere.
Or we can be bold and set our eyes on a higher target,
where the end of many aspects of poverty is in sight in all countries
and where we have transformed our economies and societies
to blend social progress, equitable growth and environmental management.*
UN High Level Panel Report on Post 2015 Agenda

We believe and agree with the High Level Panel Members that indeed we have a choice. But we believe that choices alone will not move this world forward. The world has suffered enough from individual choices.

The reason the world is still talking about extreme poverty twenty years after commitment to eradicate it is because we have left the world to run on too many choices. We now need commitments, responsibilities and fair rules that apply equally to all. We need an agreement that all humanity is equal.

Only then will choices begin to matter.

The UN High Level Panel has presented to us options. Some we admire for their audacity and hope, others we worry for their cowardice and attempt to insist that the strong must always triumph over the weak. But ultimately their role was not to direct us to pathways out of poverty and inequality.

Theirs was to provide perspectives, personal perspectives, by a team of very diverse individuals.

The responsibility of moving forward with this Report, alongside those of the Global Compact, UN Task Team, Global Conversations and UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, now rests with the UN Secretary General-in the manner in which he captures these voices that have been shared over the past one and a half years, and which he now must distill and communicate to the UN Member States. It also, and ultimately so, rests with the member states, especially members of the Open Working Group, the High Level Summit and finally the General Assembly. Here is where decisions will be decided, and it is here where decisions will be made on how shared responsibilities, and what will be left to individual choices.

The High Level Panel has planted beacons, some in the wrong places, but beacons all the same.

They have directed us away from lighthouses we ignored in when we drafted the MDGs-again some are false.

But the ultimate responsibility does not lie in the contents of an 81-page Report.

The final decision is left to our conscience which, thankfully, never lies.

Will the Open Working Group and the General Assembly, as well as the many business players, donors and civil society groups-listen to the truth that resides in our conscience, or will we ignore voices simply because these people are too weak and we are too strong?

Once again, insist that we should be given freedom to do as we please listen to - we will share, but to plant beacons and direct us away from where the light houses shows we should not approach.

We believe that the Panel had asked the right questions from the very beginning and involved relevant actors in trying to answer them.

The Panel also recognizes that the current MDGs did not focus enough on the most vulnerable groups of societies such as those living in extreme poverty, persons with disabilities and other marginalized and excluded people.

In this Report we examine some of the Beacons, and some of the light houses, and assess them against truths that we already know, and which we feel we must now confront.

2. Summary Observations

Overarching Theme

- We agree that the world will be a better place when we end extreme poverty
But we would like to stress that the poor are not poor because they are less fortunate.
The majority of poor people are ironically found in some the most resource rich parts of the world. Poverty is about in-equality, exploitation, corruption, and poor governance, not “less fortunate” as the Panel seems to suggest.
- We agree that Aid, philanthropy or corporate social responsibility should not be a camouflage for tax avoidance, evasion and resource exploitation in a manner that leaves the owners of these resources poorer.
- The five transformative shifts that the Panel recommended are pertinent, but we had expected that realization of universal human rights would be a key component of the transformative shifts. It is also important to note that transformation around the Growth agenda alone if not can in fact undermine the other transformational shifts.

Government Oversight over Business

- Experience over the past ten years have shown that governments are increasingly pushing the agenda of big businesses and the two can no longer be trusted to work on creating a more coherent, transparent and equitable system for domestic resource mobilization. Instead we call for collective rule not just on development financing, but on preventing tax avoidance, corporate greed and all forms of corruption, especially among political eldership. Zero tolerance as the panel has mentioned.

State-Society Relations and Participatory Governance

- We agree with the Panel that businesses, states, and even civil society organizations, ultimately derive their legitimacy and existence from the society. But we would like to go further and ask that people are not merely asking to be consulted as the Panel suggests. Voices from the people prove that they are asking to drive the agenda, to be the reason, not merely beneficiaries, of business and governments.
- We disagree with the recommendation by the High Level Panel that Industries will self regulate and that investors and shareholders will readily forgo profit for morals. The Panel agrees that only 25 per cent of large companies report on sustainability practices. This is despite the fact that these standards have been around for over 20 years. Instead we call for global compliance standards and rules that we all agree to follow. Self regulation only works when there is an overarching framework that is followed by all. The conduct of business and some governments has proved that Industry standards-when left as a burden to a few-end up making it easier for those who are out for quick gains. What we need are global overarching rules to which we all comply. These can then anchor Industry standards.
- While we agree with the Principle of Value addition as a way of promoting growth, we do not agree with the way the Panel has proposed it. The private sector does not always add value where they are likely to pay more taxes. Africa is a classic case where resource extractors prefer to export materials in their raw form then add value elsewhere to create jobs in other countries, only to sell them back expensively to source countries. We agree to value addition only at source.
- We also differ with the proposal that open trade offers more opportunities for future growth. Countries still have a responsibility to protect their nascent industries from exploitation by open markets and big businesses, and should be allowed to ensure small farmers and small businesses benefit in small local markets while being allowed to take advantage of open markets.

- We applaud the call for an enabling environment for Civil Society and call that beyond laws and space for operation, governments change their funding structures that currently benefits only sections of organized civil society and in some cases serve only to promote donor foreign and trade policies.
- We agree that we need a new Global Partnership, but insist that such partnerships should not be anchored on discussions on sustainable development. Instead what we need is partnerships that recognize society and people as the primary drivers of and reason for development. The concept for Public Private Partnerships should be replaced by a less focus on business and more on people driven development. We call for 4Ps-Private-Public-People Partnerships.
- We agree on the need for CSOs to recommit to greater accountability and implementation of the Istanbul Principles for CSO Development effectiveness.
- We agree with the suggestion for a mandatory comply or explain, but would like make this applicable to all businesses and not based on some market capitalization, especially considering that most businesses are today not publicly listed and that some businesses will take advantage of this loophole to promote non compliance.

Peace and Personal Security

- We applaud the HLP for calling for Peace and personal security as a foundation for development. But we are concerned that the High Level Panel has said little about external stresses to society and places heavier responsibility on conflict affected countries. There is little attention to the role that international actors play in fueling and sometimes sustaining conflict. We are also concerned that the Panel has paid little attention to the Principles of *Do No Harm* that calls for governments to ensure their actions and those of their businesses do not fuel conflict.

Relevant to the African context is their silence on the centrality of state society relations in peace and conflict transformation-Good governance and institutions that guarantee the rule of law and freedom of speech are the foundations for state legitimacy, and there central to addressing long term Peacebuilding.

Cross cutting issues

- It is worthy highlighting that poverty disproportionately affects children and that its impact has lasting consequences on children's cognitive and physical development. There is therefore the need for ensuring that this fact is recognized and that children are given adequate emphasis in this respect. Therefore, age becomes an important characteristic that need to be explicitly mentioned as ground of discrimination.
- Zero tolerance of violence against and exploitation needs to be to all.
- Data Revolution is an important aspect of the Panel's recommendations. Data has not only been manipulated in the past, but has been used to punish countries while selectively rewarding others. We join in the call to improve the quality of statistics and information available to citizens. We should actively take advantage of new technology, crowd sourcing, and improved connectivity to empower people with information on the progress towards the targets. Without such revolution, monitoring progress and accountability would be impossible.

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