

# Lessons from the Proposal for a Sustainable Development Council for the UN General Assembly (From Rio+20) for the Future of the High-level Political Forum

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## Presenters

- **Mohamed Khalil**, Sustainable development and climate change senior expert, and Former G77 & China lead coordinator and negotiator for Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development
- **Jan-Gustav Strandenaes**, Senior Advisor on governance for Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future

## Respondents

- **Paula Caballero**, RARE Managing Director for Climate and Water – previously Director for Economic, Social and Environmental Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Colombia where she spearheaded and helped shape the UN's Sustainable Development Goals
- **Albert Butare**, Rwanda, former Minister of Energy and Water and former Co-chair of the 2011 Germany Nexus Conference
- **Marianne Beisheim**, Senior Associate, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)

**Moderator: Felix Dodds**, Adjunct Professor, Water Institute, University of North Carolina, USA





**Stakeholder Forum**  
FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

**HOW STRONG AN  
INSTITUTION IS  
NEEDED TO  
IMPLEMENT THE SDG  
PORTFOLIO BY 2030?**

**A FORUM?  
A SUBSIDIARY BODY?  
A COUNCIL?**

**By Jan-Gustav Strandenaes**

**Senior Adviser on Governance and  
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**Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future**

## 75 years ago, almost to the day, 50 nations agreed to the Charter of the UN

The focus at the time was urgent implementation and strong governance in a strong institution to safeguard the well-being of the peoples of the planet

Today 75 years and 193 countries later, we are clamouring for exactly the same things: urgent implementation, strong institutions and strong governance

Last September in 2019 at the UN Headquarters, member states of the UN agreed to call for urgent action now naming this third decade of the 21st century a decade of implementation.



Since the presentation of Sustainable Development in the UN Report Our Common Future, by Norway's Prime Minister, Ms. Brundtland in 1987, sustainable development issues have taken on a life of their own, through FOUR Summits, and ...

- 1992 UNCED and Agenda 21
- 1993 CSD
- 2002 WSSD and the JPOI
- 2003 A revamped CSD
- 2012 Conference on SD and The Future We Want
- 2013 – HLPF mandated
- 2015 – Adoption of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

**OUR  
COMMON  
FUTURE**

THE WORLD COMMISSION  
ON ENVIRONMENT  
AND DEVELOPMENT



## The SDGs presented as an idea at Solo, Indonesia, in 2011, by Paula Caballero of Colombia:

"At the international level, we need an organization to enhance the integration of sustainable development. Various options were discussed, ranging from an enhanced mandate for ECOSOC and reviewing the role of CSD, to the establishment of a Sustainable Development Council. There was a significant interest on the discussion on the sustainable development goals."

➔ (Solo Message, 2011)



# This presentation aims to show that The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development needs a strong institution because:

- The 2030 Agenda is becoming too large for a Forum to handle. The workload is fast expanding in volume and complexity
- It is becoming too demanding for a small forum with scant resources
- The 2030 Agenda must have a home at the UN with authority to make decisions and coordinate institutions working on Sustainable Development within the system to avoid duplication and create coherence
- Sustainable Development has reached political legitimacy, and needs a corresponding heavyweight institution which commends political respect among countries
- Transformative change as advocated by the 2030 Agenda in the world needs an authoritative institution with administrative leadership on par with Heads of Government

7 But now there is a growing need for the UN to do more on the SDGs – an expanding and complex agenda – has the UN an adequate institution to do this?



Has the HLPF been successful in implementing its mandate?

**Then - what is the mandate?**

**Is the mandate the same today as back in 2012 – or in 2015?**

**Are the mandates and tasks increasing and becoming more serious and challenging?**

**And of so – are our institutions fit for purpose?**

**Do forms really follow functions?**

**How can we Build Back Better and not regress?**

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The original mandates for the entire **2030 Agenda works** are primarily defined in three documents:

- **A/Res/67/290**: “Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development”, July 2013
- Further expanded with assignments from **A/Res 70/1** “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” –September 2015
- Further strengthened by a third: **A/Res/70/299** – “Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level”, August 2016

# Mandates fulfilled? 19 identified only in 67/290...

<b>Provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations</b>	<b>Perhaps</b>
<b>A concise negotiated political declaration for the GA</b>	<b>Not really</b>
<b>Follow up and review</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>A focused, dynamic, action-oriented agenda - new and emerging sustainable development challenges</b>	<b>Perhaps to negligible</b>
<b>Enhance the integration of the three dimensions</b>	<b>Improving</b>
<b>A thematic focus with that of ECOSOC and the 2030 agenda</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Follow up, review progress in the implementation of all major UN conferences</b>	<b>Improving</b>
<b>Involve relevant UN bodies, in particular WTO, the Bretton Woods institutions, their respective means of implementation</b>	<b>Not really</b>
<b>Improve cooperation/coordination within the UN system on sustainable development programmes and policies</b>	<b>Has begun, needs strength</b>

# Mandates fulfilled – continued - 19 identified from 67/290

Promote sharing of best practices and experiences relating to the implementation	YES
Facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned	YES, but mostly on successes
Promote system-wide coherence and coordination of SD policies;	Improving
Take into account work of Development Cooperation Forum, other activities of ECOSOC relating to integration and implementation of sustainable development;	Begun, and improving, (Yes?)
Shall benefit from regional preparatory processes	Not really
Devote adequate time to the discussion of the sustainable development challenges facing developing countries	Begun – improving (hopefully)
Identify and address new and emerging issues	Not really
Strengthen the science-policy interface	Begun, improving
Develop an independent Global Sustainable Development Report	Improving
Deal with SCP	Improving, but far to go

# Mandates pertaining to HLPF:

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- ➔ **From 67/290:** Found in paras: 1, 6, 7, 11, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 29
- ➔ **From the 2030 Agenda document:** found in paragraphs: 74, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90
- ➔ **Further strengthened in 70/299:** paragraphs: 4, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20

# The Global 2030 SD Portfolio – expanding the knowledge

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## Agreed and operationalised

- The 17 SDGs with their 169 targets/2030 agenda
- The 232 review indicators (2016)
- Resolution 67/290 - HLPF
- The Addis Ababa Action Agenda
- The Paris Climate Agreement (December 2015)
- The Sendai Outcome document, Disaster reduction
- The Samoa Pathway (SIDS agreement)
- Relevant work by UNDP, ECOSOC Commissions, CBD, other UN institutions, UN Specialised Agencies

## To be followed

- World Data Forum, 2021/23/25/27
- Annual HLPF reviews
- The Reviews, national, regional, global
- SDG High Level meeting, 2023/27
- Indicator reviews 2020/24/28
- Annual Finance for Develop Forums
- UNEP Geo-reports
- The UN Environment Assembly, every 2 years, UNEA 2021/23/25
- The Global Sustainable Development Report 2019 – and additional ones
- UNGA resolutions on Sustainable Investment
- ECOSOC deliberations

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Does the present institution have an adequate position and strength to coordinate, direct and find a way forward for the 2030 Agenda?



# A forgotten directive?

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Pointing back to paragraphs 84 and 85 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document, and allowing for future strengthening of what we have, the second preambular paragraph of 67/290 gives us the framework for an improved institution:

- “*Emphasizing* the need for an improved and more effective institutional framework for sustainable development, which should be guided by the specific functions required and mandates involved; address the shortcomings of the current system; take into account all relevant implications; promote synergies and coherence; seek to avoid duplication and eliminate unnecessary overlaps within the United Nations system and reduce administrative burdens and build on existing arrangements.”

# The difference between a Council and a Forum

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## HLPF is

- Directed by the President of ECOSOC/UNGA
- Universal membership
- Has no Bureau or decision-making powers,
- Works with a general reference to UNDESA to support HLPF (§ 23) in a secretarial manner
- 5 days for reviews, 3 days for the High-Level Segment
- A preparatory process through internet, no easy access to all documents
- Monitor delivery of SDGs and receive VNRs from countries, on certain goals
- A drafted report and a Ministerial Declaration negotiated outside of HLPF in advance of HLPF
- Selected inputs by stakeholders from the floor

## A Council could have

- An Assistant SG at secretariat level giving political weight to the 2030 Agenda
- Universal membership
- A Bureau with decision-making powers, and an elected President of the Bureau as leading
- A negotiated agenda
- A well-resourced and large secretariat
- Work on an annual basis with a prep conference and an annual conference with a negotiated outcome where the best parts of HLPF experiences are integrated (VNRs etc)
- Mandated to coordinate Sustainable Development for the entire UN system and with an outreach to all member states through the UN Regional Commissions

# Do we need a Council?

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- ▶ Nations are upgrading SDG work at a high political level, must be met at the same level by the UN
- ▶ An ASG at Council secretariat would carry more authority within and outside of the UN system than a commissioner appointed by the SG
- ▶ The 2030 SD portfolio is growing fast, and the volume of work demands a better resourced institution with a well-resourced and dedicated secretariat
- ▶ Nations are introducing new regulations and standards at all levels on SD, the UN may fall regrettably behind without a strong political institution to follow-up and be unable to inspire and lead SD development (ref investment regulations)

- ▶ A Council could be mandated and have the authority to work on SD coherence and coordinate decisions on SD policy at UN, avoid administrative duplication
- ▶ A Council could be in a position to direct implementation of decisions made through the UN system
- ▶ With the new Green Deals and Financial directives on investment regulations, a Council could have more political weight to work with ECOSOC, the World Bank, IMF and other finance institutions to promote better global economy
- ▶ A Council could be in a better position to work with important stakeholders and attract their attention

# What could a relationship between an SD Council and UN look like?

- A Council for Sustainable Development – could be an institution at the highest level, to deal with all matters relating to Sustainable Development
- It could absorb work of ECOSOC on sustainable development and the SECOND COMMITTEE of the UNGA while keeping the integrity and mandates of ECOSOC.
- The two Councils could meet on the issues of Green, Equitable and Inclusive Economy, the Green New Deal in Finance and what contribution they could have to deliver the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- The Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of UN system operational activities could be dealt with by ECOSOC with recommendations to the SD Council to address on challenges and opportunities in helping to inform the impact of UN activities delivering on the 2030 Agenda for SD at the country level.
- The UN Specialized Agencies and Programmes would report to ECOSOC with actions on sustainability that the Council could address and bring forward
- The Council could have space to address the implementation of special focus areas, such as the Sendai Disaster Reduction and the Samoa Pathway
- It could be an interface with the MEAs

## Other benefits of a Council could be

Engender the transformative change. It could:

- Identify gaps in the delivery of the 2030 Agenda and seek to establish new multi-stakeholder partnerships to help deliver
- Decide on time- relevant agendas that need extra work from the 2030 Agenda such as anti-biotic resistance
- Address emerging issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the role of building back better through the delivery of the 2030 Agendas for Sustainable Development and the sustainable development goals
- Monitor and support relevant partnerships, seek quantification of their contribution to deliver the 2030 Agenda.
- With UNEP and OCHR support, integrate MEAs, Conventions, rights issues into the 2030 agenda
- Advance green equitable and inclusive economies to help deliver the 2030 Agenda
- It could be a forum where we review local and sub national government implementation, industry and financial institutions alignment and implementation
- Be a proper forum for stakeholders to discuss with member states the delivery of the 2030 Agenda This could be at the highest level for all stakeholders including the private sector
- Upgrade regional issues, strengthen and improve innovative work, use UN regional meetings as decisive prep meetings
- Be the real institution which can coordinate and integrate all outcomes from the ongoing 2030 Sustainable Development Portfolio

*Thank you for participating*  
**A recording of this webinar  
and the presentation slides  
will soon be available on the  
Stakeholder Forum website.**  
**<https://stakeholderforum.org/>**

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