

Governance for Sustainable Development Volume 3: Preparing for the Heads of State review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is produced by the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development. The coordinators of the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development are the governments of Germany, Nigeria, Republic of Korea and Romania. The publication is financed by the Government of Sweden. The Government of Sweden does not necessarily share the opinions here within expressed. ARTICLE 19 bears the sole responsibility for the content.

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## Foreword

**Akinremi Bolaji, Yeongmoo Cho, Verena Klinger-Dering, Cristina Popescu, David Banisar, Felix Dodds and Quinn McKew**

The Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development have continued to host workshops on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The 2030 Agenda represents one of the most important sets of Global Goals that the international community has committed to. It is an unprecedented effort that embodies universal aspirations for achieving a more just, equitable, peaceful and sustainable future. It is an excellent example of successful multilateralism.

This ambitious and unique exercise represents a paradigm shift in policy-making for sustainable development. It gives a roadmap by which we all, the UN, governments and stakeholders can work together to address the most pressing global challenges. In this context, the rule of law, as well as effective, robust, participatory and accountable institutions are of the utmost importance to achieve the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets.

This is the third book that the Group of Friends of the Governance for Sustainable Development has produced in an effort to share widely the papers that have been presented at the workshops for member States to discuss. The Group recognize that there is an inextricable link between good governance and sustainable development and that, as the 2030 Agenda is implemented, governance challenges will need discussion and action at all levels and by all institutions.

Mindful of these challenges, the governments of Germany, Mexico, Nigeria, Romania and the Republic of Korea, with the technical support of the Tellus Institute and the organization ARTICLE 19 have tried to create an informal space for member States to discuss governance related issues.

This Group of Friends was originally created during the preparation of the Rio+20 Conference as a flexible and informal space to discuss issues related to good governance and foster cooperation between multiple actors to feed into the Rio+20 conference. It has continued through the process of negotiation of the 2030 Agenda and now is addressing issues that are related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

In 2018, the Group of Friends convened UN officials, experts, and representatives from government at three participatory workshops on governance and the 2030 Agenda implementation. Two of these workshops were organized in partnership with UN-DESA Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development focusing on early preparations for the Heads of State review of the 2030 Agenda in September 2019. The third workshop focused on the review of SDG 16 initiatives to help early preparation and discussion for the July High Level Political Forum when SDG 16 progress will be reviewed.

The Group of Friends will continue to be a place for discussions of the institutional architecture for the 2030 Agenda's implementation, follow-up and review. It is our great pleasure to present this publication which compiles the papers presented at the Friends

workshops in 2018 updated from the engaging and valuable discussions that representatives from government, UN officials and experts had at the aforementioned workshops. In this sense, we would like to thank all the paper writers and participants for their important contributions. Moreover, we extend our gratitude to the Tellus Institute and the organization ARTICLE 19 who have worked extensively to make these dialogues and the present publication a reality.

We expect the present publication to be a useful input for the ongoing discussions about the institutional architecture for the 2030 Agenda. This agenda has already captured the imagination of this generation. We now know that sustainable development will only become a reality if we have the enabling environment for it to happen. Good governance will be pivotal for implementing, reviewing and improving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We hope that this publication contributes to addressing the challenges we will be facing over the coming years to 2030.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations

A4SD	<a href="#">Action for Sustainable Development</a>
AAAA	<a href="#">Addis Ababa Action Agenda</a>
ACC	<a href="#">Administrative Committee on Coordination</a>
ACF	Advocacy Coalitions Framework
ADC	<a href="#">Africa Data Consensus</a>
APF	<a href="#">Asia Pacific Forum</a>
APRM	<a href="#">African Peer Review Mechanism</a>
ATPS	<a href="#">Africa Technology Policy Studies Network</a>
AU	<a href="#">African Union</a>
AWS	<a href="#">Alliance for Water Stewardship</a>
CBD	<a href="#">Convention on Biological Diversity</a>
CBDR	Common but Differentiated Responsibilities
CBHR	<a href="#">Corporate Benchmarking on Human Rights</a>
CEB	<a href="#">Chief Executives Board</a>
CEDAW	<a href="#">Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women</a>
CGD	Citizen-Generated Data
CIVICUS	<a href="#">World Alliance for Citizen Participation</a>
CoD	<a href="#">Community of Democracies</a>
CLEW	Climate Land Energy and Water
CR	Country review
CSA	Country self-assessment
CSD	<a href="#">Commission on Sustainable Development</a>
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
DCF	<a href="#">Development Cooperation Forum</a>
DEFRA	<a href="#">Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (UK)</a>
ECESA	Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs
EEAC	<a href="#">Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils</a>
EITI	<a href="#">Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative</a>
EMG	<a href="#">Environmental Management Group</a>
ESG	Environmental, Social and Governance
FAO	<a href="#">Food and Agriculture Organization</a>
FfD	<a href="#">Financing for Development</a>
FSC	<a href="#">Forest Stewardship Council</a>
GAVI	<a href="#">Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization</a>
GN-NCSD	<a href="#">Global Network of National Councils for Sustainable Development and Similar Bodies</a>
GPEDC	<a href="#">Global Partnership for Effective Cooperation</a>
GPEI	<a href="#">Global Polio Eradication Initiative</a>
GRI	<a href="#">Global Reporting Initiative</a>
GSDR	<a href="#">Global Sustainable Development Report</a>
GWP	<a href="#">Global Water Partnership</a>
HLPF	<a href="#">High Level Political Forum</a>
HPC	Hybrid Parliamentary Committees

IACSD	<a href="#">Interagency Committee on Sustainable Development</a>
IAEA	<a href="#">International Atomic for Energy Agency</a>
IATF	Inter-Agency Task Force
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
ICSC	International Civil Society Centre
IDEA	<a href="#">Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance</a>
IAEG-SDG	<a href="#">Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators</a>
IEP	<a href="#">Institute of Economics and Peace</a>
IFI	International Financial Institutions
IFLA	<a href="#">International Federation of Library Associations</a>
IFSD	<a href="#">Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development</a>
IGES	<a href="#">Institute for Global Environmental Strategies</a>
IIED	<a href="#">Institute for International Environment and Development</a>
IMF	<a href="#">International Money Fund</a>
INDC	Intended Nationally Determined Contributions
IPU	<a href="#">Inter-Parliamentary Union</a>
IUCN	<a href="#">International Union for Conservation of Nature</a>
JPol	<a href="#">Johannesburg Plan of Implementation</a>
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LDC	Least Developed Country
MDB	Multi-Lateral Development Banks
MDG	<a href="#">Millennium Development Goals</a>
MDG-EIAG	<a href="#">Millennium Development Goals Expert Inter-Agency Group</a>
MGoS	Major Groups and other Stakeholders
MID	Maurice Ile Durable (Mauritius)
MOI	Means of Implementation
MSP	Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships
NCSD	<a href="#">National Councils for Sustainable Development</a>
NFFT	National Council for Sustainable Development (Hungary)
NPEAD	<a href="#">New Partnership for Africa's Development</a>
NPoAs	National Plans of Action
NSDS	National Sustainable Development Strategies
NSO	National Statistical Offices
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	<a href="#">Overseas Development Institute</a>
OECD	<a href="#">Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</a>
OHCHR	<a href="#">Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights</a>
OI	<a href="#">Open Institute Kenya</a>
OWG	Open Working Group
PA21	Philippine Agenda 21
PDP	Philippine Development Plan
PMO	Prime Minister's Office
PrepCom	Preparatory Committee
PRI	<a href="#">United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment</a>
PPP	Public Private Partnerships
QCPR	<a href="#">Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review</a>



REEP	<a href="#">Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership</a>
RNE	<a href="#">German Council for Sustainable Development</a>
RTI	Right to Information
SAICM	<a href="#">Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management</a>
SAP	Strategy and Action Plan
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDS	Sustainable Development Strategy
SDplanNet	Sustainable Development Planning Network
SDTF	<a href="#">Sustainable Development Transition Forum</a>
SF	<a href="#">Stakeholder Forum</a>
SHaSA	Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resource-Based, With Time Based Deliverables
SSI	<a href="#">Sustainable Stock Exchanges</a>
TAI	<a href="#">The Access Initiative</a>
UCLG	<a href="#">United Cities and Local Governments</a>
URU-Fogar	<a href="#">United Regions Organization</a>
UN	<a href="#">United Nations</a>
UNCAS	<a href="#">United Nations Convention Against Corruption</a>
UNCED	<a href="#">United Nations Conference on Environment and Development</a>
UNCTAD	<a href="#">United Nations Conference on Trade and Development</a>
UNECA	<a href="#">United Nations Economic Commission for Africa</a>
UN ECLAC	<a href="#">United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean</a>
UNDESA	<a href="#">United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs</a>
UNDPI	<a href="#">United Nations Department of Public Information</a>
UNDP	<a href="#">United Nations Development Programme</a>
UNEA	<a href="#">United Nations Environment Assembly</a>
UNESCO	<a href="#">United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</a>
UNESCO-IPDC	<a href="#">UNESCO International Programme for Development Communication</a>
UNEP	<a href="#">United Nations Environment Programme</a>
UNEP-FI	<a href="#">United Nations Environment Programme Finance Initiative</a>
UNGA	<a href="#">United Nations General Assembly</a>
UNICEF	<a href="#">United Nations Children's Fund</a>
VI	Voluntary Initiative
VNR	Voluntary National Reports
WB	<a href="#">World Bank</a>
WBA	<a href="#">World Benchmarking Alliance</a>
WHO	<a href="#">World Health Organization</a>
WSSD	<a href="#">World Summit on Sustainable Development</a>
WTO	<a href="#">World Trade Organization</a>

## Biographies

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**Aparajita Banerjee**, is Environmental Protection Agency Postdoctoral Researcher, Centre for Sustainable Development Studies, UCD Geary Institute, School of Politics and International Relations in University College Dublin. She holds a Ph.D. from the Michigan Technological University (2016). Her expertise lies broadly in the area of environmental sustainability and has recently co-edited a book titled Environmental Policy in the Pursuit of Sustainability based on different case studies in Mexico and the United States. She is currently focused on exploring how multi-stakeholder partnerships can evolve for achieving the UN SDGs.

**David Banisar**, is a Senior Legal Counsel at ARTICLE 19. He has worked in the field of information policy for over 20 years and was previously Director of the Freedom of Information Project at Privacy International. He has authored books, studies and articles on freedom of information, freedom of expression, media policy, whistleblowing, communications security and privacy. He has also served as an advisor and consultant to numerous organizations, including the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the UN Development Programme and the Open Society Institute. Banisar was a research fellow at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and Policy Director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center in Washington, DC. He has a Juris Doctor in law and public policy from The Columbus School of Law, at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

**Akinremi Bolaji**, is currently Minister Plenipotentiary and Head of the Second Committee in the Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the UN. Born on 4th December 1965, in Ibadan, the largest city in West Africa, Mr Akinremi Bolaji joined the Diplomatic Service of Nigeria in 1993, after a stint in the private and media sector. His foreign service training traversed both Nigerian and Indian Academy. He is a Multilateralist Diplomat and has served in the Embassy of Nigeria in Addis Ababa. He served as the Chief Protocol Officer in The Office of the Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Before his Posting to New York He was the Deputy Director & Head of Policy planning Division as well as Head Crisis Management and Public Communications Division cum Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign affairs of Nigeria,

**Marianne Beisheim**, is a renowned expert in the field of global governance and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since 2010 she holds the position of Senior Researcher at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, SWP). The SWP is an independent research center, charged with providing analysis and recommendations to the German Parliament and Federal Government on a wide range of international affairs. Previously, she worked as a Research Associate for the German Parliament and as Assistant Professor for International Relations at the Free University Berlin.

**Geert Bouckaert**, has been Professor at the KU Leuven Public Governance Institute at the KU Leuven University in Leuven, Belgium, since 1996. He is former President of the European Group for Public Administration and is currently president of the International Institute of Administrative Sciences. He has authored or co-authored numerous books, including *Public Management Reform, A Comparative Analysis: Into the Age of Austerity*, and *Performance Management in the Public Sector*. Mr. Bouckaert has been visiting professor to several universities, including Bocconi University in Milan, Italy, and University of Potsdam in Germany. He has conducted extensive research on governance in the public sector at both the national and subnational levels with a focus on reform, performance, trust, agencies, information systems and financial cycles. Mr. Bouckaert is a member of several editorial boards of international public administration journals. He has been awarded several honorary doctorates and the Anneliese Maier Research Award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. He advises the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and several Governments on their reform initiatives.

**Yeongmoo Cho**, is currently Counsellor working within the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Korea to the United Nations.

**Jack Cornforth**, joined CIVICUS in September 2014 to work on DataShift, which he coordinated from mid-2016. He is currently leading the Resilient Roots initiative, supporting a number of organisations around the world to test if being more accountable to their constituents will make them more resilient to external threats. His current role also involves coordinating across these two initiatives and CIVICUS' other data and accountability-related efforts, including work to facilitate civil society monitoring of the SDGs, to ensure strategic coherence and joined-up delivery. He was previously seconded to campaign-experts MobLab, to coordinate CampaignCon 2017, a global skill and experience-sharing gathering for activists. He previously worked for Stakeholder Forum, facilitating engagement in a number of multilateral processes, including as Assistant Editor of Outreach magazine. Jack is based in London, UK.

**Felix Dodds**, is an Adjunct Professor and a Senior Affiliate at the Water Institute at the Environmental Science and Engineering within the Gillings School of Global Public Health at the University of North Carolina. He is also Associate Fellow at the Tellus Institute. He was the co-director of the 2014 and 2018 Nexus Conferences on Water, Food, Energy and Climate at UNC. Dodds was the Executive Director of Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future from 1992-2012. He played a significant role in promoting multi-stakeholder dialogues at the United Nations and prosed to the UN General Assembly the introduction of stakeholder dialogue sessions at the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development. He has been active at the UN since 1990, attending and actively participating in UNFCCC, UNCBD, the World Summits of Rio Earth Summit, Habitat II, Rio+5, Beijing+5, Copenhagen+5, World Summit on Sustainable Development and Rio+20, while also attending the UN Commissions for Sustainable Development and UNEP Governing Councils. In 2011, he chaired the United Nations DPI 64th NGO conference – 'Sustainable Societies Responsive Citizens'. From 1997-2001, he co-chaired the UN Commission on Sustainable Development NGO Steering Committee. Dodds has written, or edited, sixteen books the most recent is *Negotiating the Sustainable Development Goals: A Transformational Agenda for a Insure World* written with Ambassador David Donoghue and Jimena Leiva Roesch it is the fourth book in the Vienna Café Trilogy the other books are *Only One Earth: The Long*

*Road via Rio to Sustainable Development* written with Michael Strauss and Maurice Strong and *From Rio+20 to a New Development Agenda Building a Bridge to a Sustainable Future* and *The Plain Language Guide to Rio+20* written with Jorge Laguna Celis and Elizabeth Thompson. He is also an International Ambassador for the City of Bonn.

**Jorge Fernandez**, is the current Delegate General of the Basque Country in the United States, based in New York City. As the Delegate, he is in charge of a team that covers trade and economic subjects, as well as political and institutional ones, within the transferred government competences from the Spanish federal government to the Basque regional one. In particular, he leads the relations with the United Nations in the different fora where the regions participate, follows all developments regarding the Agenda 2030-- one of the key government priorities, and the relations with the Spanish Permanent Mission to the United Nations, and other Member States and regions with presence in the city. Previously, Jorge was the Director of Investment Projects of the Basque Trade and Investment Agency, where he leads a team providing investment information and financial advice to corporate and individual clients, and maintaining knowledge of a wide range of Basque strategic sectors. He has also worked as the Government Delegate of this trade agency in Mexico and Poland for over a decade, aiding Basque companies in their market entry or development. Prior to joining the government, Mr. Fernandez worked in the private sector as an international project manager and export adviser for large Basque manufacturing companies focused in the European and Asian markets.

**Patricia Galdamez**, is the Senior Advisor and Civil Society Coordinator of the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies (PCSD). She is a Salvadoran lawyer, specialized in project management and previously worked for USAID and was Executive Director of the Democracy, Transparency, Justice Foundation in El Salvador.

**Alexandra Hiniker**, is Strategic Relationships Manager for the Mayor's Office for International Affairs, and Program Director for Global Vision | Urban Action. In this capacity, she is responsible for highlighting the connections between local and global sustainability using the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. Alexandra has more than a decade of international development, policy, and advocacy experience working in 18 countries around the world. Before joining the Mayor's Office, she was the PAX Representative to the United Nations, focusing on the protection of civilians in Syria, Iraq, and South Sudan. Previously, she worked on humanitarian disarmament in some of the world's most bombed and mined countries, first with the United Nations in Cambodia, and then with the Cluster Munition Coalition in Laos, followed by Lebanon. She began her international development career implementing pandemic preparedness projects in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe. Prior to that, she served as a Princeton Project 55 Fellow with the Center for Neighborhood Technology in Chicago. Alexandra has a B.A. from the University of Chicago and an M.A. from Uniwersytet Jagiellonski in Krakow, Poland, and also studied at Sciences Po-Paris. She is currently pursuing an M.S. in Urban Policy and Leadership at Hunter College. Originally from New Carrollton, Maryland, Alexandra now resides in Jackson Heights, Queens.

**David Horan**, is a Post-doctoral Researcher at University College Dublin's School of Politics and International Relations and Visiting Researcher at the Earth Institute, Columbia University, New York. He holds a Ph.D. in Economics from the European University Institute (2012). He is

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**Ms. Verena Klinger-Dering**, Counsellor for Sustainable Development, German Permanent Mission to the United Nations. She joined the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety in 1992. She worked in different areas ranging from public relations, international nature conservation policy to EU environmental policies. From 2008 to 2012 she was seconded to the Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU and has dealt with files amongst others in the area of nature conservation and biodiversity, EU environmental strategies and international environment agreements. Since September 2012 she works as policy officer in the unit for general , international and European aspects of water management. Her priorities of work are the promotion of international water cooperation and the mainstreaming of water issues into global initiatives and programs, i.e. the promotion of the water-energy and food security nexus in the follow-up process to the Bonn2011 Nexus Conference.

**Quinn McKew**, is the Deputy Executive Director of ARTICLE 19, an international freedom of expression and information NGO. Quinn leads ARTICLE 19's global programs on ICTs, protection of human rights defenders and the campaign to incorporate transparency and good governance in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. She is responsible for global operations and governance at ARTICLE 19 including the integration of the 8 regional offices and 50+ regional partner organisations. Prior to joining ARTICLE 19, she worked for the largest non-profit management consultancy in Europe, and was a campaign manager for leading environmental organisations in the United States. McKew has a Masters of Business Administration from Georgetown University focusing on global non-profit management and a BA in International Relations and the Environment from Stanford University.

**Enda Murphy**, is Professor of Planning at the School of Architecture, Planning and Environmental Policy in University College Dublin. He holds a PhD (2005) in Transportation Planning from Trinity College Dublin (TCD). Professor Murphy has held visiting professor positions at the University of Economics, Ho Chi Minh City, University of Hartford, USA and Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town. He is a former Fulbright Scholar. He is author/co-author of more than 80 academic journal papers, book chapters, conference papers and reports and is co-author of two books. His research interests are broad in scope but centre on the areas of urban transportation and spatial planning, environmental noise, neoliberalisation and crises, and related issues.

**Charles Nouhan**, Chairman of Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future and its New York Representative to the United Nations, was Deputy Director of Stakeholder Forum from 2000 to 2002. During that time, he worked beside then Director Felix Dodds to engage the key UK and international stakeholders, and other non-governmental organizations, with the United Nation's Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, Earth Summit 2002. A professional waste manager and sustainable cities practitioner by day, Charles counsels institutions, businesses,

and communities on sustainable waste management solutions that are consistent with the UN's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. His newest project is the promotion of a Sustainable Development Multi-Stakeholder Partnership to advance and deliver a zero-emissions technology capable of utility-level electrical power generation from ocean waves.

**David O'Connor**, works in the SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) Delivery Team. He is working with colleagues to assess needs of both developed and developing countries as they prepare to implement this universal and potentially transformative agenda. He is providing conceptual guidance to a set of country and cross-cutting case studies of early SDG implementation efforts in developed countries, focusing on how they are addressing the universality of the agenda. In a next phase, the focus will shift more towards emerging and developing economies' SDG readiness. The team aims to draw upon expertise located across the Institute to support SDG implementation. One key aspect will be the coordination at country level of SDG implementation with climate action plans reflecting countries' intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) codified in the Paris Climate Change Agreement. David also serves as the Permanent Observer of IUCN to the United Nations. Before joining WRI, he led the Policy and Analysis Branch of the United Nations Division for Sustainable Development and, in that capacity, headed the team which guided analytically the development of the sustainable development goals and supported their negotiation and that of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He also guided the preparations of the first two editions of the Global Sustainable Development Report. Prior to joining the UN, David worked for many years at the OECD Development Centre in Paris, doing studies on the co-benefits of climate policy in China, India and other developing countries. He also authored an OECD study on Managing the Environment with Rapid Industrialization: Lessons from the East Asian Experience, as well as numerous shorter studies on financing sustainable development, policy and entrepreneurial responses to the Montreal Protocol, and economic instruments for environmental policy in Asia.

**Derek Osborn**, has been associated with Stakeholder Forum for many years, first as Chairman, later as President and currently as a Director. He is also Chairman of Cynnal Cymru (Sustain Wales), a similar organisation supporting multi-stakeholder engagement with sustainable development issues in Wales. In his first career Derek Osborn was a civil servant in the Department of the Environment, serving as Director General of the Environment for six years in the early 1990s. At that time he led the UK team preparing the Rio Summit in 1992, and other international negotiations as well as helping to shape the UK environmental agenda. From 1996 he has pursued a portfolio career with appointments in the public, private, academic and voluntary spheres all linked with sustainable development and the protection of the environment. He chaired the Round Table on Sustainable Development in the UK for two years and subsequently served on the UK Commission on Sustainable Development for several years. For five years he chaired the Board of the European Environment Agency, and later was a member of the European Economic and Social Committee and was the first chair of its Sustainable Development Observatory. He was a non-executive Director of the Severn Trent Water Company for a number of years, and is currently a member of Dyr Cymru, the Welsh Water Company. He was a visiting fellow of Green College, Oxford in the 1990s and subsequently a visiting professor at University College London.

**Minh-Thu Pham**, is currently Executive Director for Policy at the United Nations Foundation, where she develops and leads strategic initiatives to strengthen the UN's ability to solve global

problems, including on the Sustainable Development Goals and peace and conflict. She has also taught international policymaking at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University and has over 15 years of experience in foreign policy, international diplomacy, and fieldwork. She has served in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General for Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon as policy adviser in the Strategic Planning Unit, managing initiatives to strengthen the UN and improve relations between the U.S. and the UN. Minh-Thu has advised the UN special envoy for malaria and the top international official in Bosnia and worked for Save the Children and other organizations in Ethiopia, Vietnam and Washington, DC. She was once a crew photographer for the BBC series Planet Earth and was a documentary photographer. Minh-Thu is a fellow of the Truman National Security Project; was selected a Term Member of the Council on Foreign Relations in 2007; and serves on the Board of Directors of the Coalition for Asian-American Children and Families. She holds an MPA from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University and a BA in History from Duke University where she was a Benjamin N. Duke Leadership Scholar. She was born in Vietnam and lives in New York City with her husband and daughter.

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**Jan-Gustav Strandenaes**, had his debut with the UN and the environment in the 1970s through the Stockholm Conference for Environment in 1972 and has stayed with this arena ever since, worked on disseminating information on and teaching about UN issues during the 80s and early 90s, has followed and worked with the UN Commission for Sustainable Development since 1997, when he that year, was a liaison officer between the UN and the NGO community at the UN headquarters in New York. After his first assignments for the UN in Latin America in the 70's, Jan-Gustav has worked and lived in Botswana, Uganda, the US and Sweden in addition to Norway. He has extensive NGO experience developed through three decades in almost all continents in the world, speaks several languages and has lectured and given workshops all over the world on the UN, governance, the environment and sustainable development, evaluated projects and organisations, advised governments on relations with civil society, chaired UN meetings and facilitated UN processes, translated several books from English to Norwegian and authored two

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**Felipe Victoria**, is currently the Policy and Institutional Affairs Officer of the Delegation of the Basque Country in New York City. As such, Felipe is in charge of following all issues that relate to the Agenda 2030 at the United Nations, liaising with all relevant institutions and partners at the UN, in particular UNDESA, and with the Spanish Mission to the United Nations. He also manages and follows common programs and projects with other regions present in New York City, like Quebec and Flanders. Prior to this role, he served as an international adviser at the Spanish Embassy in Cairo, Egypt, where he covered trade and economic issues in the Red Sea Basin region, namely Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia. He has also served as a guest lecturer to the Colombian War College and the University of the Andes in Bogota-Colombia, lecturing on regional challenges and security, the functioning of the UN System, and geopolitical hotspots; and serving also as a foreign affairs specialist at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain, dealing with multilateral affairs issues, particularly the UN System.

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## **Section 1 -Sustainable Development 16 Initiatives**

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# **Elaborating Principles of Effective Governance for Sustainable Development**

By Geert Bouckaert

## **Introduction**

Good governance objectives such as those found in the 2030 Agenda tend to be aspirational in nature and describe a number of very broadly defined objectives – such as the rule of law, low aggregate levels of corruption and participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Aspirations at this level provide limited specific guidance on institutional reforms. As such they are not much help to countries thinking about pragmatic ongoing improvements in national and local governance capabilities and may even distract and undermine important institution-building initiatives if such initiatives do not seem to satisfy the aspirational criteria.

Instead, the immediate governance capabilities that are relevant may be narrowly defined: how to improve the appointment of bureaucrats, how to improve the construction of infrastructure, or how to reduce specific types of corruption in health delivery, and so on. The challenge for many countries is to think about feasible improvements in governance capabilities starting from where they are and to focus pragmatically and selectively on key problem areas. CEPA has thus recognized the need for the effective governance agenda to be both clarified and made more operational.

To that end, the experts decided at the sixteenth session of CEPA (in 2017) to move forward with drafting a set of principles of effective governance for sustainable development. Voluntary by design, the principles are intended to spur countries to think about feasible, pragmatic reforms that take into account each country's starting point and prioritize key problems in building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions according to each country's capacities and context.

## **Key activities**

- 1. Clarifying internationally-recognized principles of effective governance for sustainable development*

CEPA has stressed that any eventual set of principles must be guided by the Charter of the United Nations and grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties. The initiative should also be substantially consistent with the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits, as well as with relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. For example, building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels is a sustainable development commitment in its own right and is reflected in specific targets under SDG 16, among them target 16.6 calling for development of effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels, and target 16.7 calling for responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.

A key activity of the initiative is to clarify and articulate these basic principles of effective governance, as agreed in the United Nations context, and to bring them together as a

common point of reference. The governance concepts contained in the principles are not new ideas and should be readily recognizable to policymakers and practitioners in any area of public administration.

## *2. Relating the principles to concrete practices*

Having delineated the basic principles, there remains the difficulty of relating them to helpful practices, which are expected to be great in number and highly varied. Identifying and assessing the impact of such practices on sustainable development outcomes is a second key activity of the initiative.

The Committee recognizes that such practices should be concrete if they are to be of use to practitioners and clearly connected with the specific governance challenges to be addressed. How to assess the relevance of practices in this sense is not obvious. Practices that appear to be applicable may refer to broadly defined concepts (e.g., rule of law or smart cities), pertain to public policy but not directly to institution-building (e.g., fiscal and monetary policy or the designation of protected areas) or they may be more indicative than actionable (e.g., public services are delivered). Moreover, practices might be considered “good” not if they convey a conditional recipe, but if they:

- Focus on outcomes rather than rules.
- Allow for the progressive realization of objectives with a view to solving particular problems in particular local contexts through the creation of an authorizing environment for decision-making that encourages delegation and experimentation.
- Have strong empirical links to the pragmatic improvements in governance which are the ultimate outcomes of interest.

The Committee and other entities have explored a range of commonly used strategies for addressing important governance challenges in the past, such as building a professional civil service or promoting integrated policymaking to enhance effectiveness, ensuring the independence of the auditing function or expanding the availability of open government data to strengthen accountability, and institutionalizing participation mechanisms or strengthening local finance to foster inclusiveness. Such strategies may be used to link the principles to concrete practices and provide a solid basis for further work.

The Committee has stressed that the practices are not intended to be a list of things that Governments should be doing. Each practice could be useful or not, depending on national and local contexts, visions, models, needs and priorities. CEPA has also stressed that there is no single way of organizing institutions that are responsive and effective, although such institutions may share common features. The adoption of any practice will be conditioned to a large degree by the political feasibility of particular reforms. Countries may also have their own legislation and approaches, which might in some cases go further than what is suggested by CEPA.

## *3. Identifying areas where further work on technical guidelines may be helpful*

With a fuller picture of the principles of effective governance for sustainable development as well as proven or promising practices that contribute to them, CEPA may more readily identify and advise on areas where further work on technical guidelines could be helpful. Similarly, assessments could be initiated of relevant technical guidelines with a view to promoting their alignment with the SDGs and the principle of leaving no one behind.

## **What the Committee has achieved so far**

### *1. Agreement of the experts on the purpose, scope and application of principles of effective governance in the context of the 2030 Agenda*

CEPA has devoted substantial time to an exploration of the purpose, scope and application of the proposed principles and related practices, taking into account the development context of governance including recognition of the power dynamics, attitudes, behaviours and interests that may enhance or hinder efforts at readying institutions and policies for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. A broad view of effective governance has consistently been the result. Specifically, the experts have agreed that the principles should be:

Relevant to implementation of the 2030 Agenda as a whole – It is recognized that achieving the targets of SDG 16 will be critical to the implementation of all the SDGs and that there are strong, positive linkages between the institution-building objectives of the 2030 Agenda and most of the other targets.

Seen in the context of different layers of governance – Each of the basic principles may guide action in the management of individual organizations; collaboration across government; relations with non-State actors; organizational attitudes and behaviours; and governance at the systemic level.

Applicable to a country's broader administrative system – Taking a cue from related regional initiatives, this would include any institution or organization that undertakes public service duties, independent constitutional bodies, and both national and subnational bodies, whether or not they have their own legal personalities.

Relevant in all governance paradigms and regardless of variations in legal systems.

### *2. Agreement of the experts on a set of eleven basic principles of effective governance for sustainable development*

On 24 April 2018, at its seventeenth session, the Committee adopted the set of eleven basic principles of effective governance contained in its sessional report (E/2018/44). The principles have been articulated in easy-to-recall, non-technical language, with the essential SDG 16 elements of effectiveness, accountability and inclusiveness at the core.

The basic principles comprise: (a) competence, sound policymaking and cooperation under the rubric of effectiveness; (b) integrity, transparency and independent oversight under accountability; and (c) non-discrimination, participation, subsidiarity, intergenerational equity, and leaving no one behind under inclusiveness.

#### *4. Endorsement of the principles by the Economic and Social Council*

By its resolution 2018/12 of 2 July 2018, the Economic and Social Council reaffirmed the need for pragmatic ongoing improvements in national and local governance capabilities to achieve the 2030 Agenda and other international agreements, and endorsed the principles of effective governance for sustainable development as an initial reference point in building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels and in support of the implementation of all Sustainable Development Goals.

ECOSOC also encouraged the Committee to continue to identify and review related technical guidelines to operationalize the principles, following a well-defined process for assessing the relevance of a practice to the principles and the evidence of impact, including from sectoral perspectives, and to engage the relevant United Nations organizations, regional organizations and professional and academic communities in this regard.

#### **Challenges the initiative has faced**

##### *1. Conceptual challenges: What is a practice? How to know if it is relevant and impactful?*

As indicated above, there are considerable conceptual challenges in assessing concrete practices for relevance and the strength of the empirical evidence of their impact on outcomes related to the SDGs. While relevance is often a matter of interpretation based on an individual's knowledge and experience, a pragmatic approach would be to look for a connection to one of the commonly used strategies and actionability, that is, whether the practice is supported by operational guidelines (e.g., on the management of organizational performance in health services, measures to prevent corruption in access to education, or gender-responsive budgeting) and is actually being implemented in countries. The elaboration of some objective standards of assessment may be needed.

##### *2. Engaging a wide range of experts in identifying and assessing related practices*

In addition to assessing relevance, attention should be given to ensuring that there is sufficient empirical evidence of the impact of a practice on the achievement of one or more of the targets of the SDGs, as well as consistency with the principles of responsive and effective governance. Significant support from the larger research community may be needed to identify relevant practices, assess the scope and strength of the evidence base and possibly promote comparative research, for example, through the United Nations and other international organizations as well as academic networks.

There is ongoing discussion and development of relevant operational guidelines in many fields of endeavour throughout the United Nations system. One approach could be to continue to build on the effort to reference and bring together within one framework a range of relevant standards and guidelines. In some cases, conventions and treaties may already lay down a framework for action that is of a legally binding nature, as, for example, in the case of the United Nations Convention against Corruption.

Principles of effective governance could indeed build on those and other agreements, as articulated above, but be of a voluntary nature. In other cases, technical committees and the secretariats of various international organizations may have formulated a variety of operational guidelines as follow-up to aspirational agreements and commitments made at the intergovernmental level. Joint initiatives with UNDP, FAO, ILO, UNODC and other interested entities of the United Nations system could be explored, with the first step being to identify guidelines relevant to implementation of the principles from various sectoral perspectives, taking into account the interrelationships inherent in the SDGs.

Relating the principles to concrete guidelines, evaluating the strength of the evidence of the impact of these practices on outcomes related to the SDGs and linking to global efforts to support implementation of the SDGs may be where the main challenges lie going forward.

### **What should the Ministerial Declaration in 2019 say to address outstanding challenges?**

To build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels in support of SDG 16 and the implementation of all SDGs, countries may wish to reaffirm the basic principles of effective governance for sustainable development and avail themselves of international technical guidelines that have been developed according to strictly professional considerations and are known to be effective under similar conditions.

Encourage collaboration among professionals in the relevant specialized disciplines, which has proven to be an important determinant of both the quality of resultant technical guidelines and their legitimacy.

Recognize that, although the scale of the governance challenge is large and multidimensional, many specific improvements in building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions implemented incrementally over a period of years can yield important long-term results.

## **Community of Democracies and the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda**

By Patricia Galdamez

### **Introduction**

The UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, adopted unanimously by 193 United Nations Member States in September 2015, constitutes a historic global effort, creating an action plan for the entire world to follow, aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all.

The mission of the Community of Democracies (CoD) to support democratic institutions and promote the democratic values enshrined in the Warsaw Declaration is firmly anchored in the 2030 Agenda. This connection is recognized in the Agenda when it reaffirms that there can be no sustainable development without peace, nor peace without sustainable development; acknowledging the importance of democracy as a precondition for economic and social development.

The 2030 Agenda created a visible frame for the Community to strengthen its role at the global level and within multi-stakeholder efforts, to strengthen democratic principles and institutions, promoting its implementation and in particular of Goal 16.

Vital aspects of democracy, such as good governance, rule of law, human rights, peace, and security are recognized in Goal 16, which calls upon countries to “*promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels*”.

The commitment to pursue a more peaceful environment is a historical first on such a global scale and Goal 16 is the driving factor which will encourage respect for human rights, the rule of law, equal access to justice for everyone and effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. In addition, as an organization dedicated to strengthening democratic norms and institutions throughout the world, the CoD views Goal 16 as a necessary foundation for stable progress on all other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The relationship between Goal 16 and other SDGs can be seen in the following examples:

- Fighting corruption is essential in supporting economic growth (Goal 8) by restoring trust in the economy through consistent market-based transactions;
- Ensuring inclusive and representative decision-making is a vehicle for promoting gender equality (Goal 5); and
- Ensuring equal access to justice for all is an important step in reducing economic inequalities (Goal 10).

### **Promoting and Supporting the Implementation of Goal 16**

Capitalizing on efforts made by CoD’s Governing Council member states in multi-stakeholder partnerships and initiatives around the 2030 Agenda and the global indicator framework including: the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs),



the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Promoting Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, and the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development; and taking advantage of the Community's role as a global intergovernmental coalition with broad geographical participation of states, and other stakeholders including civil society, the Community has a structure that facilitates the necessary multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral approach needed to support the advancement of the 2030 Agenda.

Seeking to engage in efforts to promote the implementation of the Agenda and its 17 SDGs, the CoD understood that its demanding nature would require pursuing partnerships involving all stakeholders in society to meet the commitment of "leaving no one behind", and that it would also be crucial to preserve the integrity of the Agenda ensuring that goals, like Goal 16, were not sacrificed when priorities were made, noting that an effective legal framework and strong democratic institutions would be critical to ensuring all SDGs were achieved.

Given the centrality of Goal 16 and knowing its critical nature to affect progress towards all Sustainable Development Goals, the CoD in line with its mission and with the financial support of the governments of the United States, Japan and Sweden, developed a set of Global Voluntary Supplemental Indicators for Goal 16.

Seeing the need to fill the gaps left by the current set of global indicators, which fell short of covering the full spirit of Goal 16, the supplemental indicators aimed to facilitate better measurement of critical aspects of peaceful, just, and inclusive societies, supporting the comprehensive achievement of Goal 16, and, in doing so, helping to enable the achievement of the Sustainable Development Agenda as a whole.

The CoD was well positioned to bring together the perspective and the necessary expertise to create the set of voluntary supplemental indicators, having the ability to consult with both its member states, and with civil society, academia, as well as other global democracy partners and stakeholders, such as the UNDP.

To develop the indicators, the CoD carried out an eight-month consultative process in 2017, convening a "Group of Experts" who provided key input and assisted the Technical Lead, Dr. Havard Nygard (Senior Researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo), in developing the set of voluntary supplemental indicators for the 12 targets under Goal 16. In the construction of the indicators, the CoD drew on a range of international legal frameworks, academic study, policy research and also put special emphasis on the Warsaw Declaration.

Additionally, to guide the selection for the supplemental indicators, the CoD drew on the following set of criteria:

- **International comparability** – Indicators should be equally relevant, at least in theory, to all countries, and that an indicator for one country can be compared to the same indicator for another country, presuming that the same methodology has been used to collect the data.
- **Validity/Relevance** – The chosen indicator must be relevant to the overall target and cover issues not adequately covered by existing indicators. The extent to which an indicator is relevant both for the overall target and for principles in the Warsaw Declaration was

considered. Implicit as well in the study's understanding of relevance is that the indicator is also a reliable measure of the target and/or principle.

- **Simplicity** – Indicators should be simple to communicate and easy to interpret. However, when relevant and necessary, composite indicators, essentially indices, may be used.
- **Feasibility** – Data must either already exist for the indicator, or it must be clear that it is feasible to collect the proposed data. Generally, indicators are prioritized that are already used and in existence and in which there is experience with the behavior of the indicator and an experience base or established methodology or cross-country data for the indicator.
- **Policy actionable** – Indicators should, at least in theory, be susceptible to policy interventions so policy makers can monitor and effect change. This also entails that indicators be sufficiently specific. The indicator should first and foremost be nationally useful and be able to inform national policies.

The indicators developed by the Community of Democracies are meant as a supplement and voluntary non-prescriptive tool for states to use in measuring progress towards Goal 16. Specifically, they represent a supplementary framework that can be used to measure and track progress along dimensions of peace and conflict, human rights, good governance, rule of law, and fundamental freedoms, which are at the core of SDG16 and that were not adequately covered by existing global SDG 16 indicators.

The Voluntary Supplemental Indicators for Goal 16 were presented at the 26th Governing Council meeting of the CoD in Washington D.C. on September 14., 2017. The importance of the supplemental indicators as a tool was further highlighted in the Declaration of Washington, as agreed at the Ninth Community of Democracies Ministerial Conference on September 15, 2017, where the Governing Council of the CoD welcomed the voluntary adoption and implementation by Participating States, as appropriate, of the additional supplemental indicators developed in order to achieve the full scope and spirit of Sustainable Development Goal 16.

In 2018, the CoD has continued to encourage the advancement of SDG 16 and promote the Voluntary Supplemental Indicators for Goal 16 in different multilateral fora at both global and regional levels. Activities carried out include: the Busan Democracy Forum 2018 organized in January by the Permanent Secretariat of the Community of Democracies (PSCD) in coordination with Asia Democracy Network (ADN), Asia Development Alliance (ADA) and with the cooperation of the government of the Republic of Korea and the Metropolitan City of Busan. The Forum provided the CoD the opportunity to engage in a conversation on Goal 16 as the enabler of the 2030 Agenda with approximately 300 democracy stakeholders, including civil society from the Asia region; and the Inter-Regional Dialogue on Democracy (IRDD) workshop on “The Role of Global and Regional Organizations in the Advancement of Sustainable Development Goal 16”, carried out by International IDEA in coordination with the CoD and the Office of the United Nations in Geneva (UNOG), at the Palais des Nations in the margins of the 37th session of the UNHRC in March.

Both the Busan Democracy Forum and the IRDD workshop provided an opportunity for the Community of Democracies to present the Voluntary Supplemental Indicators for Goal 16 and have a meaningful discussion on challenges, good practices and lessons learned regarding the advancement of the 2030 Agenda and more specifically on Goal 16.

## **Looking Ahead: Championing the Advancement of the 2030 Agenda**

While Goal 16 creates a visible frame to contribute in strengthening of democracy worldwide, and its elements of peace, just and inclusive societies are central to the mandate of the Community, other Sustainable Development Goals of particular importance to the work of the CoD include: Goal 5 which sets out to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; and Goal 17 on strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development, particularly through the sub-target on strengthening multi-stakeholder partnerships.

## **The Community of Democracies and the Sustainable Development Goals**

While democracy is core to the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs that have been identified as most relevant to the work of the Community are: SDG 16 (promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable institutions at all levels); SDG 5 (to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls); and SDG 17 (strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnership for sustainable development).

Within these, the following SDG targets are particularly connected to the work of the Community of Democracies:

- **SDG 5.5:** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.
- **SDG 16.3:** Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all.
- **SDG 16.5:** Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms.
- **SDG 16.6:** Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels.
- **SDG 16.7:** Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels.
- **SDG 16.8:** Broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in the institutions of global governance.
- **SDG 16.10:** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.
- **SDG 17.16:** Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries.
- **SDG 17.17:** Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

As the world continues to move along the road map for sustainable development for the next 12 years, the Community of Democracies has undertaken several activities to promote SDG 16 and will continue to seek opportunities such as:

- Continue to play a key role in keeping the focus on the integrity of the 2030 Agenda and supporting the effective implementation and reporting on the achievement of Goal 16 and its interlinkages with the rest of the Agenda, at the global, regional and national levels.
- Encourage its Governing Council member states to lead by example and use the Voluntary Supplemental Indicators for Goal 16 as a tool in their national planning, monitoring and Voluntary National Review (VNR) process, as they prepare for the discussion that will take place during the High Level Political Forum in 2019 when Goal 16 comes under review.
- Identify and share best practices amongst CoD governing council member states and the wider democratic community for national level implementation plans and monitoring efforts on Goal 16, including by keeping the issue in the Agenda at Governing Council meetings.
- Continue to interact with international and regional organizations, multi-stakeholder initiatives and other multilateral efforts, including civil society, facilitating synergies aimed at promoting the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Agenda and in particular of Goal 16.
- Continue to promote a broader discussion on all the 2030 Agenda targets on peaceful, just and inclusive societies (SDG16+), in international fora and within multi-stakeholder initiatives.

## SDG16 Briefing for UN Delegations - DataShift

By Jack Cornforth

### Introduction

DataShift is a global, multi-stakeholder initiative convened by CIVICUS, world alliance for citizen participation. It leverages the potential of new technologies for innovative, community-grounded social accountability.

It does this by helping civil society organisations (CSOs) produce and use data, especially citizen-generated data, to directly influence policy making on the issues that matter most to them. By facilitating cross-sector learning, building skills and knowledge, and coordinating focused action, DataShift is bringing people-powered accountability to the heart of sustainable development.

Citizen-generated data is data that people or their organisations produce to directly monitor, demand or drive change on issues that affect them. It is actively given by citizens, providing direct representations of their perspectives and an alternative to datasets collected by governments or international institutions.

There is a strong consensus, partly based on lessons learned from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), that citizen and civil society engagement is critical to the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.

In the context of the SDGs, citizen-generated data can play an important role driving progress on sustainable development, especially at local levels. This is because it can “raise the flag” when official sources of data miss or mask progress, violations or inequalities between groups, especially at the local level. Or in other words, provide “groundtruth” by verifying that official data reflects the reality on the ground, supplementing official reporting to explain the why behind the numbers.

The production and use of citizen-generated involves a powerful process that builds citizens’ and civil society’s technical skills and confidence to engage in governance processes. This applies to amplifying citizen voices and perspectives on SDG progress, including of those typically marginalised and hard to reach. It can also enable trust and relationship building across diverse groups of stakeholders, to engage in dialogue and establish new norms for social action to achieve the SDGs.

During an initial two-year pilot phase, focusing our activities in Kenya, Tanzania, Nepal and Argentina, DataShift worked towards four primary objectives:

- Increase the **coverage** of citizen-generated data initiatives across the world, particularly in the Global South.
- Strengthen the **credibility** of citizen-generated data, so that it is taken into account as legitimate and reliable
- Enhance the **complementarity** of citizen-generated data, both within civil society and across other sectors, including government.
- Accelerate data-driven **campaigning** by civil society

## **Key activities of the Initiative**

### *1. Research*

DataShift has conducted extensive research and analysis on citizen-generated data. This includes partnering with Open Knowledge International to publish a three-part research series that investigated how citizen-generated data can be used to monitor progress around the SDGs. This research has provided recommendations for CSOs working on citizen-generated data projects to link up with the SDGs in mutually beneficial ways, along with suggestions for how DataShift could support them to do so. As a consequence, DataShift has identified SDG 16.10 in particular as a priority area for further activities.

### *2. Capacity development*

For the past year, DataShift has focused on this workstream via the Data for Action capacity building programme, a two-week facilitated online course that is helping civil society organisations to develop the skills to improve their data literacy, collect citizen-generated data, and use it to power local campaigns which contribute towards achieving the SDGs. Data for Action is the culmination of two years of working with expert partners at the national level across four pilot countries, to co-create and implement tailor-made support processes to improve their collection and use of citizen-generated data.

### *3. International collaboration and advocacy*

To achieve its lofty objectives, DataShift continues to rely heavily upon existing partnerships, as well as striving to forge new partnerships to further increase its activities, reach, and ultimately the uptake of citizen-generated data as a vital complement to official (government) data.

In its current phase, DataShift is continuing its work towards these objectives in a more streamlined way. Having focused in on which approaches are most successful at the community and micro-intervention levels, DataShift is now concentrating on using citizen-generated data to strengthen stakeholder engagement, empower marginalised communities through increased skills and stories of their accomplishments (eg. data place-making), and build trust between governments and civil society. More specifically, we are doing this through CIVICUS initiatives such as Speak!, MobLab's Campaign Accelerator trainings, as well as a pilot survey and engagement approach guide.

Via the integration of a data-driven approach into other CIVICUS initiatives, DataShift is reaching more actors in more segments of civil society and more geographies. The initiative is thus becoming one of the organisation's key offerings to more than 4000 members of the Alliance in 186 countries.

## **What the Initiative has achieved so far**

Through groundbreaking research, an extensive capacity strengthening programme, ongoing engagement with government and other key stakeholders, along with deep dives into SDG 5 on gender equality, DataShift has made significant gains towards each of its four priority objectives (increasing the coverage, credibility, complementarity of citizen-generated data, along with its use in campaigning). This applies both within its initial four pilot countries and at the global level.

*1. Put citizen-generated data on the map and created a global community of champions*

DataShift has been instrumental to seeing citizen-generated data go from being a niche, poorly understood concept, to a key tool at the disposal of both civil society and governments to mobilise citizens and better understand our progress on sustainable development. This includes making major inroads in the recognition of citizen-generated data as a crucial source of ‘non official’ data for SDG monitoring and accountability

Gender Thematic Forums in Tanzania and Argentina have brought together civil society organisations, social movements and other stakeholders, to develop collaborative approaches for increased cooperation on data generation and use on a range of gender-related issues, including with (often initially reluctant) government agencies. Through these processes, promising breakthroughs have been made in both countries on government willingness to work with civil society around gender data collection, sharing and use.

DataShift helped to create a Citizen-Generated Data Task Team within the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data’s ‘Leave No One Behind’ Working Group. This group has become the main channel for cooperation and advocacy on citizen-generated data at the international level, and is currently developing a set of citizen-generated data case studies that have been specifically selected due to their potential for replication and scaling.

*2. Built civil society’s capacity and confidence with data*

DataShift has provided over 30 organisations (and counting) across Argentina, Nepal, Kenya, and Tanzania with tailored training on data generation and use that has enabled them to work towards their objectives in smarter, more impactful ways. Each organisation worked with in-country expert partners to co-create and implement tailor-made support processes to improve their collection and use of citizen-generated data. Subsequently, these experiences have been analysed and aggregated to create a two-week online Data for Action course to help organisations.

*3. Identified where and when citizen-generated data can support action on the SDGs*

Through extensive research, DataShift has identified clear opportunities for citizen-generated data (CGD) to be leveraged to drive action on SDGs. We have revealed that CGD is usually more useful for catalysing local action than high-level policy-making. On the other hand, the pilot phase has suggested that CGD is particularly useful for measuring certain SDG issues, especially those which governments have little or no data on. This includes certain targets pertaining to Goal 16, such as 16.5 (corruption) and 16.6 (strong institutions). Thus if existing CGD projects (e.g. I Paid A Bribe and Pulse Lab Jakarta) on these priority issues can be strengthened, scaled across other localities within a country, and efforts to support the aggregation of the data they produce are well

resourced, then there remains much potential for CGD to support SDG monitoring. This applies to both its integration into official government follow-up and review efforts, or something pursued via independent initiatives led by civil society. More specifically:

- CGD can help combine quantitative with qualitative data to increase the validity of the SDG indicators
- CGD can deliver parts of the necessary data, or at least rich contextual information, whenever indicators measure a causal relationship
- CGD can often be flexibly applied across cross-cutting SDG targets and themes, thereby overcoming silo thinking and creating alternative indicators
- The SDGs can be used as a common framing to build connections across CGD initiatives and facilitate communication and prioritisation of issues
- Because a lot of CGD focuses on building local capacity, there is a lot of room for CGD to contribute to progress on SDG 16. Local citizen-generated data projects which speak to targets like 16.10, need to be scaled up to tie-in to national SDG monitoring and accountability efforts.

In addition, DataShift has worked to domesticate SDG 5 at the community level in Lanet Umoja, Nakuru County in Kenya. Through this “Global Goals for Local Impact” project, DataShift worked with the community to use citizen-generated data to better understand and then demand action on their gender-related development and governance priorities. The project went beyond the mere collection of citizen-generated data, to empower the community to undertake advocacy campaigns targeting local government decision-making and budget processes, and secure new resources for services that empower women and girls.

## **Challenges the Initiative has faced**

### *1. Scaling and aggregating citizen-generated data*

While there are some great examples of CSOs and citizens generating new data on important aspects of development, these initiatives still vary greatly in terms of their quantity, quality and sophistication. While DataShift has been successful at building the capacity and confidence of a number of CSOs to use new technology to generate data, and use it in ways that can support their decision making and bolster their campaigns, scaling this impact remains elusive. However, a specific citizen-generated data task team within the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data sees DataShift collaborate with other established campaigns and partners all collectively working to help scale-up the generation and use of this data source.

Furthermore, the highly localised nature of these initiatives means it is often not possible (nor necessarily desirable) to replicate them in other places. Nevertheless, there are a number of citizen-generated data initiatives (e.g. SafeCast; FixMyStreet; HOT) which do indeed seem more suitable for scaling, and thus possess more potential for contributing to SDG monitoring efforts at the national level. Yet in order to compare or aggregate the data these initiatives produce across different localities, collective data standards, metadata, or other documentation still need to be developed, which is likely to be a slow, labour intensive task. However initiative such as Everyone Counts are making important progress here.

### *2. Knowing exactly when and how to use citizen-generated for SDG monitoring*



Aside from a number of more practical barriers identified in the next paragraph, theoretically speaking there remains a mismatch between citizen-generated data (CGD) & SDG monitoring in a number of ways:

- CGD has more focus on local action than high-level policy-making
- CGD tends to focus on SDG targets rather than indicators, using different units of analysis
- CGD can deliver contextual information to drive progress around sustainable development, but the causal relationship between CGD and how it connects to the SDG indicators is often unclear
- It is often the action that is undertaken as a result of CGD that will contribute the most to drive progress around sustainable development. Yet this local action needs to be scaled up to tie-in to national SDGs

### *3. Official recognition of the value of citizen-generated data*

Despite making progress with a handful of governments, the remains almost zero official recognition of the value of citizen-generated data (along with other sources of non-official data) in supporting SDG monitoring and accountability. Similarly, the lack of clear mechanisms or opportunities for civil society to input data into the formal Follow-Up and Review process remains a major hurdle for realising the true potential of citizen-generated data. While international, multi-stakeholder initiatives like the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development have provided new opportunities for making progress on these challenges, little has actually been achieved in concrete terms, owing largely to a lack of clear commitments and resources from most member governments to work with CSOs to come up with long-term collaborative programmes for demand-driven data generation and sharing.

### **What should the Ministerial Declaration in 2019 say to address outstanding challenges?**

The primary accountability relationship is that between a State and its people. Therefore, the Post-2015 accountability architecture should be rooted in inclusive national accountability processes, premised on robust and participatory data-gathering and monitoring – including citizen-generated data. Processes at the global level should draw clearly on feedback, outcomes and information from local and national levels, including reports and data from civil society and communities.

An inclusive follow-up and review process which includes clear mechanisms for governments and civil society stakeholders to work together in partnership would help increase the coherence, coordination and utility of this data for SDG monitoring. And if non-official data producers follow the same methodological standards as NSOs – and are open to similar levels of scrutiny – then there is every reason to view their data as equally valid.

Therefore the ministerial declaration should contain a clear commitment to collaborating with civil society (and other stakeholders) to better measure progress on SDG 16. More specifically, governments should commit to:

- Use citizen-generated data process to better understand and address their citizens' needs in order to reach their SDG commitments

- The creation of a process which aims to create a mechanism for the creation and flow of non-official data into official SDG Follow-Up and Review processes at the national level.
- Linking and aggregate multiple data sources at different spatial scales, depending on the governance level addressing the issue
- Build methodological capacities around standardisation of both data types and collection methods to facilitate comparison and foster trust in the data
- Work with and build on existing government processes to help align interests
- Capacity building for data collection and monitoring: Advances in technology have led to a dramatic increase in the types and volume of data available. However, data often has “baked-in” bias which is used to mask inequalities and justify the status quo. Marginalised groups in particular have had data used against them and not had the knowledge or resources necessary to engage in dialogues that affect their lives. Financial support and resources should be put towards building the capacity of civil society and local government staff, including communities and individual women, men and children, to gain the data literacy skills and confidence to engage in governance processes. This will empower civil society to provide specific recommendations in SDG-related reports and consultations and to monitor progress.

## **Open Government Partnership: Accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals**

By Abhinav Bahl

### **What is the Open Government Partnership?**

The Open Government Partnership has a simple but powerful goal: that governments should truly serve and empower their citizens. OGP's vision is that governments become more transparent, more accountable, and more responsive to their own citizens, improving the quality of governance and services that citizens receive. In this way OGP aims to be a powerful, positive global movement for openness and deeper democracy, and as a countervailing force against the rise of closed government.

OGP was founded by eight heads of states and nine civil society leaders in 2011 as a response to increasing demands for governments to be smarter, more open, and accountable. It was designed to create space for reformers that wanted to tip the balance in favor of openness, and learn the lessons from past failures in global development by ingraining country ownership and accountability at its core.

To join OGP, governments must meet eligibility criteria on fiscal transparency, access to information laws, and citizen participation. Upon joining, a government must work with civil society to produce an action plan containing specific commitments for reform. Progress against these commitments is monitored by OGP's independent accountability arm, the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM). In addition to action and accountability, OGP also emphasizes learning. By sharing inspiration, lessons learned, and technical expertise among peers in its global network of reformers, OGP aims to spark a race to the top in the pursuit of ambitious open government reforms.

### **Building a Global Movement for Open Government**

Since 2011, OGP has grown from 8 founding national governments to 76 national and 20 subnational governments, which have together made over 3,000 commitments toward more open and accountable governance. These commitments have been co-created with civil society organizations, with over 1,000 groups involved around the world. These organizations focus on a wide range of topics, including anti-corruption, access to information, gender equality, youth empowerment and open data.

Government and civil society reformers in many OGP countries are undertaking transformative policy reforms that put citizens at the heart of government, allowing them to shape legislation and policies in areas most critical to daily life. These include many long-fought-for landmark reforms in both North and South countries, including beneficial ownership disclosure in the UK and Norway, lobbying laws in Chile and Ireland, open contracting in Ukraine and Nigeria, and Access to Information laws in Brazil, Sri Lanka, and Kenya.

This growing movement draws its political support from a diverse range of background. While President Obama was instrumental in founding OGP, Prime Minister Kvirikashvili and Prime Minister Trudeau currently co-chair the partnership. There has also been strong support from local

government leaders such as the Mayors of Paris and Buenos Aires. OGP also has six global ambassadors, including Oxfam CEO Winnie Byanyima and Mo Ibrahim, and has formal relationships with seven leading multilateral agencies, including the World Bank, UNDP, and OECD.

## **Results**

OGP is fundamentally about action. Every participating government - local or national - has to work with their civil society to produce an open government action plan every two years, detailing precise reform commitments. These locally-owned plans tackle different issues according to the context, and ideally reflect the priorities of citizens. While not every commitment is ambitious, or implemented, an impressive collection of results are now emerging from the reforms members have implemented in the first six years of OGP.

### *1. Strengthening global norms and national efforts on open government*

OGP has strengthened the international effort and normative framework for openness in government. One indicator of OGP's influence lies in the reforms that governments initiated to become eligible for joining the partnership. For example, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire have all passed substantial legislation in an effort to qualify for OGP membership. At the domestic level, open government as a concept and priority has taken root in several countries. Through the OGP process, countries are carving out basic institutional features, rules and mechanisms that legitimize and establish the foundation for open government reforms to take place.

### *2. Securing high-level political commitment*

OGP has been highly successful in securing public commitments from heads of state and other high-level political officials, spurred in part by international peer pressure and the alignment of OGP commitments with preexisting reform proposals or movements. High-level political commitment to open government raises the priority of those reforms and provides valuable "cover" for political leaders and administrators to pursue a reform that may be unpopular with other colleagues or considered risky. High-level commitment also often provides impetus for domestic open government reforms, even if it is not sufficient in and of itself to bring about those reforms.

### *3. Fostering civil society-government dialogue*

What began as a bold and challenging idea to governments—co-creating policy reforms with civil society based on equality and mutual respect — is now a much more established concept, especially in OGP countries that have gone through several action plan cycles. National OGP platforms have helped to build relationships between government and civil society stakeholders, which has led to better understanding and more constructive dialogue. This cultural shift, at least within the OGP process, has been one of the great successes of the OGP model.

### *4. Accountability and learning*

OGP's Independent reporting Mechanism reports are widely considered credible and fact-based, where participating countries are judged by rigorous standards common to all. By sharing inspiration, lessons learned, and technical expertise among peers in its global network of reformers, OGP also aims to spark a race to the top in the pursuit of ambitious open government reforms.

Below are a few examples of open government reforms by OGP countries:

- **Anti-Corruption – UK:** Organized crime costs the UK at least £24 billion each year, often hidden in shell companies. Lifting the veil of secrecy over who ultimately owns and controls companies can expose wrongdoing and disrupt illicit financial flows, including those derived from corruption. Through their OGP action plan, the UK was the first country to commit to a publicly available register of beneficial ownership -- making public who really owns and controls UK companies. Since implementing this commitment, the UK has become a national leader in the area of Beneficial Ownership, and has encouraged and supported other countries making similar commitments. OGP has facilitated the emergence of a global norm with 14 countries now committing to beneficial ownership reforms in their action plans.
- **Public Participation – Paraguay:** In 2015, allegations of corruption, mismanagement of public funds, and lack of transparency around education funding were leveled against Paraguay's national government, compounded by the general absence of public participation in government. To address these issues, the government and local civil society used OGP to create an ambitious program to develop more than fifty Municipal Development Councils across the country. Designed to bring people together to discuss management of public funds and services, they provide a participatory forum for citizens to develop, monitor, and conduct hearings on local development initiatives in order to make public services more responsive to community needs.
- **Natural Resources Transparency – Mongolia:** Mongolia has used OGP as a platform to boost natural resource transparency. Over 1,000 companies holding more than 3,000 leases, exploration licenses, and production sharing agreements work across Mongolia's vast lands, looking for natural resources. The environmental and health impacts of this work are of major concern to the public, illustrated by the thousands of people protesting poor air quality in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Working in partnership with local NGOs, the government now publishes information on actions taken by companies that are potentially harmful to the environment and to people's health. So far, the environmental ministry published 22 environmental datasets, including information on pollution, and developed a website to allow citizens to monitor real time air quality changes that was used by over 120,000 people by early 2017.
- **Access to Justice – Kenya:** Through their OGP NAP, Kenya began reforming their judiciary in 2011. The government committed to public vetting of judges and of the case allocation system. The Minister of Justice and the Chief Justice introduced software that randomly allocates cases to judges to reduce corruption in handling and allocation of cases. These reforms promote transparency in the administration of justice in part by integrating new technologies to improve expediency in judgements.
- **Public service delivery feedback at the subnational level:** Inconsistent participation in attempts to gather public service feedback from citizens created a perception of government indifference to citizen needs in Elgeyo Marakwet County, Kenya. In response,

the county government committed in their first Sub-National Action Plan to institutionalizing the WhatsApp messaging platform as the official communication channel to provide timely government information and rapid response to citizen feedback. Through this commitment, the government is working to become more responsive to citizen needs and improve public services based on an open dialogue with citizens.

- **Declassification and Access to Information - Ukraine:** In an environment characterized by low trust in government given historical suppression of information by authorities, reformers from both government and civil society used OGP to develop a policy that established open and effective access to classified documents on the struggle for Ukraine's independence. Ukrainians can now examine records on the political persecutions and human rights violations carried out against relatives and friends by the Soviet state. After decades, many Ukrainians are able to find the truth about atrocities that occurred under the Soviet regime.
- **Opening up the bureaucracy and reducing red tape - Philippines:** The government used the national action plan to publicly commit to reforms to reduce bureaucratic red tape in the cost of doing business. The reform program resulted in the Philippines significantly improving its ranking in the World Bank's Doing Business Report, from 138 out of 189 countries in 2013 to 108 in 2014 and 95 in 2015. Investment in the Philippines increased by 10% over a similar period, thanks to an improved business climate.

## Lessons Learned

Over the last seven years, we've learned a lot from our work in supporting government and civil society reformers on the ground in OGP countries.

### 1. *Closing civic space*

A critical precondition for the transformative effects of open government is healthy civic space, which is shrinking or under attack in many parts of the world. Together, OGP participating governments, civil society and partners need to protect and enhance civic space. Through a combination of thought leadership and action leadership roles, they must make the case that citizen engagement is vital to a healthy democracy.

### 2. *Working politically*

OGP countries' performance depends to a great extent on the incentives, resources and interests facing domestic political actors. Country level reformers need support to navigate the complex politics surrounding major reforms. Thus OGP needs to be sensitive to discrete political climates and their impact on OGP commitments, particularly in navigating political transitions.

### 3. *Implementation gap*

In some member countries there is a real gap between political commitment to OGP and implementation of reforms at the country level. We need to understand better how political will translates into reform and support countries with brokering the technical and financial inputs needed to successfully implement reforms.

### 4. *Ambition beyond transparency*

An often-predicted shift from foundational transparency reforms to the hard work of civic engagement, with government responsiveness to tackle the root of citizen distrust and elite capture, has not taken place at scale. OGP is making investments to support countries to go beyond transparency reforms with commitments that tackle the day-to-day needs of citizens like health, education, corruption, etc.

#### *5. Scaling up learning*

Establishing the rules, mechanisms and institutions to facilitate open government are not enough to produce ambitious reforms. While a focus on helping OGP countries comply with OGP processes is necessary, this needs to be balanced with other value-adding activities such as peer exchange and learning to encourage greater ambition of open government reforms. Support to OGP reformers on OGP processes needs to be complemented learning on implementing reforms on the ground.

### **OGP and the SDGs**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development demands bold action. It requires coordinating policy on multiple fronts, forming new partnerships, and committing significant resources across the globe. It also requires an open and accountable approach to implementation. With government and civil society working together in 76 countries to make governments more open and effective, the Open Government Partnership (OGP) presents a unique opportunity to advance the 2030 Agenda.

As an international partnership with a country-owned policy platform and independent accountability mechanism—i.e. action plans and the Independent Reporting Mechanism—OGP provides a readymade vehicle for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. OGP action plans can be used to adopt concrete commitments aligned with SDGs across member countries, while its Independent Reporting Mechanism ensures a focus on results by holding governments accountable for implementation.

### **Joint Declaration on Open Government for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

Recognizing the synergies between the OGP and SDGs agendas, members of the OGP Steering Committee met on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly in New York City in September 2015 to endorse the Joint Declaration on Open Government for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By endorsing the Declaration, governments commit to use OGP action plans to adopt commitments that promote transparent and accountable implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since then, many more governments and civil society organizations have signed the declaration, which commits governments to use OGP to encourage transparent, accountable, participatory, and technology-enabled implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

To help member countries use OGP's action plan framework to spur progress on the 17 SDGs, the OGP Secretariat and the Transparency and Accountability Initiative published a special SDGs edition of its flagship Open Government Guide. The OGP secretariat is also supporting

governments and civil society to develop open government reforms that tackle the SDGs through its country support program.

## **Advancing SDG16**

Open government principles directly address Goal 16 targets. OGP's goal is to advance key open government principles—transparency, civic participation, accountability, and technological innovation—in order to strengthen the rule of law and build just, effective and accountable institutions. Increasing the availability of information on government activities, enabling and deepening civic participation, ensuring government is not corrupt and held accountable to the highest standards of service, and harnessing new technologies to strengthen governance are synonymous with open government and the advancement of Goal 16. The following examples illustrate how countries are using OGP to advance SDG 16:

- **Liberia - Increasing judicial transparency:** Liberia is increasing the transparency of the judiciary by proactively publishing court documents in order to facilitate citizen monitoring and build trust in the justice system.
- **Serbia - Strengthening the anti-corruption agency:** Serbia is improving the ability of its anti-corruption agency to prevent conflicts of interest through increased transparency on the rights and obligations of public officials and more accurate monitoring of asset declarations.
- **Sri Lanka - Strengthening the right to information:** Sri Lanka is implementing the Right to Information act with an emphasis on building the capacity of the bureaucracy to provision RTI requests and pursue proactive disclosure policies.

## **Beyond SDG16**

Beyond SDG16, OGP countries are tackling challenges such as health, education, natural resources, climate change that are directly related to the goals by promoting transparency and accountability, empowering citizens and civil society, and fighting corruption in those sectors. Examples of how open government is being used to tackle these goals are illustrated in the SDGs Edition of the Open Government Guide.



## **Partnerships for SDG16: The Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, and UNDP’s contributions with others to delivery of SDG16.**

By Lucy Turner

### **Creating and Leveraging Partnerships for the Achievement of SDG16**

Through the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Member States articulated a vision of “...a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity.”

As clearly recognized by Member States when crafting the Sustainable Development Goals, in order to achieve the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it will be important to leverage partnerships within the UN and externally, so that targeted support can be provided, tailored to specific country contexts, in order to support nations in fulfilling their global commitments.

To support progress on partnerships for SDG16, in early 2016 UNDP convened partners’ meetings to develop an alliance in support of Member States for reporting on SDG16 by drawing on resources available from other Member States, private sector, civil society, and across the UN system as a whole. UNDP now co-facilitates the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies with colleagues in other Agencies, Funds and Programmes in the UN Development System and beyond – UNESCO, UNHCR and UNODC – and in close liaison with the Global Compact.

Brief details follow below, including examples of how UNDP, as co-facilitator of the Global Alliance, is also working on a range of other SDG16 support to support Member States with implementation, monitoring and reporting.

### **The Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just, and Inclusive Societies**

The Global Alliance for Reporting on peaceful, just and inclusive societies, which is an important institutional innovation: the UN’s first multi-stakeholder decision-making forum and coordinating platform to enable evidence-based, nationally-driven collective action on peace, justice and inclusion. For this purpose, the Global Alliance leverages the potential of the reporting structure of the 2030 Agenda.

The Alliance is run by a Steering Committee comprised of seven Member States (Cabo Verde, Mexico, Norway, Qatar, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and the United Kingdom), three civil society organisations (NYU Centre on International Cooperation, Transparency and Accountability (TAP) Network, and World Federation of United Nations Associations (WFUNA) and three businesses (Deloitte Ltd., LexisNexis, and White & Case LLP). The Secretariat of the Global Alliance is serviced by UNDP, UNESCO, UNHCR and UNODC as co-facilitators, working with an Advisory Group of other UN entities, including the Global Compact.

Approximately 30 other partners (governments, civil society and private sector) support the work of the Alliance to connect Member States' reporting needs to reporting resources (tools, methodologies, expertise), wherever they exist in the international system.

One of the strongest aspects of the Global Alliance is the community it has developed around the work geared towards SDG16+. Along with its partners, the Global Alliance has held two global workshops in different regions so far, one in Buenos Aires for the Latin America & Caribbean region, the other in Oslo for the Europe and CIS region. These workshops were attended by 25-member states in total from the different regions, and each participating Member State developed a mini-plan for reporting on SDG16 in its own national context. This community has spurred interest and invites countries to request for direct support.

The Alliance conducts various knowledge development activities and advocacy events. For example, the Alliance in March launched a report—produced with One Earth Future, International Peace Institute, SDG Fund, and Aim2Flourish—on the role of private sector data in enabling evidence-based national policy and action on SDG16. We are producing a template for reporting on SDG16+, and compiling a database of resources for reporting on SDG16.

The Alliance has held several high-level advocacy events, including a high-level, private sector-hosted UN General Assembly side-event, held at the offices of White and Case in September last year, addressed by the UNDP Administrator, and moderated by Pulitzer-prize winning New York Times journalist Nick Kristof. This event to help to present the business case for private sector action on SDG16 was followed by an event at Davos in January.

Alongside this, direct country support is at the heart of the Global Alliance's vision and activities. Here are just a few examples:

- In Argentina, Global Alliance-funded research on innovative monitoring and reporting methods for SDG16 engaged specialized civil society organisations as well as public officials of the Executive Branch, the Judicial Branch, and Public Prosecutor's Offices and specialized organizations of civil society, and was designed to develop measurement alternatives with objective indicators that involve citizen participation. Emphasising inclusive approaches to measure vulnerable populations in the labour and cultural market (specifically, young victims of human trafficking), baseline research conducted over recent months and a validation workshop aimed to influence legislation currently before parliament, and subsequent policy and programmatic initiatives. This work has been warmly welcomed by the National Coordinator of the Federal Council against Human Exploitation and Trafficking.
- In Albania, the Global Alliance supported a baseline study on SDG targets 16.1 and 16.2 with a special focus on violence against women and girls. The baseline study identified diverse data sources, opportunities and challenges for reporting on these indicators, has been peer reviewed, and will be shared with stakeholders soon.
- In Pakistan, the Global Alliance provided technical support to enable the Ministry of Planning of Pakistan and a Pakistani CSO to develop a framework for reporting on SDG16. The Secretariat organised meetings with SDG16 measurement data experts and drew on resources from throughout the system to prepare a comprehensive response to a list of

questions. The Alliance remains on stand-by to advise on the resulting draft framework, and has been invited to Pakistan to continue the discussion.

- In Somalia, the Global Alliance is supporting the development of a monitoring and evaluation system for the rule of law. This will be the first-ever system in which it will be possible to measure overall, outcome level impact of investments in SDG16+. The Alliance is supporting the development of a model which will enable Member States to measure the overall impact of their investments in SDG16 in countries around the world—for example, changes in overall level of victimization and impunity, rather than for example number of workshops held or even convictions achieved for specified crimes.

### **UNDP's support to SDG16 in partnership with others**

UNDP's co-facilitation of the Global Alliance, and partnership with colleagues across the UN system and beyond in support of Member States for effective reporting on SDG16 through the Alliance, is one aspect of a wider commitment to partnerships for SDG16.

Other key elements of UNDP's developing portfolio of partnerships for new work on SDG16 include the following:

- UNDP has actively supported the establishment of the Praia City Group on Governance Statistics which was set up in 2015, after endorsement by the Statistical Commission in March 2015 to advance international standards for official statistics covering governance, peace, security and human rights. It is the first city group to have its secretariat in Africa. The work of the Praia Group will be instrumental for the measurement and monitoring of the targets and indicators for SDG16. UNDP has been a member of the Steering Committee of the Praia Group in support of the Institute of Statistics of Cabo Verde (INECV), alongside representatives from the National Institute for Statistics and Geography of Mexico, the Philippines Statistics Authority, PARIS21, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the African Development Bank, PRIO, IRD/DIAL and Transparency International. Along with 80 other members, including national statistical offices (NSOs), UN agencies, multilateral and bilateral agencies, and academies, Steering Committee members including UNDP have been contributing to the development of a Handbook on Governance Statistics led by INECV for use by NSOs, which will be an invaluable resource to contribute towards the successful measurement of governance-related indicators.
- The SDG16 pilot monitoring program 'Monitoring to Implement Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies', led by UNDP's Governance & Peacebuilding Cluster and the Oslo Governance Centre, supported El Salvador, Georgia, South Africa, Tunisia, Uruguay, and Indonesia to develop and implement inclusive monitoring methodologies, make the monitoring process open and transparent, and to use the monitoring work to propel implementation, not only in monitoring, but also in identifying solutions to the challenges revealed in the reporting. This pilot initiative helped El Salvador and Uruguay report on SDG16 in their Voluntary National Reviews at the 2017 High-Level Political Forum. The initiative is currently being scaled up to support Argentina, Central African Republic, Colombia, Lebanon, Moldova and Mongolia.
- The Oslo Governance Centre is also developing a SDG16 Portal. The Portal will be launched in July 2018 and will curate learning and evidence on SDG16 – including core

knowledge resources and guidance. A key feature of the Portal will be in providing an interactive space for users to exchange information and knowledge and to serve as a virtual space for emerging communities of practice to exchange and access expertise on SDG16 implementation, monitoring and reporting. The Portal aims to be a ‘one stop shop’ for SDG16.

- UNDP serves as interim custodian for three global indicators of SDG16 that currently lack agreed international methodologies for reporting : 16.6.2 satisfaction with public services; 16.7.1 diversity in decision making positions in public institutions; and 16.7.2 responsive and inclusive decision making. UNDP is working with a range of partners within and outside the UN system including national statistics offices and civil society experts, to develop sound, robust and universally feasible methodologies for these indicators to be measured in a globally comparable way.

These current partnerships for priorities on SDG16 build on earlier support to Member States in partnership with others to assist Member States to prepare for delivery of SDG16 in a number of important ways:

- by facilitating with other UN partners, the Member State-led Dialogues on Strengthening Capacity and Building Effective Institutions and on Localising the SDGs.
- by piloting approaches to governance in the context of the SDGs with a selection of Member States from Africa, Asia and Europe.
- by hosting a Virtual Network of experts on indicators for peace, justice and institutions.
- by supporting the development of Governance Peace and Security modules of the AU’s strategy for the harmonisation of statistics in Africa (SHaSA).

### **UNDP’s support to Member States for delivery of individual targets of SDG16**

UNDP has long advocated for stronger partnerships, across the UN system as well as among external stakeholders, in delivering assistance on governance at the national level, and have carried this commitment into the SDG era – examples include:

- The Global Focal Point (GFP) for Police, Justice and Corrections Areas in the Rule of Law in Post-Conflict and other Crisis Situations, established by the Secretary General in 2012, has enabled the UN to work closely together in supporting justice in crisis affected and fragile situations, and has helped to jointly mobilize resources for country programmes. Led by UNDP and DPKO, and together with UN Women, UNODC, OHCHR, UNHCR and others, the GFP has carried out joint assessments, planning, programming and resource mobilisation. With a dedicated goal and targets related to promoting the rule of law in the 2030 Agenda, support through the GFP will also contribute to the achievement of ROL-related targets, including SDG16.3.
- UNDP and the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA) lead 21 other UN entities in the development and application of the International Small Arms Control Standards (ISACS), which seek to help States achieve their SDG16.4 target to significantly reduce illicit arms flows by 2030. ISACS contribute to strengthening the rule of law, justice, security and human rights by helping to take illicit arms out of circulation and by building the capacity of police and corrections to safely and securely manage their stockpiles of arms. As the UN Secretary-General has stated, “The International Small Arms Control

Standards contribute directly to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.”

UNDP will continue to support the building of capacity for implementation of the SDGs generally, and specifically development of statistical capacity for measuring progress on governance. Through alignment with the Mainstreaming, Acceleration, and Policy Support (MAPS) process of the UN Development Group, the Governance & Peacebuilding Cluster in UNDP’s Bureau for Policy & Programme Support will work with Member States to ensure delivery of all aspects of SDG16, in line with UNDP’s Strategic Plan outcomes on conflict reduction, early recovery in post-conflict situations, access to basic services, voice and accountability. An illustrative list of support available on governance and SG16 to contribute to MAPS includes work on: Core Government Functions; Conflict and Development Analysis; Localisation; Parliamentary Oversight; Strengthening Capacities for Governance Management (SIGOB); SDG16 Interlinkages; Institutional Context Analysis; Foresight methodologies.

Each aspect of SDG16 will also need to be mainstreamed into key areas of policy and delivery at all levels of activity in Member States, and support will be required for acceleration of key elements of the process thought to be in need of specific attention, in addition to dedicated policy support. Through support for Member States, UNDP working in partnership with others will contribute through work on key priorities under the new Strategic Plan to implementation of SDG16. This includes work on: Responsive and Accountable Institutions; Rule of Law, Justice, Security and Human Rights; Inclusive Political Processes; Conflict Prevention; Anti-Corruption; Youth.

## **Challenges and Recommendations**

The inclusion of SDG16 in the 2030 Agenda is an enormous opportunity, as well as posing novel challenges. Some Member States had already committed to governance in the MDGs with MDG 9 – but the challenge to move from “MDG+” to the SDGs, and to work with a universal and integrated set of goals and targets on behalf of all Member States, represents a step-change. The frameworks and methodologies for implementing many of the SDG16 targets and measuring progress are still in development, and various actors are at different stages in their understanding of, and commitment to, SDG16. UNDP and partners across the UN system need to acknowledge this complexity and meet the challenge of engaging consistently across the board, with a wide range of actors in new and innovative partnerships.

The challenge of resource mobilisation should also not be ignored. All advocates and practitioners for SDG16 rely on support of different kinds (financial and practical) to develop their programmes, and UN agencies are constantly leveraging their existing resources and seeking new sources of funding for support on behalf of Member States, to accomplish activities related to governance and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda. All partnerships will need to test respective roles and capacities, and deal frankly with resource constraints in trying to achieve development outcomes on behalf of people most likely to be left behind through action on SDG16.

## **The SDG16 Data Initiative**

By Massimo Tommasoli

### **Introduction**

The SDG16 Data Initiative (SDG16DI) was launched in July 2016 by a consortium of 14 partner organizations, including the Global Forum for Media Development, Governance Data Alliance, Institute for Economics and Peace, International IDEA, Namati, Open Society Foundations, Peace Research Institute Oslo, Saferworld, Small Arms Survey, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, TAP Network, Transparency International, and the World Justice Project.

SDG16DI seeks to support the open and holistic tracking of the commitments made by all 193 UN Member States captured in Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG16). The 14 members of the SDG16 Data Initiative have a diverse range of organizational focuses, covering the issues and topics included within the 12 targets of SDG16.

The SDG16DI was created to respond to the gap in terms of comprehensive data on SDG16 issues. We believe that the collection of such data will be critical for accountability and policy-making purposes, and thus plays a central role in helping to deliver action towards meeting SDG16. It will ensure that progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and SDG16 can be measured. In addition, accountability actors at the national level can use such data in order to hold governments to account for their commitments to peaceful, just and inclusive societies.

In a crowded space of SDG16-related work, the SDG16 Data Initiative has been designed to complement the work of official processes, such as the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and Inter-Agency Experts Group's review processes, to ensure our work is able to achieve the maximum desired impact. While we support current efforts underway to develop an official indicator framework for monitoring the SDGs, the partners of this initiative see several remaining shortcomings that we want to address, such as civil society generated data, open global monitoring and improved availability of data for civil society actors.

We believe that the next several years will be crucial if the 2030 Agenda is to live up to its transformative ambition. While there are many pieces to the puzzle, without trustworthy, independent sources of data, we will never be able to judge the international community's progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda, and SDG16 in particular. The indicators and data used for monitoring progress towards SDG16 are critical for people-centered accountability and policy-making purposes, and thus play a central role in helping to deliver action and change towards meeting SDG16.

### **Key challenges**

The SDG16DI has identified six key challenges to achieving our aim of open and holistic tracking of the commitments made by all UN Member States to measure and realize SDG16.

- The current official indicators selected by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG indicators (IAEG-SDGs), which are being used for reporting both on national and global

trends, are limited in scope and will provide an incomplete picture of progress on the targets, especially if not complemented with context-specific indicators at local, national and regional levels.

- Methodologies for some of the most important officially-agreed global indicators have not been decided and will likely continue to be debated for several years, holding back immediate progress towards gathering data. The IAEG-SDGs has classified official indicators in three clusters: Tier 1 indicators that are conceptually clear, have an internationally established methodology and standards are available, and data are regularly produced by countries for at least 50 per cent of countries and of the population in every region where the indicators are relevant; Tier 2 indicators that are conceptually clear, have an internationally established methodology and standards are available, but data are not regularly produced by countries; and Tier 3 indicators, for which no internationally established methodology or standards are yet available, but methodology/standards are being (or will be) developed or tested. As of 31 December 2018, for the whole SDG framework the updated tier classification contains 101 Tier 1 indicators, 84 Tier 2 indicators and 41 Tier 3 indicators. In addition to these, there are 6 indicators that have multiple tiers (different components of the indicator are classified into different tiers). Progress on this matter is slow. As regards SDG16 indicators, since the first proposed classification into tiers of March 2016, only one indicator was reclassified by the UN Statistical Commission from Tier 3 to Tier 2; one Tier 3 indicator was split into two indicators, out of which one is now classified as Tier 2 and the other one as Tier 3; and three indicators were downgraded from Tier 1 to Tier 2. Currently only 6 of the 23 indicators are ranked as Tier 1 by the IAEG-SDGs and only 7 indicators have data available for 90% of UN Member States.
- For political reasons, many Member States will likely decide not to report on some of the official global indicators for SDG16 due to their politically sensitive nature, despite the fact that they are intended to be the primary source of information for determining progress made towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. The impartiality of the data they produce may, in some cases, be questionable.
- Even when Member States are willing to gathering data, many governments lack the capacity to do so in a comprehensive manner—especially given there are 232 official indicators across all 17 SDGs. Strengthening their capacity to collect relevant data will require significant support from the international community.
- The state-centric reporting and review processes established at global, regional and national levels will undoubtedly mean that the interpretation of SDG16 data will not always be sufficiently independent. The extent of this will be tested during the 2019 HLPF Voluntary National Reviews of progress on SDG16.
- If and how data produced for tracking SDG16 is used to deliver actual change – whether acting as an accountability currency or through shaping policy – is still not fully understood or appreciated. Better understanding how policy makers and civil society actors use this data is key to ensuring data is shared and packaged to deliver the real change.

## **Current work and achievements**

The SDG16DI focuses its work under four key aims: collect the data, curate the data, communicate analysis of the data and catalyze change through open access to data.

The SDG16DI collects data through collaboration between the partners, each dedicating time to ‘scrape,’ or find, collect and organize existing data-sets. We identify and draw on a wide range of data sources, collating a catalogue of sources, including both official and non-official.

Additionally, as the SDG16DI is intended to complement the official indicator framework for monitoring the SDGs, the SDG16DI collects data for both the globally agreed SDG16 indicators and additional, complementary indicators, which data experts regard as contributing to a more multi-faceted and comprehensive measure of progress against the various targets. Our partners continue to investigate, discuss and test innovative approaches to monitoring SDG16.

The SDG16DI curates the data, primarily through our website, SDG16.org, allowing users to compare progress across time and context, understand the strengths and weaknesses of different indicators and data sets, and identify gaps in data availability. This will involve further development of the current SDGDI website, introducing new features as well as regular maintenance of the site to ensure its relevance and usability.

The SDG16DI catalyzes change through better understanding how, at both global and national levels, SDG16 data are being used by change-makers, whether they be reformist officials in government or campaigning civil society organizations. We engage with a range of actors, including global initiatives on SDG16, government and UN officials, civil society, and research organizations through bilateral meetings, UN processes, and events, forums and workshops hosted by the SDG16DI and others.

The SDG16DI launched its interactive website (SDG16.org) during the 2016 HLPF at the UN, featuring the ability to view data on global heat maps, and compare data by country and indicator. The website offers a ‘one-stop-shop’ for all open data tracking SDG16 data indicators for use by civil society and policymakers alike. The website also features data on several complementary SDG16 indicators identified by the SDG16DI members to more comprehensively track progress on SDG16 targets. In 2017, the SDG16DI translated the website landing page into all official UN languages in order to improve its global accessibility. The website also includes a small resources section and a blog with the aim of providing analysis and interpretation of the data.

The SDG16DI communicates both what the data tell us about global progress toward achieving SDG16, the availability of SDG16 data and innovative approaches to SDG16 data collection. Since 2017 the SDG16DI produces its annual Global Reports (available online at SDG16Report.org) to this end. The Global Reports assess global progress towards realizing the 2030 Agenda’s commitment to peaceful, just and inclusive societies and is an opportunity to benchmark progress over the past year and explore key trends in-depth. The 2017 Global Report provided governments, UN officials, and civil society stakeholders, a baseline of the latest available data for SDG16 indicators, a review of key trends, and of challenges encountered. The Report discussed each SDG16 target’s data availability and limitations; it showcased the state of data availability for the countries under voluntary review at the 2017 HLPF; and it explored how SDG16 data can be used for local accountability. With the 2017 Global Report, the SDG16DI aimed to ensure accessibility and functionality and as such developed it as both a physical report and an interactive website. The 2018 Global Report highlighted and shared successful and innovative approaches to closing



SDG16 data gaps, with government, UN officials and civil society stakeholders. The 2019 Global Report is still under development but will focus on “Missing data, and the role of non-official data to fill the gaps”.

The SDG16DI annual Global Reports are launched at official side events on the margins of the HLPF in New York. The launch of the 2017 and 2018 Global Reports at the HLPF filled their venues at UN Headquarters to triple capacity. Another side event is planned during the 2019 HLPF.

The SDG16DI has also co-hosted a workshop at the 2016 Open Governance Partnership Summit in Paris with Saferworld, the Transparency, Accountability and Participation (TAP) Network, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The 30-person workshop focused on how indicators can drive action and accountability, key lessons were shared in a joint blog after the event. In our efforts to integrate and collaborate with other active processes both collectively, and through our members individually, the SDG16DI has engaged with ‘non-official’ and parallel processes such as the Praia Group, whose Chair Cabo Verde cohosted the SDG16DI’s 2017 Global Report Launch, the Open Government Partnership, the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, and the Global Alliance for Reporting Progress. The SDG16DI has also worked to engage with UN bodies and processes such as UNDP, UN Statistical Commission, UN World Data Forum, and the IAEG-SDGs.

### **Next steps**

Based on a context analysis conducted during the SDG16DI annual retreat in Oslo, October 2018, the SDG16DI chose to emphasize advocacy as a key method of change, and has articulated three key change objectives for their work in 2019:

- The SDG16DI will expand its partnership to other members of civil society, especially those representing local and marginalized voices, who understand and engage with SDG16 and its targets, indicators and data.
- The official indicators should both retain Tier 3 indicators and add additional indicators that more accurately reflect the objectives of the targets.
- Member States, National Statistical Offices and UN custodian agencies should accept the role of civil society non-official methodologies and data, so that they are integrated into monitoring processes.

In conclusion, with the HLPF review of SDG16 as well as the the first comprehensive review of the SDGs as a whole, the year 2019 will offer an opportunity for testing the effectiveness of existing reporting tools and databases. The SDG16DI will contribute to such an effort by making available its innovative approach, conceptual framework and partnership experience for the advancement and implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

## **Section 2 - Advancing the 2030 Agenda: Lessons learnt from the first cycle of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)– Reform or Revolution?**

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# **Rethinking the UN intergovernmental bodies after the creation of the High-level Political Forum, HLPF, with a focus on the roles of the General Assembly, ECOSOC and HLPF**

By Jan-Gustav Strandenaes

## **Introduction - a brief recap**

According to formal decisions taken by the UN, the High-level Political Forum, HLPF, will be subject to a review during 2019 and 2020. This process is timely for several reasons, not the least because the present Secretary General, (SG) Antonio Guterrez, has initiated a process of reforms to upgrade or modernize the UN. By the end of HLPF in July 2019, what may be termed the first cycle of the 2030 Agenda has come to an end. The basis for this assertion is related to the Voluntary National Reviews, the VNRs, which have become the central element of HLPF. By the conclusion of HLPF in 2019, all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been reviewed by member states and the UN.

HLPF was established at Ro+20<sup>1</sup> and the first HLPF session took place in 2013. However, what has come to be recognized as the first proper HLPF took place in 2016. In the report of the Secretary General in January 2016 on the follow-up to the 2015 Summit Decision on the 2030 Agenda,<sup>2</sup> the Secretary General outlined a four year thematic review cycle of the 2030 agenda with the various SDGs as the main component.<sup>3</sup> This was later adopted by the UN and the proposed agenda for 2016 in the SG's report became the agenda of HLPF which was the first to review a set of SDGs where the VNR came to be the key agenda. Following the success of this HLPF, the UN decided to agree to the themes and clusters of SDGs proposed by the SG in January and did so immediately following HLPF in 2016.<sup>4</sup>

Several questions are raised or need to be raised in the context of the reform processes of the UN, the most recurring being “is the UN fit for purpose?” The same could be said about HLPF. Bearing in mind that Member States will have the opportunity to formally address the reform of the HLPF during the 74th session of the General Assembly, this article will attempt to feed into this narrative. The article will review options for reform of the HLPF and for the second cycle of the 2030 Process at the UN. Questions to be asked are: does HLPF continue to serve Member States, stakeholders, the UN system and most importantly the 2030 Agenda itself? Does HLPF function as the central platform for review of progress on the 2030 Agenda and can it be strengthened?

A set of guiding principles for the HLPF reform process could be the following:<sup>5</sup>

- Keep what works, elevate what is good, and change what has failed to deliver.
- Make the institutional architecture charged with implementing the 2030 agenda more effective.
- Raise the level of ambition for what can be achieved.
- Foster a more conducive and enabling environment to ‘Leaving No One Behind’.

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 84 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document

<sup>2</sup> A/Res/70/1

<sup>3</sup> A/70/684 “General Assembly Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level”– Report of the Secretary General

<sup>4</sup> A/70/299

<sup>5</sup> See: <https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/en/>

## What is the mandate of HLPF?

Has the HLPF been successful in implementing its mandate? If so - what is the mandate? This represents a crucial question, and which appears at first sight as a simple answer, turns out to be much more complicated one in the end.

The mandate of HLPF is primarily defined in three documents: A/Res/67/290 and further expanded with assignments from “Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” and further strengthened by a third document: A/Res/70/299.

But contrary to what many seem to think, HLPF is not governed by one simple mandate, but a list of mandates, found in a number of paragraphs under these three resolutions. A closer look at these three important resolutions, will reveal the enormity of the responsibility which rests heavily on HLPF. At the same time, these also indicate the heavy workload given to HLPF. This can be found in the following paragraphs:

- From 67/290: Found in paragraphs: 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

In all, more than thirty mandates are identified above. Are they all fulfilled? By consulting the synthesis outcome reports from each of the three HLPFs (2016, 17 and 18) made by UNDSO and also by consulting several follow-up reports, the following two charts can be made.<sup>6</sup> 19 of the above 33 mandates were selected as the most important,<sup>7</sup> and given a value of success:

<b>Mandates fulfilled? 19 identified ...</b>	
<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 United Nations 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>

<sup>6</sup> It must be emphasised that this overview of mandates and their fulfilment is based on the author’s own understanding of accomplishments, and a further and even more detailed and serious scrutiny should be conducted.

<sup>7</sup> Selection and priority of importance also made by the author

<b>Mandates fulfilled? 19 identified</b>	
<b>Promote sharing of best practices and experiences relating to the implementation</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned</b>	<b>YES, but mostly on successes</b>
<b>Promote system-wide coherence and coordination of SD policies;</b>	<b>Improving</b>
<b>Take into account work of Development Cooperation Forum, other activities of ECOSOC relating to integration and implementation of sustainable development;</b>	<b>Begun, and improving, (Yes?)</b>
<b>Shall benefit from regional preparatory processes</b>	<b>Not really</b>
<b>Devote adequate time to the discussion of the sustainable development challenges facing developing countries</b>	<b>Begun – and improving (hopefully)</b>
<b>Identify and address new and emerging issues</b>	<b>Not really</b>
<b>Strengthen the science-policy interface</b>	<b>Begun, improving</b>
<b>Develop an independent Global Sustainable Development Report</b>	<b>Improving</b>
<b>Deal with SCP</b>	<b>Improving, but far to go</b>

As can be seen from the chart above, four mandates have been fulfilled, and three have not been fulfilled. The result is not by any chance scientifically carried out, but as the author took the charts and showed it to several delegates during HLPF in 2018, not one disagreed to this assessment. If nothing else, the charts should provide food for thought when it come to the review process of HLPF.

### **Mandates and work-loads keep expanding**

The growing realisation of the complexity of a global sustainable development agenda is deeply affecting the work of HLPF. In addition to the identified mandates, there are three elements repeatedly highlighted when it comes to the SDGs – they are integrated, indivisible and universal. In addition, there are the three dimensions of sustainable development that also need to form a basis for work with the 2030 Agenda: the environment, the social and the economic dimensions. These six elements are almost always referred to – and accepted, at least in theory, and they represent serious challenges when it comes the implementation of the SDGs. Moreover, they keep widening the scopes of the HLPF’s many mandates. Realising this complexity, and making serious efforts to integrate the six elements referred to above, the political landscape is widening and its narrative expanding. Since the 2015 UN Summit on Sustainable Development, the UN has hosted a number of conferences, expanding the knowledge base of global sustainability issues and at the same time increasing the work-load and mandate for HLPF. A possible reference to this expanding narrative could be named the ‘2030 Portfolio’. Its key components are:

<b>THE 2030 SUSTAINABLE</b>	<b>DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO</b>
Current and operational	Developing and to be followed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 17 SDGs with their 169 targets/2030 agenda</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>World Data Forum, 2019/21/23/25/27</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Addis Ababa Action Agenda</li> <li>• The Paris Climate Agreement (December 2015)</li> <li>• The 232 review indicators (2016) for the SDGs</li> <li>• The Reviews, national, regional, global</li> <li>• The annual High-level Political Forum, HLPF</li> <li>• The Sendai Outcome document, Disaster reduction</li> <li>• The Samoa Pathway (SIDS agreement)</li> <li>• The UN Environment Assembly, every 2 years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HLPF review 2019/2020</li> <li>• The new 2030 agenda cycle from 2020 to 2023</li> <li>• SDG High Level meeting, 2019/23/27</li> <li>• Annual FfD forums</li> <li>• UNEP Geo 2019</li> <li>• UNEA 2019/21/23</li> <li>• The Global Sustainable Development Report 2019</li> <li>• 2027 – a kick off process to replace the SDGs (?)</li> </ul>
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And it really does not stop there. We can further add:

- Istanbul Declaration and Programme of Action.
- The Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024.
- Regional responsibilities, such as:
  - The African Union’s Agenda 2063.
  - The programme of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD).
- Issues related to durable peace and sustainable development and countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.
- An annual SDG Progress report by the SG based on the global indicator framework and data produced by national statistical information collected at regional level.
- The UN Interagency Task team on Science Technology and Innovation for the SDGs
- The annual report from the ECOSOC five-day special high level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, WTO and UNCTAD to assess follow up and result orientation on financing issues and means of implementation.

**Have we understood all what we need to understand? Or have we overlooked directives we have agreed on?**

The point in enumerating the conferences above, with their outcome documents, is to show the growing work-load levelled onto HLPF and its secretariat. A successful review of HLPF must take this into consideration. It is further imperative that there exists an understanding of key mandates for HLPF if the body is to be reviewed, and quite possibly be strengthened. Reading a UN resolution often becomes routines for those who work with these resolutions, and routines often make us forget key elements of those resolutions. The second preambular paragraph of 67/290 may be such an element. It states:

*“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,”

Another ‘overlooked directive’ may be found in A/Res/70/299 “Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level”, also a preambular paragraph:

*“Reaffirming also that in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Member States committed to engaging in systematic follow-up and review of the implementation of the Agenda in accordance with agreed guiding principles, including those set out in paragraph 74 of resolution 70/1, and asserted that the high-level political forum on sustainable development would have a central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review processes of the 2030 Agenda at the global level, working coherently with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other relevant organs and forums, in accordance with existing mandates,”*

Both ‘directives’ demand that all mandates including all outcomes be taken into consideration when we all engage in implementing the entire 2030 agenda. And its key coordinating mechanism, HLPF, should in strength and resources reflect this. But does it? Is it strong enough and does it have adequate resources to deal with all this – coordinate, analyse, synthesise and implement? Reading paragraph 84 and 85 of the Rio+20 Outcome Document, we see that these two above mentioned preambular paragraphs encapsulate to a high degree the gist of these two paragraphs from the Rio+20 process.

Paragraph 84 states: “We decide to establish a universal, intergovernmental, high-level political forum, building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently replacing the Commission. The high-level political forum shall follow up on the implementation of sustainable development and should avoid overlap with existing structures, bodies and entities in a cost-effective manner.”

“Building on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently replacing the Commission,” these lines were to become a central element in the construction of the new unit, called a hybrid construct within the UN family of units and bodies. To what extent has HLPF managed to integrate the most important elements from CSD?

The US historian, Timothy Snyder writes that: ‘History does not repeat, but it does instruct.’<sup>8</sup> A pointed, slightly polemical comparison between the Commission on Sustainable Development, CSD, and HLPF, can look like this:

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<sup>8</sup> From ‘On Tyranny – twenty lessons from the twentieth century’. Timothy Snyder, The Bodley Head, London. 2017

## Can the differences between CSD and HLPF teach us something?

CSD 11	HLPF
CSD established in 1993, after UNCED and the GA agreed and decided on Agenda 21	HLPF was established in 2013, a year after Rio+20 with no specific work programme
CSD was given a specific and detailed mandate with a structure to promote its mandate: a resourced and dedicated secretariat; a Bureau and a Chair; and had decision-making powers	HLPF was given a mandate which was generic and general, had no dedicated secretariat, no Bureau, no chair, and has no decision-making power
CSD was given an easily understood position in the UN hierarchy: a subsidiary body under ECOSOC	HLPF was a 'new construct' at the UN, functioning under the auspices of ECOSOC and the UNGA
CSD had a well defined work-programme outlined in general details by Agenda 21 including the Rio Principles	HLPF was given its work-programme only in 2016, after the UNGA had agreed on the 2030 Agenda and 70/299

There are a few more differences between CSD and HLPF that are obvious. Bearing in mind the essence of paragraph 84 from the Rio Document, are there lessons from CSD that can be used to strengthen HLPF during the review process? Belo is added yet another comparison between CSD and HLPF that could provide food for thought:

CSD	HLPF
An elected Bureau with an elected Chair	Directed by the President of ECOSOC/ UNGA
53 members, on a rotating basis	Universal membership
Had a decision-making power with a mandate to vote	Has no decision-making powers, but has proceeded to vote
Had a dedicated secretariat with a proper mandate, staff and resources	Works with a general reference to UNDESA to support HLPF (§ 23 of 67/290) in a secretarial manner
Time: two-week preparation, two-week negotiations	5 days for reviews, 3 days for the High-level Segment
A proper preparatory process through a conference	A preparatory process through internet, no easy access to all documents
Thematic reviews, proper time available	VNRs from countries, on certain goals, short time available
A Chairs summary, and a negotiated outcome based on the summary	A drafted report and a Ministerial Declaration negotiated outside of HLPF in advance of HLPF



Multistakeholder dialogues	Selected inputs by stakeholders from the floor
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In some ways, HLPF is an example of the ingenuity of what delegates can accomplish. There was a need for a new unit to replace CSD. There was a need for a unit to be calibrated according to the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. For a while, in the run up to Rio+20, several stakeholders, including many countries, were all working and lobbying hard to establish a Council for Sustainable Development. Taking cognizance from the work done within the UN in establishing the Council on Human Rights, many thought a new council would see the light of the day at Rio+20. This was not to be, and in many ways HLPF arose out of the ashes of a Council as a hybrid unit. Some countries were adamant at designating HLPF as merely a platform, other would call it a body. A platform has no formal standing within the UN system and a forum is, well, just a forum. The true organisational and formal nature of HLPF is yet to be agreed. For the time being it functions as a coordinating mechanism for the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, and with a growing mandate and work-programme. Time has come to regenerate the formal power behind the coordinating mechanism of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

### **Agenda-setting – rooted in 67/290, ignored or forgotten?**

Any review of a 2030 institution and any new agenda that will take this world closer to the fulfilment of the goals of the 2030 agenda must recognise the directives found in agreed resolutions. Why else do we negotiate and finally agree through consensus on documents? A/Res/67/290, the resolution giving HLPF its mandate and work-programme, is in this matter of ‘constitutional importance.’ 67/290 is often referred to, but to what extent are all paragraphs remembered, understood, and implemented? In the context of the HLPF review and agenda setting for the new cycle, two paragraphs from 67/290 have immediate relevance:

§18. “*Emphasizes* that the forum shall provide a dynamic platform for regular dialogue and for stocktaking and agenda-setting to advance sustainable development and that the agenda of all meetings of the high-level political forum shall be focused, while allowing flexibility to address new and emerging issues;”

§ 22. “*Requests* the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council to coordinate with the Bureau of the Council and with the bureaux of the relevant committees of the Assembly to organize the activities of the forum so as to benefit from the inputs and advice of the United Nations system, the major groups and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate;”

What actually do these paragraphs express?

They are about agenda-setting and that the agenda-setting should be based on ongoing processes and, of equal importance, embrace new and emerging issues. The latter part does indeed also reflect one of the key items outlined in the agenda of the Rio+20 conference where all this originated. The second paragraph (§22) states that that the Presidents of ECOSOC and UNGA should consult with the entire UN system and with relevant stakeholders including the major groups to establish these agendas. The question we need to ask is: has this really taken place? And if not, should this process not be reviewed at present due to the ongoing work on reviews and decisions that need to

be taken concerning a new agenda cycle? To complete a relevant agenda for sustainable development, paragraph 22 also has a direct reference to the entire UN system. In this context it must also mean that the key elements of the 2030 Portfolio must be taken into consideration in setting the new agenda for the next cycle.

It has always been cumbersome to engage and include new and emerging issues into agendas. There are many reasons for this, not the least because it is difficult to identify new issues. One of the weaknesses of CSD was its rigid agenda, an agenda that was agreed to last for a decade or more. During the formative parts of HLPF – between 2013 and 2016 – a discussion on agenda-setting and stakeholder engagement, including developing future-literacy models could have been part of the discussion. Instead these years were wasted as the political leadership of the UN at the time showed little interest in having a functional mechanism dealing with the outcomes of the Rio+20 conference. Despite this, the UN secretariat managed to develop a template for analysing trends in sustainable development. Rooted in paragraph 20 of 67/290 and the AAAA outcome document, efforts were made to bring independent scientists into the process to understand the parameters and complexities of present and future trends in sustainable development. A science-based report was to be written. This will materialise itself in 2019 in the Global Sustainable Development Report. The key findings of this report could be brought into the agenda setting process.

### **Is there enough time?**

During the negotiations in the summer of 2013 when member states struggled to agree on the mandates and organisational architecture of HLPF, a recurring question that came up was the duration of HLPF. CSD had a two-week preparatory process and a two-week negotiation process, in all 20 work days. HLPF has ended up with five days plus three days, in all eight days. The question of time is a recurring theme. There seems to be a growing consensus that eight days are too little. Could combining events that are all relevant to the 2030 Agenda and already agreed on be a solution?

As an experiment, let us do the ‘time-math:’

- Could combining the Ffd/AAAA (5 days), the science technology input (2 days) and ECOSOC Partnership Forum, (1 to 2 days) be added to HLPF’ and made into one process, and in this way give the HLPF/2030-Agenda process more time? If we made this combination of events, it would add up to: 9 days (Ffd/AAAA + Science Tech + ECOSOC partner-forum) + 8 days (HLPFs 5 + 3); a total of 17 work days. It would still be short of CSD’s 20 work days, but the entire process could be more focussed on specifically and relevant themes. Combining these events appear to be more of an organisational challenge than a thematic one. One almost obvious advantage to such a combination would be an integration of parallel processes, increasing thematic relevance and contributing strongly to coherence.
- Such a move would be consistent with several of the resolutions mentioned (67/290; 70/1, 70/299, 61/16) and make HLPF at the centre of the 2030 agenda, which also has been stated strongly in several documents.
- It would not run contrary to the formality of the system.
- It would allow for more coherence and integration of process.

- This would also bring the work on the 2030 Agenda by the Subsidiary Bodies and Specialized Agencies at the UN including the Bretton Woods institutions, WTO and UNCTAD into the HLPF process. As ECOSOC is responsible for coordinating the input from the Specialized Agencies, the agencies and a few subsidiary bodies of ECOSOC could function as ‘Task Managers’ or ‘Global Focal Points’ for the various SDGs, and still keep their own integrity and specialties intact.

### **Reforming (modernising) HLPF: The case of UNGA, HLPF and a Bureau**

Every SG of the UN – except one – has come in with a reform agenda. History shows that these efforts have had varying degrees of success. A key stumbling block appears to have been widespread reluctance to organizational and procedural change. Such reaction is based probably more on caution than obstruction as most delegates are fully aware of how strenuous and cumbersome processes can be to reach consensus agreements.

One way of anchoring a modernized – or positively reviewed HLP – into the system is simply to build on what is already there, and tweak the system to accommodate the urgent challenges involved in the 2030 Agenda. It would also be imperative to see if HLPF lacks strength. And if it does, simply strengthen it. After all it is the key, global mechanisms to coordinate the 2030 Agenda and thus shepherd the world towards a better future.

HLPF functions under the auspices of the General Assembly and ECOSOC. As a new UN entity, such a construct has made many a delegate – including savvy secretariat people wonder about its functionality. In 2013 several member states meant HLPF needed a Bureau. Others were opposed. As of today, HLPF has no politically composed governing body. Yet the question is raised time and again and those opposed argue against creating yet another global bureaucracy. Still at the end of every HLPF – since its inception – delegates have been musing about a political element within HLPF to help steer it. Another issue that keeps coming up is the issue of universality vs the membership of ECOSOC. Debates on this issue have sometimes showed how countries differ in their understanding of UN’s structural formalities. Questions are raised along the lines of: Should ECOSOC with its 54 members be in a position to override the outcome of the HLPF which has a universal membership? Does the fact that ECOSOC is a Charter body give it more political privileges than HLPF which is ‘simply’ a new construct despite the difference in membership? The question itself is not easy to answer, and perhaps needs thoughtful research and dialogue. In the meantime, perhaps a fruitful discussion about this formality could be centred around the following question: If not an elected Bureau, perhaps a Steering Committee? This was, by the way, a Brazilian proposal in 2013, during the formative negotiations of HLPF. Such a Steering Committee could be constructed and function the following way:

- A Steering Committee (SC) for HLPF could have members from the 6 UN GA committees.
- The SC would always be chaired by the President of ECOSOC, and every four year, when the HLPF is convened under the GA, the President of ECOSOC becomes the Vice Chair and the GA President becomes the Chair.
- Such an SC would enable coherence between the UNGA system and the 2030 agenda, even help ‘solve’ the universality conundrum’ – ECOSOC 54 members, HLPF members: all member states.

- An SC would ‘respect’ the two formal elements of the HLPF – that it is established under the auspices of the UNGA and ECOSOC.
- The SC would also be in a position to prepare the agendas for HLPF in close collaboration with the dedicated secretariat, and work with the member states and address national concerns, and work with ECOSOC to coordinate the SDGs across the entire UN system.
- The SC could also function as the formal link between HLPF sessions while not jeopardising ECOSOC’s authority and provide a formal sounding board for the secretariat.
- An SC would function as the political governance structure of HLPF. It would be properly representing all member states of the UN, it would be formally in a position to make recommendations that are valid throughout the system, on follow-up and reviews, as requested by paragraph 2 of 67/290 and paragraph 82 of the September 2015 Summit Declaration.

### **Are we willing to dedicate enough resources to have a functional HLPF?**

If we are resourceful, we allocate resources – if not, we fail. This statement functions almost as a dictum in the context of the formalities behind a successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Too many times, statements like the following are made: “The UN must do more with less.” And yet – we know there is enough money to go around and solve all the problems we are aware of today. To have a functional HLPF, the mechanism needs resources.

Having a dedicated secretariat was the biggest organisational novelty of the League of Nations and one of its real successes. It meant among others that the secretariat could hold member states accountable to decisions made through minutes being taken, it meant that member states received services on all international issues they took to the multilateral body.

No proposal to strengthen or modernize HLPF will be possible without a well-resourced and dedicated secretariat. The present reorganization has gone a long way to improve the functionality of the service that the secretariat gives member states and other stakeholders and the present secretariat has contributed immensely to the successful outcomes of HLPF. The VNR labs is one outstanding example of the secretariat’s ingenuity and dedicated work. But a serious question remains – is this enough? How long can the secretariat function on doing more with less?

The present structure needs to be strengthened, and as we seek coherence and not overlapping, parallel institutions working on the 2030 agenda should be avoided. The first CSD decade (1993 – 2002) was in many ways a strong success – and this is to a fairly large degree attributed to the secretariat of CSD. This success can and should be repeated with a reviewed HLPF serviced by a well-resourced secretariat.

### **Summary**

The focus of this article has been an effort to identify key issues that need to be dealt with in reviewing HLPF. The key issues can be summarised in the following way:

- Mapping and understanding mandates.
- Agenda setting – developing a process according to mandates.
- Emerging issues, helping to identify thematic reviews.

- Integrating the GSDR as the result of an independent scientific appraisal.
- The political and organisational relationships between HLPF, ECOSOC and UNGA, organise a Steering Committee.
- Improved integration of the entire UN system in HLPF (Specialized Agencies, Subsidiary bodies etc.).
- Improved integration of the FfD, AAAA into HLPF, Bretton Woods, WTO, UNCTAD including other relevant elements of the UN pertaining to the 2030 Agenda.
- Integrate the Technology Facilitation Mechanism/ The UN Interagency Task team on Science Technology and Innovation.
- Regional issues, strengthened and improved, more innovative work.
- Integrating MEAs, Conventions and rights issues into the bigger picture of the 2030 agenda.
- Major Groups and stakeholder engagement.
- Developing and negotiating the Ministerial Declaration.
- Implementation and partnerships/role of stakeholders.
- How do we integrate the digital world into the HLPF equation?
- None of this is possible unless we allocate more time and more resources to HLPF.

## **Epilogue**

“Doing more with less” is not a truism, it is a disaster. We are faced with the biggest challenge in humanity’s existence – saving the globe. We cannot afford not to give our ideas adequate resources. We will never be able to calculate the cost of not doing enough. That cost will be astronomical and incalculable. Who will be willing to take the responsibility for such a financial and global disaster – or will we just leave the problems for our next generations – the youth of today to be dealt with and just leave everybody behind?

## **Review of the role of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)**

### *Summary of Discussion*

This paper tries to reply to the following two questions: how VNRs can be improved to be most effective in accelerating national implementation of the 2030 Agenda on the basis learned from three years of VNRs and how they can serve as a mechanism for sharing experiences and lessons learned between countries

### **Introduction**

When the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) was established at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in June 2012, it was done within the context of the one of the two themes of the Conference: institutional framework for sustainable development. The outcome document of the Conference “The Future We Want<sup>9</sup>” stipulates among other things that the strengthened institutional framework for sustainable development should “identify specific actions to promote effective implementation of sustainable development, including through voluntary sharing of experiences and lessons learned<sup>10</sup>”. It also proposes for the HLPF to among other things “promote the sharing of best practices and experiences relating to the implementation of sustainable development and, on a voluntary basis, facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned<sup>11</sup>”. Thus, the seed was planted in this Conference, that HLPF will be, among other things, a platform for voluntary sharing of experiences, successes and lessons learned.

This notion was further elaborated and strengthened in the resolution on format and organizational aspects of the HLPF in paragraph 2 which decided on HLPF functions saying that it will “(...) follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments”<sup>12</sup> and in paragraph 8 which decided that HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC “shall conduct regular reviews, starting in 2016, on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives, including those related to the means of implementation, within the context of the post-2015 development agenda”<sup>13</sup> and goes on to set the principles for conducting the follow-up and review stipulating that they will be “voluntary, while encouraging reporting, and shall include developed and developing countries, as well as relevant United Nations entities; shall be State-led, involving ministerial and other relevant high-level participants; shall provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders”<sup>14</sup>.

These same principles were reaffirmed and further elaborated in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development that has a whole section on follow-up and review where it says in addition to the resolution 67/290 that follow-up and review processes “(...) will take into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and will respect policy space and priorities;

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<sup>9</sup> A/RES/66/288

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, paragraph 76 (f)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, paragraph 85 (i)

<sup>12</sup> A/RES/67/290, paragraph 2

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., paragraph 8

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., paragraph 8 a - c

(...) track progress in implementing the universal Goals and targets, including the means of implementation, in all countries; (...) maintain a longer-term orientation, identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices. They will help to mobilize the necessary means of implementation and partnerships, support the identification of solutions and best practices and promote the coordination and effectiveness of the international development system; (...) be open, inclusive, participatory and transparent for all people and will support reporting by all relevant stakeholders; (...) [be] people-centered, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind; (...) build on existing platforms and processes, where these exist, avoid duplication and respond to national circumstances, capacities, needs and priorities; (...) will be rigorous and based on evidence, informed by country-led evaluations and data which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable and disaggregated; (...) will benefit from the active support of the United Nations system and other multilateral institutions.”<sup>15</sup>. And this is also reaffirmed in paragraph 84 on voluntary national reviews and further elaborated in the resolution 70/299 where it is reiterated that VNRs’ “(...) aim is to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned (...)”<sup>16</sup>.

### **Reality of voluntary national reviews at HLPF**

Without counting the countries that have presented more than once, 102 countries have presented their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) in 2016, 2017 and 2018. This is over a half of total membership of HLPF as “all meetings of the forum shall provide for the full and effective participation of all States Members of the United Nations and States members of specialized agencies”<sup>17</sup>, which means that HLPF has 197 countries as members. With 95 countries to present, there is still a possibility to have all countries present twice by 2030 as is suggested in the Secretary-General’s report on critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level<sup>18</sup>, and at least once by 2020 especially as 41 countries will be presenting in 2019 for the first time<sup>19</sup>.

This shows that countries see a benefit in undertaking a VNR. The experience gained in the three years of VNR presentations shows that VNR process contributes to changing mindsets which can help overcome usual silo approach to development. It helps countries map gaps and identify challenges and focus on priorities and act on them. It also contributes to better engagement of all stakeholders and creating of meaningful and useful partnerships.

However, there is a question, how much justice is being done to these presentations at the HLPF and how useful these presentations are for countries, especially as VNRs should not be an end in themselves but should advance national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, meaningful, well-thought through and prepared comments and recommendations would be very useful.

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<sup>15</sup> A/RES/70/1. Paragraph 74 a - i

<sup>16</sup> A/RES/70/299, Paragraph 7

<sup>17</sup> A/RES/67/290 Paragraph 4

<sup>18</sup> A/70/684

<sup>19</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/> where 41 countries will be presenting for the first time and 10 for the second time.

The experience from presentations has shown that 15-minute presentation could be enough to concentrate on summaries of best practices, lessons learned, gaps and priorities, especially as majority of countries also produce a written VNR report as well as main messages.<sup>20</sup> However, Q&A time definitely needs to be longer in order to allow for a meaningful exchange between presenters and various stakeholders. (See Figure 1 with the number of hours and number of countries that have presented so far). But additionally, there has not, up to now, been sufficient interest from other countries to actively engage on VNRs. It might be that countries receive reports late and often in different UN languages, but it might be that countries do not know how best to approach this process, which is relatively new to the development arena<sup>21</sup>.

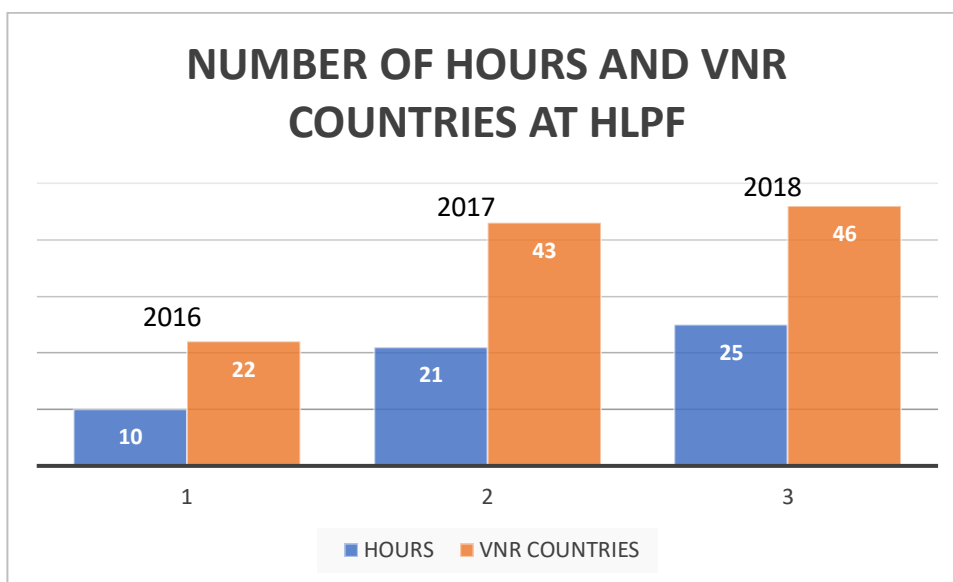


Figure 1

The experience with an unofficial space for VNRs that was for the first time organized by DESA at the 2018 HLPF, showed on the cases of two countries<sup>22</sup>, how more time can result in meaningful and useful discussions both for the country in question and for the stakeholders and can be conducive to advancing national implementation. Both countries elaborated on their lessons learned and challenges and heard comments and recommendations from stakeholders.

## How VNRs can be improved to be most effective in accelerating national implementation of the 2030 Agenda

### *What we have learned so far*

<sup>20</sup> Both can be accessed here <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

<sup>21</sup> See also SWP Research Paper 9, October 2018 “UN Reforms for the 2030 Agenda Are the HLPF’s Working Methods and Practices “Fit for Purpose”?” by Marianne Beisheim, section on “Hardly any VNR report presents systemic reforms with transformative potential” [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research\\_papers/2018RP09\\_bsh.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2018RP09_bsh.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Summary of VNR Labs can be found here <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2018#vnrs>



Many analyses of VNR reports have been undertaken by various stakeholders. There is a broad agreement that some VNR reports are still not following UN Secretary-General's Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews<sup>23</sup> at the HLPF, which makes comparability of reports difficult. Majority use the chapters of the SG guidelines, but not the structure of the report<sup>24</sup>, which could also improve the quality of reports<sup>25</sup>.

Nevertheless, the preparatory processes that have been organized<sup>26</sup> as well as reports submitted all speak to the benefits of VNR process as a part of the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

At the national level, VNR process have contributed to strengthening political will around the implementation of the 2030 Agenda; mobilizing all parts of government (especially parliaments and local government) and stakeholders around 2030 Agenda; focusing on priority areas and mapping them with budget requirements and resource mobilization; aligning national development plans with the 2030 Agenda and adapting existing institutions and/or creating coordinating bodies to support the VNR process; taking stock of what exists and what still needs to be done and identifying next steps; strengthening evidence-based decision making through engagement of national statistic offices and relevant stakeholders, including scientific community.

At the global level at HLPF, VNRs can draw international attention to the national level implementation of the 2030 Agenda. VNRs allow for sharing of benefits and challenges, identifying priority areas and where more assistance is needed and sharing best practices and lessons learned. Many countries include in their delegations other parts of government (members of parliament, local government representatives) and non-state actors (civil society, private sector) as presenters. It also gives an opportunity to interact with countries and various stakeholders outside official meetings (VNR Lab, side events, special events). More detailed recommendations are provided in the summary by the President of ECOSOC<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The SG guidelines can be found here

[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17346Updated\\_Voluntary\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17346Updated_Voluntary_Guidelines.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> For more comparison between 2016 and 2017 VNR countries' reports regarding the content and following SDG guidelines, see Progressing national SDGs implementation: An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, March 2018, published by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, Chapter 3.0 Assessment of VNR reports against the UN SG's common reporting guidelines at <https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2018/05/Full-report-Eng.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> For more on the quality of VNR reports see "UN Reforms for the 2030 Agenda: Are the HLPF's Working Methods and Practices "Fit for Purpose"?" by Marianne Beisheim, section on "Hardly any VNR report presents systemic reforms with transformative potential" [https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research\\_papers/2018RP09\\_bsh.pdf](https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2018RP09_bsh.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Since 2016, 10 global and 12 regional VNR workshops were organized by UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and evaluation gathered from VNR countries participating in these workshops

<sup>27</sup> See President's summary for 2018 [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/205432018\\_HLPF\\_Presidents\\_summary\\_FINAL.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/205432018_HLPF_Presidents_summary_FINAL.pdf)

However, as has been pointed both in analysis and by countries themselves a number of challenges still persist.

#### At the national level

- Insufficient time to properly organize extensive consultations with all stakeholders in VNR process
- Insufficient time for drafting a report including translation into one of 6 UN languages
- Creating national ownership for 2030 Agenda with whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach
- Accelerating action in priority areas, the localization of the SDGs and the strengthening of the institutional capacities of all key stakeholders engaged in the process, including the monitoring and reporting institutions
- Strengthening the role of evidence-based statistics and policy making to increase transparency and improve the public service and SDG delivery
- Insufficient policy coordination and coherence to maximize impact and avoid duplication
- Lack of capacity especially in local governments
- Lack of monitoring and evaluation frameworks
- Lack of institutional engagement of relevant stakeholders including with private sector

#### At the global level

- Insufficient analysis in the reports and not enough time to have a proper discussion engaging countries and stakeholders on WHY and HOW a certain measure constitutes a good practice and whether/how it could be replicated by other countries (15 minutes for presentation in individual or panel format including showing visuals and 10-15 minutes for Q&A)
- Inadequate response from other countries in commenting and asking relevant questions on the report
- Lack of concrete recommendations for countries to follow-up if they so choose
- Differentiation of countries coming to present the first time and those presenting 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> time
- Lack of institutionalized follow-up

### ***What can be improved***

When looking at what can be improved on the basis of experience gained through the support to the VNR process, reading the VNR reports and listening to VNR presentations, the voluntary nature of the VNRs needs to be borne in mind. The only way that countries will embrace the recommendations will be if they see value in them for their own national implementation and the achievement of the SDGs and if they see that it has worked in other countries.

#### ***National level***

- Strengthening national ownership including through capacity building and whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach and through preparing the VNRs by national team using international assistance when needed to be in control of one's own development

- Linking the VNRs to reporting to other mechanisms and conventions as well as using advancement in these areas for strengthening implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs
- Identifying key transformational and systemic changes and looking at their impact
- Strengthening monitoring and oversight including through parliaments and supreme audit institutions, the latter have already seen positive action from some governments implementing their recommendations such as better adapting institutions to carry out policy coherence, including subnational stakeholders in the process, strengthening cooperation among all branches of government
- Explaining the impacts strategies and policies put in place have on national level implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- Substantiating statements on progress in implementation by quality data
- Addressing implementation of all 17 SDGs and strengthening monitoring and evaluation
- Strengthening policy coherence and interlinkages among SDGs by showing tradeoffs and how they are achieved
- Strengthening follow-up by identifying areas where more needs to be done and where the challenges are as it would be useful for setting up various matching processes after VNR presentation and twinning/policy dialogues between countries that have/seek good policy advice in certain areas. This is also useful for forging partnerships that can strengthen implementation, such as between government and private sector, academia, scientific community, civil society, etc.
- Providing examples of costing for SDGs and alignment of budgets with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda
- Better engaging donors UN country teams and UN system for developing countries in national VNR preparation as well as other relevant regional and subregional UN and other organizations
- Having national presentation of a VNR and using the VNR process as a communication tool, which needs to be followed up once the VNR has been presented. Showing political will to continue working on challenges identified in VNRs after the VNR has been presented at the HLPF is an important step to be undertaken

### *At the global level*

- Using SG voluntary common reporting guidelines to increase comparability, but also to improve overall quality of reports over time by learning from good practices and reflecting these by updating periodically the guidelines. But it would need to go beyond chapter headings and looking more in-depth
- Focusing VNR presentation at HLPF on explanation of impact of policies and strategies, lessons learned and peer learning that can be of benefit to all countries and providing examples that had a significant impact on implementation. The more information, data, monitoring and assessment is being put forward including on all 17 SDGs, the more useful it will be for other countries
- Strengthening of interactive discussions including through providing more time for Q&A and possibly asking group of countries, relevant parts of the UN system and stakeholders to work together to prepare comments and questions as “friends of VNRs” and even come with some recommendations that countries might consider in the follow-up process

- Better use lead discussants, including by using experts, to prepare more detailed comments for VNR countries
- Consider including a session at the HLPF to discuss the main outcomes and findings from previous VNRs
- Strengthen HLPF to serve as a broker and matchmaker for partnerships in the follow-up after the VNRs through looking at areas where countries need support.

## Conclusion

The VNR process since 2016 has proven, according to the countries that have gone through the VNR process, a useful process for national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It has been shown above that countries reported strengthened political will, mobilization and focus on the 2030 Agenda by all actors at the country level. Most countries have aligned the Agenda with their national plans and strategies and identified priorities. Many are still struggling to improve policy coherence and capacity in policy integration and the use of goal oriented, evidence-based, and participatory frameworks to formulate, implement and review policies and strategies for sustainable development, but at least the awareness that it needs to be done is there. All countries have identified challenges with data, therefore investing in statistical offices and their capacity to produce high quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data to be able to deliver evidence-based statistics to increase transparency and improve the public service and SDG delivery is essential. Finding more institutionalized and more meaningful engagement with stakeholders including non-traditional ones like foundations and philanthropic, and finding ways to work with the private sector is still a challenge for many countries, but the awareness is there that governments alone cannot deliver the Agenda by themselves.

It seems that most countries at the national level have stepped up to provide enabling environment for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but at the global level HLPF still needs to do justice to their national investment in the VNR process and make coming to present at the global level worth their while.

To be able to do that, HLPF needs to live up to its mandate to provide a global platform for exchange of experiences, lessons learned, peer learning and establishment of partnerships. But for that to happen two important things need to be in place: one is more substantive VNRs with strong peer learning element incorporating all the above-mentioned points; and the other one is more time than 30 minutes allotted to each country's presentation and possibly a different format to maximize time.

The resolutions guiding the work of HLPF<sup>28</sup> will come under review during the 74<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly. Member States need to look at what worked and what did not during the first cycle. The minimum that a country might expect coming to present at the global level is to get adequate time to meaningfully discuss with its peers, partners and stakeholders, its own national implementation and in the course help other countries learn from it and learn from them, so that HLPF would be able to contribute to a clearer roadmap of what the country needs to do after presenting its VNR. This is especially crucial for the second and subsequent cycles of HLPF

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<sup>28</sup> A/RES/67/290 and A/RES/70/299

when many countries will come to present their VNRs for the second or even third time and where they need to show how they have benefited from the first VNR process both nationally and at HLPF. Without good exchange of views and lessons learned and constructive comments and recommendations, it will be an uneven process where countries will invest a lot nationally, while not getting enough in return at the global level.

## UN Reforms for the 2030 Agenda – Are the HLPF’s Working Methods and Practices “Fit for Purpose”?

By Dr. Marianne Beisheim,

### *Abstract*

The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is currently the heart of the UN’s sustainable development governance. It is meant to support member states in taking on political leadership and responsibility for implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. An analysis will show, however, that the HLPF risks failing in its task: the complexity of the 2030 Agenda, the HLPF’s broad mandate, the large number of participants, and their high expectations are creating problems for a forum that – having been founded in 2013 – is not sufficiently equipped for this. In 2016, member states already decided to review the format and organisational aspects of the HLPF in 2019–2020. Drawing on an analysis of the HLPF’s current working methods and practices, this study explores ideas for improvements. While in-depth reforms are necessary, they would be difficult to realise in the current political context. Improvements to working methods and practices, however, are within the realm of the possible.

### **Introduction<sup>29</sup>**

In September 2015, the heads of state and government of all UN member states adopted the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.<sup>30</sup> According to its title and preamble, the 2030 Agenda aims at nothing less than “Transforming Our World”. However, this postulated paradigm of a more systemic, integrated and inclusive approach to sustainable development is far from established. Moreover, the very concept of multilateralism has been in a serious political crisis ever since. And yet it is precisely the function of multilateral institutions to stabilise mutual expectations regarding the behaviour of cooperation partners, especially in crisis situations. Ideally, these institutions should promote evidence-based learning, enable political decision-making on collective solutions, and then help with implementation and follow-up. For this to succeed, however, structures and processes intended to lead to decisions must be well-developed, and resources must be made available for them. This is the basic idea behind the “*Fit for Purpose*” discussion that has gained traction within the UN since 2014. This is not necessarily a case of constantly expanding institutions, but also of curbing bureaucratic proliferation and (re-)aligning structures and processes with goals (form follows function).

In 2012, during the Rio+20 conference, member states could not yet agree on a set of SDGs nor on a procedure for follow-up and review, but laid the foundation for one with the decision to establish the *High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development* (HLPF). In 2013, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on its mandate and format, including regular reviews.<sup>31</sup>

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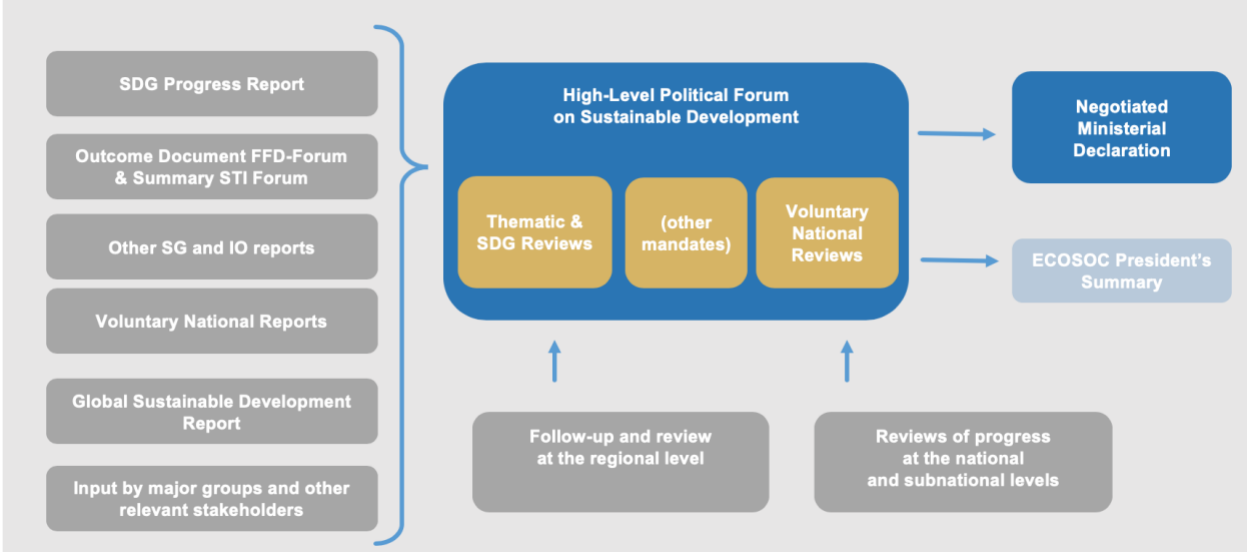
<sup>29</sup> This is the shortened version of SWP Research Paper 9/2018, see <https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/un-reforms-for-the-2030-agenda/>.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1) (New York: UN, October 2015).

<sup>31</sup> UNGA, *Format and Organizational Aspects of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development* (A/RES/67/290) (New York: UN, August 2013).

This mandate was very broadly formulated. And in 2015 the rather complex 2030 Agenda with its 17 goals, 169 targets and more than 320 indicators was adopted. This now determines – and burdens – the annual programme planning. Among other things, various reports are expected to be addressed, such as the Secretary-General’s annual SDG progress report and other reports from the UN system, the regional commissions, reports on the various thematic areas, and reports on financing for development (see Figure 1). The HLPF is also supposed to pay particular attention to regional developments as well as the special needs and concerns of different country groups. This wealth of input and tasks means that reports are usually only taken note of, but that their results are not evaluated or discussed, and no decisions based on them are made.

Figure 1: Extensive Tasks of the HLPF



© 2018 Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP). Chart based on Eleni Dellas, Alexander Carius, Marianne Beisheim, Susan Parnell and Dirk Messner, *Local and Regional Governments in the Follow-up and Review of Global Sustainability Agendas* (Berlin and Brussels: adelphi/Cities Alliance, 2018), 18.

At the same time, political and societal interest in the HLPF is high (see Table 1), as are expectations. The HLPF is thus in danger of falling victim to its own success if it cannot fulfil the high demands with current processes and resources.

*Signs for a growing interest in HLPF*

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Senior Government Representatives*		77	125	
Registered Participants/Stakeholders*	1,500	2,458	2,200	
Reporting Countries (VNRs)	22	43	46	51
Side Events		147	260	

\*Data sets vary and cannot be consistently compared over time.  
*Source: Own compilation using UN-HLPF website*

As early as 2016, UN member states had decided to *review* the “format and organizational aspects” of the HLPF at the 74<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly, “in order to benefit from lessons learned in the first cycle of the forum”.<sup>32</sup> The political will of member states to reform the UN is usually limited to cost-saving – or at least cost-neutral – options, which must additionally be in line with the interests of the respective states. Given that situation, demands for far-reaching reforms that would require a change to the UN Charter, however well they sound, are unlikely to find consensus. In the current political situation it seems more sensible to follow a piecemeal approach, reforming the *working methods* so as to increase their effectiveness and efficiency.

At the same time, all reform efforts should enable the HLPF to best implement the added value of the 2030 Agenda, in particular its focus on transformation, interlinkages (synergies and trade-offs between goals) and policy coherence, as well as accountability to citizens and the principle to “Leave No One Behind”. To this end, the HLPF can and should generate politically relevant results as per its mandate, to provide *policy leadership and guidance* on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This is the central benchmark for evaluating the HLPF’s working methods and practices. How then should the HLPF’s working methods and practices be reformed?

## **UN-HLPF Interim Assessment: Analysis and Recommendations on Working Methods and Practices**

Both the UNGA resolution on the HLPF adopted in 2013 and the 2030 Agenda attribute to the HLPF “a central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review processes”.<sup>33</sup> What working methods and practices are being used to implement this “central role” now, that is three years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs? The working methods and practices of three important building blocks of the HLPF will be analysed below: (1) Thematic and SDG reviews as well as (2) the Voluntary National Reviews are meant to evaluate the implementation status and promote learning processes. The HLPF specifies (3) a Ministerial Declaration as its outcome.

### *Thematic and SDG Reviews: Need More Preparation to Add Value*

The 2030 Agenda mandates the HLPF to hold “thematic reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including cross-cutting issues”.<sup>34</sup> In 2016, member states agreed in a resolution to discuss each year at the HLPF an overarching theme (Thematic Reviews) and to discuss selected SDGs in more detail (SDG Reviews). By the end of the first four-year cycle, all 17 SDGs should have been reviewed “in-depth”, taking into account their “integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature”.<sup>35</sup> This is precisely where the added value of these reviews with the HLPF

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<sup>32</sup> UNGA, *Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the Global Level* (A/RES/70/299), 29 July 2016, para. 21.

<sup>33</sup> UNGA, *2030 Agenda* (see note 2), para. 82.

<sup>34</sup> UNGA, *2030 Agenda* (see note 2), para. 85.

<sup>35</sup> UNGA, *Follow-up and Review* (see note 4), para. 2–5.



could and should lie: a solid and honest analysis of the state of implementation with special attention to the principles of the 2030 Agenda (transformative, integrated, inclusive, etc.), on the basis of which politically relevant recommendations for further implementation can then be generated.

The reality is different. In 2017, three three-hour panels for the Thematic Reviews and one two-hour panel each for the SDG Reviews took place during the first week of the HLPF. In 2018 this was reversed to create more time for SDG reviews. In 2018, UNDESA also tried to give the panels more structural strength. First, a short statistical assessment of each SDG's targets was given. Representatives of member states, international and regional organisations as well as academia and society were asked to focus their panel contributions on country experiences and lessons learned, also discussing synergies and trade-offs among the SDGs and with other SDGs. This was followed by a debate in plenary session (usually very short, for lack of time).

In view of the time pressures, good preparatory and follow-up processes are essential. The 2030 Agenda already provides for the sensible use of existing review procedures (including their reports, data, and analyses).<sup>36</sup> Thematic Reviews will be supported “by reviews by the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums which should reflect the integrated nature of the Goals as well as the interlinkages between them”.<sup>37</sup> To implement this mandate, working groups of the extended Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA Plus, a coordination platform originally used to prepare for the Rio+20 Conference) evaluate the material from the UN system on the SDGs being reviewed. They present the results in short reports (background notes),<sup>38</sup> which are consolidated before the HLPF in an Expert Group Meeting.

However, even experts are unaware of these well-structured background notes, including their references to interlinkages and some recommendations. The HLPF did not work with them on the podiums either in 2017 or in 2018. Yet these papers could help to make discussions more focused and result-oriented. The underlying problem is twofold: first, these papers have no official status; second, UNDESA has no funds to reimburse experts' travel costs to the panels. Those who participate on a self-financed basis come mainly to present the work of their own organisation; however, this is not necessarily what is most needed.

Hence, external communication on these preparatory processes, thorough analysis, and safeguarding of results continue to need improvement. A uniform blueprint for the preparatory processes, however, would not make sense since the framework conditions of the SDG Reviews differ. Nevertheless, DESA should be mandated to develop good practice guidelines for these reviews that are sufficiently flexible and yet establish and further develop minimum standards. For example, the custodian agencies should urge their task teams to publish a roadmap for a preparatory and follow-up process in good time. Reports to the HLPF must be available much earlier. Only then can solid analyses be carried out and relevant national, regional and international actors coordinate and plan their input. Responsibilities should be clear, without creating “silos” or

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<sup>36</sup> UNGA, *2030 Agenda* (see note 2), para. 74f.: The reviews should “build on existing platforms and processes [... and] avoid duplication”.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 85.

<sup>38</sup> See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2018#inputs> (accessed 18 June 2018).

giving priority to securing resources and mandates. Moreover, the UN should strive to include the international financial institutions in a more meaningful way. Since 2010, this has been the task of ECESA Plus. However, this mechanism has so far essentially been limited to an annual briefing and to coordinating individual background papers.

Above all, the Thematic and SDG Reviews should not only present data on the agreed indicators, but must also analyse them. This analysis should focus on relevant interlinkages between goals. Integrated assessments should identify entry points for appropriate and coherent measures in all relevant policy areas. Member states should then discuss recommendations for appropriate action. In principle, member states must consider how they want to work with all these reports on the SDGs more meaningfully within the HLPF framework. For the next four-year cycle (2020–2023), they must also decide how to cluster the goals for the next round of SDGs Reviews and how to best link this to the annual HLPF themes.

### *Voluntary National Reviews: A Good but Insufficient Approach*

The 2030 Agenda encourages member states to conduct *Voluntary National Reviews* (VNRs) as “regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational level” and then report back to the HLPF.<sup>39</sup> These national reviews at the HLPF “shall be voluntary, while encouraging reporting”.<sup>40</sup> From the outset, the idea was to promote national implementation through a bottom-up review process. To this end, the VNRs in the HLPF are to be preceded by national implementation and review processes that fully involve both government and society (whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach). In accordance with the 2030 Agenda’s principle of universality, this is expected of *all* member states. In addition, reviews should also take place at the *regional* level. However, as member states did not agree on the role of the regional forums, they negotiated an individual solution whereby each region should seek an appropriate regional forum.

The fact that these review processes had already been agreed upon with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda has led to the rapid establishment of respective work processes at the national, regional, and global level. This in turn keeps the implementation of the SDGs on the agenda. By the end of the first four-year cycle, 143 member states will have voluntarily reported to the HLPF on how they are implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs at the national level.

Initially, the format of the VNRs was not very well-defined, either for the underlying written reports or for the oral presentations at the HLPF. Shortly after the 2016 HLPF, member states agreed a resolution to clarify the VNR *modalities*.<sup>41</sup> During the debates, some member states questioned much that seemed already to have been settled with the resolution on the HLPF and the 2030 Agenda. The weaknesses of the current follow-up and review mechanism are thus due to political conflict and compromise. The resolution aims at soft learning processes instead of a rigorous review of member states’ implementation and accountability to their citizens (as demanded by most NGOs). In the VNRs, member states are meant to inform each other of successes, challenges, and other lessons learned.

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<sup>39</sup> UNGA, *2030 Agenda* (see note 2), para. 79.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 84.

<sup>41</sup> UNGA, *Follow-up and Review* (see note 4).

Experiences with the VNR format are also expected to generate ideas for new and flexible arrangements for future meetings. The Secretary-General was therefore invited to update his “voluntary common reporting guidelines” for the VNRs on the basis of feedback from member states. For this, UNDESA sends questionnaires to VNR participants after the HLPF and asks for feedback on preparation, guidelines, and presentation format. In general, the resolution calls these guidelines a “suggested tool”,<sup>42</sup> thus reaffirming the *voluntary nature* of everything related to the VNRs.

Meanwhile, UNDESA has put together a rather solid *preparatory process* for the VNRs, including a “Handbook for the preparation of VNRs”. They also updated the guidelines in January 2018. However, the status of these guidelines remains weak. For example, despite clear guidance, the majority of VNRs dealt only with the goals selected for the SDG Reviews. This was never intended. Rather, as the guidelines stipulate, member states are asked to focus on their own national priorities.

In general, there is strong interest in VNRs at the HLPF. So many countries want to present their VNRs that the Secretariat (and, in fact, the HLPF itself in terms of time) is reaching the limits of its capacity (see Table 1). While the demand is encouraging, it results in extremely limited time per country: only 10-15 minutes remain for each country to present its VNR individually or in a panel.

In principle, the idea is that the VNR at the HLPF is only the culmination of a *previous national* implementation and review process. In the 2030 Agenda’s own words, the VNRs should “promote accountability to our citizens”.<sup>43</sup> It is therefore crucial that governments discuss their (draft) reports at the national level first. So far, it is unknown how many did so. In developing countries, UN Country Teams could support such processes. Governments should absolutely not have the reports written by (externally financed) consultants. In New York, government representatives should take the opportunity to share ideas for good implementation measures or ask for support for problems they cannot solve on their own. In part, such input has already inspired mutual learning. For instance, many countries took up the ideas presented during the 2016 VNRs on how newly-created or newly-oriented institutions can guide and coordinate the national implementation of the SDGs. Such learning processes fuel a positive two-level dynamic or a “virtuous circle”: national practices inspire other countries, international feedback inspires future national implementation.

Beyond the lack of time at the HLPF for adequate reporting, the *quality* of both written and oral reports must be improved. Some reports work with the official SDG indicators, others do not. Only very few reports offer an in-depth analysis of the data that goes beyond a descriptive presentation of trends or analyse the causes behind the failures or successes. Hardly any report presents systemic reforms with transformative potential or identifies structural barriers to them. Experts like to point out that the presentations need to be characterised by self-critical reflection and should not be a beauty contest. In fact, most VNR presentations focus on development successes. So far, it has been mostly the least developed countries that have presented their challenges. Many presentations are rather technical and avoid politically controversial subjects. For example, neither Turkey nor

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., para. 9.

<sup>43</sup> UNGA, *2030 Agenda* (see note 2), para. 73.

Egypt nor Venezuela addressed the acute political tensions in their countries during their VNR presentations.

The *interactive debate* that follows the VNR presentations suffers from several problems. First, despite the specified deadline, written VNR reports are always submitted very late, if at all. This makes it difficult for other HLPF participants to prepare for substantive discussion. Moreover, many reports are only available in the respective national language. Second, the total debating time of 15 minutes per VNR, each with one to two-minute contributions, is too short for more complex reasoning. Third, de facto there has been little substantial feedback from member states to date. State representatives sitting in the plenary session (or not even doing that) were only moderately interested. Too many other parallel meetings, including of the ministers or secretaries of state present, seem to siphon off attention. Thus, many seats are filled by delegation members who do not have a mandate to speak to some VNRs. In 2017 and 2018, there were no contributions at all from the member states. Only the Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) raised tough questions on human rights violations or bad governance.

The *participation of societal groups* is primarily organised through these MGoS. In 2017, they created a complex coordination mechanism for preparing the HLPF and involving as many local groups as possible. The main focus of this work is on the written and oral comments during the HLPF. In 2018, they collected and presented substantial contributions on the VNRs. These need to be coordinated in an elaborate process, since there is only time in each panel for a maximum of one or two statements (of one to two minutes each). This comes at the expense of the depth and quality of the contributions. For the HLPF-VNRs, it has become the custom that questions have to be submitted beforehand. While this may be useful for preparing answers, it should not be possible for member states to reject these questions in advance. Usually, the chairs and moderators of the meetings decide whom they call; they should be briefed to be aware of the participation rights of MGoS. At any rate, to date the HLPF-VNRs have not made countries justify themselves as “duty bearers” before their citizens as “rights holders” (as in the reviews of the UN Human Rights Council) – but then that was neither their mandate, nor is it to be expected in the near future. Nevertheless, parallel or shadow reports as well as of other comments by societal actors on the VNR reports should be bundled and made accessible online. MGoS formulate also other far-reaching demands for their future participation in the HLPF.<sup>44</sup>

After the comments and questions on the VNRs, the *responses* of the reporting countries are kept very short due to time constraints. Hence, they are also not likely to interest other member states in mutual learning as intended. In 2017, obviously prepared statements were occasionally read out in place of answers – fortunately no occurrences were observed in 2018. Some countries ignored critical questions from civil society.

Where reforms are concerned, consideration should be given to how the debate could be *better prepared*. So far, lead discussants have only been used for the VNR panel presentations, not the individual presentations; their contributions contained solid feedback on the VNRs. One possibility would be to ask two- or three-member states to help prepare the interactive debate by actively collecting and processing comments. They should also include shadow reports or parallel

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<sup>44</sup> MGoS HLPF/Coordination Mechanism/Steering Group, ed., *MGoS Priority Recommendations for Strengthening the HLPF* (New York, March 2017).

reports by civil society in preparing for the discussion. For example, for the Universal Periodic Reviews at the UN Human Rights Council, the Secretariat prepares a “Summary of Stakeholders’ Information” for each country. Such a document could then be used by member states to prepare the interactive debate of VNRs at the HLPF. However, this would have to be mandated and Secretariat capacities would need to be increased.

In general, less would be more. To focus discussions more on mutual learning processes, presenting states should be asked to outline transformative implementation measures proven to be successful that could inspire other states. They should also highlight particular challenges where they are politically ready to take action but need the support of partners. Thereafter, UNDESA could connect or twin states with partners so as to match demand and supply, for example as regards policy ideas, technologies, financing, or investments. The UN system should also take up the information and adapt its support measures accordingly.

Such a targeted *follow-up of the VNRs* is still lacking. The annual UNDESA “Synthesis Report” is helpful for a cross-country overview of the VNRs.<sup>45</sup> However, there is no explicit mandate and no reliable financing for them. Moreover, the Secretariat, being committed to political neutrality, cannot publish unduly critical analyses. NGO alliances are much more sceptical in their analyses of the VNR reports.<sup>46</sup> All these analyses increase the VNRs’ visibility, which could help them to be taken more seriously in future. But their potential for implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs can only be increased if VNR results can be worked on in a more systematic and politically visible way. There is a lack of mandates and resources for this.

#### *The Ministerial Declaration – without HLPF Results*

At the end of the HLPF, which meets annually in July under the auspices of ECOSOC, the member states adopt the Ministerial Declaration, first by acclamation at the end of the HLPF (for the first time by vote in 2018), and then again formally on the following day as part of the ECOSOC President’s report to the ECOSOC High-Level Segment.

One problem is that the Ministerial Declaration is already being negotiated *before* the HLPF (usually in June). In other words, it cannot present any HLPF results and incorporates hardly any analysis from the thematic, national, or regional learning processes. Consequently, it is not very action-oriented and does not provide the *political leadership and guidance* for further implementation that is expected from the HLPF according to its mandate.

In addition, the Minister Declaration is negotiated intergovernmentally. Non-state actors can be involved only if the two facilitators (two UN ambassadors who organise the negotiations at the

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<sup>45</sup> UNDESA/DSD, *2017 Voluntary National Reviews. Synthesis Report* (February 2018), [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17109Synthesis\\_Report\\_VNRs\\_2017.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/17109Synthesis_Report_VNRs_2017.pdf) (accessed 18 June 2018).

<sup>46</sup> The *Spotlight Report* (2016 and 2017) of the *Civil Society Reflection Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the report *Progressing National SDGs Implementation. An Independent Assessment of the VNR Reports Submitted to the UN HLPF in 2017*, published in 2018 by the *Canadian Council for International Co-operation*.

invitation of the President of the General Assembly) support this and no member state objects. Even then, only a few New York based NGO representatives participate in these negotiations.

However, the disappointing outcome document is not only due to the unfortunate timing of the negotiations, but also to a politically difficult situation. The Ministerial Declaration negotiated at the UN's New York headquarters reflects the lines of conflict there. It is currently almost impossible to go beyond the agreed contents of the 2030 Agenda – it is enough of a struggle to preserve them. This relates, for example, to the sections on means of implementation, where debates between North and South are rekindled. Other contentious issues that have hampered consensus in recent years are women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and now also the multilateral trade and climate regime. Last but not least, the wording on the right to self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation has been an issue in every final plenary. In 2018, the US requested a recorded vote on the document as a whole – which meant that for the first time the Ministerial Declaration was not adopted by consensus, as the US and Israel voted against it.

To summarise, the added value of the document is currently limited, since it only takes stock of trends and challenges and lists very general commitments. Moreover, the conflicts mean that, in the best case, agreed wording from older documents is merely repeated. In contrast, the *Summary* prepared by the ECOSOC President following the HLPF takes up the HLPF results and also presents recommendations from the meetings. However, there is only a weak mandate for this document; it has therefore hardly any official political significance. Even the Ministerial Declaration has no direct or binding effect: since the HLPF has no decision-making powers of its own, the document goes via ECOSOC to the General Assembly. Nevertheless, pragmatists point out that it is important to maintain a negotiated ministerial declaration so that high-ranking politicians come to New York. But they should then also be able to make forward-looking policy recommendations. As it stands, during the general debate, their microphone is turned off after a few minutes, and their contributions no longer influence the final document. Neither helps to increase their political interest in the HLPF. It remains to be seen to what extent this will be the case with the concise “Political Declaration”, to be adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the HLPF in September 2019 under the auspices of the General Assembly. Also relevant in this context: for the eight-day HLPF to be held in July 2019, no Ministerial Declaration is to be negotiated, meaning that it is currently completely open how the results of this meeting will be documented.

Ultimately, this is where the basic conflict over the importance of the HLPF resurges, which already burdened the negotiations on its mandate in 2012–2013: should the HLPF merely be a “platform” for non-binding intergovernmental exchange, at the end of which a negotiated document is adopted by consensus, or should it be a high-level forum (with universal membership) that takes relevant decisions on the future course of action?

## Looking Ahead: Pro-Actively Shaping UN Reforms

### *General Recommendations for the HLPF Review 2019–20*

The HLPF was established in 2013, two years before the 2030 Agenda was adopted. As a result, its working methods and practices cannot match the level of ambition of the 2030 Agenda. In general, member states must decide whether they want to *expand* the currently overloaded HLPF (for example with more days for meetings) or *streamline* its mandate. Unfortunately, member states tend to want ever more with (even) fewer resources. Ultimately, this leaves everyone dissatisfied. The HLPF can only gain political significance if it is mandated to take *relevant decisions* and give *policy guidance*. Only then will high-ranking politicians develop an interest in participating. For this, the format of the two-day HLPF under the auspices of the General Assembly must likewise be reconsidered. It would be important to prepare the outcome document of that summit – the mandated “Political Declaration” – in such a way as to provide effective political guidance for the further implementation of the 2030 agenda.

Concrete reform ideas have already been presented on important HLPF building blocks – the Thematic and SDG Reviews, VNRs, and the participation of non-governmental actors and scientists. From the outset, there was a consensus that the HLPF should not duplicate existing multilateral processes on the topics of individual SDGs. Instead, the forum should build on them, foregrounding the principles of the 2030 Agenda (transformation, integration, inclusiveness). For this to succeed, data, trends and policies from relevant sectoral processes must be evaluated and analysed sufficiently *early in the run-up* to the HLPF. This would at least provide a basis (although not a guarantee) for high-level representatives of the Member States to discuss policy recommendations during the HLPF and, at best, also mandate and resource their implementation. In the empirical analysis of the HLPF’s current working methods and practices, it became clear that it is precisely these *preparatory and follow-up processes* that are lacking. Relevant reports must be available significantly earlier in the year so that they can be taken up by the delegates before negotiations on the HLPF Ministerial Declaration begin. “Reports” are not “reviews” – the latter require evaluation and analysis. More time and resources are needed for that. Here, it is helpful that the latest resolution on the ECOSOC review has called on the UN Secretariat to adjust the ECOSOC calendar and the reporting arrangements of its subsidiary bodies.<sup>47</sup> UNDESA’s capacity must also be strengthened so that incoming reports can be better synthesised and results communicated more effectively. The preparatory processes and their results should be communicated more intensively and transparently to the outside world. Moreover, the national teams preparing the HLPF should be strengthened. They should also be involved more in negotiating the Ministerial Declaration. It is not helpful if only representatives from the New York UN missions negotiate, because then the usual conflicts tend to dominate.

The drafting of the HLPF’s programme could be supported by an “Advisory Programme Committee” that for example could assist the search for suitable panellists. The moderators of the HLPF panels should insist that invited panellists take note of all relevant reports to the HLPF and formulate policy-relevant recommendations based on them (rather than merely represent their own

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<sup>47</sup> UNGA, *Review of the Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 68/1 on the Strengthening of the Economic and Social Council (A/RES/72/305)* (New York: UN, 25 July 2018), para. 31.

topics and interests). These recommendations should be based on the overarching principles of the 2030 Agenda.

Beyond that, member states could also decide to hold a one-week preparatory meeting in late May.<sup>48</sup> By then, the Secretary-General's SDG report, the reports from the UN system, the synthesis reports for the SDG reviews, and VNR reports (or at least the so-called "main messages") should be available. Such an *HLPF Spring Meeting* could then hold the Thematic and SDG reviews. Results could feed into the negotiations on the Ministerial Declaration in June, which on this basis could and should contain more substantial recommendations. In July, these recommendations should be discussed at ministerial level during the three-day high-level segment of the HLPF. To make more time for this, the VNRs that are not presented by heads of state and government or ministers could be moved to the other HLPF days.

To summarise, member states should mandate and enable the UN to organise processes *earlier and more transparent, integrated and analytical* when it comes to the preparation and then follow up of the HLPF's building blocks and corresponding results. If member states cannot bring themselves to relieve the Secretariat and the ECOSOC agenda by giving up historically outdated mandates, then they will have to make new additional resources available for this. Finally, it should also be transparent how the results of the HLPF are subsequently implemented.

### *Building the Political Will for Reform*

The existing political momentum for an ambitious reform of the HLPF should be further expanded. With regard to the HLPF, the *ECOSOC Review* is of particular importance. In 2013, the General Assembly adopted reforms to the functioning of the Economic and Social Council. Since then, the cycle of ECOSOC meetings has been running from July to July. Since 2016, the annual topics of ECOSOC and HLPF have been coordinated with reference to the 2030 Agenda. Since 2017, the last day of the ECOSOC High Level Segment has been directly connected to the HLPF and was used for the first time in 2018 to discuss trends and scenarios. In July 2018, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on further reforms.<sup>49</sup> From now on, the one-day Integration Segment of ECOSOC will be held directly before the HLPF to process the input from member states, the UN system, and other relevant stakeholders; develop action-oriented recommendations for follow-up and feed into the ensuing HLPF. How this is to be achieved within the framework of a single day is unclear. However, it will be tested in 2019 and then reviewed at the 74<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly as part of the broader review of Council segments and meetings, along with the format of the HLPF.

These and other UN reform processes create a momentum that interested member states should use to tackle the HLPF Review, planned for 2019–20, with real commitment. For example, Sweden, Germany, and others could revitalise the 2015 "High-Level Group" in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda - now together with other heads of state and government. In Europe, interested parties might include the Nordic countries (especially Denmark, Finland,

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<sup>48</sup> To avoid the usual dispute over the number of meeting days, the preparatory week could use three days of the HLPF, plus one day each of the ECOSOC *Integration Segment* and the *Development Cooperation Forum*. The HLPF in July would then comprise only five days instead of eight.

<sup>49</sup> UNGA, *Review of the Implementation of General Assembly Resolution 68/1* (see note 19), para 11.



Sweden, Norway), France (VNR and G7 Presidency in 2019), the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland. International partners could be Colombia (as initiator of the SDGs), Ecuador (Presidency of the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly), Republic of Korea (Co-Chair Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (ECOSOC Presidency), and other small island developing states (SIDS).

Such a group could try to convince the General Assembly to call on the Secretary-General to present a report no later than early 2020 setting out options for HLPF reform based on the experience of the first four-year cycle (see Chart 2). To prepare for this, the Group could provide resources with the help of which the Secretary-General could appoint a small expert panel to develop options for reforms, consult widely with member states and stakeholders on this, and present results in autumn 2019. A first interim report from the expert panel could already inform the negotiations on the Political Declaration for the HLPF Summit of Heads of State and Government in September 2019. Intergovernmental negotiations could begin in spring 2020, and the agreed reforms could be adopted at the latest in the context of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN.

## **How to address interlinkages among the Sustainable Development Goals in the HLPF?** *Summary of Discussion*

*The paper aims to stimulate informal discussions on how the high-level political forum (HLPF) could in the future help Member States and the international community address the integrated nature of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), based on the experience of the first cycle of review of the 2030 Agenda. The paper briefly presents recent evolutions in the understanding of interlinkages among sustainable development issues. It then reflects on policy integration at the national level in the context of the SDGs, as observed since their adoption. The paper examines how the dimension of integration has been covered in the HLPF so far. Finally, some considerations are provided on possible ways in which integration could be addressed more prominently in future review cycles of the 2030 Agenda.*

### **1. Introduction**

Awareness of the interdependence among sustainable development issues, and associated synergies and trade-offs among development objectives, is not new. The need for policy coherence was already emphasized in Agenda 21 in 1992. Yet in practice, achieving policy integration has remained elusive. The 2030 Agenda and the sustainable development goals (SDGs) have put a renewed focus on policy integration. This has resulted in greater political salience of the concept, especially at the national level, as witnessed by countries' current efforts to implement the SDGs (UN, 2018). At the same time, fostering policy integration in practice has always been difficult, and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda by itself does not change that fact.

In this context, this paper asks how the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF), as the follow-up and review mechanism for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, can support individual Member States and the international community in their efforts to promote policy integration. In keeping with the objectives of the meeting for which this paper was written, the analysis presented here is not exhaustive in any sense. In particular, for lack of space, the paper does not present a comprehensive list of references. The aim is to stimulate informal discussions among Member States and non-State stakeholders as they reflect on how to adjust the HLPF in order to enhance its effectiveness as a follow-up and review and agenda-setting mechanism for the Agenda and the SDGs over the next 12 years.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 briefly describes select recent evolutions in the understanding of interlinkages among sustainable development issues. A second section reflects on policy integration at the national level in the context of the SDGs, as observed since their adoption. Section 4 examines how the dimension of integration has been covered in the HLPF so far. In section 5, some considerations are provided on possible ways in which integration could be addressed more prominently in future review cycles of the 2030 Agenda.

### **2. Understanding of the interlinkages among the SDGs: some glimpses of the current landscape**

The Earth Summit in 1992 had introduced national sustainable development strategies (NSDS) as vehicles for constructing coherent and shared visions and pathways to sustainable

societies. Successive international documents produced by the conferences that followed Rio even included targets for adoption of NSDS by all countries by a certain date. NSDS were also mandated in the European Union and its members. However, for various reasons, these strategies were never able to achieve the objective of policy integration by themselves (see for example Nordbeck and Steurer, 2016 and Candel, 2017).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, empirical work on interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs among sectors was developing quite rapidly, spurred by practical problems on the ground as well as interest from policy communities. One area that has seen consistent progress in the matter is the so-called “CLEW nexus” or “food nexus”, which focuses on interactions between agriculture and food, land, energy and climate change (Bazilian et al., 2011). Policy and modeling work in this area was feeding and benefiting from international conferences organized on the topic, in particular a conference organized in Bonn in 2011 at a time when countries were preparing for the Rio+20 conference.

As documented elsewhere (Dodds et al., 2014), integration and interlinkages were a constant thread in the intergovernmental negotiations of the sustainable development goals. Interlinkages are apparent in the final formulation of the SDG targets themselves. Perhaps because of this, since 2015, research on interlinkages has been mushrooming, going from reviews of the scientific literature (e.g. ICSU and ISSC, 2015; ICSU, 2016; UN, 2015, 2016) to modelling to awareness raising and visualization tools to the search for indicators that would reflect the interlinked nature of the Agenda. Individual academics, large research programs, think tanks, and international organisations have contributed to this effort. Many conferences and events in turn have entertained interactions between policy-makers and scientists on nexus issues, with some of them focusing explicitly on feeding the political process of follow-up and review of the SDGs at the UN.

Lastly, there have been efforts by international organizations to apply the methodologies and insights from this body of research to capacity development and technical assistance on the ground. Examples include the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Policy coherence was strongly emphasized in the interim reference guide to UN country teams produced by the UN Development Group in 2015 on “mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda”.

In the face of these positive developments, the casual observer may wonder what the impacts in terms of policy integration will be. One question that arises is to what extent the impetus in the science community to study interlinkages does materialize in policy. Current research has focused on interlinkages among issues, much less on how to address them in practice. Institutional aspects of integration are not covered in much details by academic research concerned with the SDGs, even though they are the ones that matter most in practice.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> For example, in a prominent article on integration for the SDGs written by leading scientists, recommendations in relation to institutions were limited to the following two: (i) Integrated sustainable development plans that enforce linkages among fragmented sectors and promote policy coherence; and (ii) political leadership on sustainable development at the highest levels of government, for example in a dedicated powerful ministry or the executive branch. See Stafford-Smith et al. (2016).

Prominent academic research reports produced in this context have focused on the global level, whereas the national level is where much of the needs for policy integration are. Yet the relative importance of interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs depend on the national context (development stage, geography, structure of the economy, legal framework, etc.). Costs and benefits of integration and the trade-offs between those are also largely context-dependent and not well understood. While reviews at the HLPF and work on policy coherence by influential organizations such as OECD have zoomed in on systemic level (cross-sectoral) mechanisms for coordination, one feels that the lessons from decades of integrative arrangements at the sector level (for example for water, conservation, oceans, etc.) have not yet been capitalized on. Similarly, there seem to be few systematic reviews of existing legal and regulatory frameworks as they apply to policy coherence in specific sectors or nexuses. There are, of course, exceptions, some of which provide interesting models for replication. Among many, one can mention a review on SDG target 2.4 undertaken by Brazil's supreme audit institution (TCU, 2018); work done in Sri Lanka to systematically map the mandates of individual public institutions to the SDG targets (De Zoysa, 2017); and work done by many supreme audit institutions across the world in the context of audits of preparedness of governments to implement the SDGs (UNDESA, 2018b). In sum, institutional aspects of integration seem to be the weak link in the knowledge body that has been fast accumulating.

### **3. Policy integration in the context of the SDGs: current efforts at the national level**

Based on the information that is flowing from the country level, integration has been taken seriously by governments as they try to implement the SDGs. Some of these efforts are documented in voluntary national reviews (VNRs) presented by countries at the HLPF each year, as well as in other publications (UNDESA, 2017, 2018a, 2018c; OECD, 2017). As mentioned above, supreme audit institutions have started to bring light on these efforts, as they have progressed in auditing government preparedness to implement the SDGs. Integration is part of the institutional issues they consider in these audits, which also look at means of implementation and monitoring and evaluation).

Many countries have tried to enhance horizontal integration by putting in place coordinating structures or mechanisms at the systemic level. Efforts to enhance vertical integration for the SDGs have taken a wide variety of forms. Engagement of non-State actors in SDG implementation is also an area of active experimentation (UN, 2018; UNDESA, 2018a). Yet, because integration is difficult to measure and has to be balanced in terms of costs and benefits in specific contexts, promising examples have not so far been translated into systematic evidence of "success". Available evidence does seem to point to robust elements of enabling environments for integration, for example, supporting planning and budget processes. But more research is needed in this area.

Pending detailed investigation, it does not seem that the adoption of the Agenda has spurred comparable discussions on the need for integration at the global level (for example, between the trade and environment legal regimes).

### **4. How has integration been featured at the HLPF since 2015?**

When discussing how integration is featured at HLPF, it is convenient to distinguish three geographical levels that are singled out in the follow-up and review part of the 2030 Agenda: global, regional and national. Another distinction that I use here is between the inputs that come to the HLPF; the HLPF meeting proper; and its outcomes. The discussion in this section is organized along these categories.

### ***Global level***

Inputs to the HLPF are many. However, in terms of mandated analytical inputs, the 2030 Agenda singles out only two: the annual SDG progress report, and the quadrennial Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR). The SDG progress report is organized by SDG around the global indicators, and does not address synergies and trade-offs. Pilot editions of the GSDR (UN, 2015, 2016) featured integration prominently; they were discussed in dedicated science-policy sessions of HLPF in 2015 and 2016, which therefore provided a space for discussions on integration. The consideration of interlinkages, synergies and trade-offs is a work track of the ongoing edition of the GSDR, to be published in 2019. Yet, it is unclear how the content of the GSDR will feed into the HLPF.

In addition to official inputs, integration was also discussed in informal settings, such as dedicated expert meetings organized by UN organizations in preparation for HLPF (e.g. one meeting held in Vienna in December 2016 organised by UNDESA). In 2018, so-called “VNR labs” were organized in the margins of official sessions of the HLPF, one of which was on integration. The labs provided informal spaces where countries could share their experiences with like-minded peers and non-governmental experts.

Looking at the HLPF meetings since 2015, integration was little discussed, even though some of the sessions in which individual SDGs were reviewed did cover interlinkages with other goals (for example, when discussing food security and oceans).

Finally, in terms of outcomes, integration was not covered in any detail in the ministerial declarations that came out of the HLPF meetings under the auspices of ECOSOC. It is unclear if and how integration will be touched upon in the declaration of the HLPF in 2019.

### ***Regional level***

Integration does not seem to be a main feature of any of the regional forums on sustainable development that are organised each year before the HLPF in the five regions. As an indicator of this, the reports from these meetings, which are official inputs to the HLPF, contain hardly any mention of the words “policy integration” and “coherence”.

### ***National level***

The national level is the one at which issues of policy integration seem to have received the most attention in preparations for the HLPF. Integration is covered to some extent in VNRs (UNDESA, 2017, 2018c), perhaps helped by the fact that integration was one of the categories of the voluntary guidelines for national reviews proposed by the UN Secretary-General in January

2016. However, the HLPF proper featured no time for an exchange of experiences among reporting countries, on integration or any other issues.

In sum, integration, while not totally absent, has occupied a marginal space in the HLPF, be it in terms of inputs, content of the meeting, and outcomes. Echoing this conclusion, academics have noted that “there is barely any discussion about how the accountability regime(s) should be designed to support the integrative nature of the SDGs among the various proposals for its designs by scholars and NGOs” (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen et al., 2018).

To some extent, the little time devoted to discuss integration is a logical result of the general parameters of HLPF (see other chapters in this book), especially in terms of mandated inputs, duration of the meeting itself, and intergovernmental outcomes.

## **5. Could the HLPF do more to promote integration, and if so, how?**

Arguably, given the importance of integration at all levels for the success of Agenda 2030, and the importance that countries have put on it as they started implementing the SDGs, integration should be an important consideration of the follow-up and review of the 2030 agenda, and hence of the HLPF.

The extent to which this can happen depends very much on the general parameters of the HLPF and the follow-up and review system for the 2030 Agenda, as currently defined by General Assembly resolutions 67/290 and 70/299 and by the Agenda itself. If those stay the same, there is little scope for doing more. For example, at the international level, the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC has not so far been used to set in motion new tracks of intergovernmental discussions on global issues of concern for integration (for example, reviews of international law in different fields to make them more compatible among them and with the SDGs). Going to the national level, the main value that UN meetings could bring is to provide a venue for countries to exchange experiences on what institutional and policy approaches work for integration. But without more time to discuss, this will not happen at the HLPF, as it would come at the expense of something else.

Below are a few proposals for HLPF to foster enhanced take-up of integration at different levels. I start by looking at proposals in relation to the HLPF itself. I then look at preparatory processes. Finally, I consider the “outside world”.

### ***At High Level Political Forum***

The following suggestions could marginally increase the coverage of integration at the HLPF. I distinguish those that would require legislative changes in order to be implemented from those that could be accommodated within existing parameters and rules.

A first idea would be to include in the mandated documentation for the HLPF a report that focuses on interlinkages and integration. This would require legislative changes. There used to be such a report in the context of the Commission on Sustainable Development, the predecessor of the HLPF. To be tractable and avoid repetitions from one year to the next, the report could

focus on interlinkages among the SDGs being reviewed each year. For a start, such a report could use the existing global indicators but provide an interpretation of the trends that goes beyond an SDG-by-SDG narrative, as is currently done in the SDG progress report.

In the absence of additional mandated documentation for the HLPF, an avenue for documenting progress on integration would be through the report of the inter-agency tasks force (IATF) on financing for development, which is an annual mandated report under the follow-up process of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA). SDG 17 (means of implementation) is supposed to be reviewed each year at HLPF, and the main analytical input for this is the report of the IATF. Target 17.14 under this goal is about policy coherence for sustainable development. However, so far the IATF report has not covered policy coherence.

In the long term, it could be worth adding a component on integration in the set of global indicators for the SDGs. It is quite clear, and it has been pointed out by scientists, that monitoring progress on the Agenda based on strictly sectoral indicators (e.g., SDG by SDG and target by target) may work at cross-purpose with integration objectives. However, given the sensitivity and ponderousness of the process of definition of the global indicators, and the amount of work remaining to be done to bring all current indicators to an operational stage, this would take a long time to materialize. Given that the SDG indicators are intergovernmentally agreed, such a move would be definition require legislative changes. On the positive side, because of pre-existing work on integrated indicators done inter alia by UNEP, such work would not need to start from zero.

Turning to the HLPF meeting itself, it may be possible within current time constraints to each year carve a space for a session on interlinkages during the first week of HLPF, focused on the SDGs being reviewed review that year. This would require no legislative changes. By contrast, providing more time for discussion on integration among countries presenting voluntary reviews would require legislative changes.

Finally, in order to address integration meaningfully in the outcomes of the HLPF, it would be important to ensure that the conclusions of the GSDR on how to address synergies and trade-offs are taken up by the ministerial declaration that comes out of the HLPF under the auspices of the General Assembly every four years. Absent this, and given that annual meetings of the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC do not really play an agenda-setting role, little is likely to emerge from the HLPF (in either configuration) in terms of policy guidance for integration, and crucially so for issues that would genuinely require cooperation among Member States.

### ***Around the HLPF***

In order to increase the coverage of integration around the HLPF, a first suggestion would be to beef up the “integration lab” organized in the margins of the official meeting, giving it more time and structuring it in a way that encourage workshop-like discussions, enticing Member States that have put in place mechanisms and policies that they consider successful to share those. Alternatively, sharing of experiences may happen in informal expert meetings organized pre-HLPF and focused on integration among the SDGs considered each year, using previous

experiences in this area as templates. During the HLPF, side events can also foster dialogue among governments and other stakeholders on integration.

### ***Outside the HLPF***

Perhaps the more promising leads for featuring integration more in the context of the follow-up of the SDGs are to be found outside the HLPF proper. The HLPF, in its agenda-setting function, could encourage them through its ministerial declaration, in the model of what other groupings (e.g. G20) often do.

A first type of initiatives that hold promise are intergovernmental implementation conferences on specific SDGs, such as the Ocean Conference organized in 2017. Discussions on interlinkages in those contexts (for example, on the blue economy around the Ocean Conference) allow all stakeholders to look at SDGs in an integrated way. Because of their narrower scope, they enable more concrete and policy-relevant discussions than those held in the context of the whole set of SDGs; they stimulate analytical and policy inputs; and they can provide support and encouragement to countries to develop more integrated approaches.

Relatively similar in approach but much less costly and cumbersome to organize are conferences focusing on a specific nexus of issues (the food-energy-climate nexus mentioned above is an example, but there are many others that would deserve similar treatment), which aim to create a space for dialogue among scientists, policy makers, and major groups. In order to really push the envelope in terms of integrated approaches though, nexus conferences would have to be organized in a way that avoids the sectoral silos (e.g., one day on food, one day on energy and one day on climate) and forces sectoral experts to come out of their comfort zone and consider integration in practice. One way to do this may be to focus the sessions of the conference on cross-cutting tools and instruments (e.g. integrated planning processes, budget processes, institutional setups, financing, and how to measure success in integration).

The HLPF could also encourage efforts by international organisations, research programmes and think tanks to measure progress on integration, for example through joint modelling efforts, policy forums, development of (non official) indicators and analytical frameworks that look at integration as opposed to progress on individual SDGs.

Ultimately, the take-up of these or other suggestions will depend on the appetite of UN Member States for providing the HLPF with the means to play a real agenda-setting role (as was envisioned in the Rio+20 outcome document). The HLPF under the auspices of the General Assembly in 2019 will be revealing in this regard, as it will be the first time that Member States gathered at the highest level will have to react to the evidence on progress on the whole set of SDGs. The summit will reveal how far they will allow the evidence to feed back into policy adjustments across the range of issues that the Agenda covers, and this may define the clout and role of the HLPF for years to come.

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# **What is the Role of National Multi-Stakeholder Platforms in Advancing the 2030 Agenda, and How Can They Be Best Encouraged and Supported?**

By: Charles Nouhan, Derek Osborn, Jack Cornforth, and Farooq Ullah

## **Introduction**

Over the course of the past 25 years, many countries have set up National Councils for Sustainable Development (NCSDs) or other bodies serving a similar purpose: to further sustainable development at the national level. NCSDs can play a valuable part in several different ways. Over the long-term, by maintaining a consistent focus on the wide-ranging challenges of sustainable development NCSDs can help Governments and other parts of society to keep the longer goals of sustainability steadily in view. This can lessen the danger of those longer-term requirements being over-shadowed or over-looked by politicians and other leaders as they wrestle with the many shorter-term preoccupations and challenges that confront them from day-to-day.

By being comprehensive and by ensuring broad participation, NCSDs can help to maintain an extensive overview of the whole of sustainability and the need for coherent integrated policies that transcend the narrower perspectives of individual departments and sectors concentrating on one subject at a time. They can help to avoid silo-thinking and the capture of particular policy areas by sectoral interests. With broad participation, NCSDs can help to build alliances and partnerships between all the different sectors of society that need to be involved in the quest for sustainability. This can lessen the danger of treating the subject of sustainability as one that can be handled solely by top-down Government-led policies.

Lastly, by employing a strategic approach NCSDs have often been used to engage a wide range of stakeholders in the process of creating national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs). National Councils have often then been involved in the implementation, monitoring and review of these strategies, as well as advising on new and emerging sustainability challenges.

NCSDs have not however been universally adopted by countries as a means of promoting sustainable development. But several of the countries that have made the most progress on sustainable development have found that NCSDs have played a valuable part in achieving this progress. Conversely, where countries have discontinued their NCSDs this has often coincided with a marked decline in political ambition to achieve more sustainable patterns of development.

It, therefore, seems appropriate to examine the experience of NCSDs and the part they have played in those countries which have established them. Different countries have established councils in different ways, with different types of membership, different mandates, different modes of operation and different levels of resources. Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future (SF) has endeavored to keep in touch with this diverse experience throughout the world and to analyze what appear to be some of the critical success factors. This chapter summarises the results of that work.

## **History of NCSDs**

The first wave of NCSDs was created around the time of the first Earth Summit in Rio de

Janeiro in 1992, in the worldwide surge of enthusiasm for sustainable development that followed that summit. Many of the national councils established at that time were particularly charged to help with the creation of the first round of national sustainable development strategies, called for by the Earth Summit. The 2002 Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development reinvigorated this global movement and was associated with the creation of a further wave of national strategies and national sustainable development councils.

That new momentum was however short-lived, and the beginning of the 21st century saw the cause of sustainable development lose momentum at both the international and national levels. Political attention shifted to security issues following September 11, 2001, and other terrorist attacks, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The global economic crisis of 2008 and the emergency measures that followed represented a further setback for the cause of sustainable development.

However, in the face of worsening environmental, social and economic circumstances, the Earth Summit 2012 (Rio+20) made a determined effort to put sustainable development back on the agenda. In particular, Rio+20 launched a process to establish a new set of universal Sustainable Development Goals, the SDGs, later adopted by Heads of State and Governments at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015 as the organization celebrated its seventieth anniversary. These new goals form a core part of the 2030 Agenda adopted at that meeting, formally known as ‘Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.’

### **Redefining NCSDs after Rio+20**

In addition to the momentum that led to the 2030 Agenda, the Rio+20 Outcome Document called on countries to ‘...strengthen national, subnational and/or local institutions or relevant multi-stakeholder bodies and processes, dealing with sustainable development.’ As this new agenda emerged it became increasingly important to also discuss the means for its implementation and monitoring, as well as to increase political momentum for sustainable development transition at the country level. It was thought that national sustainable development strategies, in one form or another, would need to be revised or recreated to include new national targets and indicators as part of this new global goals framework. And bodies such as NCSDs would again be needed to assist in the development and review of such strategies to provide an important channel for communication and partnership building between stakeholders and national-level decision-makers.

In order to assist this process in April 2012 SF, in partnership with the German Council for Sustainable Development and support from the Government of Finland, launched a Global Network of National Councils for Sustainable Development and Similar Bodies (GN-NCSDs) (Note 2). It aimed to strengthen national councils and support them in engendering sustainable development at the domestic level and was open to multi-stakeholder bodies set up by Governments as councils or other government-related bodies working on issues of sustainable development. To support this work SF undertook a survey of all the NCSDs operating in 2014. The contents of this chapter are largely based on the results of that survey and its subsequent analysis.

## **The current state of NCSDs**

When the initial research for this chapter was conducted in 2014, fifty-four councils were registered on the Global Network. The German Council for Sustainable Development (Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung, or RNE) is a good example of a long-established and successful NCSD. Established by the German government in 2001, the primary tasks of the RNE are the development of contributions for the implementation of the German Sustainability Strategy, the identification of concrete fields of action and projects, and making sustainability an important public concern. The RNE's broad remit is well-illustrated by the list of projects outlined on its website (Note 3). Ranging from educational competitions to public lectures on sustainability, and including initiatives like the sustainable shopping cart to regional networks for sustainability strategies, two key lessons from the RNE example are the need for considerable resources and expertise to deliver such a national program and, in particular, the political will required to maintain such continuity.

Estonia is another country that has benefitted from a long-established and successful NCSD. The Government of the Republic of Estonia established its Commission for Sustainable Development in 1996, reforming it in 2009 so that its members would include only NGOs (Note 4). The Commission supervised the development of the Estonian National Strategy on Sustainable Development, Sustainable Estonia 21, approved by the Estonian Parliament (Riigikogu) in 2005, wherein its principal aim was and remains to combine the requirements for success arising from global competition with the preservation of the sustainable development principles and Estonia's traditional values. Today, the Commission continues to inform the Estonian government on the country's progress toward sustainability, most notably with its contribution to the Estonian Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the implementation of Agenda 2030 at the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development 2016.

Other NCSDs have been more vulnerable to political changes. In the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, for example, a well-funded independent Sustainable Development Commission, SDC, was established in 2000 as the Government's independent adviser on sustainable development. It worked for 10 years to help decision-makers and advisors embed sustainable development as the operating system of choice in the four Governments of the UK. But when a new government was formed in May 2010, it chose to dissolve the SDC in favor of giving responsibility to its four governments, with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) committed to taking on the SDC's stakeholder engagement function for the government in London. Sustainable development has subsequently been given a much lower priority in UK policy-making.

In order therefore to identify the characteristics of successful and enduring NCSDs, the survey sought to ascertain NCSD expectations for, and recommendations on, the SDGs and to review NCSDs' work over the previous 25 years. The review focused particularly on countries and situations where NCSDs had been seen to function well, in order to identify common elements of good practice, or success factors, that might be useful to other countries establishing or reshaping these bodies at the time, and now in the context of delivering the 2030 Agenda.

## **Form and Function**

As the form and function of NCSDs vary greatly from one country to the next, SF began its 2014 survey with no expectation that a universal blueprint or model for their creation and operation would emerge. Nevertheless, the review revealed a number of common factors or elements that appear to have contributed to the success of the most effective NCSDs, and also a few factors that have occasionally led to difficulties or less satisfactory outcomes. By reviewing that work, and through exploring best practices and common trends regarding the purpose, composition, and functions of NCSDs, this chapter hopes to provide existing NCSDs with a resource to help them learn from other circumstances, past and present, to become more effective in facilitating the delivery of sustainable development at the national level.

The chapter is therefore arranged around three main topics:

1. Purpose and mandate
2. Composition and membership
3. Functions and activities

## 1. Purpose and Mandate

NCSDs have often been created when countries have decided to adopt NSDSs, and their mandates have frequently related to ways of engaging stakeholders with the creation, implementation and monitoring of such strategies, as shown in Table 1 from the 2014 survey. This linkage can provide a broad basis for determining the overall mandate of an NCSD.

Table 1: Examples of NCSDs Supported by NSDSs

NCSD	NSDS	NCSDs Role in Relation to NSDS
Bangladesh Sustainable Development Monitoring Council	National Sustainable Development Strategy 2010–21 (NSDS)	NCSD ensured effective implementation and monitors NSDS progress
Estonian National Commission on Sustainable Development	Estonian Sustainable Development Act and the Sustainable Development Strategy (SE21)	NCSD monitors progress towards SE21
Hungarian National Council for Sustainable Development (NFFT)	National Framework Strategy on Sustainable Development of Hungary	NFFT mandated by parliament to analyze NSCD implementation
Mauritian Durable Commission (MID)	Maurice Ile Durable Policy, Strategy and Action Plan (MID SAP)	MID was created by the government to ensure compliance, monitoring and follow-up of the MID SAP
Tunisian Commission for Sustainable Development (CNDD)	National Sustainable Development Strategy (SNDD)	CNDD developed the SNDD, analyzes and monitors its implementation, along with other national sustainable development policies*

Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD)	Philippine Agenda 21 (PA21) and Philippine Development Plan (PDP)	PCSD advises the government on NSDS, scrutinizes government implementation and facilitates stakeholder engagement
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\* Indicators of Sustainable Development - National Agency for the Protection of the Environment

More detailed agendas usually arise from the priorities of the time. Sometimes governments find it useful to be able to refer particular issues to their NCSD for examination. In other cases, an NCSD may itself identify a particular sustainable development-related issue that needs attention. For instance, the German RNE adopted a German Sustainability Code for business in 2011. Meant to be a sustainability reporting instrument for any company to use, the initiative was in large part responsive to the needs of companies with global supply chains to understand the linkages between sustainability and risk of not fully understanding their supply chain. Other NCSDs set their national objectives based on geographical and/or natural resource-related specificities. One main objective of the Mauritian NCSD is the protection of oceans and advancing a ‘blue economy,’ a theme recently elevated by today’s global attention to plastics pollution in our oceans and waterways. Similarly, the Tunisian NCSD elaborated a national action program to fight against desertification.

A core function of most NCSDs is to operate as an advisory body to the government, examining sustainable development issues and advising in public and private reports on the evolution and success of sustainable development strategy and policy. This has clearly been one of the most productive areas of NCSD activity, particularly when they have been able to help move policy and action forward decisively in a priority area. At other times, NCSDs have had more difficulty in getting their recommendations accepted or considered seriously enough. In some countries, efforts have been made to give NCSDs a stronger influence by requiring that their recommendations receive a response from the government within a stated period, by requiring that they are consulted on certain issues, or by having their reports reviewed by parliamentary committees or similar structures within the legislature. Lessons could also be learned from the regional level, as the European Union, by long-standing agreement reports or opinions adopted by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and its Sustainable Development Observatory, always receives a response from the European Commission.

A number of NCSDs have also found a variety of ways to promote their messages going beyond the classic function of publishing a report and recommendations. They have used modern media channels to spread their messages and have operated informally and privately with governments and other organizations, as well as advocating their solutions publicly. The UK SDC, for example, developed an online network for consulting a wide range of individuals on sustainable development issues. In Mauritius, the Maurice Ile Durable’s (MID) comprehensive website enables stakeholders to keep track of ongoing programs and legislation development, and even request funding for sustainable development projects (Note 5).

Some NCSDs seem to focus primarily on their analytical and advisory roles, such as those in Benin, Belgium, Estonia, and Mozambique. But some NCSDs have also played other roles in promoting sustainable development understanding and actions among other sectors of society. Many sustainable development strategies cover a very wide range of topics, and their

implementation requires action from many different departments and actors in other sectors of society. For instance, national sustainable development strategy evaluation in Germany is a regular, international and integrative process. In 2009, 2013 and 2018 the federal government conducted peer reviews to evaluate Germany's sustainable development policies. Each peer review involved national and international actors from various sectors and was supported by the German RNE. The French NCSD also invited a range of stakeholder groups, including the private sector, to participate in a peer review process during the establishment of its NSDS.

Communicating effectively with the business sector is one key role of NCSDs. Another is finding ways of developing two-way communication with regional and local levels of government, which frequently play crucial roles in advancing sustainable development. In this regard, at the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development from 16 to 18 June 2015, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) made a strong case for the role of sub-national sustainable development bodies during its presentation 'Sustainable Development Bodies and Their Roles at National and Local Levels Report - Strengthening Integration, Implementation and Review: Role of Sustainable Development Bodies after 2015.' In particular, the need for national statistical systems, especially national statistical offices, to take a leading role at the regional and local levels to adequately collect, compile, analyze and report on targets and indicators for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs. NCSDs that are able to play a wider role of this kind can be very valuable in helping to build a wider societal understanding and support for the sustainability transition that is needed. Of course, wider outreach efforts of this kind need to be adequately resourced and appropriate communication capabilities brought into play.

## **2. Composition and Membership**

Broadly speaking, the composition and membership of NCSDs and similar bodies can be categorized into three groups:

- I. Government representative memberships
- II. Mixed memberships (consisting of government and non-governmental members that represent other sectors and interests)
- III. Memberships drawn entirely from outside government

Each model can work well and will usually be a direct reflection of the political system and or the culture of the country in which they exist, but each has characteristic problems that need to be addressed carefully.

### ***I. Government Representative Memberships***

NCSDs with only government or ministerial members have a great deal of authority and legitimacy to back up their work. They can be a very useful means of securing an integrated government approach to sustainable development, particularly if they are led or given strong support by the Head of State and include ministers or senior representatives from departments across the sustainable development spectrum. For example, the Chilean Council of Ministers for Sustainability and Climate Change reports directly to the President.

Tasked with recommending policies for sustainable management of natural resources,



sustainability criteria to be incorporated into policy-making, the creation of protected areas of the state, and with identifying the criteria and mechanisms by which citizen participation is to be incorporated into environmental impact statements, Chile’s NCSO has shown notable progress in public awareness raising and engagement. Boasting fifteen regional environmental advisory councils, public awareness-raising workshops, national and regional dialogues hosted by the Government, consultation with indigenous peoples, and “Dialogues for a Sustainable Chile” organized by stakeholder groups, the Council of Ministries has also created a National Council for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

On the other hand, a group composed only of Ministers may find it harder to develop a longer-term vision and to present policies and practices that the sustainability transition requires. It is important for such ministerial NCSOs to ensure that they have access to objective, evidence-based information, and analysis about current sustainable development issues and trends, along with the impacts of continuing or altering current policies.

Table 2: Strengths and Challenges Associated with Government Representative Membership NCSOs

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater influence over policy, even potentially having legislative powers</li> <li>• Stronger leadership</li> <li>• Greater resources to implement strategies</li> <li>• Higher public profile</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Potentially less independent and objective</li> <li>• Higher risk of being influenced by political interests</li> <li>• Not necessarily conducive to long-term thinking</li> <li>• Can result in lower levels of ambition</li> </ul>

## *II. Mixed Memberships*

The majority of NCSOs have mixed memberships, usually consisting of members of government along with stakeholders from a range of other sectors such as business, academia and organized labor. Their primary advantage is that they draw upon a wide range of perspectives and expertise, leading to more well-informed analysis and recommendations. The more stakeholder members an NCSO has, the greater the possibilities for engaging and consulting broad networks of stakeholders.

In cases such as these, it is important to ensure that the outside representatives do not feel inhibited by this diversity and are able to speak and participate freely. They must feel free to scrutinize the whole range of relevant government policies and challenge them where appropriate. In some cases, government voices have been known to dominate those of other non-government members. Conversely, an outside body needs to be given easy access to individuals in government and to information so that they can make an informed and significant contribution.

Mixed memberships can, however, make it harder for NCSOs to reach consensus, especially as the positions of government members are often less ambitious than their non-government counterparts. This, of course, is not to say that consensus is essential for an NCSO to operate effectively; quite the opposite in fact. Nevertheless, it can make the production of clear and

coherent recommendations a potentially tricky and slow process. There is also sometimes a tendency for individual members to promote their own agendas over the common good, which can also potentially lead to siloed thinking and a focus on individual issues at the expense of the larger strategic picture.

Table 3: Strengths and Challenges Associated with Mixed Membership NCSDS

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Likely to be more representative</li> <li>• Can facilitate greater participation</li> <li>• Greater ability to draw on a wide range of opinions and expertise</li> <li>• Likely to lead in more progressive recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding dominance of government voices over those of stakeholders</li> <li>• Avoiding deadlock and producing coherent messages in a timely manner</li> <li>• Avoiding siloed thinking and keeping track of the larger picture</li> </ul>

### III. *Non-Governmental Stakeholder Representative Memberships*

NCSDs which primarily consist of members from outside government that represent a range of different sectors and interests generally have little problem scrutinizing government policy and speaking out about perceived unsustainable policies and practices. Conversely, they may struggle to be as influential as NCSDs that have government members. As NCSDs with this composition have historically consisted of primarily environmental actors, it is important that their interests, experience, and expertise go beyond the dimension of sustainable development and include authoritative voices on economic and social issues.

They also need to be of a status and standing to be able to engage effectively with ministers and senior officials in a range of departments, whether related to economics and finance, industry and social affairs, planning or the more conventional environment institutions. This will likely also include, on occasion, liaising with Heads of State and their offices to ensure their input into overall strategic issues.

Table 4: Strengths and Challenges Associated with Outside Government Membership NCSDS

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their independence enables thorough scrutiny of government policy and speaking out about perceived unsustainable policies and practices</li> <li>• Likely to be very representative and have strong connections to substantial stakeholder networks at the subnational level</li> <li>• Can potentially call upon large public support base to provide legitimacy and help advocate for recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influence over decision-makers and policy</li> <li>• Having representatives of a high enough status and standing</li> <li>• Ensuring interests and expertise that go beyond environmental issues</li> <li>• Securing long-term funding</li> </ul>

## **Common Trends**

For the latter two types of NCSD, good representatives of business interests on NCSDs appear to be particularly important to ensure that the views and capabilities of that sector are fully engaged. Adequate representation of other key sectors such as trade unions, local government, non-government organizations, and other major groups is also crucial to ensure that a broad range of perspectives are considered and expertise brought to the table. This is also crucial to increasing stakeholder ownership of NSDSs, something consistently identified as being key for successful implementation.

Similarly, understanding the need for the sustainability transition depends on a deep scientific understanding of global processes and the threats that are facing the planet, and also on a deep economic understanding of the kind of sustainability transition that needs to take place in the global and national economies over the next generation. NCSDs need strong capabilities among their members and staff in the fields of science, environment, and economics.

Appropriate Chairmanship of the council is particularly important. Some NCSDs have been chaired or co-chaired by the prime minister or another senior minister. Experience suggests that although this confers high status and legitimacy to the deliberations of the council, it may also inhibit the essential function of a council in challenging the status quo in order to work towards a more sustainable long-term vision for a society in the future. An independent chair or co-Chair from outside government often seems to deliver the best results. Such individuals need a public profile of high standing and reputation in order to be trusted both by the government and other interests. The involvement of senior business leaders with sustainability interests and concerns has worked well in a number of cases such as Estonia, Germany, and Mauritius. Senior scientists, economists or other intellectuals with good practical experience and networks have also managed the role well, for example in the UK and France. Gender balance is also an important objective. The German RNE has achieved a nearly 50/50 gender balance, but many other Councils have not been so well-balanced.

In order to be relevant and useful, a council needs to have good and open relationships at many levels of government and to be able to join creatively and in a trusted way with the evolution of policies to advance sustainability. On the other hand, councils must retain sufficient independence to be able to challenge policies or programs that seem to be tending in unsustainable directions, both privately and, where necessary, publicly. Building mutual trust and understanding around this role of being a critical friend is an essential success factor. It is not an easy balance to maintain and there are examples of problems arising in both directions—for example, councils that have become too close to government, and have therefore lost public credibility and usefulness as an agent of change; and councils that have become too oppositional and have therefore lost access to and influence with government, sometimes to an extent that they have been disbanded or had their funding ended. Getting and keeping this balance right needs constant attention.

### **3. Functions and Activities**

The role of NCSDs and the specific activities that they undertake varies between countries.

However, it is possible to identify a number of broad functions that are often found in the work of NCSDs.

### **Strategy Creation and Advice**

For the majority of NCSDs, the primary function is to provide the government with advice on sustainable development issues. Frequently this includes advising on the creation or review of National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs). In some cases, there is a role in setting national sustainable development targets.

When originally established, NCSDs in Armenia, Croatia, Hungary, Mauritius, Panama, and the Philippines, were actually made directly responsible for the drafting of NSDSs and designing specific policies for their implementation. Whether simply advising or being actively involved in the drafting process, the inclusion of NCSDs in strategy creation help to integrate the individual priorities of the government departments that are involved, to tackle cross-cutting themes more effectively, and to draw other parts of society into playing their part in the overall national strategies. Being able to draw on a wide pool of stakeholder knowledge and expertise makes NCSDs well equipped to provide recommendations for strategies that address the three dimensions of sustainable development in a more coherent way and maximizes mutual benefits while minimizing trade-offs between sectors. In addition, greater independence and the participatory approach tend to result in NSDSs, and their subsequent policies, enjoying a greater level of support from the different sectors of society and from the general public.

### **Policy and Implementation**

A number of NCSDs are also involved in the creation of sustainable development policies and programs, often specifically designed to implement NSDSs. In general, this occurs in an advisory capacity, providing comments and feedback on government legislation. However, some NCSDs have a role in the actual drafting of policy. This can involve working with a particular sector, such as business, agriculture, education or health, to explore the implications of social, environmental and economic issues for these groups and develop sector-specific models for advancing sustainable development. Engagement with the private sector around strategy and policy implementation can, if managed correctly and transparently, characterize councils as business friendly, effectively link sustainability with economic growth, prosperity, and relevance to businesses and communities, and help with gaining the support of this sector and even leverage greater resources for implementation.

Although somewhat unusual, a small number of NCSDs (Mauritius, Panama, etc.) have been known to play a role in the implementation of sustainable development policies; however, this only appears to be the case in smaller countries and where NCSD is very closely linked to the government.

### **Monitoring and Scrutiny**

Sustainable development covers a very broad range of issues, and it is sometimes difficult to determine when progress is being made as developments in one area do not necessarily correspond with those in others. Many countries have now adopted sets of sustainable development indicators to keep track of progress and to help set targets for the future. Some NCSDs such as Mauritius and the recently formed UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development, UKSSD, (Note 6) have played an important part in assisting the further development of sustainable development indicator sets and in highlighting the messages that emerge from monitoring progress. Such assessments can then feed into the regular NSDS review processes, and, in particular, into debates about what should be done to deal with situations where targets are being missed.

### **Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity Building**

Successful NSDSs need to involve all parts of society. They cannot be created and driven forward by governments alone, and have often played a vital role in engaging with stakeholders of all kinds to help draw on the suggestions and ideas and build society-wide partnerships for the implementation of strategies. NCSD stakeholder engagement can be broadly split into types: 1) activities that seek inputs from stakeholders to inform NCSD thinking, research and recommendations; and 2) activities convened by NCSDs that aim to increase stakeholder understanding of sustainable development issues, strategies and policies. Both these roles require adequate resources and expertise to be effective.

Regarding their role in the development and scrutiny of NSDSs in particular, NCSDs that have taken a participatory approach have been more likely to foster a strong sense of national ownership of the strategy, something that is key to successful implementation. Some NCSDs have also been able to play a leading role in promoting the kind of changes that are needed in education and training programs to advance sustainable development. Examples have typically included specific capacity-building activities for representatives of government and stakeholders; however, campaigns to improve the general public's understanding of and action on sustainable development have also been undertaken by some NCSDs.

### **International Outreach**

Most NCSDs have a mandate that is primarily directed to the advancement of sustainable development in their own country. But several NCSDs (Belgium, Chile, Germany, Hungary, the Philippines, etc.) have found that they can learn from the work of their peers in other countries in mutually helpful exchanges, and may also be able to work together usefully on some regional or global issues. Many NCSDs have therefore been active players in regional groupings such as the European Environment and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils (EEAC) and SDplanNet in the Asia-Pacific region (Note 7). Others have been part of global networks such as the Earth Council, which formed after Rio 1992 and helped establish and facilitate the exchange of information between more than 80 NCSDs in developing countries working to further the goals of the first Earth Summit.

### **Prospects for NCSDs**

Do we know enough to evaluate the prospects for national councils? A few NCSDs have existed for many years and appear to have become an accepted element of national governance for sustainable development. But in many other countries, governance for sustainable development has either not taken deep root or has been allowed to dwindle. Though many early NCSDs are no longer operational, the 2030 Agenda has sparked a strong interest in the re-emergence of a global network of NCSDs as a tool to link, and perhaps even to actively coordinate, global NCSD activities to better inform the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) (Note 8) and its voluntary national reviews (VNR) mechanism. But those expressing that interests also recognize the challenges and barriers to revising and reinvigorating languishing or stagnant NSDSs, and restarting the machinery that NCSDs have provided for supporting and engaging stakeholders in the creation and implementation of national strategies in order to meet the goals set by the 2030 Agenda.

### **Challenges faced by National Councils**

The present global situation is not optimal for the advancement of sustainable development. Short-term economic difficulties tend to dominate political discourse at the expense of longer-term sustainability requirements. The rise in populism and nationalism militates against the global perspectives and multilateral co-operation that are crucial to achieving sustainability.

NCSDs are themselves vulnerable to these short-term political preoccupations and have sometimes been discontinued by Governments unwilling to face up to the longer-term challenges which they exist to address. The Australian Government's short-lived National Sustainability Council, (October 2012 to November 2013) was, for example, a casualty of a change of government and a shift to social and financial conservatism.

In order to survive and make headway in this more challenging environment, the NCSDs need to lift their game and build up new alliances. They need to be able to show how the SDGs and 2030 Agenda are relevant to the non-state actors within the process and to the man and woman on the street. They need to be skillful and professional in helping government, business, and the broadest range of stakeholders to work together and trust each other. They need to make themselves useful to Parliaments and legislatures in their task of scrutinizing and holding Governments to account for progress on sustainability.

Can councils that have endured, due perhaps to becoming a part of the DNA of government or national cultural, or perhaps part of the broader national consciousness, be enlisted to guide others? Can the correct stakeholders be meaningfully engaged in the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda and, if so, what kind of enabling environment is needed to do this?

The enduring success of some NCSDs, like those in Germany and Estonia, offers examples of

good practice and achievement that should provide hope and models for other countries to consider. Both councils continue to make meaningful contributions at home and abroad through committing to broad stakeholder participation, which has helped them to secure ongoing funding and support from their governments. According to Anneli Lepp, Policy Officer of the Permanent Mission of Estonia to the United Nations, financing is the determining factor but, even then, “...not durable if the sustainable development agenda is not in the DNA.” Ms Lepp went on to emphasize the intergenerational links needed between the current generation of actors and a county’s youth, and the need to engage the “right stakeholders” (Note 9).

The continued existence of a particular NCSD should not, of course, be regarded as an end in itself. But the global imperative for the world to make the sustainability transition does not go away; nor does the need to ensure that there are strong mechanisms that enable dialogue between government and stakeholders of all kinds to assist and guide the process. NCSDs have proved to be one effective means of building these partnerships for nearly 30 years. They can and should be part of the solutions needed over the next 12 years as the international community strives to meet the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. Where NCSDs exist, they should be nourished. Where they do not yet exist, careful consideration should be given to establishing them. Where they have been discontinued for essentially short-term reasons, consideration should be given to re-establishing them, possibly in a new format.

## **Recommendations for a way forward**

Past experience informs us that a global network of national councils for sustainable development and similar bodies across the world would be a useful resource. But reestablishing such a network will prove challenging in a world of competing economies and ongoing political polarization. Yet, the following few recommendations might spark an interest in and some support from governments and other bodies for a way forward:

1. Establish a network of the willing, where countries with durable NCSDs act as mentors or match-makers;
2. Finance a fuller assessment of NCSDs to establish which forms of councils are most effective, considering cultural, geographic, and economic factors that foster durable councils;
3. Facilitate a mechanism to reliably and permanently connect regional and local-level sustainability councils to NCSDs;
4. Endeavor to ensure that mentoring includes helping councils at all levels to identify in-country resources of durable funding; and
5. If a stand-alone NCSD is not viable, facilitate joint programs or activities at the regional level rather than have no NCSD at all.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The original version of this chapter was published as a Stakeholder Forum paper in April 2014, as ‘National Councils for Sustainable Development: Lessons from the past and present’ by Derek Osborn, Jack Cornforth, and Farooq Ullah.

<sup>2</sup> Although no longer current, the now dormant Network of National Councils for Sustainable

Development and Similar Bodies website can be found at [www.ncsds.org](http://www.ncsds.org).

<sup>3</sup> For a full listing of the German Council for Sustainable Development's active projects, see [www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/projekte](http://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/projekte).

<sup>4</sup> Prior to 2009 the Estonian NCSD, chaired by its Prime Minister and co-chaired by the Ministers of Economy and Environment, was comprised of 28 experts including six representatives from government, five parliamentarians, five governmental departments, nine from academia, one from business and two NGOs.

<sup>5</sup> The Maurice Ile Durable's comprehensive MID website can be found at <http://mid.govmu.org/portal/sites/mid/MIDRole.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development is a cross-sector network, representing organizations from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland that span the business, stakeholder, academic and public spheres, irrespective of their interests, size or location. More can be found at [www.ukssd.co.uk](http://www.ukssd.co.uk).

<sup>7</sup> SDplanNet has three operating institutions (International Institute for Sustainable Development [IISD], Institute for Global Environmental Strategies [IGES] and Africa Technology Policy Studies Network [ATPS]) and regional and global collaborating partners in Asia, the Pacific, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa.

<sup>8</sup> The United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) replaced the Commission on Sustainable Development, CSD, which had lasted for 20 years, on 24 September 2013, after the last session of the CSD.

<sup>9</sup> Ms Lepp's remarks were made on September 11, 2018, at a meeting organized by the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development group and the UN-DESA Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development, 'Advancing the 2030 Agenda: Lessons learnt from the first cycle of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development - How far can we go?'



## The Role of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships in Implementing the 2030 Agenda

By Felix Dodds

To fully understand the role Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs) can play in Implementing the 2030 Agenda, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their targets, we need to understand the origins of MSPs, the MSP experience thus far, and how it can be improved to be more effective in this new phase extending through 2030.

### Understanding the Terminology

One of the many problems that has emerged in the discussion on MSPs is that they are often mixed up with other approaches such as Voluntary Initiatives (VIs) or Public Private Partnerships (PPPs).

All three are important, but they need to be separated as each takes a different approach in reporting, capacity building, knowledge management and other key governance issues.

To begin, I outline the three definitions below.

**Multi-stakeholder Partnerships** are specific sustainable development commitments and contributions, undertaken together by various partners, intended to support the implementation of transformation towards sustainable development and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other relevant sustainable development agreements.

**Voluntary Initiatives** are individual voluntary commitments focused on delivering concrete results for sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) invited organizations to make these voluntary commitments.

**Private Public Partnerships** are contractual arrangements between single or several public agencies (federal, state or local) and single or several private sector entities. Through such arrangements, the skills and assets of each sector (public and private) are shared, in delivering a service or facility for the use of the general public. Other stakeholders might be sub-contractors in a PPP.

Before going further, I want to visit a fourth term that is often misunderstood – *the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 8: Global Partnership for Development*. This is a government-to-government or government-to-industry partnership, not an MSP.

This chapter is about MSPs and how they have developed and should develop in the coming years to principally help in implementing the SDGs and their targets.

### History of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development

The first part of the journey is to understand the origins of the multi-stakeholder idea, which emerged in intergovernmental forums.

- *1992: Stakeholder engagement in policy and implementation*

The idea for multi-stakeholder partnerships was first put forward by Maurice Strong – Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) – at the Conference on Environment and Development (1992),

otherwise known as the Earth Summit. The main outcome document from the conference was Agenda 21. It was the first UN agreement to identify roles and responsibilities for stakeholders. It had nine chapters that broke down how the UN classified groups that are not governments, all grouped together under the general term ‘non-governmental organizations,’ into sectors of society that could play a significant role in helping to deliver Agenda 21 – the Blueprint for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The nine stakeholders were: Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, Non-Governmental Organizations, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Scientific and Technological Community and Farmers.

- *1996: Emergence of Stakeholder Dialogues*

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), set up in 1993 to monitor the implementation of Agenda 21, also became a place to experiment in the involvement of stakeholders in policy development and in reporting on their delivery of Agenda 21. This included initiatives such as ‘Day at the Workplace,’ which assessed the sustainability metrics of a particular workplace. Another session looked at Local Agenda 21, which highlighted the role of local government in delivering Agenda 21 targets at the local level.

This opening-up of the UN system to stakeholders grew considerably in the years immediately following the 1992 Conference and influenced a number of UN Conferences and Summits between 1992 and 1996. Perhaps the largest impact was observed at the 1996 the Habitat II Conference on Human Settlement, where two major developments took place. The first was the enabling of stakeholders to propose text in its informal meetings, a first at a UN conference, with the text coming to life if a government endorsed it. The second was the emergence of a very interesting approach to engage stakeholders in debate and in commitments. The conference had two intergovernmental committees, one for the negotiations of the Habitat Agenda and the other for each stakeholder group focused on the contribution of local authorities, the private sector, parliamentarians, non-governmental organizations, foundations, science and engineering, and the UN system.

This approach was endorsed by the UN General Assembly for the Rio+5 UN General Assembly session in 1997 and subsequently for meetings of the CSD. Between 1998 and 2001, the CSD dedicated two days to interactive dialogues with stakeholders, usually three or four per three-hour session. The outcome of these sessions created an ongoing dialogue on policies between the CSD and stakeholders and provided an avenue for the two to try and move policies forward together.

- *The UN Global Compact*

Industry engaged with not only the CSD in the follow up to the 1992 Conference, but also with other UN bodies. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan sought to deepen this engagement. In 1999 Secretary General Annan launched, as a challenge, the UN Global Compact as a voluntary initiative based on CEO commitments to implement universal sustainability principles and to take steps to support UN goals at the World Economic Forum. The UN Global Compact promotes ten principles and is now comprised of over 8000 companies and 4000 non-business participants. In launching the UN Global Compact, Secretary General Annan sought, in his own words, the following:

“a creative partnership between the United Nations and the private sector. I made the point that the everyday work of the United Nations -- whether in peacekeeping, setting technical standards,

protecting intellectual property or providing much-needed assistance to developing countries -- helps to expand opportunities for business around the world. And I stated quite frankly that, without your know-how and your resources, many of the objectives of the United Nations would remain elusive.

The United Nations agencies -- the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) - - all stand ready to assist you, if you need help, in incorporating these agreed values and principles into your mission statements and corporate practices. And we are ready to facilitate a dialogue between you and other social groups, to help find viable solutions to the genuine concerns that they have raised. You may find it useful to interact with us through our newly created website, [www.un.org/partners](http://www.un.org/partners), which offers a "one-stop shop" for corporations interested in the United Nations. More important, perhaps, is what we can do in the political arena, to help make the case for and maintain an environment which favours trade and open markets." (Annan, 1999)

The UN Global Compact originally had nine universal principles:

***Human Rights***

Businesses should:

- Principle 1: Support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and
- Principle 2: Make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.

***Labour Standards***

Businesses should uphold:

- Principle 3: the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
- Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
- Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour; and
- Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation.

***Environment***

Businesses should:

- Principle 7: support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;
- Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote environmental responsibility; and
- Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Principle was added on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2004 in accordance with the UN Convention Against Corruption which had been adopted in 2003.

***Anti-Corruption***

- Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery. (UN Global Compact, 2018)

• *2000: Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*

In 2000 at the Millennium Summit, a number of suggestions on how to focus government action over the first 15 years of the millennium were identified. The following year, these were synthesized into a set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the UN system through an interagency task force. As mentioned in the introduction of **Millennium Development Goal 8**:

A Global Partnership for Development, was set of targets for government and the private sector. It was not as some have suggested an MSP process.

The UN and its Member States recognized the need to identify some broad guidelines for how to engage with the private sector. In 2000, guidelines on cooperation between the UN and the private sector were issued by the UN Secretary General to enhance the cooperation between the two. It had five general principles:

1. Advance UN goals: The objective needs to be articulated clearly and must advance UN goals as laid out in the Charter.
2. Clear delineation of responsibilities and roles: The arrangement must be based on a clear understanding of respective roles and expectations, with accountability and a clear division of responsibilities.
3. Maintain integrity and independence: Arrangements should not diminish the UN's integrity, independence and impartiality.
4. No unfair advantage: Every member of the business community should have the opportunity to propose cooperative arrangements, within the parameters of these guidelines. Cooperation should not imply endorsement or preference of a particular business entity or its products or services.
5. Transparency: Cooperation with the business community sector must be transparent. Information on the nature and scope of cooperative arrangements should be available within the Organization and to the public at large.

- 2001: First UN Global Partnership Resolution (every 2 years)

Beginning in 2001, Member States sought to give direction on global partnership between the UN Global Compact and the private sector every two years using a standing item on the Second Committee of the UN General Assembly. The General Assembly resolution – “Towards Global Partnerships” – was included on the General Assembly Second Committee agenda, adopted in 2001 and then updated every two years.

The adopted resolution stressed the need for Member States to further discuss partnerships and consider ways and means to enhance cooperation between the UN and all relevant partners, including partners from developing countries to give them greater opportunities to contribute to the realization of the goals and programmes of the Organization.

- 2002: Bali Guidelines and World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) Type 1 and Type 2

In 2000 and 2001, stakeholders, the UN, and Member States first explored the idea of “multi-stakeholder partnerships” as a potential outcome from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD). These would be a mechanism, but not the sole mechanism, to deliver political commitments. The Bali Guidelines on Partnerships included the following points:

- Objective of Partnerships
- Voluntary in Nature/Respect for fundamental Principles and Values
- Link with Globally Agreed Outcomes
- Integrated Approach to Sustainable Development
- Transparency and Accountability
- Tangible Results

- Funding Agreements
- New/Value Added Partnerships
- Local involvement and international Impact

WSSD delineated the types of government commitments as Type 1 commitments and Type 2 commitments.

**Type 1:** policy agreements and commitments

**Type 2:** commitments and action-oriented multi-stakeholder platforms focused on deliverables translating political commitments into action

- 2003: Commission on Sustainable Development/Economic and Social Council - criteria and guidelines for partnerships

WSSD didn't agree an intergovernmental set of criteria and guidelines for partnerships. It left that to the first meeting of the Commission on Sustainable Development (2003) after WSSD. The CSD decision agrees that partnerships are:

- voluntary initiatives undertaken by Governments and relevant stakeholders;
- contribute to the implementation Agenda 21, JPoI;
- not intended to substitute commitments made by Governments;
- bear in mind the economic, social and environmental dimensions;
- comprised of predictable and sustained resources for their implementation, should include the mobilization of new resources, and where relevant, should result in the transfer of technology to, and capacity-building in, developing countries;
- designed and implemented in a transparent and accountable manner;
- should be consistent with national laws and national strategies;
- providing information and reporting by partnerships registered with the CSD.

The outcome from the CSD was then endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of the UN and, as I write these words (November 2018), the only real set of criteria and guidelines that the UN is instructed to use in relation to MSPs.

- 2006: United Nations Office of Partnership created

In 2006, the United Nations Office of Partnership (UNOP) was created to strengthen system-wide coherence in the establishment of operational relationships with global partners of the United Nations. This was done “to provide support for the United Nations Democracy Fund; and to support partnership initiatives from non-State actors or United Nations entities in the light of General Assembly resolutions on the importance of engaging public and private sector stakeholders in the implementation of the Millennium Declaration, as well as the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.” (UN, 2006)

- 2008: First Annual UN Partnership Forum within ECOSOC

Many people do not realize that there was a lot of hostility to the MDGs when they were launched. This was in part because many saw the MDGs as a reduction of the 1990 UN Conference and Summit Global Programmes of Action, negotiated with enormous engagement by stakeholders, into just 8 Goals and 21 targets. By 2008, stakeholders were more accepting. The idea of developing MSPs to help deliver the MDGs had its first outing at the newly created ECOSOC 2008 Partnership Forum and was focused around the delivery of the MDGs.

- 2010: UNGA first revision of Guidelines between the UN and the Business Community

The UNGA's first revision of guidelines between the UN and the private sector gave new instructions around the areas of impact, transparency and accountability, in particular. The revision said it:

“9. Encourages the United Nations system to continue to develop, for those partnerships in which it participates, a common and systemic approach, which places greater emphasis on impact, transparency, accountability and sustainability, without imposing undue rigidity in partnership agreements, and with due consideration being given to the following partnership principles: common purpose, transparency, bestowing no unfair advantages upon any partner of the United Nations, mutual benefit and mutual respect, accountability, respect for the modalities of the United Nations, striving for balanced representation of relevant partners from developed and developing countries and countries with economies in transition, sectoral and geographic balance, and not compromising the independence and neutrality of the United Nations;” (UN, 2009)

The lack of more clear instructions did not change the way that partnerships were being approached by the UN. There was no new due diligence and no real attempt to delist MSPs that were not reporting or delivering against their stated aims and objectives.

- 2012: Rio+20 Voluntary Initiatives/Commitments

The academic reviews of partnerships showed that up to 70% of the partnerships registered on the UN website were either dormant or had ceased to be trying to achieve their stated aims.

Rio+20 focused more on Voluntary Initiatives/Commitments; some 700 of these were announced during the conference, while only 207 MSPs were announced.

“283. We welcome the commitments voluntarily entered into at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and throughout 2012 by all stakeholders and their networks to implement concrete policies, plans, programmes, projects and actions to promote sustainable development and poverty eradication. We invite the Secretary-General to compile these commitments and facilitate access to other registries that have compiled commitments, in an Internet-based registry. The registry should make information about the commitments fully transparent and accessible to the public, and it should be periodically updated.” (UN, 2012)

The Voluntary Initiatives/Commitments at Rio+20 were issued by governments, intergovernmental organizations, major groups and others to contribute to the implementation of the inter-governmentally agreed SDGs and commitments in the Rio+20 outcome document, “The Future We Want.” Within a year of Rio+20, the UN registry has grown to 1,382 pledges with committed resources estimated at more than \$636 billion.

“I am encouraged by the more than 700 concrete commitments registered at the Conference, from governments, business, industry, financial institutions and civil society groups, amongst others,” said United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, stressed that “voluntary commitments and partnerships are important contributions that are strengthening the implementation of sustainable development everywhere by allowing people from all parts of society to contribute.” He also added that

“partnerships and voluntary commitments complement but do not substitute for government responsibilities and inter-governmentally agreed commitments.” (UN, 2013)

- 2014: SAMOA Pathway

SAMOA Pathway -The SIDS Action Platform emerged to support the follow up to the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS Conference), including through a partnerships platform, a partnerships framework, and a UN Implementation Matrix.

It came about to “request [that] the Department of Economic and Social Affairs ... finalize a standardized partnership reporting template and process, in consultation with the Steering Committee, which takes into account existing reporting mechanisms and the need to minimize the reporting burden and ensures reporting coherence.

It also stated the following:

101. In this regard, we request the Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States, to present recommendations, including through the use of existing intergovernmental mechanisms, for a partnership framework to monitor and ensure the full implementation of pledges and commitments through partnerships for small island developing States. The framework should ensure that partnerships focus on the priorities of small island developing States, identify new opportunities to advance their sustainable development of and ensure the full implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the Samoa Pathway. The recommendations should be presented to the General Assembly for consideration and action at its sixty-ninth session.

124. In this regard, we are committed to supporting the efforts of small island developing States:

(a) To request the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly and to the Economic and Social Council on the progress achieved in implementing the priorities, commitments, partnerships and other activities of the small island developing States;

(b) To request the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to continue to maintain a partnerships platform focused on the small island developing States and to regularly convene the inter-agency consultative group to report on the full implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the Samoa Pathway, with adequate and timely analysis based on relevant targets and indicators relevant to the small island developing States in order to ensure accountability at all levels.” (UN, 2014)

- 2015: 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development identified MSPs as a mechanism to help deliver the goals and targets in the SDGs and, more broadly, the commitments in the 2030 Agenda.

The Agenda for Sustainable Development outline the following goals with respect to MSPs:

“17.16 Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented **by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals** in all countries, in particular developing countries

17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, **building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.**” (UN, 2015)

To enable the UN website to register the commitments made for MSPs and Voluntary Initiatives/Commitments, the UN over time has developed a number of ways to monitor the partnerships. It has introduced, based on the SAMOA Pathway but not upon any intergovernmental decision as of yet, two approaches. The first is the introduction of the SMART criteria when registering “specific, measurable, achievable, resource-based, with time-based deliverables.” It is also in the process of introducing a traffic-lights approach to registered MSPs and Voluntary Initiatives/Commitments; this would be in relation to the annual reporting requirement. It has been suggested that if they don’t report within a year, they have a yellow-light attributed to their partnership. If they haven’t reported within two years, a red-light would be attributed and, after three years, would ultimately be delisted.

The High-Level Political Forum established mandate that includes a ‘platform for partnerships,’ which stated the following:

“84. The HLPF, under the auspices of ECOSOC, shall carry out regular reviews, in line with Resolution 67/290. Reviews will be voluntary, while encouraging reporting, and include developed and developing countries as well as relevant UN entities and other stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector. They shall be state-led, involving ministerial and other relevant high-level participants. They shall provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.” (UN, 2015)

- 2015 Towards Global Partnership Resolution

The 2015 UNGA resolution on Global Partnerships stressed the UN system needs to develop, for those partnerships in which it participates, a “common and systemic approach which places greater emphasis on transparency, coherence, impact, accountability and due diligence, without imposing undue rigidity in partnership agreements.”

It also underscored the need for the Economic and Social Council to hold, during its partnership forum in 2016, “a discussion on the best practices and ways to improve, inter alia, transparency, accountability and the sharing of experiences of multi-stakeholder partnerships and on the review and monitoring of these partnerships, including the role of Member States in review and monitoring.” (UN, 2015)

- 2017: Secretary-General's Report on Re-positioning the UN Development System to Deliver on the 2030 Agenda

As part of the UN Secretary General’s reposition of the UN Development System to help it deliver the 2030 Agenda, the Secretary General recognized the role that MSPs might play. The Report said that the Development System “can only be realized with a **strong commitment to partnerships at all levels between governments, private sector, civil society and others.**”

It goes on to say that “with this recognition, we must harness the **convening power of the United Nations through platforms where stakeholders** can meaningfully engage, build trust, exchange know-how and technologies, strengthen relationships and bring synergy and coherence to achieve results.”

It then asserts the need to “embed **multi-stakeholder partnerships into the core business model of the UN development system**, pooling system-wide expertise across the partnership spectrum.”



### ***What did we learn from the MSPs over the last twenty years?***

“A thousand flowers bloom” was how Nitin Desai, Secretary General of WSSD, described the relation between the MSPs and the worry of a lack of proper accountability and capacity building system for the follow up at the end of the Summit in 2002.

What we found was that up to 70% of inactive/useless (Pattberg et al. 2012) MSPs that did survive showed some good/improved over time (Beisheim/Liese 2014). A detailed review of 330 of WSSD partnerships was undertaken by the International Civil Society Centre (ICSC) in 2014. The study found that “thirty-eight percent of all partnerships sampled are simply not active or do not have measurable output. Twenty-six percent of all partnerships show activities ... not directly related to their publicly stated goals and ambitions. An underlying problem was that many [MSPs] have vague and diffuse goals and lack appropriate monitoring and reporting mechanisms, making the causality between the output of the partnership and impact on the ground difficult to establish. A key finding of the ICSC study was a lack of monitoring and reporting mechanisms have generally limited the effectiveness of MSPs. Improved monitoring, evaluation and reporting are tools that will help to assess progress vis-à-vis targets and goals and will no doubt enhance the credibility of the MSPs.

Beisheim (2014), in eight years of research on multi-stakeholder partnerships, have found governance structures of MSPs are ‘terra incognita.’ It is often difficult to find how MSPs are monitored. Some of the monitoring systems are external, but they are not public, and also not always independent. They suggest that a transparent, accountable, efficient, participatory and qualitative governance structure is a must in order to increase the effectiveness of MSPs. Two other recent key studies have served to provide more in-depth analysis of these issues and their importance for partnerships – World Vision’s “Getting Intentional: Cross-sector Partnerships, Business and the Post-2015 Development Agenda” and BCG/MIT’s “Joining Forces: Collaboration and Leadership for Sustainability.” (ICSC, 2014)

Surprisingly, the vast majority of MSPs were not in developing countries but in OECD countries. This was not the point of the MSPs when they were originally being promoted in 2000 to 2002. There has been very little quantification of what they delivered. For instance, how many people got access to water or sanitation, two of the MDG targets under MDG7, that wouldn’t have otherwise had there not been a push for MSPs?

Finally, it is clear there was very little UN funding committed to reinforcing the push on MSPs after the WSSD conference. No real attempt to build capacity and knowledge management. This is now changing, and there is much more likely that this new attempt to use the MSPs to help deliver the SDGs is likely to be more successful.

### **Examples of Successful Partnerships**

In this paper, there are four successful examples I would highlight as successful MSPs; these include the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (the GAVI Alliance), the Global Polio

Eradication Initiative (GPEI), the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP) and the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

The review of these partnerships reveals that all four had solid organisational structures and were given clear objectives, a defined timeline, well organised and strong facilitators, and secure funding. Having a clear, well-defined and easily understood objective was crucial. People could easily relate to it and feel ownership because its thematic approach was clear and logical. Funders could see and understand what they contributed money to, and staff could easily grasp what their mandates and programmes and also developed ownership. With a clear and well-defined purpose, objective monitoring and evaluation became possible, was not cumbersome to execute, and could be done on a reasonable timeline. Evaluation and monitoring could lead to adjustments – when and if needed. These are points I outlined in a paper for UNDESA in 2016.

### ***1. The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization (GAVI):***

**Background and Objectives:** Established January 2000 and has raised over \$500 million;

Vaccine provision and development, country level immunization programmes and health systems strengthening (HSS); special focus on low-income countries.

**Lead Facilitators and Funders:** WHO, UNICEF, World Bank, Gates Foundation, International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturer’s Association, US AID (funders 1/3rd from bilateral donors, private donations and Gates Foundation).

**Governance Structure:** GAVI has a secretariat and board – one third of the board is elected on an independent basis with expertise in health; at country level, GAVI works through Interagency Coordinating Committees and Health Sector Coordinating Committees.

**Outcomes and Challenges:** Built on the experience of the Vaccine Initiative launched by UNICEF in 1990; generally seen as successful in increasing the numbers vaccinated but less successful influencing vaccine pricing.

**Monitoring:** A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and Strategy; ensures valid, reliable, useful performance measures are available and used to support organizational and stakeholder learning, management of strategy, improvement of programmes, mitigation of risk and reporting of performance; built on the experience of the children’s Vaccine Initiative launched by UNICEF in 1990, has been successful but some critics have said that it can push for one approach too much.

### ***2. The Global Polio Eradication Initiative (GPEI)***

**Background and Objectives:** Launched by WHO in 1998 at the World Health Assembly with the objective to eradicate Polio by 2000; today polio has been reduced by 99% globally.

**Lead Facilitators and Funders:** WHO, UNICEF, the US Centre for Disease control, Rotary International, bilateral donors also included Russian Federation, Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Malaysia, World Bank and African and Inter-American Development Banks.

**Governance Structure:** The Advisory Committee on Polio Eradication, the Global Commission for the Certification of the Eradication of Poliomyelitis and the UN Interagency Committee play vital roles with WHO regional offices, large networks of health workers, public health managers & professionals.

**Outcomes and Challenges:** Polio incidents have reduced by 99%, but the commitment to global polio eradication by the World Health Assembly (WHA) is not legally binding on states and therefore the enforcement mechanisms of GPEI are not strong.

Monitoring: GPEI operates within a broad framework of intergovernmental and interagency cooperation and participation; the Independent Monitoring Board assesses progress towards a polio-free world and convenes on a quarterly basis to independently evaluate progress towards each of the major milestones of the GPEI Strategic Plan; the IMB provides assessments of the risks posed by existing funding gaps.

### ***3. Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Partnership (REEEP)***

Background and Objectives: Initiated by the UK government in 2002 as a WSSD Type 2 partnership; emerged as a response to WSSD failure to agree targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency; aimed to promote collaboration to achieve a significant increase in the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency to improve energy security and provide for reliable delivery and to deal with climate change/energy issues; project implementation and policy advice at national level and advocacy at global level is its main thrust.

Lead Facilitators and Funders: Traditional bilateral donors (90 projects in over 40 countries); 60% of REEEP's activities deal with policy and regulation, and the remaining deal with project financing.

Governance Structure: REEEP has a governing board that is responsible to a 'Meeting of Partners' which is the ultimate authority of REEEP; projects are developed and proposed by the programme committee and final selection by the International Selection Committee; a governing board is responsible to an assembly, 'a Meeting of Partners,' which is the ultimate authority of REEEP.

Outcomes and Challenges: REEEP contributed to change in renewable energy; REEEP has used a multiple approach to establish national partnerships involving small-scale private sector partners, NGOs and public partners; REEEP has also financed local projects that may not have been from the outset financially viable from a market point of view; South Africa proposed targets for of 5% of total primary energy use to come from renewable energy resources by 2010; By 2009, IAEA estimate this had reached 13.1% and has now increased to 19%.

Monitoring: Has a Governing Board responsible for the conduct of the business of the organization in accordance with the Statutes and holds office for a period of four years; it is comprised of no fewer than six members and meets at least once a year; its functions are to develop and oversee the key strategic direction of the REEEP, including targets, timeframes and funding priorities, prepare the financial rules and accounting system of the organization, consider and decide upon applications to become Partners and provide instructions to the International Secretariat.

### ***4. Forest Stewardship Council***

Background and Objectives: FSC Founding Assembly in 1993, the secretariat relocated in 2003 to Bonn, Germany; Main thrust from UNCED in 1992 to establish an independent and international forest certification system; The vision was to ensure the social, ecological, and economic rights and needs of the present generation were met without compromising those of future generations through promoting environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests

Lead Facilitators and Funders: Not for profit NGO with membership in over 60 countries, financed through a multitude of sources – individual and corporate grants, donations and projects; it has a strong collaborative relationship with various UN bodies and has over the years worked with UNEP and had projects financed through the GEF; governments cannot be members

Governance Structure: Board of Directors and an international secretariat with a General Assembly as the highest decision-making body

Outcomes and Challenges: Formally organised as an independent nongovernmental organisation, works outside of national regulations with its outreach; with expertise competence and project portfolio, the FSC can function as an incubator for multi-stakeholder partnerships; the FSC administers a self-elaborated third-party certification system on wood and timber products that serves to verify whether products – 8% of global forests are certified and 25% of all industrial round-wood production

Monitoring: FSC has developed 12 system indicators under four main categories – economic, social, environmental and general; the FSC Monitoring and Evaluation Program has also developed a Code of Good Practice for Assessing the Impacts of Social and Environmental Standards, works with ten credibility principles integrated in the FSC monitoring work – sustainability, improvement, relevance, rigour, engagement impartiality, transparency accessibility, truthfulness, efficiency. (Dodds, 2016)

### **Some Types of Partnerships**

Not all MSPs are trying to do the same thing. Marianne Beisheim came up with a good classification of the different types of MSPs:

1. MSPs for sharing knowledge: this would be exchanging knowledge between various stakeholders and disseminating knowledge to help to deliver the goals and targets (e.g. GWP- Global Water Partnership);
2. MSPs for providing services to deliver the goals and targets (e.g. GAVI– the Vaccine Alliance);
3. MSPs for setting standards: this would establish standards and norms in areas where there are currently no (or no adequate) regulatory mechanisms to advance the delivery of the goals and targets (e.g. AWS - The Alliance for Water Stewardship).

This approach helps with capacity building, knowledge management and with quantifying the actual contribution that MSPs are making towards delivering the SDGs and their targets.

### **Due Diligence and Industry**

There is, at present, no system-wide due diligence with regards to companies the UN should work with and which can be recognized on the UN website as being engaged in an MSP.

This has become an increasingly important issue due to the activities in certain UN Agencies and Programmes that did not have proper due diligence mechanisms in place. A number have started to designate the UN Global Compact as that mechanism. In the development of the PPPs for the SDGs by the UN Economic Commission for Europe and in relationship to UNEP's work both bodies are stating that companies have to be a member of the UNGC or at least be in the process of joining it.

The UNGC may have delisted over 6000 companies for not reporting or adhering to the UNGC, but it doesn't have the staff to provide effective oversight for the voluntary reports being submitted. This is why the development of two new initiatives on benchmarking is very critical. The first is the Corporate Benchmarking on Human Rights (CBHR), which is a unique collaboration led by

investors and civil society organisations dedicated to creating the first open and public benchmark of corporate human rights performance. Discussing CBHR, Mark Wilson, the CEO of AVIVA, said:

“Competition is a beautiful thing when it is used to do good. For the first time, we have a public measure of companies’ human rights performance which will focus attention in the boardroom on their performance versus other companies and allow investors to ask the right questions. More transparency and a desire to improve in the rankings will spark a race to the top in corporate human rights.” (Wilson, 2017)

The UNGC members unfortunately did not do well in the independent review of their human rights policy and actions. Some of the examples from the 2017 Report:

- Pepsi: 22%
- Starbucks: 25%
- Woolworth: 25%
- Shell: 37%
- Coca-Cola: 40%
- Gap: 44%

The second is the World Benchmarking Alliance, a similar coalition of private sector and stakeholders, which is in the process of producing their first report on benchmarking companies on the SDGs. The UNGC is a member of this coalition.

If the UNGC is to become the due diligence mechanism for the UN and its relationship with the private sector, the benchmarking will provide a critical objective perspective of whether the voluntary report submitted is accurate and will need to ensure the UNGC has the ability to challenge some of the reports submitted.

The UN Joint Inspection Unit in September 2018 published its report – United Nations System: Private Sector Partnerships Arrangements in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It suggests a role for the UN in establishing rating systems for companies.

"Organizations also note there are obvious benefits stemming from external due diligence assessments, and that the United Nations system should continue to engage private sector companies that specialize in rating the sustainability of prospective United Nations partner companies based on their environmental, corporate and social performance (including on human rights)." (UN, 2018)

This could be very important if the UNGC uses the Corporate Benchmark on Human Rights and the work of the World Benchmarking Alliance to challenge voluntary reports submitted by companies.

## **MSP Charter**

The lack of any new guidelines for MSPs since the UNGA’s endorsement of the CSD 2003 Decision has been frustrating for many people who have been engaged in MSPs over the last 15

years. There is now a lot of experience on what has worked, what hasn't and that would now help new partnerships in their development but also to create some accountability. In frustration, a number of stakeholders led by the MSP Institute and the Tellus Institute have gone outside the UN system to create a MSP Charter, which is informed by an International Advisory Board of equally frustrated present or former government representatives and stakeholders. It is hoped the MSP Charter will help new partnerships at least start from a similar place. It's unclear if it will develop into a certification scheme, but it may. Its objective is to "enable a focused discussion on such a shared vision, and synthesize key principles in a brief document. The Charter can be used to promote principles and best practices." (MSP Institute, 2018)

## *Principles of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships for Sustainable Development*

*2<sup>nd</sup> Draft, as of October 18, 2018*

The common challenge of sustainable development requires the joint commitment of all stakeholders. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are a way of joining forces, to build on the strengths of each partner, and to complement governmental and stakeholder capacities and capabilities for the benefit of all.

We strive for true transformation towards realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in a joint effort to leave no one behind. We will do our utmost to adhere to the following principles for multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) for sustainable development:

### **Clear Objectives - Supporting Global Goals, National and Regional Plans**

- MSPs should have jointly defined specific objectives, contributing to globally agreed goals and outcomes, and consistent with relevant initial conditions, strategies and policies of the countries, regions and communities where their implementation takes place.
- MSPs should complement governmental, intergovernmental, and stakeholder activities and initiatives towards the implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. They serve to mobilize and combine the capacities of different stakeholders and citizens for achieving the transformative agenda on the ground. Their ambition may reach beyond national goals and regulations.
- Each MSP should specify their implementation methodologies and dedicated resources, and set specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable and time bound targets for their achievement (SMART approach). MSPs should also clearly define when they are to conclude after reaching their objectives. All partners should explicitly commit to their well-defined role in achieving the aims and objectives of the respective MSP.
- All this should be captured in a written partnership agreement, endorsed by the leadership of each partner organisation, and made publicly available.

### **Respect for Fundamental Principles and Values**

- MSPs for sustainable development are based on mutual respect, equity, mutual benefit, and shared responsibility of the partners involved, taking into account the Rio Declaration Principles, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the values expressed in Agenda 2030 / 2030, respecting indigenous knowledge and national regulations. Potential partners need to meet minimum standards, and due diligence procedures should be in place. Business partners should consider joining the [UN Global Compact](#). Major Groups and other stakeholder members should comply with the [Istanbul Principles](#), and consider joining the [Civic Charter](#).

### **Integrated and Systemic Approach**

- MSPs for sustainable development should strive to integrate the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in their design and implementation. They should take a systemic approach, build a shared understanding of the whole system context and take this into account when devising their work program.

This includes looking at all factors, their interlinkages, relevant institutions, rules and assumptions and aiming to transform all elements that need change and development in order to achieve sustainable development.

### **Multi-stakeholder Approach**

- MSPs can be arranged among any combination of partners, including international institutions, governments, regional groups, Major Groups and other stakeholders.
- MSPs should in their initial stage undertake a stakeholder mapping and analysis. MSPs are inclusive in nature. All those that are affected by their work and all those that (can) influence the issues at hand need to be engaged. Following the 2030 Agendas "leaving no one behind" principle, MSPs should also identify and engage marginalised groups that may be affected by their work. This may include investing in building partners' capacities such as training of specific groups.
- All partners should be involved in the development of the MSP from an early stage, so that it is genuinely participatory. Yet as partnerships evolve, there should also be opportunities for additional partners to join on an equal basis if appropriate.
- Levels and kinds of engagement of partners can vary – from core partners implementing activities together, through engaging in a subset of activities to participating forums of consultation.

### **Form Follows Function**

- MSPs are the strategy of choice when individual organisations cannot tackle an issue on their own, hence they are often set up to address intractable, complex, wicked, systems-wide challenges / opportunities.
- MSP designs and set-ups will be unique, and will always depend on their specific objectives and conditions under which they operate. MSPs need to invest significantly in their governance structures and their core organisations and secretariats.

### **Good Governance**

- MSPs should have solid governance structures in place, including inclusive, transparent and accountable processes of preparing and making decisions, policies on actual and potential conflicts of interests, and mechanisms for resolving disputes.
- MSPs for sustainable development should address potential power differences, diverse interests and potential conflict among partners in a constructive manner so as to ensure equity and fairness in all decisions and activities concerning the partnership, and harnessing lessons learned.

### **Transparency and Accountability**

- MSPs for sustainable development should be developed and implemented in an open and transparent manner and in good faith. All partners are equally accountable for what they do. They are accountable to each other. And MSPs are accountable to the outside world.
- An accountability map and strategy should be developed identifying the elements of accountability relevant to the specific MSP: Both internal and external stakeholders should be engaged in this, using clear communication strategies. Subsequently, MSPs should specify arrangements to monitor and review their performance against the objectives and targets they set. Reports should be made regularly and should be made



accessible to the public, including financial information. Available and/or expected sources of funding and/or investment should be clearly identified.

- MSPs for sustainable development should keep relevant public institutions informed about their activities and progress in achieving their targets. Depending on the levels and topics of their work, this may include United Nations' bodies, governments at national, sub-national and/or local levels.
- MSPs should actively take part in relevant review processes, sharing lessons learned about factors of success and failure, and strategies for scaling up and out.
- Organisations and individuals can serve as promoters and brokers of MSPs by reaching out to potential partners, building relationships with stakeholders, and bringing them together to explore collaboration. Those who convene MSPs need to adhere to the same principles in order to be legitimate conveners, champions and/or partners in MSPs.

#### **Effective Communication and Leadership**

- Effective communication is a key success factor for MSPs. High quality facilitation and joint reflection within the partnership is required.
- In successful MSPs, both formal and informal leadership roles are identified, valued and leveraged to enable the cross-sector approach.

#### **Fostering Learning**

- Participatory, collective learning is at the heart of MSPs. In the process of learning, different partners' perspectives become clear, and mutual understanding can grow so that diversity can indeed foster creativity and innovation, overcoming obstacles along the way. MSPs should organise and foster learning loops, and secure and publish the lessons learned. (MSP Institute, 2018)

## **Conclusion**

As I write this paper, the new UNGA resolution – “Towards Global Partnerships: A Principle-Based Approach to Enhance Cooperation Between the United Nations and all Relevant Partners” has been tabled by the EU countries.

Reviewing the present version of the resolution before any negotiations have started, it should be welcomed as a move in the right direction towards expanding the general coverage to MSPs and not primarily focusing on the UN Global Compact and the private sector.

It even takes forward a number of the key points in the guidelines from the 2003 ECOSOC decision:

*“Emphasizing that multi-stakeholder partnerships in particular and the resources, knowledge and ingenuity of all relevant stakeholders will be important in mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, complementing the efforts of Governments and supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular in developing countries,*

3. Stresses that partnerships are voluntary and collaborative relationships between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and, as mutually agreed, to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits;

4. Also stresses that new alliances and partnerships will be critical to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, as an effective instrument for mobilizing additional human and financial resources, expertise, technology and knowledge, while reiterating that those alliances and partnerships are a complement to, but are not intended as a substitute for, the commitment made by Governments with a view to achieving the Goals;

5. Further stresses that partnerships should be consistent with national laws and national development strategies and plans, as well as the priorities of countries where they are implemented, bearing in mind the relevant guidance provided by Governments;” (UN, 2018)

The resolution, however, fails to set out new guidelines and criteria which would help partnerships that exist or will exist. By failing to do so, a huge opportunity will once again be missed. Member States would do well to just start from the 2003 decision and relist it in the resolution and negotiate updates.

The second area that is missing from the draft resolution is any explanation of what due diligence would look like and what role the UN Global Compact might play in this.

The resolution makes the following points:

“15. Stresses the need for the United Nations system to continue its efforts to develop, for those partnerships in which it participates, a common and coherent approach across the United Nations system that places greater emphasis on transparency, impact, accountability, human rights, due diligence and risk management, while taking into account the specific mandates of United Nations agencies, programmes and other entities and without imposing undue rigidity in partnership agreements;

16. Acknowledges the importance of corporate sustainability reporting, encourages companies, especially publicly listed and large companies, to integrate sustainability and human rights due diligence information into their reporting cycles, encourages industry, interested Governments and relevant stakeholders, with the support of the United Nations system, as appropriate, to enhance existing models and develop new models for best practice and to facilitate action for the integration of sustainability reporting, taking into account experiences from already existing frameworks and paying particular attention to the needs of developing countries, including for capacity-building, and welcomes in this context the collaboration of the United Nations Global Compact with the Global Reporting Initiative and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development;” (UN, 2018)

The time has come to outline an effective due diligence mechanism for the private sector. This paper suggests the beginning of what this might look like, perhaps by using benchmarking to start to challenge the voluntary reports of companies that are members. This would be a beginning and something the UN Joint Inspection Unit has suggested might be worth considering.

If the UNGC is to become a due diligence mechanism for the UN and its relationship with the private sector, then it will need to have intergovernmental oversight. This is too important an issue to push under the carpet again. If Member States will not address it now, they will find that they will be forced to do so when something goes horribly wrong and there is nothing in place that could have prevented it.

I would hope that would not happen; however, if it does, there will be finger pointing to those governments – particularly those of developed countries – who failed to put more robust system in place.

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## **The UN High-Level Political Forum and Parliamentary Governance for Sustainable Development.**

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### **Introduction**

In 2015, the adoption of resolution A/RES/70/1 2030, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UN Agenda 2030), as an historic and wide-ranging inter-governmental policy agreement was an important statement of future intent for UN member states. The Agenda touches the entire geography of the globe covering potentially all aspects of how society, economy, the environment and the polity are organized. As an ambitious agenda it aims to address the unsustainable nature of existing development practices and build a livable future for generations yet to come via 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. The SDGs are considered indivisible and applicable equally to all members states irrespective of the any nation's stage of development. Compared to the Millennium Development Goals project, the SDGs are more comprehensive as they address the social, economic, environmental and governance pillars of sustainable development. They also emphasize the need to address all the goals in an integrated manner, through global, regional, national and local partnership approaches, alongside a vision, means of implementation and a follow up and review mechanism.

However, the key weakness of the 2030 Agenda lies in the fact that the SDGs and associated targets are non-binding for all 193 signatory nations which undermines the veracity of the agreement and the prioritization of SDG implementation among national governments. The immediate challenge, therefore, lies in finding ways to encourage, steer, and indeed pressurize policymakers to pursue the goals and targets through national implementation plans and policies that induce partnerships within and between countries. Innovative and effective governance structures capable of steering the implementation process in every nation is necessary (Scholz et al., 2016). Our argument is that this is a necessary building bloc to induce a new wave of multilateralism where partnerships within nations contribute to global partnerships lead by coalitions of governments.

Governance for sustainable development is described as “the steering requirements and mechanisms that enable the formulation of concerted and adaptive policies that foster the cooperation of diverse actors in delivering sustainable development” (Pisano et al. 2015, p.58). In other words, governments cannot do it alone given the nature and complexities of the goals. Participatory arrangements are required where various stakeholders from civil society, academia, businesses, women organizations, and the like, can participate in the policy-making process as well as share responsibilities in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the targets under

each goal. Creating such participatory platforms can also provide flexibility in the adoption of policies as the ‘whole-of-society’ continues to learn from each step of the way together, respond to policy problems, and jointly maneuver impending challenges.

Not surprisingly, countries focused on implementing the SDGs have incorporated different ways to include stakeholders in the implementation process ranging from gathering information from the stakeholders to more deliberative consultative actions (DeVries 2015).

Evidence suggests that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is simply inappropriate to plan for sustainability (Schelly and Banerjee, 2018). Thus, there is an urgent need to explore and outline different approaches that have the potential to make space for ‘whole-of-society’ participation at different levels and various levels of interactions. In this chapter, we explore spaces or entry points for country-level major groups and other stakeholders to engage in the different heuristic stages of SDG policy-making at a national level. In particular, entry points into parliamentary decision making.

There is a clear interdependency that we wish to explore in this chapter between the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and national level “whole-of-society” implementation. The working philosophy of our approach is based, to a large degree, on the existing open governance adopted by the UN HLPF at a global level. We wish to explore a form of interoperability of public policy dialogues at national and global levels. Outcome documents, such as ministerial and leaders declarations, at the UN are not binding while parliamentary committees at national levels are pathways to legislative change are binding. By exploring HLPF structures in national parliaments and making them interoperable with the UN HLPF we are proposing how a body like the UN HLPF can induce ‘whole-of-society’ participation at different levels, but particularly at the binding level of the nation-state. This has the potential to create very effective global ‘whole-of-society’ partnerships, led by governments that set, implement and review sustainable development public policies around the globe.

We first review the role and functions of the UN HLPF. Then we explain in detail our proposed hybrid parliamentary committees (HPCs) and how it would provide a participatory space for non-governmental major groups along with exploring possibilities to legitimize them by making the government obligated to consider their inputs in the policymaking-process related to the UN 2030 Agenda in the same spirit of the UN HLPF. We argue that implementation of such an approach at national levels will induce a more effective UN HLPF that will produce a more effective global partnership for sustainable development lead by government in a new wave of multilateralism.

As global, or interstate, challenges worsen, governments alone do not have the finance or capacity to address the problems such as climate change. A new wave of multilateralism in the forms of a global partnership lead by governments is badly needed. Getting national-level parliamentary committees focused on sustainable development with non-government check and balances is an important first and necessary step that this chapter explores in more detail. We will use Ireland as a case study to show how our proposals might be integrated to the existing policymaking processes without being overtly disruptive.

## **UN High-Level Political Forum**

In 2013, the HLPF emerged out of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+ 20) with the mandate “to provide political leadership, integrate the environmental, economic and social dimensions of sustainable development, encourage policy coherence, review progress, and promote implementation of the wide-ranging public and private commitments made since 1992” (Abbott and Bernstein 2015, p. 223). Additionally, the HLPF is also a platform where major groups and other stakeholders identified as crucial to the implementation of Agenda 2030 have an opportunity to participate in follow-up and review, agenda-setting and implementation (Strandenaes 2014). Nation-states present their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) to the HLPF with a goal to share experiences, identify emerging best practices, and learn from the challenges and critical lessons that emerge from the process of SDG implementation planning and policymaking in different countries. The core focus of the HLPF is the implementation of the SDGs, and all its actions are channeled towards implementing the 17 goals in member countries and assisting with the myriad of challenges that arises from goal monitoring and implementation.

The HLPF is also one of the most inclusive intergovernmental entities. General Assembly resolution 67/290 decides that, while retaining the intergovernmental character of the forum, the representatives of the major groups and other relevant stakeholders shall be allowed: attend all official meetings of the forum; have access to all official information and documents; intervene in official meetings; submit documents and present written and oral contributions; to make recommendations; to organize side events and round tables, in cooperation with Member States and the Secretariat. The quadrennial meetings under the UNGA result in negotiated political declarations whereas the annual meetings under the ECOSOC result in ministerial declarations that go directly to the UNGA even though declarations remain legally non-binding (Abbott and Bernstein, 2015).

Though the HLPF has very ambitious goals, the financial and budgeting resources provided to the Forum is insufficient for its scale and responsibility. Moreover, the HLPF does not have an autonomous bureau or a secretariat and relies heavily on the resources of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). The result of these deficiencies is that the HLPF functions only as the caretaker of the SDGs. Despite this, there are numerous proposals for improving its design (cf. Beisheim, 2014). Abbott and Bernstein (2015) argue that the role of the HLPF is that of an orchestrator. According to them, orchestrators use indirect and soft governance strategies to encourage nation-states to take their SDG commitments seriously. Hard governance strategies of control like mandates, treaties, or regulations are replaced with collaboration and cooperation. Thus, the HLPF does not adopt any formal agreements or provide recommendations.

The HLPF have set an expectation of appropriate behavior for participating nations. This is achieved via the provision of an inclusive platform for nation-states and major groups and other stakeholders to report and review how each country is implementing the SDGs at regular time intervals.

The sixth annual Sustainable Development Transition Forum (SDTF), hosted by the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development of UNDESA, welcomed 130 representatives and experts of country governments, the United Nations System, policy think tanks, academic institutions and civil society from around the world in Incheon, Republic of Korea, October 2018,

to discuss how to enhance the role of the UN HLPF in accelerating progress towards the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Some of the key insights emerging from the 2018 SDTF were the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represents an important instrument for strengthening multilateralism as the Agenda and SDGs can be achieved only through collaborative effort of all countries and stakeholders. The HLPF has established itself as the global platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda reflecting implementation at all levels and of all actors. However, strengthening political guidance, outcomes, including a more action oriented ministerial declaration that reflects actual discussions at the HLPF and incorporating outcomes and policy guidance from different constituencies – business, parliamentarians, local governments, educational institutions is important. The declaration should be a more whole of society outcome.

While the national level Voluntary National Review Process (VNR) does strengthen political will, national ownership and focused attention to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and engaged governments and stakeholders around the Agenda. Nations can go further to establish new forms of coordination and adapt or create new institutions to strengthen the whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach.

Stakeholders are an essential part of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Institutionalizing engagement of stakeholders at all levels is essential. Stronger engagement of stakeholders at the national level will also result in a stronger engagement at the regional and global levels. In this regard, it is important to strengthen capacity of stakeholders including at local and community levels. Equally important would be to find ways to strengthen official engagement of all stakeholders at the HLPF.

The 2018 Incheon Outcome document from the SDTF summarizes well our approach in this chapter. Hence we outline our approach to national level SDG implementation in the next section that we enhance the ability of the UN HLPF to be more effective.

### **Hybrid Parliamentary Committees (HPCs)**

Similar to the role that the HLPF plays at the UN level, Walsh (2016) proposed the idea of the HPC as one “that could be in part inter-governmental, inter-political party; inter-major groups and other stakeholders and, finally, could include the general public using e-consultations” (p.14) that can be adopted at the nation-state level. At the heart of these committees lies neo-pluralism that empowers non-state actors as agents of change, shifting from the typical approach of state actors alone. It is a space where different non-state actors can participate with state actors to reduce externalities and incoherence in policy decisions that can affect long-term sustainability. Like the HLPF, the core focus of HPCs would be the implementation of the SDGs by following the 169 targets, adjusting to new challenges, and adopting solutions within or beyond the scope of these targets. The idea is that HPCs would become a platform where the legislators can communicate, consult, and engage with major groups and stakeholders on the one hand, while on the other, the non-state actors can play critical roles in policies that affect their cause.



Building on the work of Walsh (2016), strong representation from other parliamentarians in charge of different government departments and ministries along with regional and local authorities in the HPCs is critical to both horizontal and vertical policy integration. Participation from other parliamentarians or the legislative wing would assist in representation, legislation, and oversight. People elect members of the legislature, and they ideally carry the voices of the people so that they reach the policy agenda-setting stage. Therefore, their representation and leadership are necessary for policy-making and driving policy implementation. In other words, their participation and oversight are necessary to create the political will, opportunities for policy-making and the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the policies.

Walsh (2016) also points out that when policy-makers devise policies that relate to the social, economic, or environmental pillars of sustainable development, more often than not, relevant government departments and levels of the government do not participate in the processes. Fulfilling the objectives of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs requires an inter-play between all governmental departments. This note only makes for more holistic policy-making and all-round 'buy-in' but also ensures that spillovers to other domains are considered in policy implementation. Necessary conditions for creating policies for SDGs would require coordination mechanisms capable of integrate both the vertical and horizontal organizational dimensions both within government departments and right across the different levels of government. For example, economic policies that promote economic growth should consider social equity issues as well as their environmental impacts in such a way that no domain is compromised in the pursuit of policy goals. Inter-governmental representation in the HPC has the potential to prevent that from happening as each government department can provide feedback on spillover implications. Therefore, HPCs can enhance communications between the policy actors operating within a nation's government.

Making allowance for inter-party representation in the HPCs also fills other gaps. In many nations, political leadership often concentrates on short- and medium-term goals because they are unsure of being in government after the next electoral cycle. Chances are that most avoid those policies whose affect can be felt by the electorate years down the line (Persson and Tabellini, 2002). This means that the benefits derived from long-term policy thinking are often under or unexplored. However, inter-party representation can contribute to the continuity of policy goals and objectives through shared visions and planning. Inter-party representation can also help the new political leadership to pursue policies of the erstwhile political leadership they replace in electoral cycles. Therefore, the execution and attainment of the goals would remain constant even with changes in leadership.

Finally, taking cues from the UN HLPF, building country-level partnerships with subsystem actors belonging to private and non-governmental public domains can be critical to the HPCs. Therefore, in our proposal it is important that country-level major groups and other stakeholders participate in the HPCs. Walsh (2016) points out that "the real benefit of incorporating major groups into the policy work of government is that financial markets, companies, NGOs and civil society organizations will be encouraged to change their governance structure and policies to help a bottom-up movement which is enabled by government-led committee work" (p. 16). The benefits are three-fold; first, major groups and other stakeholders are expected to be less critical of policies in which they had a direct input and this is likely to maximize policy acceptability and adoption.

Second, major groups would share the burden of implementation as well as creating their own structures and organizational changes to deliver on their shared implementation responsibilities. Major groups can set their democratic processes where they can elect their representations in the HPCs. Members interested in becoming part of the HPCs can campaign within the major stakeholder groups thus increasing greater dialogues between and within stakeholder groups.

These processes would encourage stakeholder groups to gain a greater understanding of the interplay necessary within them as well. In the end, their inputs go into agendas of the new policies that will incentivize the uptake of greater responsibility to plan long term for society and the environment, both at home and abroad. Thirdly, there is an inherent challenge in maintaining a delicate balance so that policies are democratic but also evidence-based via the infusion of expert knowledge. Hence the status quo science policy interface can be weak. The SDGs need technological intensive transformations. Having science outside the decision-making process is inherently damaging to generating effective sustainable development policy-making. Kingdon (1995) identifies how a policy problem can be solved from different groups including bureaucrats, congressional staff members, academia, and researchers working to collect science-based evidence to affect policy changes. These partnerships need to be formalized and given entitlements in governance structures. Again taking a cue from the UN Global Sustainable Development Report, building academic and scientific inputs can be critical to the success of HPCs.

However, parliamentarians would continue to play a critical role in the HPCs, the leadership of the committees would use soft power to maintain a balance between the government and other members. There is a need for diplomatic processes to emerge that link sustainability issues across scales, scopes, and actors (Biermann and Pattberg, 2008). The inter-party representation, of the major stakeholders and even citizen participation through e-consultation platforms can arguably balance the imbalances in the system from the dominant representation of the government. Overall, HPCs have the potential to bring systematic changes in how government, social, economic, and environmental institutions operate because participants would evolve and integrate kind of holistic thinking that is required for the implementation of SDGs. Additionally, mixing horizontal and vertical inputs, the HPCs of different countries can build up their networks to share their own experiences and, in the process, learn from each other. Given that the UN 2030 Agenda aim is to leave no one behind and care for our common home for use in future generations, there is a need to organize governance structures, so these principles are binding on policy-making. This will maximize the potential for achieving the goals at home. In addition, the presence and participation of these national level partnerships create the building blocks for a new wave of multi-lateral global partnerships led by governments.

Even in the status quo, public policy theorists have found that policies are not made in vacuum and are influenced by non-state actors with interest in a policy issue. Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1999) in their work on Advocacy Coalitions Framework (ACF) found that a complex subsystem of actors belonging to diverse groups of public and private organizations operate within the policy arena. These actors come from administrative agencies, legislative committees, interest groups, researchers, media, and local government authorities (ibid). These groups of actors can form coalitions with each other or can support each other in their policy interest. These “lobby” groups can be very effective in driving or restricting policy change. Public policy-entrepreneurs can work

within and outside the government so that the issues, concerns, and solutions they champion get into policy-agenda setting (Baumgartner and Jones 2010).

Providing governance structures that allow all major groups to represent themselves, elected by their constituents, and deliberate on SDG-related policy creates policymaking that is more socially inclusive, environmentally friendly and creates economic propensity for all. Moreover, such a platform can provide the government with a better insight into the political mood of the nation as many of the members of the major groups represent citizen-initiated efforts. The buy in of the policies should create political dividends and more ownership of the policies at the implementation stage. The universal membership of the HPCs, borrowing from UN HLPF structures, provide scope for all voices to be heard and can help in maintaining a balance between the major groups in the political realm of a nation-state. Like the UN HLF the committee outcomes and recommendations will be adopted, or not, in the chamber of the legislators.

### **Case of Ireland**

To fortify our argument with empirical evidence, we take the case of Ireland. Walsh (2016) points out that, from time to time, Ireland has engaged stakeholder groups in policy-making processes.

Ireland is a constitutional republic with a parliamentary system of government. The Oireachtas, the bicameral national parliament, is composed of two Houses: Seanad Eireann (Senate) and Dail Eireann (House of Representatives). The Dail has 158 members elected to represent multi-seat constituencies under the system of proportional representation. Parliamentary elections are typically held every five years and it has been customary since 1989 for coalitions to form a government. The current government in 2019 is held in place by a confidence and supply deal with the main opposition party. The Seanad is composed of sixty members, with eleven nominated by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister), six elected by the graduates of the National University of Ireland and the University of Dublin and 43 elected by public representatives.

In general, the legislative process involves several distinct stages. First, a bill may be initiated by a Representative of either House. When a Bill is presented, provided it complies with Standing Orders, it automatically proceeds to Second Stage, during which the general principles of the Bill are debated in the House. Members are allocated a limited amount of time to make a statement on the law the Bill would create. They may also suggest other provisions to be included in the Bill. If agreed, the Bill is assigned to a committee, comprising government and opposition representatives. The Bill is then examined section by section and amendments may be made. In the Report Stage, amendments arising out of Committee Stage are considered. When all the amendments have been dealt with, the Bill is received for final consideration. When a Bill passes the final Stage in the House in which it was initiated, it is sent to the other House. If passed, the Bill is signed into law by the President.

In principle, there are multiple entry points for stakeholders in the legislative process. Stakeholders could be engaged at each stage of the process influencing, for example, the initiation of a bill, its debate in parliament, committee amendments, the final report, voting in both Houses, the enactment stage. This raises several questions about *both* the effectiveness, legitimacy and

overall desirability of stakeholder engagement in the legislative process. For example, which entry points for stakeholders are the most important for ensuring effective policy-making and which institutional structures have the right to engage with stakeholders? In the last section we propose a presence at the committee stage.

In practice, there are no formal rules obligating government to involve stakeholders in the legislative process and most of the stakeholder engagement that does occur happens in the pre-legislative stage focusing on consultation, technical assistance and advisory services. For instance, before the Government publishes a Bill, there is usually a consultation process. The relevant department may publish a Green Paper setting out the government's ideas and invite opinions from individuals and organizations. For example, the Green Paper on Energy Policy in Ireland was launched in May 2014 and 1,200 submissions were made during the consultation process. The relevant Oireachtas committee may invite stakeholders to participate in the pre-legislative scrutiny of a new law by attending committee meetings to discuss the heads of the Bill. For example, during the pre-legislative scrutiny of the Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill 2015, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children heard from adoptive parents, birth mothers, birth parents, foster parents and adoption agencies.

To date, Ireland's experience with non-governmental inputs into committee structures has largely occurred in the bureaucratic side of government rather than in the legislative process. One example of such a committee is the Oversight Group for the National Action Plan of Women, Peace and Security (2015-2018) with representation across government departments such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Justice and Equality, Department of Defense, Defense Forces, An Garda Síochána, Permanent Representation of Ireland to the European Union, Health Services Executive, civil society, academic and independent experts. However, rather than being mainstream, this type of committee structure is rare in agenda setting, policy formulation or implementation. This committee is both inter-governmental and inter-sectoral, involving representatives from civil society and academia as well as independent experts. It is responsible for reporting and reviewing progress on the second National Action Plan of Women, Peace and Security 2015-18, revising actions and targets in light of emerging issues and lessons learnt, and working with the appropriate Oireachtas committee to ensure the involvement of parliamentarians in the implementation of the Action Plan.

One major problem with these approaches to involving stakeholders is that stakeholder inputs in the bureaucratic side of government (whether in agenda setting, policy formulation or implementation) often get blocked in the legislative process. Specifically, there is a lack of checks and balances on the actions of legislators. Most of the detailed examination of a bill occurs at the committee stage, yet Ireland's parliamentary committees consist only of elected representatives. Government and opposition members have the opportunity to make amendments to the text, and the committee stage can be lengthy as there is no limit to the number of times a member may speak on an amendment. Parliamentary committees do invite expert statements and ask questions to the bureaucratic side of government and non-governmental stakeholders. Elected representatives have full control of the process.

Another example is the current arrangements for engaging stakeholders in Ireland's SDG plans. These arrangements are limited to consultation and a Stakeholder Forum. The Minister for

Communications, Climate Action and Environment has lead responsibility for promoting and overseeing national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Up to now, this has largely been a "whole-of-government initiative". The relatively short time frames provided for the completion of Ireland's first SDG National Implementation Plan and Voluntary National Review, both published in 2018, placed limitations on the scope of stakeholder consultations (DCCAE, 2018a). The Stakeholder Forum established currently lies outside the legislative process and its responsibilities are restricted to follow-up and review, public awareness raising and communicating policy (DCCAE, 2018b).

The closest example to our HPC proposal is Ireland's Citizens' Assembly. Established in 2016, it has had some notable successes in the areas of abortion rights and climate action. The 99 members of the Assembly are citizens entitled to vote at a referendum, randomly selected so as to be broadly representative of Irish society. The political issue to be considered is assigned by the Oireachtas. Each meeting includes expert presentations, Q&A and debate, roundtable discussion and a plenary session. The Assembly thus injects expertise into citizens' deliberations on the particular policy issue. A final report with recommendations are then put before the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Assembly separates out fully its deliberations from the Oireachtas and does not mix them with feedback from legislators. As a result, the Oireachtas votes on policy recommendations which it was not involved in developing. Recommendations are delivered from a directly representative section of Irish society rather than through the party process.

The Oireachtas in the areas of abortion rights and climate action has set up an inter-party parliamentary committee to deal with what are considered hard political issues. They in turn can invite expert opinions into their deliberations and make recommendations for legislative change which formed the basis of repealing the eight amendment in the constitution and lead to legislation to allow abortion for the first time in Ireland. This structure is not unlike the UN HLPF. Where dialogue happened between stakeholders as a first step leading to a declaration to be formed by ministers of nations when under the UN Economic and Social Council and leaders when under the UN General Assembly.

Our framework for HPC wishes to formalize a non-governmental input into inter-party parliamentary committees. Citizens' Assembly allows whole of society to put forward recommendations for policy change to the parliament but the parliamentary committee's topic, membership and inputs are controlled by the members of the Oireachtas. This creates several potential problems for policy-making that are especially relevant to the SDGs. First, parliamentarians represent geographic constituencies and regardless of the specific voting procedure used, ultimately it is likely there will be social groups who are left behind in the electoral process and unrepresented in the legislative process. To protect the Leave No One Behind Principle and to help achieve an integrated approach to policy-making, it is important that the economic, social and environmental interests of "unelected" social groups are given representation in the legislative process. Second, short election cycles mean that committees consisting only of elected representatives are not conducive to the medium and long-term planning and policy-making that is required to achieve the SDGs. Third, inter-party committees are open to capture by vested interests. In particular, individuals or organizations with money, political economic power and connections can influence the work of legislators at any stage of the legislative process and block stakeholder inputs from the pre-legislative stage.

To overcome these problems, we suggest that stakeholders should be given a formal mandate in parliamentary committees. Specifically, we propose the establishment of hybrid parliamentary committees that are inter-party, inter-government and inter-Major Group and other stakeholders. HPC structures would give stakeholders an ex-ante formal role in SDG policy formation, implementation and review. All stakeholders could promote and protect their interest, without harming other interest groups. Stakeholders could promote an integrated approach to SDG policy and ensure minority groups are not left behind. Such a hybrid could help to deliver medium- to long-term planning that is independent of political cycles and vested interests. There is some precedence for the presence of stakeholders in committee work of houses of government. In the Irish Senate graduates of Universities elect six members and eleven members are nominated by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister). The later can be from all walks of life. Reform of the Senate could lead to Major Groups getting a formal presence in the upper house, such as Women's group representatives. Our HPC would allow checks and balances from Major groups of society as an input into legislation, the presence of Major groups of society in the upper house would allow checks and balances at the end of the legislative process.

Finally, there is the question of whether our proposal actually results in better policy. There is, however, an interesting precedent for our proposal. Walsh and Whelan (2010) show how the top government official T.K. Whitaker's appointment of three academic economic advisors, including Professor Loudon Ryan, to the Capital Investment Advisory Committee in 1956 shifted Irish industrial policy away from three decades of protectionism and import substitution industrialization towards the export-oriented economic theories of Hirschman (1958). The committee was set up by the Department of Finance, and chaired by John Leyden, then secretary of the Department of Industry and Commerce and of Supplies. The advice from this committee was to become a cornerstone of Whitaker's industrial policy. In particular, Hirschman's theories were adopted for Ireland's vision of economic development via the writings and counsel of Professor Loudon Ryan. It has largely been credited with the development of an openness to trade that paved the way for the economic growth achieved in Ireland during the 1960s. Today industrial policy is overlooked by three organizations IDA Ireland, Forfas and Enterprise Ireland employing more than 1,200 people that still involve academics across various committees. While this example clearly illustrates how expert engagement of non-governmental stockholders contributed to economic development in Ireland. Walsh (2015) outlines how such investment supports could in principle be modified to incorporate the social and environmental dimensions of industrial policy.

## **Conclusion**

Pisano et al. (2015) identified that governance for sustainable development requires long-term planning, integration of social, economic and environmental policies across different levels of governance, participation of stakeholder groups in the policy decision-making processes and the ability to reflect on existing and ongoing policies through continuous monitoring, evaluation, and re-adaptation. We argue that these requirements should be prescribed both at international levels like the UN HLPF as well as within each nation-state level. The UN HLPF currently follows all of them to a large extent though it may be argued that more urgency is required particularly to increase participation from stakeholders and encourage a whole-of-society approach to SDG implementation. To increase stakeholders' participation both nationally and internationally, we

propose the adoption of HPCs that have the potential to play an important role within nations and internationally. In other words, our structure follows an approach that conjointly feeds into national governance approaches but also to the UN HLPF and vice versa.

Focusing on the case of Ireland, it is clear from an analysis of its political institutions that there are entry points for stakeholders in the legislative process. While there is no legal obligation on government to involve stakeholders in policy-making, we have noted that some interesting examples of stakeholder engagement in policy formulation and implementation have occurred.

To enhance stakeholder engagement in national level SDG policy processes, we outline HPCs that are inter-party, inter-government and inter-Major Group and other Stakeholders. At the root of our argument is the view that such a committee structure is necessary to prevent the capture of parliamentarians by special interest groups. Ultimately, this will aid the delivery of medium and long-term planning that is essential for sustainability planning. Moreover, it will also assist with achieving an integrated and inclusive approach to SDG policy-making. By working together with parliamentarians and bureaucrats, stakeholders can help to craft inclusive and sustainable recommendations that succeed in passing both Houses. A formal mandate for Major Groups and other stakeholders in parliamentary committees should help to enhance the role of stakeholders in the SDGs and create greater society-wide accountability in the SDG process. It would also help to move Major Groups away from their role as watch dogs towards agenda setters and policy makers and induce greater ownership and easier implementation of the SDGs. Such a process would enable the development of policies that are evidence-based and assessed in an integrated way that supports the shift to open governance.

There are shortcomings associated with our proposal. First, there is the question of whether enhanced representation in the committee stage of the legislative process actually leads to better policy? Recommendations from the committee stage may still be blocked by voting in either of the Houses. However, as Ireland's experience with the Citizens' Assembly suggests, stakeholder approval could be used as a way for parliamentarians to legitimize the passing of bills that otherwise would be difficult to get through the House.

Second, HPCs raise interesting questions about the legitimacy of involving stakeholders in the legislative process. For example, civil society, the private sector and academia are not democratic organizations and they have in principle no accountability to citizens. In theory these constituencies can elect their representatives.

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### **Section 3 - Advancing the 2030 Agenda: Lessons learnt from the first cycle of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) – how far can we go?**

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## **How could the 2019 HLPF summit deliver actions, implementation and acceleration?**

By David O'Connor

### **Introduction**

Dating back to the Rio+20 Conference, where the High-Level Political Forum was mandated in the outcome document, *The Future We Want*, UN Member States have differed significantly in their understandings of what the HLPF ought to be. Recall that the HLPF was created to replace the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which was an intergovernmental body operating under the auspices of ECOSOC. The decision to abolish and replace CSD followed years of declining effectiveness and repeated stalemate in negotiations of the CSD outcomes, notably in the period after Johannesburg when the CSD had a two-year cycle and a negotiated outcome was produced every second year – the so-called ‘policy year’.

Differences of view on what the HLPF ought to be reflect in large measure differing diagnoses of what ailed the CSD and what would be an effective remedy to its shortcomings. The HLPF’s mandates and responsibilities have been spelt out in UN General Assembly resolutions, beginning with A/RES/67/290 (Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development), continuing with *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, and culminating in A/RES/70/299 (Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level). The 2030 Agenda states in para. 83: “The high-level political forum will have a central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review processes at the global level, working coherently with the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and other relevant organs and forums, in accordance with existing mandates. It will facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, and provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up. ...”

It could be expected that such political leadership would carry particular weight when the HLPF convenes Heads of State and Government once every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly. It will do that in September of next year. How can UN Member States and other stakeholders who engage with the HLPF prepare in the coming nine months to ensure that this political leadership is exercised effectively. What sort of guidance and recommendations for follow-up could next September’s HLPF usefully deliver to sustain and accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs and implementing the 2030 Agenda, and to identify and point the way forward on new and emerging issues (as also reflected in the HLPF’s mandate)?

### **Brief Review of What has been Achieved to Date**

The HLPF is about to complete the first review cycle of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs – as outlined in A/RES/70/299, para. 3. In the first 3 years of the HLPF since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, an impressive number of countries have volunteered to present their progress in the form of voluntary national reviews (VNRs – with 111 VNRs prepared in total, the overwhelming majority for the first time). Another 51 are expected to be presented in the July 2019 HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC. The level of interest and enthusiasm for this Agenda is clearly high. In each case, countries have had to engage in a national process of VNR preparation, which almost

invariably involved broad consultations across government and, to varying degrees, with civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders.

- (1) One of the key questions to be addressed in the coming year will be: what comes next in the VNR process. While there are still a sizeable minority of countries who will not have presented VNRs by July 2019, most will have done so and will need to consider what makes the most sense by way of future reporting and other instruments to support national implementation.
- (2) With regard to the thematic reviews of the SDGs, it should be possible by next year to take stock of how effective those reviews have been to date in guiding national-level implementation as well as international cooperation. What makes sense going forward in terms of sequencing, clustering or otherwise organizing the thematic reviews, bearing in mind that the HLPF is meant to be overseeing a network of follow-up and review at the global level, not exhaustively conducting such follow-up and review all by itself? This raises the question of how more systematically to synthesize the results of various thematic review processes and feed them in a digestible form into the HLPF's deliberations.
- (3) Next year's SDG Summit should ideally provide guidance on what Member States and other stakeholders expect by way of main deliverables from future HLPFs, at least during the next four-year cycle.
  - a. Is the event itself the main deliverable – the experience sharing, learning, networking, and partnering that take place during the eight days of the HLPF? If so, how to assess whether it is delivering, whether the participants are gaining significant benefits from such participation?
  - b. Are there also other key deliverables? What for example is the value of the political declaration as it currently stands? Does it provide useful guidance to countries, other stakeholders when they go home? If not, could something be done to strengthen its impact, or is this not worth the effort?
  - c. If there is no political declaration, that would leave the Chair's Summary as the main substantive outcome – is there a way to enhance its usefulness, visibility, to allow perhaps a period of feedback and comment on its contents without opening it up to negotiation?

These are a few of the questions which will need to be confronted in 2019 and on which the remainder of this paper will offer some preliminary reflections and suggestions.

While the suggestions here are mostly mine, when I am endorsing an idea first proposed by another individual or organization, I will attribute the original source. For example, there was a recent meeting at the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development, in Incheon, Korea, the Sustainable Development Transition Forum, which gathered a number of leading experts on the HLPF, governance issues and the 2030 Agenda, and they made several interesting suggestions for strengthening the HLPF to which I will refer as appropriate in what follows.

## **1. The Preparatory Process**

With two HLPFs happening next year in short succession, simultaneous preparation for both poses challenges.

The second HLPF, the SDG Summit of September, is only a one-day event – spread over two days – but in terms of political guidance and recommendations it is likely to be the more

consequential. For, it will be attended by Heads of State and Government, and they will be expected to deliver high-level political messages on the SDGs and 2030 Agenda – what we have achieved and learned to date, where we are falling short, and what we need to do as an international community, as national governments and as other stakeholders, in partnership, to sustain momentum and accelerate progress wherever necessary to achieve the SDGs and to deliver on the pledge to leave no one behind.

As the SDG Summit is to be convened under the auspices of the General Assembly, the PGA has the primary responsibility for ensuring a successful outcome. She has already set the ball in motion with the appointment of two co-facilitators of the political declaration expected to be issued at the Summit, the Ambassadors of The Bahamas and Sweden.

While some have questioned the utility of a political declaration, it seems unlikely that there will be none, not least because it is hard to see how the world's leaders can provide the political leadership and guidance called for in the HLPF mandate without some formal declaration.

The question of its contents remains wide open however. Beyond acknowledging progress to date, if the declaration is to be forward-looking it will need to identify the main bottlenecks to faster progress towards the SDGs, especially in those countries and regions and among those populations lagging farthest behind. Moreover, it will need to offer concrete guidance to the international community, countries and other actors on how to relieve those bottlenecks and accelerate progress, including through concrete proposals for enhanced international and regional cooperation.

Guidance on how to make the follow-up and review process maximally effective in the years to 2030 could also be very helpful. Among the puzzles remaining to be solved in this regard are:

- (1) How to make most effective use of multiple fora spread over the year – at regional and global level – to monitor SDG progress and feed analysis and policy messages into the HLPF;
- (2) How to bring a host of SDG-related events organized by different stakeholder communities within the orbit of the HLPF, without having to give the UN's imprimatur to events over which it exercises no control;
- (3) Relatedly, how to feature the contributions of different groups of stakeholders to the 2030 Agenda more systematically in the HLPF, given the severe time and space constraints.

Given the current global political environment, with the skepticism in several quarters about the value of multilateral agreements, the negotiation of the political declaration is sure to be a delicate task of skillful diplomacy. What has emerged as a populist pushback against multilateralism should challenge supporters of multilateralism to find a language and a set of principles which can bring the skeptics more centrally into the conversation. The “leave no one behind” principle offers the opportunity to speak with those who perceive themselves and their communities to have been left behind by globalization, technology and other major trends of past decades.

To be able to do that, however, one must be willing to interpret the principle more flexibly than some are willing to do. Yes, we must place particular priority on the poorest of the poor when

devising public policies to deliver basic services, income support, jobs, education and health. Still, it does not follow that workers displaced from their jobs by automation or globalization or decarbonization – even if not among the poorest of the poor -- do not have very legitimate grievances and concerns which public policy needs to address. It is precisely the universality of the 2030 Agenda, with its recognition that there are poor and vulnerable individuals and groups in all countries deserving special public policy consideration, which provides the opening for a conversation with those people who constitute the political base of populist politicians across the globe.

So, in short, a political declaration issued at the SDG Summit must be inclusive, engaging those skeptics, responding to their concerns as far as possible. Some will no doubt refuse to engage and remain die-hard skeptics of multilateralism, but a political declaration will only carry sufficient weight as a demonstration of political leadership if it has the broadest possible political buy-in. And that needs to be achieved without apologizing for or diluting the ambition of the 2030 Agenda.

This imperative to achieve broad – ideally universal -- political ownership of the declaration raises difficult questions about a possible stand-off between certain civil society organizations and Member States over the content of the declaration. In the end there will need to be a willingness to compromise on all sides if there is to be a consensus on its contents. Given the charged international political environment, this may be easier said than done. The best way forward, it would seem, would be to engage civil society organizations constructively early on in the discussions on the declaration, to foster political buy-in and to engender a genuine dialogue between state and non-state actors.

Engagement of and consultation with civil society need not be limited to organized civil society but can usefully be extended to a broader cross-section of the population, including the multitudes of people in all countries who have very likely never heard of the SDGs or, if they have, have only the vaguest understanding of what they are and why they might matter for them. Indeed, one can imagine initiating a citizen conversation<sup>51</sup> – or more accurately – a flowering of multiple conversations around the world around the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, including the principle of leaving no one behind. Well structured and curated conversations among representative samples of the broader population can serve three valuable purposes in the lead-up to the SDG Summit: (i) raising awareness of the SDGs among the thus far uninformed; (ii) soliciting the views of ordinary people on how they view the SDGs and whether they see them as relevant to their lives; (iii) canvassing those people's views on what if anything they are willing and able to do to contribute towards achieving the SDGs.

## **1. The Outcomes**

The outcome(s) of the SDG Summit need to be considered in conjunction with the July HLPF's theme, SDG review, VNRs and other content. This is because there will only be one political declaration for the two HLPFs next year, to be issued at the Summit. That declaration must reference the July HLPF, but it is not yet known how far it is expected to incorporate substantive policy messages emerging therefrom. Presumably, if the Chair's Summary captures in a succinct

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<sup>51</sup> One approach to such citizen consultations on major public policy issues has been pioneered by Missions Publiques: see <https://missionspubliques.org/en/>.

and compelling manner the main policy messages and conclusions from the July HLPF, a strong reference to, endorsement of that Summary may suffice in the September political declaration.

Three of the SDGs under review in July 2019 offer an opportunity to consider a broader interpretation of the “leave no one behind” principle insofar as they are referenced in the September declaration – viz., climate change, peace and governance, and reducing inequalities. All three of these goals were contested to varying degrees in the Open Working Group and it was through a process of negotiation and compromise that all three were ultimately retained. The “leave no one behind” principle, even in its narrowest interpretation, relates intimately to the pursuit of peace, since the poorest and most vulnerable populations in the world are generally in conflict-affected countries. Goal 10 on reducing inequalities broadens the interpretation of the principle by addressing widening wealth and income inequalities wherever they are threatening to unravel the social fabric, including in middle-income and high-income countries. Viewing goal 13 on combatting climate change in light of the principle reminds governments that climate change policies can hurt some workers and some consumers, and that they need to be cognizant of such adverse impacts when designing and implementing such policies, doing whatever is possible to mitigate them. The solution is not to forego climate action but to find, in a participatory fashion, combinations of policies and programs that achieve environmental, social and economic objectives simultaneously.

The SDG Summit Declaration needs to be forward-looking, considering new and emerging issues as the HLPF is mandated to do. While the next four years are the most pertinent time horizon for consideration, in light of the HLPF review cycles, a longer time horizon to 2030 and even 2050 also needs to be considered. It is by 2050, after all, that the global economy needs to have made the transition to zero-net-carbon energy sources if the temperature goals of the Paris Agreement have a reasonable chance of being met.

Technological change offers hope to be able to make the energy transition across the globe, and the declaration could usefully reinforce international cooperation to accelerate both innovation and diffusion of the most critical technologies. Technological innovation and cooperation will also be crucial to achieving the food security and health SDGs, not least in the face of accelerating climate change. At the same time, technological change is revolutionizing work, and governments and other stakeholders need to be prepared for the potentially profound adjustments to labor markets of the coming decades. So, a strong statement of intent for enhanced international cooperation on science and technology would ideally be an important element of the September declaration.

Reaching agreement on language poses a major challenge, however, given the still deep North-South divide on matters pertaining to technology. At the very least, the declaration could offer some specific proposals on how to make the Technology Facilitation Mechanism (TFM) as effective as possible a vehicle for enhanced international science and technology cooperation.

The September declaration could also usefully speak to the need for broader engagement of non-state actors, including the private sector and not least the financial sector, in achieving the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. The declaration could define more precisely how governments intend to encourage their engagement and how these actors can in turn be more systematically integrated into the follow-up and review process, including the HLPF itself.

## 2. The Summit

How could the Summit itself be shaped to achieve maximum political effect? Beyond the political declaration itself, how else can the Summit have a lasting political impact?

Such high-level events are often seen as an occasion for the launch of new high-profile initiatives, including partnerships. Should the SDG Summit be such an occasion? In any event, countries and other actors will almost certainly use the publicity surrounding the event to launch their own initiatives. But, how can the PGA ensure the maximum durability, accountability, and impact of whatever initiatives may be launched during the Summit? Should the announcement of such high-impact initiatives be billed as a central feature of the Summit?

If so, how to obviate the risk that there would be a plethora of impressive sounding initiatives, partnerships announced at the Summit, the vast majority of which are never followed up and never held to account? Too many such initiatives have come and gone in the past, serving as good publicity at the moment, but without much risk of bad publicity a year or two hence when the initiative, partnership has failed to deliver what it promised.

Successful initiatives and partnerships are usually the result of a protracted process of gestation, based on a clearly identified need, not something conceived on short notice to meet an artificial launch deadline. If there were to be initiatives, partnerships launched, announced at the Summit, now is not too soon to encourage serious work by prospective partners, initiators to define clearly their offer and in the process to define also the metrics and process for assessing delivery of results.

If this were to be pursued, then the initiatives, partnerships to be launched at the Summit could perhaps be offered the carrot of an opportunity in subsequent sessions of the HLPF to report on progress achieved and challenges encountered along the way in a 'partnership forum', possibly with outstanding success stories featured in the main HLPF program.

It is worth reflecting on the many examples from the past of initiatives, partnership launched at high-level UN events which subsequently sank without trace, or which were not regularly monitored or expected to self-report on progress towards their goals. There seems little point in encouraging another such exercise in connection with the SDG Summit. If initiatives, partnerships were to be encouraged, there would need to be fairly stringent criteria defined, circulated and applied to ensure that only the most serious and high-priority initiatives can use the platform of the Summit to launch.

So, what would a successful SDG Summit next September look like? There would be the following outcomes:

- A Summit comprised of multiple events and opportunities for engaging the world's leaders and leading thinkers and actors in dialogue on how to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, including by forging strong partnerships and other initiatives targeted at addressing specific challenges and barriers to progress.
- An occasion for launching a number of high-profile, high-impact initiatives and partnerships designed to accelerate progress towards the SDGs and to ensure no one is left behind.

- A political declaration adopted by consensus, endorsed by the world’s leaders, reaffirming commitment to the SDGs and 2030 Agenda in their universality and ambition, guided by the overarching objective to ‘leave no one behind’, with a priority given to ending extreme poverty and a recognition that, beyond the extreme poor, other individuals and groups are being excluded and left behind in different societies, for a variety of reasons and in a variety of contexts, and that the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs can also address their concerns.
- The declaration would map out the next phase of UN Member State engagement in the follow-up and review of progress in different fora, including most importantly at the HLPF.
- It would also identify key areas for strengthening international cooperation to support the attainment of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. This could include guidance to the UN system and the multilateral financial institutions on the direction of their financial resources and technical support.
- The declaration would also spell out the ways in which different stakeholders can more fully engage in advancing the 2030 Agenda going forward, including the private sector and financial community, local governments, academia, civil society organizations and others. It would map out opportunities for their engagement in the follow-up and review of progress, including at the global level through the HLPF.
- The declaration would make clear the expectations of the international community for initiatives and partnerships launched at the Summit to report regularly on the implementation of their commitments and the ways in which they are advancing the SDGs.
- The declaration would also provide guidance and launch a process to review the HLPF’s effectiveness in follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda with a view to making it even more effective in the years to come, to pave the way for more integral involvement of multiple stakeholders, and to link its work more organically to that of other relevant fora at global and regional level. This could include drawing the links between progress on the 2030 Agenda and progress in implementing other international agreements, including on climate change, biodiversity, and desertification.

### **3. The Follow-Up**

The SDG Summit represents a milestone on a long journey but one only a short way into that journey down the long road to a sustainable future. So, in thinking about the Summit and its accomplishments, one must also consider its immediate context and what comes next.

One high-profile and closely related event happening back-to-back with the SDG Summit is the UN Secretary-General’s Climate Summit. The connections between the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement are very close procedurally as well as substantively. Procedurally, they are closely related because of goal 13’s reference to the UNFCCC as “the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change” and the Paris Agreement’s adoption by the Parties to the UNFCCC. Substantively, they are closely related because of the growing body of scientific evidence, not least reported by the IPCC, that failure to meet the Paris temperature targets is likely to have multiple adverse impacts across the SDGs which render their attainment highly problematic in many if not most countries.



So, one question which arises in the context of the back-to-back Climate and SDG summits is how far the interdependencies and synergies between the two agreements ought to translate into coordinated efforts not only at implementation but at follow-up and review.

Links between the SDGs and other international agreements will also need to be considered in the period to 2020, in particular the relationship between targets in goals 14 and 15 and the Aichi targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity and what happens post-2020 which is the intended achievement date for many of the targets.

Relatedly, 2020 is expected to be a landmark year for both the global climate regime and the global biodiversity regime – with Parties to the UNFCCC expected to announce plans by 2020 to raise the ambition of their commitments contained in their Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement, and with a Biodiversity Summit expected to take place at the United Nations in advance of the CBD COP (in China)<sup>52</sup> where Parties are expected to adopt a new post-2020 biodiversity framework designed to raise the level of ambition of global action to conserve biodiversity.

The post-2019 period marks the next phase of the follow-up and review of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, and so next year provides an opportunity to reflect on how that process should be organized, particularly within the HLPF but also in the way the review in the HLPF relates to other fora. This includes what the themes of annual HLPFs ought to be, what goals are to be reviewed each year, how the VNRs are to be conducted, how space can be created for fulsome engagement of multiple stakeholders in the follow-up and review, and generally how the follow-up and review process can optimize use of limited time and space. Some of these questions may be too specific to occupy Heads of State and Government in their political declaration, but they could usefully point the way to defining these in a timely and inclusive fashion.

If the lead-up to the SDG Summit does launch a process of citizen engagement, consultation on the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, it might well be useful to sustain the conversation following the Summit, possibly by identifying periodically – for example in advance of the annual HLPF – a new and emerging issue on which knowing ordinary people’s views, ideas could prove valuable to policy makers. It seems entirely possible that such a global conversation on global sustainable development challenges, including new and emerging issues, could become an institutionalized feature of preparations for future HLPFs.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The year 2019 is a stock taking moment, a time for reflection on what has worked with the follow-up and review of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda and where improvements could be made, particularly but not only at the global level, notably in the high-level political forum. There can be little doubt that the first few years of implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda offer reason for optimism.

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<sup>52</sup> IUCN’s quadrennial World Conservation Conference will also take place in 2020 in Marseilles, France.

Of utmost importance for the SDG Summit, at the end of the day, is for Heads of State and Government to reaffirm and redouble their commitment to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in their universality and ambition.

One not entirely anticipated development has been the enthusiasm with which non-state actors have embraced the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, including businesses as well as local government authorities, academia, non-profit organizations, NGOs and others. It is in recognition of this broad ownership of the Agenda that it is important to define, going forward, strengthened modalities for engagement, inclusion of these actors in the follow-up and review process at all levels, not least in the HLPF.

Beyond the already committed, if the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda are to be transformative, there will need to be a much broader conversation with the general public in all countries, especially those who have never heard of the SDGs and have no idea of their relevance to their lives. This includes a conversation on the significance of the principled commitment to ‘leave no one behind’ in the attainment of the SDGs. Only if the proponents of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda can bridge the communication divide with the skeptics, including the political base of populists around the world, is it likely that the ambition of the SDGs can be realized and our societies and economies guided firmly onto a sustainable development path to the benefit of present and future generations.

# **How to Re-Energize the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement**

By Felix Dodds

## **Introduction**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on climate, gave the world a roadmap in 2015 to how we might live more sustainably on this planet. Supported by the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the 2030 Agenda focused the means of implementation for the SDGs and Paris Agreement while also addressing financing for development more generally.

After the 2030 Agenda was negotiated, it was agreed that there would be a regular annual review of a set of individual goals and targets at the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on sustainable development. It was also agreed that the Heads of State and Government would review the entire 2030 Agenda to provide an additional level of oversight every four years. The first review of the 2030 Agenda by the Heads of State and Government will take place in September 2019, and they will conduct a similar review of the Paris Agreement in November and December 2020.

This paper was originally presented at the Friends of Governance for Sustainable Development workshop in December 2018. It represented an updated paper I initially shared in September 2018 after attending a UN Foundation meeting that had been held in the margins of the UN General Assembly High Level Segment (2018).

That meeting had focused on the question of whether or not we are we on track to deliver the SDGs. The outcome of that meeting made it evidently clear to me and others that we are very much not on track!

As Francesca Perucci, Chief of the Statistical Branch, said at the UN Statistical Division in an interview:

“Almost all areas where you see progress, if you look at the rate, or the pace of progress, it is never sufficient to meet the targets.” (Perucci, 2018)

It was clear that at that point in 2018, the sustainable development community was NOT offering a coherent set of messages for the review. There was also a lack of a coordinated and collaborative approach to counterbalance the growth of economic populism.

In hindsight, there is no doubt that we did not at the time realize the regressive forces that were intensifying around the world... though perhaps we should have. The results of the financial crisis in 2008 were still being felt. We had seen the political establishment in most countries become far too cozy with the financial sector. We saw them privatize the profits of a few and socialize the losses of the many. Hardly any of the culprits behind the financial crisis went to jail, and many emerged from the crisis even wealthier than before. Meanwhile, millions of people lost their jobs, their homes and, in some cases, their lives. No wonder the anger and loss of support for our political class.

## The Way Forward

The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement were unique in many ways. For starters, they both are global agreements that engaged the views of stakeholders in their development and now continue to do so in their implementation.

Since 2015, NGOs and other stakeholders too often rebrand their work around the SDGs without really taking to heart the need to change the ways in which they do THEIR work.

There are a number of differences between the SDGs and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The first is that every country must implement the SDGs, not just developing countries as was the case with MDGs. This enables a real opportunity for the developed world to change their development decisions to be more in line with sustainable development. After all, the pressing challenge of climate change and many of the other tipping points we currently face are due in large part to the actions of developed countries in recent centuries.

The second is the issue of interlinkages between different issues. There was a real recognition first around the Rio+20 conference and then in the SDG and climate negotiations that we need to move beyond silos. For instance, water availability is an important consideration in both agricultural and energy issues. The example of Barnhart in Texas where local water was used for fracking leaving no water for the local population is an acute case, but one that will become increasingly common in other communities in the future.

“We have large urban centres sucking water out of West Texas to put on their lands. We have a huge agricultural community, and now we have fracking which is also using water. And then there is climate change. West Texas has a long history of recurring drought, but under climate change, the Southwestern United States has been experiencing record-breaking heatwaves, further drying out the soil and speeding the evaporation of water in lakes and reservoirs. Underground aquifers have failed to regenerate. "What happens is that climate change comes on top and in many cases, it can be the final straw that breaks the camel's back, but the camel is already overloaded,” (Goldenberg, 2013)

The impact of climate change is encouraging policymakers to address challenges with an integrated agenda. The impending 30-40% increase in global demand for food by 2030 due to a growing population will hopefully lead to more sustainable diets, more people moving out of poverty, and increased resource efficiency due to urbanization. The same is true for energy provision, and the German Nexus Conference in 2011 estimated there would be a shortfall of water availability of around 30% also by 2030.

Given the impact these challenges will have at the community level, in particular, local governments and stakeholders need to develop tools and procedures to address these important interlinkages. Many local authorities are trying to integrate the SDGs into their planning process, which will certainly help. However, time is not on our side – we need more urgency.

## **Real World Campaign**

What we need is a **Real-World Campaign: We Are the People**, which will emphasise the 5Ps of the 2030 Agenda:

**People** – We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.

**Planet** – We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations.

**Prosperity** – We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature.

**Peace** – We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.

**Partnership** – We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity, focused in particular on the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable and with the participation of all countries, all stakeholders and all people.

The interlinkages and integrated nature of the Sustainable Development Goals are of crucial importance in ensuring that the purpose of the new Agenda is realized. If we realize our ambitions across the full extent of the Agenda, the lives of all will be profoundly improved and our world will be transformed for the better (UN, 2015).

### **Timeline and Events for a Real-World Campaign (2019 to 2023)**

We are nearly in December 2018 and are VERY LATE in our preparations if you consider the first NGO and other stakeholder meeting and paper on Rio+20 was produced in November 2008. The first set of SDGs was put forward by the UN DPI NGO Conference in 2011 (17 of them).

We can utilize the next two years to prepare for a mobilisation at the 2019 Heads of State and Government High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the 2020 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Both are critical meetings.

There are other anniversaries coming up that can also be used to help to build political momentum.

For example, 2020 is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the United Nations. 2020 is also the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day, which represents to most people the birth of the environmental movement with the creation of Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth that year.

We are living through perhaps the most challenging time for multilateralism since the 1930s. This campaign should underscore how multilateralism can help shape a fair, just, equitable and sustainable planet for everyone.

Too often, politicians criticize multilateralism for their own domestic political gains. The Brexit campaign in the UK shows how the lack of a positive narrative on multilateralism feeds a belief that you can do away with key institutions. The next two years must be a concerted effort to re-establish a positive narrative on multilateralism.

## **Phase 1**

### **A Sixteen-Month Campaign for the Planet and Us**

Campaigns too often lead up to a UN event or another and then reduce in intensity once the event is over because the media moves on to the next issue, as do the stakeholders and governments. I am suggesting the launch of this 16-month campaign on the SDGs and climate take place at the 2019 HLPF. This campaign would extend into the 2020 UNFCCC meeting, focusing on expanding solutions and partnerships for the SDGs.

Beginning in September 2019 and extending into 2020, **we should dedicate each month to a different SDG (beginning with climate).** Month by month, we would draw together stakeholder coalitions to highlight each of the SDGs (organizing around relevant UN events whenever possible).

Stakeholder coalitions will be asked to address SDG17 and climate as cross-cutting efforts and work with other coalitions where there are clear interlinkages, thereby creating new approaches and opportunities for collaborative work.

**A key objective of this would be to bring together and promote solutions and partnerships for each of the SDGs while also mobilizing a strategy to take us through to the mid-point of the SDGs in 2023.**

An organizing approach might be for each SDG be adopted and marketed by two governments – one developed and one developing – as well as relevant UN Agencies and Programmes. This could be built in a similar way to the thematic discussions for the SDGs or the Oceans Conferences we have seen since 2015 – **each creating a platform or building on an existing platform to create more synergy in solutions and partnerships.**

Key events that could be targeted to build momentum include:

- UNGA High Level Meetings (2019) including the HLPF, the financing for development high-level meeting, the climate meeting and the review of the SAMOA Pathway for SIDS (2019)
- UN Agency and programme meetings relevant to the Goals (e.g. WHO (2019, 2020), UNESCO (2019,2020) UNEA (2019), CBD, etc.)
- World Bank Spring and Autumn Meetings (2019 and 2020)

- G7 Heads of State and other G7 ministry meetings (e.g. Environment, Finance, etc. (2019 and 2020))
- G20 Heads of State (2019 and 2020)
- Earth Day (2019 and 2020)
- Review of the SDG indicators 2020
- Expo 2020 in Dubai
- Events around the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN (2020)
- Davos (2019, 2020, and 2021)
- Relevant regional meetings (e.g. African Union, EU, etc.)
- Relevant stakeholder conferences and events (e.g. WBCSD, ICLEI, ITU, IPU, CIVICUS, Indigenous Forum, etc.)

## **Phase 2**

We cannot wait until 2021 or 2022 to start planning for the mid-term review of the 2030 Agenda and that must be part of our approach to the first review in 2019.

A significant anniversary will fall in 2022 and we need to utilize that as part of the Real-World Campaign.

- UNEP's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2022, which will also be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stockholm and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Rio Earth Summit, 20 years since the Johannesburg Summit and 10 years since Rio+20

## **Our Message**

Our message should present a hopeful and positive vision of multilateralism, one that calls on all of us to join together to do our part as well as governments at all levels coming together to fulfill their responsibilities.

In many cases, we know that solutions exist; they need to be replicated. Furthermore, new partnerships need to be established where necessary and existing partnerships may need to reinvent themselves to better support each other and share knowledge.

## **What Should the High-Level Political Forum's September Declaration Incorporate?**

One mistake made when setting up the agenda for 2019 was not recognising that with two HLPFs in 2019, the first addressing the remaining SDGs and the second reviewing progress for the whole of the 2030 Agenda, we would need two different Political Declarations. It will be interesting to see how these two aspects are addressed as negotiations start on the single declaration starting in earnest in May 2019.

The September text should address two elements:

1. How to accelerate means of implementation
2. How to address new and emerging issues

And this should be done through identifying drivers and accelerators of implementation.

## **Means of Implementation**

We cannot change the SDGs and their targets, though there is a discussion on what to do to address the 23 targets that fall in 2020 or 2025. With that being said, the challenge is to focus on how to increase the means of implementation.

Here are some suggestions that could be part of the Political Declaration:

**1. *Parliaments/national assemblies should host debates and commit to action on the SDGs and Climate – IPU to support***

- Governments should commit to hosting annual debates in their parliaments/national assemblies on how best to implement the SDGs and develop national strategies with stakeholders. Voluntary National Reviews then can be developed from these activities for the next period.
- Where they don't exist, governments should commit to creating national multi-stakeholder commissions or councils to monitor and help in the implementation of national SDG and climate plans.

**2. *Local authorities should have town hall meetings and start to develop their SDG and climate strategies if they don't have them already – ICLEI/UCL to support***

- Governments should commit to assisting local and subnational governments to develop their SDG and climate strategies and implementation plans with their local communities and stakeholders by 2023.

**3. *Multi-stakeholder partnerships (MSPs) are important tool in delivering the SDGs***

- Governments should agree upon a set of principles for SDG MSPs and agree to set up guiding mechanisms for all MSPs that have been developed and registered in the UN database. Those engaged in helping to deliver a particular target should be brought together into a meta-partnership to enable effective knowledge sharing, capacity building, funding and reporting against the relevant target. These meta-partnerships, or champion MSPs, should have a strong support from the UN family to help them deliver effective solutions.
- There needs to be an enhancement of the Office of Partnerships within the UN to facilitate UN support for champion MSPs and to assemble a database of support for capacity building and other needs of MSPs both inside and outside the UN system.
- ***Can PPPs play an important role in helping to deliver the SDGs? There is much opposition to these among particularly the NGO community. There is no question that PPPs will play a role but at this point there are no principles or guidance globally for them.***

The review of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2019) should establish 2023 as the year where all regional commissions are required to follow the example of UNECE and develop their own set of PPP Principles for SDG work. Once this has happened – enabling regional and national stakeholders a real opportunity to input to the development of these principles then 2023 should consider initiating a framework convention bringing together these regional agreements.

**4. *Stock exchanges can play a significant role in setting rules, such as a reporting requirement for all companies that are listed to produce their ESG reports annually as a listing requirement***

- HLPF should establish 2023 as the year where all stock exchanges are required to implement the production of sustainability reports and annual ESG reports as a listing requirement.



- The Secretary General should bring together the key 45 companies that control something like 70% of the throughflow of the capital markets and discuss how sustainability can be integrated into the system between the asst owners and the Investment consultants, between the investment consultants and the Stock Exchanges, between the buy side manages and the stock exchange, between the sell side brokers and the list companies and the Stock Exchanges and between the retail financial advisors and the Stock Exchanges.

**5. *Credit-rating agencies can incorporate SDGs in their rating systems***

The Addis agreement resolved to “reduce mechanistic reliance on credit-rating agency assessments, including in regulations. To improve the quality of ratings, we will promote increased competition as well as measures to avoid conflict of interest in the provision

of credit ratings.” Moody’s added resilience to their rating in the US in 2017. A commitment among the three major credit rating agencies which control around 95% of credit rating in the world (Moody’s, Fitch and Standard and Poor’s) to work with the UN on integrating the SDGs and Paris Accord into their ratings would be a huge step in the right direction.

**6. *A commitment to access dormant assets for sustainability activities***

Dormant assets are assets without contactable owners, often due to previous owner dying without a will. It is estimated that there are over \$100 billion in dormant assets which could be used. Governments could commit them to being used for national and local sustainability projects.

**7. *The agreement of two UN Commissions for legally binding agreements for P10 is an important first stage, but there is more to do in this space***

- The HLPF should seek commitments from other UN Commissions to start a process of developing their own P10 conventions.

## **How to Address New and Emerging Issues**

Outside of the SDGs, the other aspect of the 2030 Agenda that needs to be addressed is that of new and emerging issues.

The core of the 2030 Agenda is the list of SDGs and their targets, but the document also started to address new and emerging issues that had become clearer since the SDGs had been agreed in the SDG Open Working Group (OWG).

Of the remaining 11 years until the 2030, goals and targets are due to be delivered yet we will see additional challenges emerge over the coming decade as new technologies impact our lives to an unprecedented degree.

This new industrial revolution will see increased automation and, in some areas, robots employed where humans used to be employed. For instance, we already are starting to see driverless cars. Uber is expecting to have driverless taxis within 5 years. Tesla is exploring new long-distance driverless capabilities, which will likely arrive sooner than we expect. The 3D printing of human organs is an amazing emerging development – but how will developments such as these impact the manufacturing sector, and those who work in it, more broadly?

China recently cloned a monkey, which raises an important question: when will we see the first human cloned? By 2030? What does this mean? Are we ready for these disruptive technologies? Who will be left out of this new revolution? Are our democratic institutions strong enough to withstand these rapid changes?

In the US, the last time we saw such a change was the Industrial Revolution. This led to a period of extreme economic inequality and empowered corporations more than ever before. Republican President Theodore Roosevelt made the first significant attempt to address these challenges through his Square Deal, which reflected three basic goals: the conservation of natural resources, the commitment to check corporate power, and the promotion of consumer protection. In a speech in Kansas in 1910, Roosevelt said:

“In every wise struggle for human betterment one of the main objects, and often the only object, has been to achieve in large measure equality of opportunity. In the struggle for this great end, nations rise from barbarism to civilization, and through its people press forward from one stage of enlightenment to the next. One of the chief factors in progress is the destruction of special privilege. The essence of any struggle for healthy liberty has always been, and must always be, to take from some one man or class of men the right to enjoy power, or wealth, or position, or immunity, which has not been earned by service to his or their fellows.” (Roosevelt, 1910)

As these new challenges emerge, the review of the 2030 Agenda in 2019, 2023 and 2027 should focus on generating effective solutions. I would like to see a new General Assembly Commission set up to look at the impacts of new technology on the delivery of the SDGs and what can be done to help ensure these impacts are largely positive for the world.

## **Conclusion**

“With just 12 years left to the 2030 deadline, we must inject a sense of urgency. Achieving the 2030 Agenda requires immediate and accelerated actions by countries along with collaborative partnerships among governments and stakeholders at all levels.” (Guterres, 2018)

The UN Secretary General is right to suggest we are falling behind and that only by working together can we hope to deliver the SDGs by 2030. Since 2015, we have observed the rise of economic populism while also making meaningful strides to address the key challenges of our age by adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate. Although much has been accomplished by stakeholders, in particular, there exists a clear need to re-establish political will among our leaders in government.

This paper proposes an ambitious campaign linking together the two major events in 2019 and 2020 to generate real momentum behind delivering both the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement. After the adoption of both of these agreements, we now need to focus on implementation. It starts to address the time between now and the half way review of the SDGs in 2023 but much work needs to be done NOW on that not in 2021 or 2022.

By fundamentally realigning finance to support both agreements and mobilizing the general public, we can better ensure we meet the ambitious goals we committed to achieving in 2015 and, in doing so, create a more equitable and sustainable world for current and future generations.

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## **HLPF, the Major Groups, Other Stakeholders and the Future of the 2030 Agenda<sup>53</sup>**

By Jan-Gustav Strandenaes, Senior Adviser, Stakeholder Forum

### **Introduction**

Implementing the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development has been made contingent on the full involvement of the major groups and other stakeholders. The importance of non-state stakeholders in intergovernmental affairs today can be illustrated by the Rio+20 Outcome Document – it begins and ends with paragraphs referring to the importance of civil society.

This article will attempt to answer a few questions related to major groups and other stakeholders: How can we ensure the upcoming Summit on the 2030 Agenda<sup>54</sup> and subsequent HLPFs fully engage major groups and other stakeholders including local and sub-national governments; what additional role or entitlements should they have?

The participation of non-state stakeholders in the multilateral system in general and at the UN in particular has become increasingly difficult over the years.<sup>55</sup> And yet, the 2030 Agenda insists that implementation of its many challenges will be impossible unless multistakeholder partnerships are developed and engaged in the implementation. Ideally, multistakeholder partnerships (MSPs) consist of three elements: Governments, the private sector and members from civil society – with equal access to decision-making. The HLPF and the 2030 Agenda is presently subject to a review process. Asking relevant questions can therefore be as fruitful and engaging as ready-made answers. The following bullet-points represent a synthesised summary of many of the questions asked about ‘multistakeholderism’ at the UN.

- Why and how has the UN moved away from referring simply to NGOs as a concept and begun using Major Groups and Other Stakeholders instead? What is driving this tendency?
- What examples are there of good practices on engagement of stakeholders from around the UN system that could be built into the next phase of the HLPF?
- What and how can stakeholders contribute to developing policy issues and how can they be an agent for implementation?
- What could local and subnational governments do to engage local stakeholders in helping to develop local strategy and policy to implement the SDGs?
- What can be done at the local and sub-national level to create partnerships to help deliver the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda?
- Could and should local and subnational governments develop their own VNRs?
- What role would local and subnational indicators play?
- Is the HLPF currently engaging non-state actors effectively in preparation? In the Forum proper? In negotiation of the Ministerial Declaration?
- Should non-state actors’ role in HLPF be changed in any significant way and, if so, how?
- Should non-state actors be asked to report on contribution towards implementing the 2030 Agenda? If so, how can this be accommodated in time available?

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<sup>53</sup> This article is based on the presentation made at the Friends of Governance meeting, New York, UN, December 2018.

<sup>54</sup> According to A7Res/67/290 the UN will host a two day event attended by State Leaders, September 24 and 25 2019, on the 2030 Agenda

<sup>55</sup> See the annual report on civil society by CIVICUS

- Should voluntary stakeholder and partnership commitments be featured in the HLPF? If so, what mechanism is needed for follow-up?

### **A brief note on ‘stakeholders’**

- Article 71 of the UN Charter recognises Non-Governmental Organisations as a proper and legal actor of the UN system under the Charter.
- The 9 Major Groups, as decided by Agenda 21, are a subset of the NGOs (Women, Children and Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, Trade Unions, Local Authorities, Science and technology, Business and Industry).
- A ‘stakeholder’ is a person, body, unit, organisation with a stake in something, it has no legal standing, and is context dependent.
- A stakeholder in this article refers to the 9 major groups and relevant stakeholders as enumerated in the Rio+20 Outcome Document (§43) and in resolution 67/290 on the HLPF, and not only civil society.

### **HLPF engaging non-state stakeholders**

Since 1992 and UNCED,<sup>56</sup> which gave us Agenda 21, the UN has come to utilise and refer to the greater NGO community as Major Groups. As explained above, this was an attempt to give greater visibility and modus operandi for the global NGO community. The concept MGs, which has been adopted in various formats throughout the UN system has allowed the UN to capitalise on the rich resource availability that this large global community represents. The largest resource is notably recognised as ‘being closer to the people on the ground’ than authorities or the private sector often are. Throughout the UN system today, there are many examples of successful interaction between non-state stakeholders and governments and the UN. Some of the best examples are found within the context of the World Food Programme, CITES, UN AIDS and UN OCHA.

These greater opportunities also bring new challenges, and being allowed to sit at the decision-making table clearly needs well-informed contributions. If non-state stakeholders are asked to contribute to developing policy issues as well as being agents of implementation, they need to be better informed and aware of their roles and understand the room in which they can maneuver. It is clear that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has provided all actors with a new political landscape. This landscape comes with a new narrative, but the narrative needs to be made into a functional narrative and that demands concrete contributions in well-defined arenas. Defining the arena is part of the review process of HLPF and agenda setting for the new cycle for the 2030 Agenda.

Local, subnational and national governments could engage non-state stakeholders in helping to develop local and national strategies and policy to implement the SDGs by always taking them seriously and keeping them up-to-date and informed. Real access is – as we shall see later – a key concept, but needs a new defining context to be operational in the new political landscape.

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<sup>56</sup> The UN Conference on Environment and Development, UNCED, in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro

One way for government at all levels to engage non-state stakeholders could be to create partnerships to help deliver the SDGs. Such partnerships should be based on national strategies for sustainable development, a strategy not many countries have today. Non-state stakeholders should be involved in developing such strategies, and they should also be encouraged to create their own strategies. If and when such non-state strategies were to be developed, space should be given for a presentation of these at the HLPF. Experience from other parts of the UN can prove that such ‘shadow reporting’ can be fruitful and contribute to familiarising people with global challenges and also transform global challenges into local concerns. What takes place at the Council for Human Rights is an example that could inspire HLPF in many ways.

The following chart<sup>57</sup> maps, in a simple way, the engagement of non-state stakeholders in the general preparation of HLPF. It also illustrates, though to a lesser extent, how these stakeholders are engaged in the present review process of HLPF. The low engagement of non-state stakeholders is also because we are still in the early stages in working on the review of HLPF.

<b>Is HLPF currently engaging non-state actors effectively, in preparation?</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>Room to improve</b>	<b>Is anything happening</b>	<b>At all?</b>
8				
<b>In the Forum proper?</b>		Room to improve		
<b>Negotiation the Ministerial Declaration?</b>				Nope
<b>1 - Should non-state actors’ role in HLPF be changed significantly, 2 - if so how?</b>		1 -Room to improve	2 - To be discussed	
<b>Should non-state actors report on their implementation of the 2030 Agenda?</b>	YES			
<b>How can this be accommodated in time available?</b>			To be discussed	
<b>Should voluntary stakeholder and partnership commitments be featured in the HLPF?</b>	YES			
<b>If so, what mechanism is needed for follow-up?</b>			To be discussed	

### Is there formal space for non-state stakeholders to participate?

The simple answer is ‘yes’. The formal answer is also ‘yes’ – with the following emphasis: implement all paragraphs in 67/290, and we have a guaranteed and complete participation of stakeholders at all levels at any time of formal and non-formal settings within the UN system (except closed meetings).

As has already been said, the Rio Outcome Document begins and ends with reference to civil society. The document has many strong references to civil society, major groups and stakeholders and uses an entire chapter, paragraphs 42 to 55, to outline ways and means for engaging with these stakeholders. Historically, it is also worth mentioning that this political understanding of civil

<sup>57</sup> The Chart was put together by the author, and represents the dominant trends in answers he got from interviewing various non-stat stakeholders at HLPF 2018 including being part of the ongoing discussions among stakeholders dealing with HLPF

society was guiding the preparatory process of Rio+20, the Open Working Group and has been fully integrated in the 2030 Agenda Document. Implementing the references to non-state stakeholders found in these UN documents, including a number of others, will open space for them and should guarantee participation. In fact, all this was materialised in the UNGA resolution which gave HLPF its mandate and work-programme. No other resolution taken by the UN GA in the more than 70-year history of the UN is more progressive and integrative towards non-state actors than A/Res/67/290 on the organisation and modalities of the HLPF.

### **What does 67/290 actually direct us to do?**

HLPF was established at Rio+20 in 2012. The text is found in the Rio Outcome document paragraphs 84 and 85. In June 2013, the General Assembly agreed to a resolution on organisation, mandates and methodology of HLPF, which unfortunately was long before anybody knew what it was going to be working with. The work-programme only manifested itself in 2015 with the 2030 Agenda document being agreed to by the Summit at the UN, with more than 140 State Leaders present in September of that year.

The Second preambular paragraph of 67/290 outlines the challenges of what is to come: “*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.”

It was clear to everyone at the time – in 2013 – the member states of the UN intended the non-state stakeholders to have a relevant and important role in the ‘institutional framework for sustainable development,’ at the UN as well as throughout the world. And as already stated, this was concretised in the 2030 Agenda document.

The mandate of HLPF is large and growing. For a detailed discussion on this issue, see my article on “Rethinking the UN intergovernmental bodies after the creation of the High-level Political Forum, HLPF, with a focus on the roles of the General Assembly, ECOSOC and HLPF,” which is also available in this book. And this growth allows for greater involvement of non-state stakeholders.

### **Which privileges are given to MGs and non-state stakeholders by 67/290?**

Major groups and relevant stakeholders are referred to in 7 paragraphs. These are: Paragraphs 8c; 13; 14; 15; 16; 22 and 24. Some excerpts:

- §8c “HLPF .... shall conduct regular reviews .... Which shall provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders.”
- § 14. “Stresses the need for the forum to promote transparency and implementation by further enhancing the consultative role and participation of the major groups and other relevant stakeholders at the international level in order to make better use of their expertise,

while retaining the intergovernmental nature of discussions, and in this regard decides that the forum shall be open to the major groups, other relevant stakeholders and entities having received a standing invitation to participate as observers in the General Assembly, building on arrangements and practices observed by the Commission on Sustainable Development, including Economic and Social Council decision 1993/215 of 12 February 1993 and Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996, which shall be applicable to the forum.”

Perhaps the most significant paragraph – and to some the most surprising when it comes to what non-state stakeholders can and cannot do at HLPF, is paragraph 15. It needs to be quoted in its entirety and is definitely the most radical paragraph to give non-state actors rights and privileges:

§15 - Decides, in this regard, that, while retaining the intergovernmental character of the forum, the representatives of the major groups and other relevant stakeholders shall be allowed:

- a) To attend all official meetings of the forum.
- b) To have access to all official information and documents.
- c) To intervene in official meetings. (!!)
- d) To submit documents and present written and oral contributions. (!!)
- e) To make recommendations. (!!)
- f) To organize side events and round tables, in cooperation with Member States and the Secretariat.

The various paragraphs must be understood in the context in which are given: in the context of an organisational unit which is of a governmental nature, owned by governments and functions at the top level of the hierarchy of that organisation. The position given to HLPF is decided in paragraphs 3 and 4 of 67/290:

§3 *Also decides* that the meetings of the forum shall be convened under the auspices of the General Assembly and of the Economic and Social Council.

4. *Further decides* that all meetings of the forum shall provide for the full and effective participation of all States Members of the United Nations and States members of specialized agencies.

The delegates negotiating the process that resulted in 67/290 were also keen to admonish the non-state stakeholders to have a functioning system outside of HLPF. This was meant to give assurance to the Member States that once the non-state actor was accredited to HLPF and allowed to sit at the HLPF table, they would represent the best possible actors outside of governments. This is the context of paragraph 16 of 67/290:

“Recognises the existence of major groups and stakeholders, encourages them to establish a system whereby they can ensure all out participation of all stakeholders. Thus the UN with member states implicitly admit that they will accept decisions taken by the non-state actors in their engagement with the HLPF.”

### **How do different stakeholders approach the 2030 agenda?**

The way that different stakeholders have approached the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reveal how seriously they consider this issue to be. It follows also that the way they



engage reveals how they regard the multilateral system and how seriously they consider global agreements to be.

Having participated in all HLPFs and studied the synthesis outcome reports made by the UN following HLPF including the SG reports, a pattern of meaningful engagement is discernible. My interviews during the HLPFs, particularly in 2016 and 2018, are also at the basis for the following assessment, including the three charts below. For those non-state stakeholders who participate actively in HLPF, two levels of meaningful engagement appear. They are:

- a) Policy advocacy and lobbying.
- b) Engagement with other stakeholders/partnerships, analysis, understanding, and implementation.

The stakeholders also list a number of pre-requisites for their engagement:

- a) Knowledge, insights, representativeness and commitment.
- b) All based on good governance, where real access is crucial.

The charts below show that as we progress towards the global level, people, read: non-state actors, are less inclined to be engaged. There are several reasons for this, and several ongoing studies that may give better answers to this issue.<sup>58</sup> However, as governments have consistently stated, multi-stakeholder partnerships are crucial to implementing the 2030 agenda and all actors must be involved. The chart below therefore could represent food for thought when it comes to reviewing HLPF.

**Stakeholder positions vis-a-vis SDGs – I** (source JG Strandenaes)

20		LOCAL	NATIONAL	REGIONAL	GLOBAL
	<b>INFLUENCE</b>				
	<b>Government</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>
	<b>Business</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>
	<b>People (academia)</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High/ Lessening</b>	<b>Less</b>	<b>Little (?) (context dependent)</b>
	<b>INTEREST</b>				
	<b>Government</b>	<b>High to inconsistent</b>	<b>High to inconsistent</b>	<b>Inconsistent to High</b>	<b>Varies to High</b>
	<b>Business</b>	<b>Less</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Growing</b>	<b>Growing</b>
	<b>People (Academia)</b>	<b>Varies to High</b>	<b>Varies to High</b>	<b>Less (Context dependent)</b>	<b>Even less (Context dependent)</b>

The next chart has a slightly different approach. Whereas the above chart tried to gauge the influence and interest of various stakeholders, the one below tries to assess in a generic way ability to implement and preparedness to do so. That ability and preparedness varied to a high degree. When looking at the global level, it came as a surprise to see that there was a fairly large group of

<sup>58</sup> See M. Beisheim, SWP, and the Earth System Governance studies (Ruben Zondervan et al)

governments that appeared less ready and prepared to implement the 2030 agenda on local level. One interesting fact revealed by the small study I conducted was that there was more substance to the VNRs if the government presenting also had a national strategy for development. As all stakeholders will be engaged in setting the new agenda cycle, these charts may provide for some food for thought.

**Stakeholder positions vis-a-vis SDGs – II** (source JG)

21		LOCAL	NATIONAL	REGIONAL	GLOBAL
	<b>ABILITY to implement</b>				
	<b>Government</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>
	<b>Business</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>High</b>
	<b>People (Academia)</b>	<b>H/Varies</b>	<b>H/Varies</b>	<b>Less</b>	<b>Even less</b>
	<b>PREPAREDNESS</b>				
	<b>Government</b>	<b>Lacking</b>	<b>Varies to High</b>	<b>Growing</b>	<b>Varies</b>
	<b>Business</b>	<b>Lacking</b>	<b>Growing</b>	<b>Growing</b>	<b>Varies</b>
	<b>People (Academia)</b>	<b>Growing</b>	<b>Growing</b>	<b>Lacking</b>	<b>Not really</b>

The final charts, combined the one above with the one below, have a different approach and try to gauge how active stakeholders are as well as the opportunities and impact stakeholders have on using the SDGs in various contexts. It is important to bear in mind the following: This chart is almost solely based on a desk study (i.e. what is available through internet). Even though there are some good portals which allows for reasonably reliable information, showing availability and giving access to global networks cannot be said to cover all nations in a good way. What was surprising was that a fair group among OECD nations failed to come up with plausible and available information on the questions asked relating to the three areas of questioning. Admittedly, this cannot be said to be a thorough study, but it reveals a tendency among nations, a tendency which hopefully will improve in such a way that the end results will state HIGH at all levels.

As most government officials and a growing number of concerned persons from academia are grappling with the need to make everybody aware of the SDGs and the larger 2030 Agenda, the charts should be a reminder of how far we need to go in a short period of time. It also reveals the need to involve all stakeholders in any preparatory and planning process that concerns all people so no one is left behind.

The chart below indicates a different kind of approaches.

Level	Systems/stakeholders active at different levels	Opportunity, engaging in implementing SDGs	Impact of using SDGs in planning and actions
Local <sup>22</sup>	Municipalities, business, civil society, sub-national governments	High	High
National	Government, private sector, civil society, academia & research	Varies, some good examples, too many poor examples	Varies, some good examples, hardly enough
Regional	Larger institutions, private sector, UN system; regional organisations, the Nordic council, EU, OAU other regional intergovernmental systems and NGOs	Varies, the 2030 agenda has created a momentum, there are opportunities, the fear is that they might decrease, it depends upon governance	Varies, and it reflects the available opportunities.
Global	OECD, the UN system, large corporations, academia & research INGOs	Symbolic to real participation of all stakeholders, could be decreasing over time due to fragmented governance and understanding of the 2030 agenda and the SDGs	Uneven picture, impact possible and growing in certain areas, though impact reflect opportunities and understanding

### What do stakeholders need to fully engage?

Engagement is a two-way street – actors give and take, contribute and receive. An often-stated truism is: unless governments own intergovernmental processes, policies will never be taken seriously. Another could be: unless people feel ownership with development, little will be implemented. In the review of HLPF, it seems simple to say: keep what works and strengthen what needs to be strengthened. Unfortunately, the tendency over the last few years is clear – there is a notable and shrinking space for civil society.<sup>59</sup>

In the upcoming review of HLPF, it is important to consider the following items as these are crucial for any stakeholder involvement – regardless of the nature of the stakeholder:

- Relevance.
- Participation.
- Access.
- Information.
- Knowledge.
- Understanding.
- Being listened to and taken seriously.
- Promises followed up.

It is also imperative that these are contextualised; for instance, access can mean many things. If non-state stakeholders are denied access to delegates on the floor of the UN conference halls, they have the same access as I would have sitting at home and seeing and listening to the debate

<sup>59</sup> See also M.Beisheim & A.Ellersiek: «Partnerships for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – transformative, inclusive and accountable” – SWP, December 2017

via streaming. Access must be real in every context. That goes for all the above bullet-pointed elements.

### **The changing roles for non-state actors**

This century offers us a new political landscape and roles are changing. Non-state stakeholders have over decades excelled at lobbying and advocacy work. To be relevant in the coming years, they must be that but do more as well. The bullet points summarise some of the roles and contexts in which stakeholders must operate. At the same time, these bullet points represent parts of the new political narrative to be taken into consideration when reviewing HLPF and creating a new agenda for the next cycle of events at HLPF. Stakeholders are:

- Watchdogs – holding everybody, including themselves, accountable.
- Research bodies, identifying emerging issues and help setting agendas.
- Implementers – establishing partnerships for the SDGs so their implementation is based on partnerships in ALL countries.
- Private sector engagement with the 2030 agenda.

A final point of discussion is whether or not stakeholder engagement should be institutionalised in a much better way. Even at the UN, there is shrinking space for non-state stakeholders.

### **Governance and relevance – stakeholders will ask difficult questions, they can be a valuable liaison to people on the ground**

This chart discusses the role of indicators in a most generic manner. Stakeholders have only to a lesser degree been engaged in formulating the indicators, but there is now a notable increased interest in this issue. Still, questions should be asked as the indicators also do have an effect on the new agenda cycle as well as the future of HLPF.

<b>DOES GOVERNANCE DIRECT REALITY?</b>	<b>A CHANGING PERCEPTION OF GOVERNANCE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Monitoring development through indicators: (SDGs are point in case)</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>On which values are the indicators based?</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Are the 230+ indicators relevant?</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Based on Collective goods?</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Whose interests do they reflect?</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>The collective interest of all society?</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>The government/authorities?</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Monetary values such as profitability and the market?</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Private sector?</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Environmental and social concerns?</b></li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>The people?</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>A rights based system?</b></li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Who developed the indicators?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Governments?</b></li> <li>▶ <b>Experts?</b></li> <li>▶ <b>The people?</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ <b>Do the governance systems today reflect the politics of our times, or should some governance principles be set in stone</b></li> </ul>
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### A few final thoughts

The 2030 Agenda document emphasises collaborative efforts by stating that all stakeholders must be involved at all levels in all contexts.

“All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership, will implement this plan. We are resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and want and to heal and secure our planet. We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.” (From the preambular text of the 2030 agenda, 70/1)

The chart below shows that we are also subject to a change of mind to make all this happen. The issue of sustainability only entered the world in 1987 with the Brundtland Commission.

IS OUR MIND-SET .....	FIT FOR PURPOSE?	Our SD mind-set has a short past and a long future (I hope)
1945 17	1970 1987 1992 2000	2012 2016 ...
Peace, Conflict, Cold War	The Development Paradigm A North South Dichotomy	Sustainable Development on its own, resulting in ... Universality is key
Environment is weak Sustainable development at zero	1987- Our Common Future SD on the political agenda 1992 - UNCED Millennium Declaration – MDGs 2000 and 2001	the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs
Universal approach in the world at the time	1972 – UNEP The Global Ministerial Forums of UNEP - 2000	2014 – UN Environment Assembly
INSTITUTIONS ...	REFLECT ...	OUR MIND-SETS

As a historian, I would say that we have come a long way in a short period of time. As an environmentalist, I would simultaneously state that we have not come far enough and have used too much time to get where we are today. Change – radical change – is needed. We have changed the world for the worse by mistake. We can change it for the better by intent.

## **Advancing the 2030 Agenda: Lessons learnt from the first cycle of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) – how far can we go?**

By Jorge Fernandez, Felipe Victoria

### **Introduction**

Traditionally, the sub-national governments have been key components in the implementation of sustainable development solutions, and more specifically, have played a fundamental role in localizing and implementing so far the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the territorial sphere that is closer to its citizens.

The Agenda 2030 is thought as a solution for a global scenario, but at the same time its commitment to the promotion of the territorial dimension and the adaptation at the local and regional level is one of its innovative features.

Both the United Nations and the European Commission have highlighted the important role of sub-national governments in the implementation of the SDGs, and have stipulated that each territory should follow in this path with due regard to its own local circumstances, and adapting it to their own reality.

With the elaboration and release in April of 2018 of the Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030, the aim is to lead and continue to encourage the participation of other regions and sub-national governments in their own SDG implementation. This approach was deemed ideal by the Basque Government because of the proximity and specific knowledge of the society's needs, as well as the skills and resources needed to ensure the best possible outcome.

Euskadi (the name of the territory in the regional language)/ Basque Country is a region in the north of Spain bordering with France of just over 7,000 km<sup>2</sup> and nearly 2.2 million citizens, with its own language, culture and identity, and a high index of sustainable human development. The Basque Government represents a region that enjoys a broad and unique way of self-government (with a high degree of autonomy and power in areas such as economy, education, industry, culture, health, security and social services).

The main contribution of the "Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030" initiative to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, is to generate a favorable environment in the understanding and implementation of the SDGs to achieve the great objective of "leaving no one behind", through the building of broad partnerships.

The Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 Agenda constitutes the Basque Government's determination to put forward its public policies in the light of the challenges of the United Nations Agenda 2030, and also establishing a link with the strategic approach adopted by the European Commission in the work for sustainable development, which focuses on the use of instruments to ensure that current and future policies take into account social, environmental and economic factors.

### **Effectiveness of the Basque Country Agenda 2030**

In 2016, the first year of the Agenda 2030, was the end of a previous Administration and the beginning of a new 4-year term after the 2016 regional elections. This moment was rightly used as an opportunity to reflect and analyze the situation of the Basque Country with respect to the new global challenges highlighted by the SDGs and the back-then recently approved Agenda 2030.

Thus, in that year, a first analysis of the existing policies and plans of the Basque Government was carried out in order to obtain a first glance of the overall current development situation, and determine to what extent the general government planning was aligned with the contents, objectives and goals of Agenda 2030.

Once the new four-year term (2016-2020) began, the Basque Government approved its Government Program for the 11th Parliamentary term. It is a document that consists of 4 pillars, 10 axes, 15 regional objectives, 175 commitments and 650 initiatives to advance Sustainable Human Development. This document includes all the commitments acquired by the government with the Basque society for the next four years.

The 15 regional objectives for the 2016-2020 term focus on the "5 Ps" included by the UN in its SDGs: Prosperity (1-7), People (8-13), Planet (14-15), Peace (16) and Partnerships (17).

Thus, the Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 Agenda:

- Covers the three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental).
- Is inter-sectoral: it affects all policy areas of the Basque public sector.
- It has Policy Coherence for Development, which is a key tool for the success of Agenda 2030 because it reinforces the idea that we are moving in the same direction. In this sense, it has assessed and taken into consideration the Framework of Reference for Policy Coherence for Development, approved by the Governing Council in April 2016.
- It is specific: it focuses on issues and commitments in which the Government has the competencies, power and capacity to act.

The Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 reflects how the different Basque sectoral policies help in the implementation of the 17 SDGs. Specifically, the Agenda includes 93 commitments, 80 planning instruments, 19 legislative initiatives, and 50 indicators to help advance the SDGs in the 2016-2020 period. These are the eight main pillars of the Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030:

- **Integrating and indivisible:** covering three dimensions of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental issues).
- **Transversal:** covers all areas of public policy and has an impact on them.
- **Time-based:** notwithstanding the foregoing, the initiatives to be developed are divided into 4 year-periods, coinciding with the legislative period of the Basque Government.
- **Specific:** focused mainly on the issues and commitments on which action can be taken.
- **Clear:** it is a simple, clear, and easy to use tool.
- **Participatory:** permanently open to multilevel and multi-stakeholder participation.
- **Adaptable:** a "living" and adaptable Agenda, open to changes and adaptation in a process of continuous improvement.
- **International:** a universal, global and international plan.

The response to the following questions and comments try to give a general answer from the regional approach in the Basque Country's perspective and the partners it works with, like nrg4SD, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and the United Regions Organization (ORU-Fogar) who have been key in much of the work in the regional action of the Basque Country. Moreover, it contains also particular comments in regards to the specific experiences of the Basque Country with regards to the process of elaboration, interaction, implementation, and presentation of the Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030.

*a) Why and how has the UN moved away from NGOs to Major Groups and Other Stakeholders and what – if any – are the success factors of this approach?*

From an international perspective, in particular when it comes to the implementation of the Agenda 2030, there is a complex diversity of non-State actors involved in the process of implementing global agendas in a country. Regional governments, municipalities, the private sector, academia, civil society, etc., all make part of the needed actors to implement successfully through partnerships the Agenda.

Previously, the UN would interact with NGOs directly, but this narrow view of the complex existing reality would make impossible the real implementation of the Agenda, and thus the Major Groups and other stakeholders has been key in opening up the participatory space for all different actors, including in this case the regional governments in their own government competences.

The most innovative part of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders systems is that it has structured a comprehensive internal organization, and therefore, always incorporating new partners and organizations. This open participation so far, and their role at the HLPF 2018, could be considered an extraordinary success.

It is also interesting to consider as a future success factor the possibility of structuring the interaction of the Major Groups on the level of impact on the policy making and competences that the different actors have. This is, that governments, in particular regions, are more relevant than other stakeholders in their execution and implementation policies, and structuring an order of precedence or importance in this group and its role with the UN counterparts is also worth considering for a successful implementation of the Agenda.

*b) What examples are there of good practices on engagement of stakeholders from around the UN system that could be built into the next phase of the HLPF?*

The different experiences of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) could be considered an interesting case, particularly in what refers to the engagement of local and subnational governments. Since, COP 10 in Nagoya, Parties to the Biodiversity Convention adopted a specific decision regulating how local and subnational governments would be engaged in the process of implementing the respective global agenda.



This opened a precedent, which enabled the CBD Secretariat to have a more attentive and continuous support to the participation of this constituency, which is key for successful implementation of almost all policies.

Moreover, the decision of engaging these parties allowed the creation of the so-called Advisory Committees of Local and Subnational Governments, which enables a continued dialogue among this constituency and its relevant parts.

Finally, alongside every Biodiversity COP, a Local and Sub-national Governments Summit is organized. The event enables the exchange of ideas and good practices of local and subnational governments on the topics being discussed, and yet the event also provides a framework for dialogue with countries and stakeholders on the efforts being pursued at the local and subnational levels.

In 2018, for the first time, the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) saw a Local and Regional Governments Forum in the form of a special event. It is crucial to keep these government entities fully engaged for the success of the Agenda 2030, and contribute and encourage the organization of similar opportunities during future HLPFs. All these events allow increased opportunities for contribution and engagement of this constituency. For future HLPFs, among others, it could be interesting to consider organizing regional segments of the Forum, previous to the actual HLPF, in order to improve the inputs and contributions made during the formal meetings, panels, and presentations at the HLPF.

*c) What and how can stakeholders contribute to developing policy issues and how can they be an agent for implementation?*

Local and sub-national governments are usually the direct government entities responsible for the development and implementation of policies on the ground. Combined with the executive and legislative powers of local and subnational governments, they can set the ground and start the implementation of a broad range of topics. Land-use and territorial planning; transport and mobility; education and raising awareness; environmental licensing; energy use and distribution; public services on health, water and sanitation, and many others, are just examples of the different areas where these governments have competences, and the importance of engaging with them, and include them in the conversation.

At the same time, the participation and contribution of local and subnational governments to the global processes, especially on the definition and negotiation, is substantially limited. This entails a clear gap, as the engagement of local and sub-national authorities to the global agendas is not automatic or immediate. Having them further engaged in global processes could result in more energetic approaches and authentic interest to revert the global goals and monitoring efforts into policies and actions under the sub-national and local administrations.

From the Basque Country's perspective and its regional realities, the Basque Government decided to follow a specific approach regarding governance and coordination of the Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 to foster policy discussion and allow all stakeholders involved become agents of implementation.

The approach of localizing or territorializing the 2030 Agenda requires monitoring and assessment mechanisms fully interlinked with those already in place in the territory where it will be implemented; this is, to make use of the systems that are already in operation.

Due to the transversal and comprehensive nature of Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030, this 1st Basque Agenda is led and coordinated by the Office of the President, specifically in a coordinated action between the General Secretariat of the President's Office, and the General Secretariat for External Action that heads the leadership-coordination mechanism on the 2030 Agenda.

The General Secretariat of the President's Office has as part of its role to coordinate the action of the Government. On the other hand, the General Secretariat for the External Action has as part of its role to foster and promote the coordination of the external action of the Government in connection with the 2020 Internationalization Framework Strategy of the Basque Country. In this Secretariat for External Action all the other areas and departments of the Basque Government are involved through Interdepartmental External Action Committee, which is headed the Secretary of External Action, and thus, also including in the conversation and governance model these stakeholders.

In a broader perspective, the participation of the rest of the government institutions in the Basque Country in the management of the Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 takes place within the Inter-institutional Committee, composed of the Basque Regional Government, the three Provincial Governments, the three Basque main city councils (Bilbao, Vitoria, and San Sebastian), and the Association of Basque Municipalities (EUDEL). Finally, the other stakeholders with a projection in the Basque Country's External Action contribute through the Basque Internationalization Council, chaired by the Basque Regional President. This is a clear reflection and example of multilevel governance.

This framework is completed with the participatory framework of the social, economic and cultural agents in each of the government areas responsible for achieving the objectives and goals of the Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030.

*d) What could local and sub-national governments do to engage local stakeholders in helping to develop local strategy and policy to implement the SDGs?*

There are several different modalities and strategies for engaging and consulting stakeholders at the local and regional levels. According to a survey held by nrg4SD from 2018, at least 70% of the consulted regions have carried consultations with other stakeholders regarding the sub-national SDGs strategies. The engagement was held in different ways such as workshops or planning debates, or the creation of committees and permanent mechanisms for the continued engagement of stakeholders – especially with academia, private sector, and sectoral approaches to the civil society, such as focusing on women or youth.

Based on the survey, nrg4SD developed some guiding steps for regions to encourage establishing SDGs strategies and stakeholder consultation, which among them, is engagement as

one of the core elements. However, additional support is required to scaling-up these recommendations to some sub-national governments throughout the world, especially in those countries where the participation in international agendas is not a standard practice, and thus, incorporating the SDGs in their local plans does not come naturally or organically.

Furthermore, multi-level governance should be at the forefront of local and sub-national strategies for the SDGs. As much as possible, all strategies should be coherent and aligned, in the sense that these could be built and envisaged as a mutual integration and support of joint-efforts. Therefore, it is important to consider on the one hand the mechanisms for dialogue and exchanges among different levels of government, and on the other hand, to have multiple strategies mutually referenced and inspired.

From the engagement of local stakeholders, the Basque Country has had multiple experiences. It is worth mentioning that one of the most innovative examples of this engagement is through one of the mechanisms of financing the Agenda in the Basque Country.

The resources to finance the Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 Agenda will be materialized in items of the General Budget approved by the Basque Country's regional Parliament with direct link to the SDGs. These items focus on promoting equal opportunities for particularly vulnerable groups (women, children and the migrant population), reducing inequality and improving environmental management and the conservation and restoration of ecosystems; they also address investments in social protection, health, education, nature conservation, the fight against climate change and cooperation policies for development.

The other method used to finance the Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 is the Sustainable Bonds (Euskadi Sustainable Bonds-ESB) launched in May 2018. These Bonds make a visible and concrete contribution to the financing and implementation of the SDGs.

To understand Sustainable Bonds, it is important noting that the Basque Country has had its own tax system for the last 150 years. The so-called Economic Agreement is a structure of bilateral tax and financial relations between the Basque Country and Spain. That means having an own autonomous internal revenue system through full management power, levying and collection of practically all taxes. Once collected by the autonomous internal revenue service of the region, an agreed amount (quota) is transferred to the Federal Government for the services it provides to the Basque Country region (Armed Forces, Justice, Diplomatic, etc.). In short, to carry out its public policies, the Basque Government has two financing channels: the collection of taxes and the bond issuance that.

The resources raised through the bond issuance (500 million euros this year) will be used to finance programs that address some of the social and environmental challenges identified in the Agenda.

The compliance is supported by an external review carried out by one of the three major European environmental, social and governance rating agencies: Sustainalytics.

This Agency has rated the bonds as a solid, credible, and a transparent financial product. It has verified that the categories of eligible programs and target populations are aligned with the principles of the green and social bonds. Moreover, that the selection and evaluation of projects that can be financed, as well as the management of income, are in line with good market practices, including the integration of environmental and social criteria into the hiring policies of the Basque administration.

The 500 million euros that were raised with the Euskadi Sustainable Bond issuance will be distributed in the following way: 81% will go to social projects and 19% to green projects. All of these projects will have an impact on one, or several SDGs. The eligible categories of projects are affordable housing; access to essential services: education and healthcare; socioeconomic advancement and employment generation; renewable energy, clean transportation, pollution prevention and control; sustainable water and wastewater management; terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity conservation; energy efficiency and climate change adaptation.

### **Sustainability Bond Framework: Process for Project Evaluation and Selection, and Management of Proceeds**

#### *Process for Project Evaluation and Selection*

- The process to select and to evaluate potential eligible projects and programs from the General Budget is performed by the Basque Government Sustainability Bond Committee.
- This Committee is composed of four representatives of the Department of Finance and Economy, and a representative of each of the following departments: Environment, Territorial Planning and Housing; Employment and Social Policies; Health and Education; Economic Development and Infrastructure.
- Each Department carries out an ex-ante evaluation of the impact indicators of the projects, in addition to the environmental impact assessment, and other actions foreseen in the statutes and regulations.

#### *Management of Proceeds*

- The Basque Government has internal systems in place to track proceeds of its bonds, and to account for all eligible programs, the Committee will monitor and prevent any such double allocation of proceeds.
- The proceeds of the Sustainability Bond will be allocated to eligible budgetary programs in the General Budget of the Basque Government, corresponding to the fiscal year of the Sustainability Bond issuance.
- The total expenditures required for the eligible programs will equal or exceed the net Sustainability Bond proceeds.
- The proceeds from the Sustainability Bond issuance will be directly allocated to the eligible projects at settlement. In the event the whole proceeds cannot be allocated, the Basque Government will temporarily keep the unallocated funds in any form of cash, liquidity position, or time deposits with banks. This event would be monitored by the Financial Department of the Basque Government's Financial Policy Department and reviewed by the Sustainability Bond Committee.

### **Sustainability Bond Allocation Reporting**

The Basque Government will report on an annual basis on the allocation of the bond's proceeds, including the total amount allocated and per eligibility category until the proceeds have been fully allocated. Allocation reporting will be available to investors within one year from the date of the Sustainability Bond issuance and annually until the bond proceeds have been fully allocated.

The reporting will produce insights into the total amount provided to the various eligible budgetary programs and the total of each eligibility category, and the allocation reporting will be made available on the Basque Government's website.

## **Impact Reporting**

Impact indicators are developed for each eligibility category. The Basque Government will provide a specific Sustainability Bond impact report for investors within one year from the issuance date, and annually until the bond proceeds have been fully allocated, with estimates of the main environmental or social impacts or outputs of the eligible programs, where feasible.

Impact indicators will include avoided CO<sub>2</sub>, renewable energy and energy savings, as well as poverty rate and school enrolment rate, among others. There is also the possibility that some case studies of projects may be provided to illustrate the positive impact.

*e) What can be done at the local and sub-national level to create partnerships to help deliver the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda?*

Under the frame of the localization of SDGs, there is a lot that can be done to foster partnerships at the local and sub-national levels. Many of us have been advocating that the New Urban Agenda (NUA) becomes the reference operative system for localizing the SDGs in urban contexts. In that regard, UN-Habitat is discussing how to re-structure itself to further contribute to this mission. At the same time, UNDP has become an important partner to help cities and regions to define their processes to deliver on the SDGs.

Another important starting point to creating partnerships with specialized stakeholders is considering some specific SDGs either alone or in clusters, and within each other's competences define a common strategy of implementation.

What is now clear is that neither the public administration nor the various private actors can attain the goals set alone. It is necessary to work together, cooperating and setting up partnerships to which each party brings its own specific expertise and added value. This is achieved through engagement on two fronts:

- By taking part in the definition and implementation of public-sector policies.
- Through defining specific action plans of the organizations that each party represents (third sector, businesses, universities, NGOs, etc.)

It has become a reality for everyone to ask themselves how they can contribute, from their respective organizations, to what must necessarily be a collective effort. The process in the Basque Country has included in the debate representatives from different sectors of the Basque society

(business, education, health, etc.). The core idea behind this is the need for convergence among the different agents of the civil society that coexist in the Basque Country and in the inter-sectoral fora the need to collaborate if the aim is to achieve the SDGs.

For this reason, the Interdepartmental Commission within the Basque Government, the Inter-institutional Commission with the Provincial Governments and EUDEL (the Association of Basque Municipalities), or the Basque Internationalization Council, have been key to generate open debates on localizing and implementing the SDGs.

As an example of a partnership in this implementation is the work from the Public Society of Environmental Management of the Basque Government (IHOBE) helping elaborate a report containing an assessment of the vulnerability and risk of municipalities in the Basque Country to climate change. This report has enabled to know which municipalities and to what extent they may be affected by the main current and future climate threats, and to define a total of 36 adaptation measures.

Also it is worth mentioning that partnerships have also been created with the 28 media broadcasters in the Basque Country to educate journalists and give specific courses by government officials about the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. This effort has also been put in place to all current and new government civil servants in all levels of the administration, where they are required to take a number of hours of courses and lessons regarding the Agenda 2030 and its implementation. Finally, through Global Compact Spain, and under the leadership of the Regional President, the different business associations have also received these educational courses specifically targeted of what the private sector can do in the advancement and implementation of the Agenda.

In addition to the essential relationships with the private sector, academia, the third sector, NGOs, and the organized civil society, the involvement of political parties and the legislative power are also essential. In this regard, the Basque Parliament has recently created a Working Group on the 2030 Agenda.

In pursuit of the objective of strengthening alliances in the region, the work with other organizations, institutions, agents, regions, and networks has been deepened and expanded. In fact, the participation in networks linked to Agenda 2030, and networks of other regions either at the Spanish level or the European level, have allowed the Basque Government to identify implementation strategies.

In this sense, there has been an active participation in the exchange of experiences and good practices through the building of partnerships, where it is relevant to highlight the following:

- Sharing experiences in events of the United Nations Development Program - UNDP, UN Habitat, and Globaltask Force of Local and Regional Governments: "Toolbox of localizing SDG".
- Sharing experiences in various newsletters: REDS (SDSN Spain), UNHabitat, nrg4sd, ORU-FOGAR, and ESDN.
- Contributing to reports on the sub-national implementation of the SDGs, answering questionnaires, gathering information, adding independent research, interviews and follow-ups to the regions. An example of such contributions are: nrgs4SD network's

“Localizing the SDGs: regional governments paving the way”; and the 2nd “Global Report on the localization of SDGs” of UCLG, from the sub-national government’s point of view.

- Dialogues with the Government of Spain at the Federal level through the Spanish High Level Working Group (HLWG) and the team of the Ambassador on Special Mission for the Implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain.
- Participation in the following meetings and events:
  - Multi-stakeholder activities on the 2030 Agenda organized by or in collaboration with Basque NGOs (such as UNESCO Etxea or UNICEF), Universities (Basque Public University-UPV) or companies (auditors Auren, Iberdrola) as well as public-private agents (Innobasque).
  - Events organized in Spain by different interested parties: the Senate, companies, academia, the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces-FEMP, NGOs, other regions (Valencia, Navarre, etc.) or networks such as the REDS Index (SDSN) or Global Compact.
  - European or International events organized or co-organized by UNDP (Local Economic Development Forum-LED), UN Habitat (HABITAT III), SDSN, ORU FOGAR, nrg4SD and other sub-national networks, OECD, etc.
  - Participation in different online seminars organized by nrg4SD or the OECD on the sub-national implementation of the SDGs.
  - Participation in the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2018, at the United Nations headquarters in New York. This year represented a milestone in the engagement and contribution of local and regional governments, where more than 240 representatives of the Global Task Force constituency attended the event. The regions reported different efforts and territorial approaches to the implementation and localization of the SDGs. Regarding specifically to the Basque Country, during the panel about sub-national financing systems, the Basque Government shared the initiative of the Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 and the experience of the Basque Sustainable Bonds.

f) *Could and should local and subnational government develop their own VNRs?*

It is our opinion that certainly yes. Local and Regional Governments (LRGs) must consider their own reporting mechanisms, and it should also be considered if it is a right policy strategy to limit all voluntary submissions to the VNR format.

Particularly, it is important to highlight that the monitoring and review at the local and sub-national levels is based on more reliable indicators and concrete, provable data.

As much as possible, these efforts should be considered as integral elements to the country’s own VNRs when writing its own report, which means that the sub-national reports are fully reflected and integrated into the national one. Moreover, in collaboration with local and regional governments, countries could consider a series of consultative events in different cities and regions, in order to build a very participatory process to define the VNR – with vast participation of all interested stakeholders.

This said, an annual monitoring report will be produced on the 1st Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030, which will showcase the Basque Country's contribution to the worldwide effort and work to implement the 2030 Agenda. Once produced and analyzed, this report will be submitted to the Basque Parliament.

Furthermore, the steps taken by the Basque Government do not end with the contribution of the regional Government Program and its public policies towards the Agenda 2030. Therefore, an Inter-institutional Commission comprised of members of all the different levels of the Basque Public Administration (3 provinces, the 3 main municipalities, and the Association of all Basque Municipalities-EUDEL) has been formally setup, and has began its periodical meetings. The intention behind this is commission is to generate common activities and a common document of the Basque contribution to the 2030 Agenda from the public sector perspective that can be analyzed together with the report submitted to the Basque Parliament.

g) *What role would local and subnational indicators play?*

Local and subnational indicators, and especially the data they generate, are fundamental for enabling the disaggregated data that is key to the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda worldwide.

It is important to avoid national averages, as this can mask the reality and the disparities that exist within countries. National data should be based on local and sub-national information, which should explore similar methodologies and indicators as much possible, in order to enable comparison and benchmarking within countries.

This process would require capacity-building in many countries, regions, and local governments, especially when it comes to the training of local and sub-national agents to produce and analyze that data. Therefore, national statistical offices should identify key actors and establish a calendar of activities to further discuss and develop the national monitoring framework, in close coordination with all levels of government and stakeholders.

Involving local and regional governments can also be an interesting option when it comes to exploring citizen-science and citizen-generated data. Local and Regional Governments can act as facilitators of this process, for example establishing online platforms or apps that allow citizens to submit data. The same could be considered through the collaboration with local schools, universities and relevant organizations.

To understand the role of the Basque sub-national indicators, it is important to mention that the Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 Agenda is structured around the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the Agenda 2030, which are linked to the 15 Regional Objectives, and are implemented in 100 Goals or Targets. The Agenda identifies the commitments of the Basque Government 2020 Program that have close links with the 17 SDGs, and focuses on issues of common interests, bypassing merely domestic issues that are not of global concern.

The number of Targets for each Objective varies between 3 and 10, depending on the Federal transferred competences to the Basque Government, and therefore, their scope is not the same for each Objective.



When the Goals involve specific planning or the approval of legislative initiatives, the Agenda identifies the Plans and Legislative Initiatives of the regional Parliament associated with each one.

Finally, the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development stipulates that each country must adapt the global indicators to its own reality, addressing the main social, economic and environmental problems, as well as associating them with specific targets to be met by 2020, 2025 and 2030. Consequently, the Basque Country 2030 Agenda associates the performance indicators with each of the 17 Objectives, to form a dashboard with 50 Indicators, including the Human Development Index by way of international benchmark indicators.

This definition of the indicators is open in the senses that, as the indicators of the United Nations and the European Union develop, so does the Agenda Euskadi-Basque Country 2030 indicator dashboard, adapting to modifications.

## **Conclusion**

The 2030 Agenda, and specifically the Agenda Euskadi-Basque 2030, represents an excellent opportunity to improve, implement, and deliver better public policies in service of the whole world, and the Basque society.

The innovative characteristic of the Agenda 2030 is that specifics steps of the Agenda are not mandated from top-to-bottom, but allows the flexibility for every country, region, and municipality to work and implement within its own government sphere of action, taking into consideration every reality and context at every level.

It is important to open a period of reflection about the role and participation of local and regional governments in international fora, specifically when it comes to the implementation of the Agenda 2030. Although the UN System has given many steps to open this participation moving away from NGOs to the Major Groups and other Stakeholders, it is crucial to consider that 60% of the implementation of the Agenda relies on local and regional governments. Thus, there is a difference in the relevance of political influence and execution among the different actors of the Major Groups (for example regional governments vs. farmers), and this should be reflected in the level of participation and interaction with the UN during the HLPF and its planning stage. A possibility worth exploring is the implementation of a formal event during the HLPF so as to open this participatory process to the sub-national governments.

With the opening of a more participatory role of the regional and local governments in the HLPF their Voluntary Regional Reviews can become more relevant, and can be also an incentive for the implementation and sharing of good practices at the local and regional level. In this sense, it is also important that these reviews are elaborated with specific data and indicators for those relevant actors, avoiding national averages, that can mask the reality and disparities that exist within countries.

So, for a successful implementation of this Agenda in our region, the focus is about sharing experiences and making visible our commitment, generating a favorable environment through an

"informal" alliance of joint-ownership of the SDGs, to make a reality the great objective of "not leaving anyone behind".

## **Global Vision | Urban Action: New York City's Voluntary Local Review of the Sustainable Development Goals**

By Alexandra Hiniker

Every city has a different language for thinking about problems, a different governance structure, a different way of planning and prioritizing urban challenges, and a different way of implementing strategies and accountability measures. This article outlines the approach New York City (NYC) has taken since 2015 to use the Sustainable Development Goals as a common language to discuss our city's priorities in practical terms, and also to identify gaps where we could learn from others.

Under local law, NYC must generate a sustainability plan every four years. In April 2015, we published OneNYC, which represents NYC's pivot toward addressing environmental quality and social equity as an integrated strategy. The consultative process to develop OneNYC involved more than 70 New York City agencies, and included New York residents and businesses as well as an advisory board comprised of civic leaders, policy specialists, and community leaders.

The values and priorities of the administration are reflected in the structure of the plan—the four visions of Growth, Equity, Sustainability, and Resiliency. Across the four visions there are 26 goals and 180 discrete initiatives.

In September 2015, a few months after OneNYC was published, world leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York City and committed to the 17 SDGs to make the world more just and sustainable by 2030. Although these commitments were made by national governments, the 2030 Agenda recognizes the critical role of local authorities and communities. Cities are at the forefront of addressing the challenges laid out in the SDGs.

Recognizing the synergies between OneNYC and the SDGs, the NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs established the Global Vision | Urban Action platform in December 2015 to both share our successes and learn from others how we can better serve New Yorkers.

The first step was mapping the OneNYC strategy to the SDGs. We then used this mapping to inform our programming, which involves incorporating NYC voices into United Nations policy discussions as well bringing the UN diplomatic corps out of the headquarters and into our communities. These activities together with the OneNYC progress report informed our Voluntary Local Review.

Since 2015, our office has convened events at the UN to hear local, national, and international perspectives on the SDGs. These are an opportunity to both strengthen implementation by sharing best practices and to build broader political support for achieving the SDGs.

We have addressed a range of topics, including mental health (SDG 3), gender equity (SDG 5), and decent work and economic growth (SDG 8). We also convened SDG stakeholders at the Ford Foundation to discuss additional topics related to the SDGs, including equity in and through tech, and climate change and urban infrastructure.

For example, at the *Creating the Conditions for Decent Work for All: Localizing SDG 8* in November 2017, panelists included the International Labour Organization (ILO), Belgium, Argentina, the NYC Department of Consumer Affairs, and the Cooperative Home Care Associates (a worker-owned healthcare agency in NYC). These experts shared their distinct but complementary roles in achieving SDG 8.

City officials also joined meetings organized by other SDG stakeholders at the UN to share their practical experience and highlight the links with our local work.

NYC's connection to the SDGs is reinforced through our Junior Ambassadors program, an initiative that empowers young people to become actively engaged with the SDGs and the United Nations. At the same time, we partner with city agencies to organize site visits for the UN diplomatic community. In the months leading up to the July 2018, we focused specifically on the SDGs that would be reviewed at that HLPF.

These include:

- a ride on a sludge vessel to learn about SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation) together with the Department of Environmental Protection.
- a trip to the country's largest recycling facility to explore SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production) together with the Department of Sanitation.
- a tour of a GreenThumb community garden to delve into SDG 15 (life on land) together with the Department of Parks and Recreation.

During the site visits, NYC agencies also highlighted how their work is integrated with additional SDGs. For example, during the visit to GreenThumb Community Gardens, IA worked closely with the Department of Parks and Recreation to identify direct links with the SDGs.

We selected this program because it addresses to SDG 15 (Life on Land). But we also identified the following SDG links:

- SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)—77% of GreenThumb gardens grow fruits and vegetables, producing an estimated 500,000 pounds of food annually.
- SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being)—studies show that gardening improves quality of life, reducing depression and anxiety.
- SDG 4 (Quality Education)—high school students are taking care of their communities by volunteering at over 725 school gardens and lifelong learning through gardening workshops is also available to people of all ages.
- SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)—community gardens prevent about 113 million gallons of stormwater from entering combined sewer systems annually.
- SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy)—solar panels are installed in some GreenThumb gardens to provide clean energy.
- SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)—GreenThumb's 550 community gardens are open to the public at least 20 hours a week so that New Yorkers have access to more green space.
- SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production)—approximately 46% of GreenThumb gardens maintain a compost system.

- SDG 13 (Climate Action) – there are over 180 rainwater harvesting systems in the gardens.
- We're now exploring additional site visits to look at the priority SDGs for the 2019 HLPF.

The third element of our work on the SDGs is the Voluntary Local Review, or VLR. All countries are invited to submit a Voluntary National Review. Because NYC was already reporting annually on our OneNYC progress, we realized there was an opportunity to share our successes and challenges more broadly and contribute to the global SDG conversation.

The VLR was written by the NYC Mayor's Office for International Affairs in partnership with the Offices of Operations, and Climate Policy and Programs, and in consultation with nearly 20 NYC agencies.

It's important to note that we did not develop any new statistics or collect new information. Rather, we built on existing resources and data, reformatting it in the SDG framework so that it was accessible to everyone.

As there is no comprehensive SDG data reporting mechanism, our review presents a qualitative analysis of our goals and targets mapped to the relevant SDGs and indicators. NYC tracks more than 1,000 indicators through a monitoring system it has been developing since the 1970s, so we shared examples of the data that NYC collects to contribute to the broader discussion about how we can measure our progress.

In addition to looking at the SDG progress, the VLR provides an overview of how the City has used the SDGs as a common language to discuss our local sustainable development efforts, which is basically what I just explained to you.

We recognize that the VLR is only useful if other cities join us in the conversation, so we are encouraging them to do so by making three key commitments. For example, Helsinki announced in September that they would submit a VLR in 2019.

These commitments include:

1. Mapping your city strategy to the SDGs
2. Holding at least one multi-stakeholder event or site visit using the SDG framework
3. Submitting a VLR to the United Nations during the High-Level Political Forum

In turn we are working with those cities to provide support and advice on what has worked for us, and also to hear from them about how we can collectively improve the process. We hope that this can also serve as a catalyst to identify additional possibilities to build momentum towards achieving all 17 SDGs by 2030.