

**Retreat on the preparation for the 2016 session of the  
High Level Political Forum**

**23-24 February 2016**

**Report of representatives of the MGOS**

1. The four representatives of the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGOS) were:

Roberto Borrero	Indigenous Peoples/Workers & Trade Unions/Farmers Cluster
Aliye Celik	Business & Industry/Science and Tech Community/Local Authorities Cluster
Meera Shah	Children and Youth/Women/NGOs Cluster
Frances Zainoeddin	Other Stakeholders Cluster
  
2. It was agreed at the HLPF Working Group meeting on 22 February 2016 that representatives would be speaking on behalf of all groups and not on behalf of any one specific group.
  
3. The retreat, co-hosted by Permanent Missions of Germany and the Republic of Korea, was held in the German House. There were approximately 80 participants, including representatives from Member States, DESA, UNEP, UNDP, UN Foundation, UN Women, OHCHR, and MGOS. The second day was a closed meeting for countries that volunteered to submit national reports to the 2016 HLPF (21 as at 23 February 2016: China, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Madagascar, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Switzerland (announced at the Retreat), Togo, Turkey, Uganda, Venezuela). A second retreat scheduled for April will focus on preparations for voluntary national reviews.
  
4. It should be noted right from the outset that the discussions during the retreat focused largely on procedural issues in terms of expectations of the national reviews, thematic reviews, the SDG progress report, the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), and the role of the 2016 HLPF. The Retreat did not discuss substantive issues.
  
5. Below is the report from the representatives of MGOS. Our understanding was that the retreat was held under the "Chatham House" rule. As such, apart from the opening session, comments are not attributed to specific participants.

**Opening session**

6. H.E. Mr. Harald Braun, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations stressed the importance of implementing the achievements of 2015, which included the 2030 Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Climate Change Agreement. The importance of the HLPF cannot be under-estimated, as we need to be able to review and monitor our progress every step of the way. He defined a successful HLPF as one that drew a high level of participation, both in working sessions and at the ministerial level; an ambitious ministerial declaration; broad cross-regional participation; and, inclusive cross-sectoral participation.
  
7. H.E. Mr. Oh Joon, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea and President of ECOSOC pointed out that HLPF 2016 will be pilot case for what is coming for the next 14 years. He thanked the countries that had volunteered for national reviews. He stressed that HLPF must ensure best practices and share mutual learning. Responsibility for implementation will primarily lie with national governments, but the HLPF must be the engine that drives the process.

8. Mr. Wu Hongbo, Under-Secretary-General, UNDESA called on governments and ministries to work together, not in silos – integrating SDGs into national policies and establishing multi-stakeholder partnerships, and fostering inter-linkages and integration. He drew attention to the studies from DESA and other parts of the UN system that show how SDGs are interlinked and how implementation and review must address these inter-linkages. He stressed that HLPF is mandated to identify problems and share lessons learned; must have sufficient resources; and must prove its worth as the central platform for follow-up and review; all must be involved in empowering HLPF to play that role; all must be involved in crafting an innovative, imaginative and effective programme for HLPF in its deliberations, with adequate information and reliable data.

9. Mr. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, UNDESA was the Moderator of the Opening segment. The following issues were raised by Member States:

- a. Must look back in order to leap forward; HLPF is not new but builds on existing arrangements.
- b. Effective coordination between HLPF, ECOSOC and the General Assembly is essential. Revitalization of Second Committee, the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) are also key to an effective coordinated approach. DESA can play role in organizing workshops.
- c. Important to have inclusive, transparent processes to ensure poverty eradication and assistance for developing countries.

#### **Expectations for the 2016 HLPF processes**

10. In response to the question “How can this year’s reviews help us to gauge our baseline, identify upcoming challenges and assess our early steps in implementation?”, the following points were made:

- a. Must break down silos and stress universality and global participation and responsibility.
- b. Pay attention to past experiences, bearing in mind at the same time that business as usual is not an option.
- c. National-level processes:
  - i. Useful to have decision coming from top level of government to implement SDGs, involving all stakeholders, including civil society.
  - ii. Participants stressed the need to bring the 2030 agenda into national politics and the need to integrate the SDGs into a national strategy. Some states are adopting new plans for SDG national implementation, whereas others are integrating SDGs into existing national development plans.
  - iii. Unlike MDGs which were addressed at government level, SDGs are to be implemented by everyone.
    - Must have good communication system to let local people know about the SDGs. Strategy for implementation of SDGs must be available to everyone.
    - Importance of national dialogues
    - Local level action also crucial – e.g. Habitat III will look at local level implementation of SDGs.
  - iv. Governments must understand the demographic composition of their population to ensure no one is left behind. Data disaggregation is key to reaching furthest behind first – need to invest in data systems.
- d. HLPF national reviews

- i. States should provide information on how all stakeholders are involved in national reviews.
  - ii. National reviews should identify challenges, including difficulties with inter-linkages with different ministries; resources; technical capacity; availability of data.
  - iii. HLPF 2016 should focus on procedures being put in place to measure SDGs, including existing policies and architecture, and not measuring implementation.
  - iv. HLPF must be able to provide guidance and support, channeling lessons learned.
  - v. Not question of blame and shame, but about learning and improving.
  - vi. Some participants emphasized the importance of compatibility and comparability between national reports to the HLPF. One participant suggested that this year's HLPF could focus on selected indicators for comparability purposes.
- e. Important role of regional review processes.
  - i. Countries can learn from each other, not only within regions, but also from beyond.
  - ii. Proposal to put SDGs on agenda for regional commissions with annual ministerial declarations for politicians to address at the highest level
- f. SG's report on critical milestones is good basis for discussion; responses to questionnaire sent out in 2015 to Member states and other stakeholders on the HLPF produced some good suggestions on functioning of HLPF. Welcomed suggestions in SG's report to make all inputs available on dedicated website in advance of HLPF and allow stakeholders to actively participate in all sessions; submit questions to those under review; and submit their own reports.
- g. GSDR:
  - i. Should be different from annual SDG progress report.
  - ii. Should become flagship report of SDGs – comparable to the reports for the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.
  - iii. Periodicity: concern about quality of report versus selective review among 17 goals if GSDR issued every four years in time for HLPF meeting under auspices of General Assembly.

11. **MGOS** representatives welcomed inclusion in discussions of Retreat and looked forward to being active participants in the SDG implementation process as well as in the HLPF process; pleased that a number of countries have explicitly included stakeholder participation in preparation of their national reviews; welcomed suggestions in SG's report and the opportunity to submit reports in accordance with para. 89 of the 2030 Agenda. MGOS also recalled that in the 2030 Agenda Member States pledged to reach those furthest behind first.

### **Thematic reviews**

12. There were three questions posed:
- a. What does it mean to leave no one behind in the various country contexts?
  - b. How can the HLPF discussions on the theme and the SDGs be informed by reviews conducted in other intergovernmental bodies and what would be the most relevant inputs?
  - c. What will make the thematic review useful to countries and how can the HLPF recommendations be elaborated?

13. The following points were made with respect to the question of what it means to leave no one behind:

- a. Leaving no one behind is difficult – parts of country are more developed than others; different cultures; challenge is to bring SDGs into every region of a country.
  - b. Must follow data trends to identify gaps. Importance of disaggregated data and moving beyond national averages. One participant noted the need to blend qualitative and quantitative data.
  - c. Important that processes for identifying most marginalized are transparent and eliminate barriers that prevent participation
14. The following points were made with respect to inputs and other intergovernmental bodies:
- a. Important role of UN development system to support SDG implementation.
  - b. HLPF is the apex, but need to define how multi-layered system should work
  - c. Need for better coordination between ECOSOC, HLPF and the GA. Intergovernmental silos and silos within UN system also need to be broken down – these conversations should be part of a coordinated process, not separate processes.
  - d. Importance of inputs from functional commissions, regional commissions, human rights bodies, other intergovernmental bodies, and civil society, but concern about how to organize and structure those inputs. Concerns and suggestions included:
    - i. ECOSOC could prepare for HLPF throughout the year by identifying issues to discuss and recommendations to address those issues by engaging with civil society to bring in inputs or summarizing inputs or creating a technical task team similar to OWG structure to tailor inputs for HLPF
    - ii. Chairs of various bodies could be invited to present
    - iii. Focus on SDG Progress Report as key report to identify trends and challenges and distill various inputs so as not to overwhelm HLP with numerous reports
  - e. Insufficient capacity at national level to cope with the many reporting requirements.
15. The following points were made with respect to how to make the thematic reviews useful:
- a. Ministers attending high-level segment may need different method of presenting national reviews – focus could be on lessons learned or summary of national or regional trends, since there is insufficient time for 20+ countries to present national reports in three days.
  - b. HLPF focus on a few goals would be more useful for Ministers attending, ensuring in-depth discussion while finding ways to avoid silos. Be creative in finding linkages across SDGs – see responses to SG questionnaire.
  - c. HLPF must not turn into a “talk show” – may be interesting but not useful, unless there are recommendations for action. Must not focus on what has been done, but rather on what needs to be done.
  - d. Must have effective merger between technical (evidence-based) level and political level of discussions to incorporate the dynamism of what is happening with SDGs.
16. **MGOS** representatives welcomed the emphasis given to a people-centered Agenda. With respect to leaving no one behind, attention needs to be given to breaking all the barriers that prevent participation; need to recognize intersectionality and the importance of data disaggregation, including citizen-generated data. Processes for identifying the marginalized need to be transparent. It may be useful to have standardized reporting forms.

### **Voluntary National Reviews**

17. After the lunch break, the participants divided into two working groups. One addressed “What would be standard features in preparing HLPF voluntary national reviews this year within the countries, what could ambitious approaches be and how can countries support each other in preparing these reviews at the national level”. Two representatives of the MGOS (Aliye and Meera) attended this working group 1.

18. The other working group addressed “How can the HLPF examination of the reviews be best prepared, organized and followed-up so as to be most useful to all countries in the context of the principles established in the 2030 Agenda? How can national reviews lead to possible support and new partnerships to assist the reviewed countries?” Two representatives of the MGOS (Roberto and Frances) attended this working group 2.

#### Working group 1

19. Participants discussed preparations for national reviews and issues that needed to be addressed, including:

- a. Importance of stock-taking – lessons learned from MDG implementation, baseline studies/gap analysis and mapping out readiness for implementation.
  - b. Importance of understanding existing institutional structures – sub-national governance and variations, whether geographic or thematic
  - c. Many stressed importance of involving stakeholders; some discussed efforts to involve stakeholders to date, whereas some raised questions as to how best to make participation a reality
  - d. Importance of data, education/communication about SDGs.
20. Participants also discussed what they might present at their national reviews at HLPF 2016:
- a. Focus on process and substance, including description of opportunities for stakeholder input.
  - b. Challenges, gap analysis rather than implementation and how to prioritize targets
  - c. Importance of stakeholder engagement at HLPF – should be able to engage with MS
  - d. Some Member States expressed the view that a template for reporting would be helpful, easing the burden on governments struggling to determine what would be most appropriate and useful for HLPF consideration.

21. In response to a question directed specifically to them about how the SDGs will influence their work, **MGOS** said many have made efforts to raise awareness of SDGs at the local levels. MGOs are constantly and routinely working on behalf of marginalized groups at the local levels and can make valuable contributions to ensuring that no one is left behind. MGOS looked forward to helping at sub-national, national and regional processes and would encourage stakeholder participation in national delegations at HLPF. MGOS stressed that they are keen to highlight their perspectives. MGOS said they looked forward to contributing to a wide array of written as well as oral inputs for HLPF deliberations, including in decisions, recommendations and outcome documents. MGOS considered themselves as implementers, catalysts and partners, not only as watchdogs.

#### Working Group 2

22. Member States addressed issues concerning commonality and coherence in the voluntary national reviews, to what extent they should be standardized bearing in mind national situations. Some wondered whether reporting guidelines would help. It was recognized that there were time constraints, for reporting as well as for reviewing by the HLPF. Concerns were expressed about having empty rooms if each national report was presented in entirety and reviewed. Issues raised included the following:

- a. HLPF session should be more interactive to discuss challenges. What are key gaps and what are success stories? Should areas requiring assistance be highlighted?
- b. Consideration of national reviews must result in solutions.
- c. HLPF should shed light for future action and must provide feedback.
- d. Not clear how Ministers would present national report – will they be given just 3 minutes? Perhaps 10 minutes for each Minister and 3 minutes for civil society on each report.
- e. Biggest challenge in 2016 is the organization of HLPF itself.

- f. Many countries have had to and will have to adjust to implement SDGs.
- g. DESA could perhaps prepare a matrix to show how reports of different intergovernmental bodies could feed into HLPF. The matrix could also show comparability of issues discussed in national reports.
- h. Involvement of civil society important, at national, regional and global levels and include civil society members in HLPF delegation. Allocation of time during HLPF should include time for national civil society voices/perspectives.
- i. Lessons learned from CSD – peer exchange and peer review process.
- j. Since 2016 is the first time for this exercise, there should be some flexibility – perhaps some roundtables for discussion might be preferable to presentation of reports or interactive moderated panel; countries should not feel over-burdened.
- k. Reports must be recognized as nationally-owned, not stakeholder owned.
- l. Reports need to address issues that are of interest for dialogue and exchange – challenges, solutions, success stories. Perhaps this can be achieved if reports were to address a theme.
- m. Suggestion that countries should share reports in advance so that Member States can react more effectively.
- n. Representative from PGA Office said that past practice has included convening of preparatory meetings to help preparation of national reports, led by countries involved.
- o. HLPF must strike balance between national ownership and comparability; balance between comprehensive and short enough to be of interest
- p. Possible to learn from different regions and different levels of development – can foster new ways of thinking.

23. **MGOS** looked forward to collaboration with governments. If no one is to be left behind, stakeholders who work at grass roots level can make valuable contributions, by gathering information and data. MGOS urged Member States to view civil society as catalysts, implementers, and partners, not only watchdogs. It was noted that while it was a challenge to provide reports on SDGs implementation, use can be made of all the other reports that are prepared on issues addressed by the 2030 Agenda, including by UN organizations, for consideration by intergovernmental bodies, regional commissions, functional commissions, human rights bodies etc. Some of these bodies are also awaiting guidance on how best they can assist HLPF. MGOS urged building on existing review and accountability processes. There is a lot of information available which can be adapted for reporting to the HLPF. MGOS stand ready to fully participate in HLPF deliberations.

### Global reviews

24. The participants came back together to discuss:
- a. How can the SDG Progress report and Global Sustainable Development Report be most useful to the HLPF in conducting its global and thematic reviews? Will other inputs be needed?
  - b. What would be useful political guidance from the HLPF and how could it be developed?
25. Attention was drawn to the thematic, national and global approaches, as well as the science-policy interface. Mandates for science-policy interface predates HLPF – Rio +20 outcome – and refined in GA resolution 67/290 to support evidence-based decision-making.
26. Lead discussant drew attention to:
- a. Business as usual is not an option.
  - b. Universality and interdependence of SDGs invite us to look for inter-linkages
  - c. If we fail to understand the political economy of change, then HLPF will be a talk show.
  - d. Reports must be relevant, bottom-up approach, made by and for people.

- e. GSDR has strong bias on policy and science – evidence-based knowledge for policy-makers.
  - f. SDG progress report should address inter-linkages among SDGs. Must break down silo approach.
  - g. Consensus building, not rivalry
  - h. HLPF should deal with the future and not with the past; it should define policies, equality and non-discrimination.
  - i. Development-friendly policies have triggered massive changes, lifted millions out of poverty. HLPF should signal importance of these trends and interpret in political terms what it means to leave no one behind – not a technical issue, but a highly political issue.
  - j. Importance of peer learning (referred to innovative information package prepared by Sierra Leone).
  - k. Retreat should come up with 3-4 recommendations for HLPF – how to give teeth to the HLPF.
27. Member States expressed views on the following:
- a. Importance of science-policy interface.
  - b. Importance of GSDR – what can report offer that other reports do not, e.g. Human Development Report. GSDR must be groundbreaking. Must be flagship report. Must have an impact. How to ensure emerging challenges are addressed?
  - c. Clear that without IPPC, there would not have been the Paris Agreement.
  - d. Periodicity of GSDR – annual, quadrennial?
  - e. SDG progress report should give snapshot of what is being done, not to address why or gaps. GSDR should guide evidence-based policy-making.
  - f. Perhaps view GSDR in different fashion – not a report but a project with a number of activities and gathering this data into a report every four years.
28. Representative of UN Foundation: How will global review resonate with people? How are families doing? How are women doing? Must ensure people are engaged. What are 2-3 outcomes expected from HLPF? Perhaps support for countries in data collection? UNF is host of global partnership for data capacity building. Evidence crucial.
29. Representative of UNEP: periodicity of GSDR is decision of Member States. Much work exists and is already happening with science interface – IPPC, IPBES (Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), and other bodies that receive inputs from stakeholders including the Major Groups.
30. **MGOS** reiterated that there are opportunities for stakeholders to provide expertise, including citizen-generated data. Important that global reviews be informed not only by SDG Progress Report and GSDR, but also written and/or oral inputs from wide range of processes and stakeholders that could be summarized and made available. Global database could provide opportunities for ongoing conversation and connecting countries, communities, or bodies that want to partner. Importance of concrete recommendations from HLPF that all stakeholders are compelled to take up.

## Closing

31. HLPF still needs to prove its worth – it needs to reflect political space and space for innovation. How to define HLPF success? High level of Member State participation, including other stakeholders? Strong ministerial declaration? HLPF must learn from previous experience. Must have better coordination of organizations of the UN system as well as intergovernmental processes. Key buzz words – focus, data, science-interface. Must avoid “talk show”. Thematic reviews can help. Always look at reason for follow-up and review – to address success factors and find ways to address challenges.

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### **Conclusion, Next Steps, Analysis**

This retreat is part of an ongoing effort to define and prepare for the 2016 HLPF in an inclusive and transparent manner. Despite guidance provided by the SG's report on the HLPF (Critical milestones towards coherent, efficient and inclusive follow-up and review at the global level, A/70/684), the discussions during the retreat made clear that the structure, substance, and organization of HLPF 2016 and future reviews at the global level remain to be fleshed out.

The discussions continued to emphasize the importance of involving stakeholders in the development, implementation, and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda at all levels. Several participants noted their efforts to begin doing so at the national level and their commitment to stakeholder participation at the HLPF. However, MGOS will need to ensure that governments adhere to these commitments. As the modalities for monitoring and review at all levels have not yet been finalized, there continues to be an important role for coordinated advocacy by MGOS around concrete proposals for engagement at the global, regional, national, subnational, and local levels.