



HLPF 2016 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 14 JULY 2016

The 2016 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) started with panel discussions on “National mechanisms for monitoring progress and reporting on implementation for the achievement of SDGs” and “Making the 2030 Agenda deliver for SIDS, building on the SAMOA Pathway” on Thursday morning. In the afternoon, discussions took place on “Countries in special situations.”

NATIONAL MECHANISMS FOR MONITORING PROGRESS AND REPORTING ON IMPLEMENTATION FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SDGS

Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the UN and Vice President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), chaired this session. It was moderated by Johannes Paul Jütting, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Panelist Lisa Grace S. Bersales, Philippine Statistics Authority, said her country will use data from innovative sources, including data generated by the private sector, civil society and citizens, to ensure data disaggregation that leaves no one behind. Panelist Pali Lehohla, Statistician-General, South Africa, highlighted: statistics as a conduit of trust for international relations; the need to modernize; and the first World Forum on Sustainable Development Data, to be hosted by his country in January 2017.

Panelist Georges-Simon Ulrich, Swiss Federal Statistical Office, stressed the importance of early involvement of national statistical offices, and the need to reinforce statistical partnerships.

Discussant Milorad Šćepanović, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Montenegro, described his country’s monitoring and reporting efforts, including through: a new national strategy on sustainable development, with guiding principles and goals; strengthening of human resources; the “nationalization” of targets and indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and adjustments to the existing institutional structure.

Discussant Peseta Noumea Simi, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Samoa, highlighted the need to contextualize and localize the SDG indicators; the human and capacity constraints faced by small island developing States (SIDS); the importance of ownership and political will; the need to build awareness and engagement of stakeholders through early and open consultative processes; and the importance of regional cooperation.

In the ensuing discussion, ESTONIA, the COOK ISLANDS, MALAYSIA and VIET NAM outlined national efforts on monitoring and reporting, and the challenges of nationalizing the 230 SDG indicators. SAUDI ARABIA, SRI LANKA and CHAD called for capacity building in national data collection and analysis. CHINA emphasized

that “monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs should not be a goal in itself.” FAO outlined their role in compiling data for a range of SDGs. CHILDREN AND YOUTH said youth should have a seat on national sustainable development councils.

The stakeholder group on older persons argued that citizen-generated evidence and data should be integrated into the monitoring process. KENYA outlined the need for equal treatment of qualitative and quantitative data. The EU announced plans to publish annual reports monitoring progress towards achieving the SDGs. NGOs questioned the feasibility of achieving inclusive national monitoring reviews when civil society participation is hindered in many countries. The stakeholder group of persons with disabilities, using sign language, asked what steps could be taken to ensure that Voluntary National Reviews include evidence on those left behind generated by human rights agencies.

In concluding remarks, Bersales emphasized the importance of using varied data sources. Lehohla argued the emphasis on monitoring is important to drive data collection necessary for national planning. Ulrich said participation by stakeholders needs to add value to monitoring and reporting.

MAKING THE 2030 AGENDA DELIVER FOR SIDS, BUILDING ON THE SAMOA PATHWAY

Sven Jürgenson, Permanent Representative of Estonia to the UN and ECOSOC Vice President, chaired this session. It was moderated by Elizabeth Thompson, former UN Assistant Secretary-General and former Minister for Energy and Environment, Barbados.

Stressing that the other SDGs would be meaningless if climate change is not addressed, panelist Anote Tong, former President of the Republic of Kiribati, underlined climate resilience as a primary goal for SIDS.

Panelist David Smith, University Consortium of Small Island States, highlighted SDG 13 (climate change), 14 (life below water), 15 (life on land) and 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) as being of particular relevance to SIDS. To overcome the sustainable development challenges faced by SIDS, he proposed the green economy approach; sustainable energy; mainstreaming science and technology into policies; capacity building; and new measurements for wellbeing.

Discussant Justina Langidrik, Republic of the Marshall Islands, called for the SDGs to be harmonized with the SAMOA Pathway, and tailored to national circumstances. Noting the heavy dependence of SIDS on bilateral assistance, she warned that tackling all SDG indicators and targets could overload governments in SIDS.

Discussant Kate Brown, Global Island Partnership, said both domestic and private sector resource mobilization are a challenge for SIDS, given their small size, and called for public-private partnerships at the local level for SDG implementation.

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In the ensuing discussion, the FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA, on behalf of the Pacific SIDS, highlighted the role of the HLPF and the UN system in harmonizing the 2030 Agenda with the SAMOA Pathway. JAMAICA, on behalf of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), noted the symbiosis between the SAMOA Pathway and 2030 Agenda, saying one cannot be realized without the other. The MALDIVES, on behalf of the Alliance of Small Island States, said SIDS have shown leadership and ownership in overcoming challenges, and are committed to doing their part. ITALY outlined efforts to support SIDS. AUSTRALIA noted that their many small island neighbors face unique challenges that require tailored development approaches.

BELIZE said issues such as climate change and challenges in accessing finance, including as a result of financial “de-risking,” are outside the control of SIDS. FAO highlighted their programme on food and nutrition challenges facing SIDS. SAMOA said the SDGs could improve South-South and regional coordination. NEW ZEALAND encouraged SIDS to report on what is most relevant and feasible, based on domestic priorities and using existing or national templates.

In closing, Smith highlighted the importance of data in tracking improvements and in ensuring finance is used in the most appropriate way. Tong said partnerships are essential for SIDS to achieve their objectives, and underlined the need for developing countries to derive greater returns from their resources, instead of only being perceived as sources of raw materials.

COUNTRIES IN SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Héctor Alejandro Palma Cerna, Deputy Permanent Representative of Honduras to the UN and ECOSOC Vice President, chaired this session.

Moderator David Steven, New York University, said the 2030 Agenda is both a promise of what can be achieved, and a warning of what will transpire if we do not act now.

Panelist Youba Sokona, South Centre and Vice-Chair of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said it is necessary to start by defining country-level development priorities, while stressing the need for the policy, research and practice communities to come together.

Panelist Jean-Marc Châtaigner, French Research Institute for Development, highlighted gaps in the number of researchers per million inhabitants, and differences in homicide rates, between different countries, and lamented an inadequate focus by the global community on least developed countries (LDCs) in the past.

Panelist Marina Djernaes, EcoPeace Middle East, warned against the environment being held hostage in conflicts situations, or waiting to act until peace agreements are reached. She stressed the need for bottom-up as well as top-down approaches to solve cross-border problems, and said civil society plays a critical role in conflict areas.

Panelist Claudio Huepe Minoletti, Universidad Diego Portales, highlighted the challenges, complexities and internal variations of middle-income countries (MICs), where he said sustainable development should be pursued as a means to growth, instead of growth pursued as a means to sustainable development.

Panelist Stephen Chacha, Africa Philanthropic Foundation, called for more effective conflict prevention and mediation, and for an annual report on progress towards SDG implementation in countries in special situations.

From the floor, ZIMBABWE emphasized the need to ensure that no one is left behind despite cultural and political beliefs. ZAMBIA called for harmonization of the 2030 Agenda with other global agreements such as the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries and the SAMOA Pathway. PAPUA NEW GUINEA highlighted the vulnerabilities and resource constraints of SIDS, and the challenge of setting up credible data systems.

BANGLADESH highlighted the need for increased support to LDCs, but said this should not encroach on their national policy space. WOMEN questioned how SIDS could ensure involvement of diverse grassroots organizations in SDG planning, implementation and monitoring. BAHAMAS, on behalf of CARICOM, said that as the

most indebted region, CARICOM would benefit from measures such as debt relief and increased official development assistance. CHILDREN AND YOUTH underlined the importance of involving youth in conflict resolution processes.

In response to inputs from the floor, Minoletti stressed the interrelatedness of different sustainable development issues. Châtaigner said North-South, South-North, South-South and North-North projects are needed to build genuine capacity. Sokona highlighted the SDGs as an opportunity for LDCs to follow a completely different development pathway. Chacha said youth should be at the center of both Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2030.

IRAN said extreme poverty is still the main challenge for countries in special situations. CHILE and Minoletti argued for the establishment of new classifications and indices to measure the development of MICs. CHAD emphasized domestic resource mobilization. BELARUS called for a UN focal point to analyze the situation in MICs, saying there is currently insufficient data. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES argued that fast-tracking development could result in adverse effects on indigenous peoples. The stakeholder group of persons with disabilities asked how humanitarian programmes could include “standards of disability inclusions” in their work.

NGOs emphasized the need for human rights to be at the center of the 2030 Agenda. CANADA outlined plans to conduct a comprehensive international assistance review to refocus the country’s assistance to the poorest and most vulnerable. The EU said it is committed to delivering smarter and tailored development cooperation. The DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO called on the HLPF to focus on the crucial issue of mobilizing resources both at the national level, by helping countries maximize their potential, and at the international level.

Chacha noted that none of the countries in special situations have achieved the Millennium Development Goals, and the lessons learned through that process should be the starting point. Djernaes highlighted the role of the UN as a catalyst to increase the engagement of civil society, and of international engagement. Sokona said the dialogue has to move to the regional, national and local levels, where linkages between different crosscutting priorities are much clearer. Châtaigner called for further investment in research.

Steven summarized six key highlights from the session: finding common ground; focusing on problem solving and jointly developing solutions; understanding patterns of vulnerability and tailoring strategies accordingly; the strong role of the UN as an enabler and creating enabling environments for specific types of countries; institutional innovation tailored to the needs of the SDGs; and new and strengthened partnerships. As a challenge, he said 2019, when heads of State and government will come together at the HLPF, should be seen as a deadline to show significant, sustained and measurable progress in countries in special situations.

IN THE CORRIDORS

With the first week of HLPF 2016 nearly at an end, it is perhaps time to consider the outcome document that will be agreed next week – the HLPF 2016 Ministerial Declaration. In the making since June, an agreed text was to be provided to the ECOSOC President on 8 July following further informal discussions earlier in the month. But although a Zero Draft is online, an informed delegate divulged that last-minute behind-the-scene discussions are still underway.

According to numerous observers, a group of countries wanted to include a paragraph in the Declaration on people living under colonial and/or foreign occupation, but this was not acceptable to others. A delegate quipped that this was very much in keeping with the afternoon’s topic, on countries in special situations. Some hinted that other elements also remain controversial. Nevertheless, as the day drew to a close, a new version had apparently been circulated, with many crossing their fingers that this would be the final iteration.