

HLPF 2017 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY 10 JULY 2017

The 2017 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) opened on Monday, 10 July 2017, at UN Headquarters in New York.

Following an opening plenary that reviewed progress on implementing the 2030 Agenda in the first two years since its adoption, key regional and sub-regional players, including representatives of UN Regional Commissions, exchanged regional experiences to support the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the afternoon, a thematic review on “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world: Addressing multi-dimensions of poverty and inequalities,” took place.

OPENING PLENARY

Frederick Musiwa Makamure Shava, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Zimbabwe and President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), opened the meeting and invited Member States to adopt the provisional agenda for the session (E/HLPF/2017/5). Noting the strong political signal sent by the large number of countries presenting voluntary national reviews (VNRs), he said this is the first time the HLPF will carry out an in-depth discussion of a set of SDGs.

Highlighting key messages from the UN Secretary-General’s report on progress towards the SDGs (E/2017/66), Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, said the report uses the global indicator framework developed by the UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators adopted by the UN General Assembly in July 2017.

Vivania Ditukana Tatawaqa, Women’s Major Group, called for reflection on the role of civil society in 2030 Agenda implementation, while underscoring the HLPF’s role in promoting accountability and multilateralism.

Robert Johnson, Institute for New Economic Thinking, described the new “dangerous discontents” of globalization, calling on them not to direct their discontent at emerging and poor countries. He underscored the need to halt the ongoing devastation of oceans, and the tremendous potential for alleviating poverty by improving the condition of women.

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr, The New School, highlighted issues that could compromise SDG implementation, including: inadequate strengthening of data collection capacity; gaps and distortions in the indicator framework due to limitations in data collection; and lack of balance among the indicators.

IMPLEMENTATION AT THE REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL LEVELS

This session was chaired by ECOSOC President Shava.

Shamshad Akhtar, UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, said baseline data availability varies considerably across the Asia-Pacific region, and “substantive

work” is still needed to prepare data for Goals 10-17. She reported insufficient progress on a third of SDGs in the region.

Alicia Bárcena, UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, identified progress on, among others: creating inter-institutional and inter-sectoral architecture at the highest political levels; incorporating SDGs into development plans and national budgets; strengthening regional architecture; and converting regional fora into multistakeholder spaces.

Identifying peace in the region as a global and regional responsibility, Mohamed Ali Alhakim, UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, identified common efforts to address migration, prevent depletion of natural resources, and eliminate barriers to women’s participation in development efforts.

Olga Algayerova, UN Economic Commission for Europe, emphasized the need to: consider how SDGs link with existing development plans; promote policy coherence by facilitating government coordination; tackle persistent gender gaps; and use a sub-regional approach for SDGs that have transboundary dimensions.

Highlighting an annual GDP growth of almost 4% from 2010-2015 in her region, Aida Opoku-Mensah, UN Economic Commission for Africa, said challenges include: data gaps; inequality; illicit financial flows; weak public institutions; and ensuring investments, to benefit from population growth.

Speakers then discussed the key drivers of change in their respective regions. Alhakim stressed the importance of peace and security; investments in green technology; and empowerment of women and youth. Algayerova highlighted promoting economic norms and standards; horizontal and vertical coordination across policy areas and government levels; attracting new allies and actors; and partnerships. Opoku-Mensah underlined the need for evidence-based policy-making; human capital development; management of natural resources; green innovation; domestic resource mobilization; and harnessing the positive impact of migration.

Bárcena stressed: equality as a driver of growth; gender mainstreaming; a revolution of technology and materials; addressing the indivisible nature of the SDGs; and institutional models that involve high-level actors and civil society. Akhtar stressed: addressing trade distortions; regional cooperation and integration; global sustainable and quality growth; and redistribution of income and wealth and resource mobilization, including through domestic means.

Shava called for a discussion on lessons learned on the means of implementation for SDGs in the regions. Akhtar said leveraging private finance should be the Asia-Pacific region’s highest priority. Bárcena highlighted tax evasion and illicit financial flows as key challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean and stressed the need to “recalibrate” middle-income countries (MICs).

Underscoring that financial integration and financing for development remain weak in Western Asia, Alhakim pointed to partnerships with the private sector and post-conflict reconstruction as important regional opportunities. Algayerova echoed the importance of engaging the private sector, while highlighting the

critical role of official development assistance (ODA) in meeting development needs. Opoku-Mensah cited the infrastructure gap, slow declines in poverty levels, and low investments in research and development as continuing challenges to development in Africa.

Highlighting the report of the Eurasian Economic Union on SDGs, Oleg Pankratov, Vice Prime Minister, Kyrgyzstan, said the report shows that regional economic integration provides an additional incentive to implement the 2030 Agenda.

The ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN) highlighted the mutually reinforcing nature of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda, noting efforts to strengthen such complementarities.

The COMMUNITY OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STATES said a working group on environment and climate change is developing a regional strategy to contribute to SDG implementation at the regional and national levels.

The CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY identified the challenges that limit the capacity of small island developing States in the region to develop national strategies and mobilize resources, including a high rate of indebtedness, and classification as an MIC.

The SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY highlighted: the Community's Protocol on Science Technology and Innovation; the African Union's Science, Technology and Innovation Strategy for Africa – 2024; and sub-regional efforts to promote research, innovation and technology transfer.

The EU outlined the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy; European Council Conclusions on the 2030 Agenda; and the European Consensus on Development.

The LEAGUE OF ARAB STATES highlighted an Arab institute for sustainable development established since HLPF 2016; and the importance of ODA in poverty eradication.

BHUTAN, BELARUS and MEXICO stressed the importance of Regional Commissions in implementing the 2030 Agenda. WOMEN affirmed that good regional governance is at the heart of sustainable development.

THEMATIC REVIEW: ERADICATING POVERTY AND PROMOTING PROSPERITY IN A CHANGING WORLD: ADDRESSING MULTI-DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITIES

Nabeel Munir, Deputy Permanent Representative of Pakistan and ECOSOC Vice President, opened the session. Moderator Vikas Swarup, High Commissioner of India to Canada, invited panelists to discuss the multiple dimensions of poverty, progress on their measurement, and creative solutions.

Panelist Sabina Alkire, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, introduced the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) and provided examples of how the MPI approach has allowed countries to identify gaps in national policies, budgets, and inter-sectoral coordination.

Noting that her country is using the MPI to implement SDG 1, panelist Claudia Vasquez Marazzani, Colombia, said the Index has enabled her government to coordinate better, reduce the rural-urban poverty divide, and anticipate changing poverty levels.

Panelist Anthony Lake, UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), noted that half of all "multidimensionally" poor people in the world are children. He called for a renewed focus on better data and equity.

Lead discussant Laura Stachel, We Care Solar, described the efforts of her organization in augmenting existing healthcare programmes by including the issue of energy access, including through campaigns to "light every birth" and by establishing women's solar ambassador brigades.

Lead discussant Emem Omokaro, African Society for Ageing Research and Development, said economic growth is not always associated with poverty reduction, and called for a "life cycle" approach to development that recognizes the importance of social inclusion.

In the ensuing discussion, Alkire highlighted MPIs that incorporate measures of discrimination and social isolation. Lake drew attention to key differences between the Millennium Development Goals and the SDGs.

KENYA mentioned the challenge of securing participation of the poor in poverty reduction programmes. CHINA described an intention to lift all rural areas out of poverty by 2020. FINLAND recognized social protection systems as a key instrument for poverty eradication, social cohesion, and gender equality. CHILE discussed its multidimensional poverty measurement approach, which tracks education, wealth, health, housing, and the environment. WOMEN said gender-disaggregated data are needed to capture individual-level differences in the MPI. The EU emphasized the importance of inclusion and participation.

ARGENTINA questioned what institutional interventions are available to promote synergies and multiplying effects to eradicate poverty through a multidimensional approach. COMOROS asked how to harness the innovative solutions that youth can provide in the fight against poverty.

INDIA stressed the importance of financial assistance and said the SDG indicator framework is not yet complete, with many tier two and three indicators "based on perceptions." SUDAN highlighted that free market macroeconomic policies that call upon governments to minimize their role in basic service provision are incompatible with the objective of poverty eradication.

UN Environment underscored the links between poverty eradication, durable growth, improved management of natural resources, and gender empowerment. MALI stressed the need to pay attention to the causes and effects of poverty. ROMANIA highlighted national strategies for poverty eradication, gender equality, and employment.

Panelists discussed, *inter alia*: development of laws and programmes that transcend terms of office; UNICEF's ongoing efforts to improve its multi-indicator country survey; multidimensional poverty in high-income countries; and the importance of gendered poverty indicators.

INDONESIA called for the fulfillment of basic needs, infrastructure development, new economic opportunities, support for entrepreneurship, and international cooperation to break the cycle of multidimensional poverty.

NORWAY emphasized the role of youth and a long-term perspective in engaging with them. PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES lamented austerity measures that have affected poor people and called for a rights-based response to economic crises. CHILDREN AND YOUTH called for a ban on age-based discrimination in accessing universal services.

SIERRA LEONE called for an integrated multidimensional poverty figure. NGOs called for reporting on efforts to address poverty among children. WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS emphasized the need for fair wages.

In concluding remarks, Marazzani emphasized the interlinkages between challenges in education, employment, and health, especially for vulnerable youth. Acknowledging the varied weight indicators for MPIs, Laurence Chandy, UNICEF, pointed to the risk of a proliferation of different national measures. Alkire questioned if there is need for a global MPI, to complement national MPIs.

Summarizing discussions, Swarup said the SDGs represent the plan, and MPIs the tools, to overcome poverty. He called for the will to execute the plan.

IN THE CORRIDORS

Discussions on the difficult task of eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity began on Monday at HLPF 2017 with only a small nod towards the challenging global backdrop against which this task must be accomplished. A speaker described the rise of "dangerous discontents" in developed economies – citizens who have reaped insufficient benefits of globalization, and are rising up in protest – while urging them not to direct their discontent at poor countries. Indeed, the task of balancing the benefits of globalization among and within countries has become even more critical in the two years after the SDGs and 2030 Agenda were adopted. Otherwise, as one participant remarked, rising nationalism and withdrawal from multilateralism will seriously hamper progress.

Meanwhile, work on the ministerial declaration continued in closed sessions, where delegates tried to find language to reflect common ground on difficult issues such as climate change.