

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON
LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIRST CYCLE OF THE HLPF
6-7 May 2019

General takeaways

1. HLPF can be improved. No specifics on how HLPF might be improved. There was no clear distinction made between implementation of the SDGs and the actual HLPF procedures for follow-up and review.
2. Agreement on improvement of VNRs during the first cycle, but more needs to be done, especially with inclusion of stakeholders and addressing challenges, bottlenecks. Agreement that VNRs should not be a “beauty contest”.
3. Some agreement on insufficient time for review of VNRs and themes, but no recommendations for extension of days allocated.
4. Agreement on enhancing role of regional fora, but no specifics.
5. Agreement on the need to address interlinkages, but no specifics on how to do this, and no discussion on the HLPF role to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations.
6. Agreement on stakeholder involvement, including participation in negotiations for Political Declaration.
7. Ministerial Declarations should be more action-oriented.
8. Agreement on need to appoint Co-Facilitators for the HLPF Review as soon as possible.

Brief summary

Participants at EGM included Member States, DESA, organizations of the UN system, MGOS, and representatives of other NGOs.

Session 1: Has the HLPF fulfilled its role?

Chair: Ms. Katerina Fialkova, Director, Department for Multilateral Economic Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Czech Republic.

Lead discussant: Amb. David Donoghue

1. General agreement that HLPF has functioned well, but improvements are necessary, particularly with respect to giving greater attention to interlinkages. In terms of measuring success, HLPF mandates provided in resolution 67/290 should be reviewed.
2. While VNRs have improved during the first cycle, they need to look at interlinkages across goals. Difficult to monitor leaving no one behind. VNRs should not be a beauty contest.
3. Stakeholder involvement is essential.
4. A human rights approach must be taken.
5. Means of implementation must be addressed.
6. Ministerial Declaration needs to be more action-oriented.

7. Regional forums should be given a greater role.
8. Need to distinguish between SDG implementation and the functioning of HLPF. While HLPF provided the platform for discussions and presentation of VNRs, reports submitted to it are not considered. It has not provided political leadership, recommendations and guidance.

Session 2: What has the process of VNRs taught us thus far?

Chair: Mr. Thomas Wollnik, Head of Programme, Partners for Review

Lead discussant: Ms. Julia Cela, Coordinator, Directorate for Policy and Priorities for Development, Unit of Policy for Development and Good Governance, Department for Development and Good Governance, Albania.

1. VNRs have provided impetus at the national level for implementing SDGs.
2. Multistakeholder involvement essential, but generally no official mechanism is established to ensure involvement.
3. No evidence of reaching those left furthest behind.
4. No discussion of issues that cross borders – illicit financial flows, human right; aid; refugees.
5. Focus is on small steps but not a big leap for transformation.
6. Little information on use of indicators.
7. VNR training, VNR labs useful. Peer learning useful.
8. Parallel report, spotlight reports and shadow reports would make process more meaningful.
9. Need to defend multilateralism.
10. More days needed for discussion of VNRs.
11. No feedback from HLPF.

Session 3: How can we get the most out of the thematic reviews of the SDGs and of the theme?

Chair: Ms. Gisele Fernandez, Deputy Director General for the 2030 Agenda, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mexico.

Lead discussant: Ms. Sylvia Hordosch, Policy Advisr/Intergovernmental Support Division, UN Women

1. Do we need a theme every year?
2. No need for theme if interlinkages are discussed.
3. Transforming our world should be highlighted every year.
4. There is a disconnect between EGMs and HLPF.
5. Some reviews should be delegated to other UN entities (e.g.WHO for health, ILO for employment and social protection).
6. HRC reports are increasingly dealing with SDGs – should be meeting between ECOSOC and HRC.
7. Must think beyond national boundaries.
8. What is the link between panel discussions and the Ministerial Declaration?
9. Concrete recommendations are missing.
10. Monitoring and evaluation are important.
11. There should be more information on bottlenecks, trade-offs, gaps.

Session 4: What can similar review processes teach us?

Chair: Mr. Mateo Estreme, Minister and Director of the Directorate for International Organizations in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Worship, Argentina.

Lead Discussant: Mr Rahul Mahotra, Head of Division: Reviews, Results, Evaluation and Development Innovation, Development Co-operation Directorate, OECD.

1. Disappointing that OECD was the only organization that presented experience on “similar review processes”. Examples of reviews by ECOSOC intergovernmental bodies would also have been helpful, e.g. Commission on Population and Development (Programme of Action of the ICPD), Commission on Status of Women (Beijing Programme of Action), FFD, Sendai Framework, etc.
2. OECD obligatory reviews of its Flagship development report: Joining forces to leaving no one behind (2018):
 - a. Peer-led, not state-led; mandatory every 5 years
 - b. Clear theory of change; clear methodology; Secretariat role is crucial; accountability – from reporting to reviewing and from information to action; peer learning.
3. UPRs are time-consuming and heavy – not possible for SDGs.
4. Voluntary nature of VNRs must be maintained.
5. Regional fora provide for in-depth discussions and peer learning.

Session 5: Pathways to expand multi-stakeholder participation

Chair: Mr. Felix Dodds, Senior Fellow, Global research Institute University of North Carolina.

Lead discussant: Ms. Kathryn Tobin, Advocacy Coordinator, WaterAid.

1. Must be clear about terminology for civil society (which excludes indigenous peoples, local authorities, academia) and stakeholders.
2. Costly for stakeholders to participate. Lack of funding. Reports are not considered by HLPF.
3. NGOs have had a long history of reaching those left behind. When government policies have failed, NGOs have provided food, shelter, education, medicines, care.
4. HLPF webpage could offer dedicated space for shadow reports.
5. Member States delegations should include stakeholders.
6. Member States often do not know how to include stakeholders – training sessions for preparation of VNRs should help.
7. Need to discuss empowering people.
8. Stakeholders need to be part of negotiations for Political Declaration
9. DESA support of HLPF must be strengthened; NGLS no longer exists.
10. Special Human Rights Rapporteurs should be invited to speak at HLPF.
11. HLPF outcome is not clear. No political leadership, guidance, or recommendations

Session 6: Next steps

Chair: Mr. Nazrul Islam, Director-General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh.

Lead discussant: Ms. Verena Klinger-Dering, Counsellor, sustainable Development, Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations.

1. A group of EU countries are looking into the HLPF. In short-term no change in HLPF mandate; current use of SDGs, theme should continue for 2020.
2. Co-Facilitators for HLPF Review should be appointed as soon as possible.
3. Survey should be organize to solicit views about HLPF.
4. HLPF must not backslide.
5. Need to clarify as soon as possible what will be discussed in 2020.
6. DESA will prepare report of EGM; similar meeting will be held in the fall.

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19 May 2019