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HLPF 2015 HIGHLIGHTS: TUESDAY, 7 JULY 2015

The 2015 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) continued on Tuesday, 7 July. In the morning and afternoon, the ministerial segment of the HLPF undertook moderated dialogues on “Communicating and implementing a universal agenda at home” and “Our HLPF in the next 15 years.” In the afternoon, the general debate of the high-level week commenced under ECOSOC.

“COMMUNICATING AND IMPLEMENTING A UNIVERSAL AGENDA AT HOME”

Opening the morning session, ECOSOC Vice-President Mohamed Khaled Khiari, Tunisia, stressed the need for a narrative to inspire and engage people to support implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, noting that how the HLPF supports this process needs to be further explored.

Moderator Laura Trevelyan, BBC Anchor, described the SDGs as being “the child” of the MDGs. While she stated they are more inclusive, she highlighted the remaining challenge to translate them into concrete impacts.

Carlos Alvarado Quesada, Minister of Social Development, Costa Rica, called for: making poverty visible and concrete through clear frameworks and indicators; empowering social actors by “opening and sharing the control panel”; fighting the “opacity of averages” as “no one experiences reality in aggregates”; and building upon a common reality to create a narrative that inspires action, has purpose and engages actors.

Thomas Silberhorn, Parliamentary State Secretary for the Federal Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany, called for a paradigm shift so that sustainability becomes the core of actions taken and is internalized into national goals. He emphasized that significant paths for collective action by stakeholders can be achieved through partnerships.

Piotr Otawski, Deputy Minister of Environment, Poland, said there is no contradiction between the post-2015 development agenda and national policies, but that sustainable development challenges are of such a magnitude and complexity that cooperation is required. He highlighted education and awareness raising as being crucial.

Jim Clarken, Executive Director, Oxfam Ireland, emphasized that the next 15 years could be the most transformative with positive prospects to engage all stakeholders, but that investment in communication at all levels is required.

Discussant Joško Klisović, Deputy Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Croatia, noted that it is national governments’ responsibility to communicate the post-2015 development agenda in language that citizens and stakeholder groups can understand, relate to and engage in. He said communication should facilitate individuals’ ownership of the process, with the government in charge of addressing conflicts of interest and managing finance to enable implementation.

Discussant Peter Davies, Commissioner for Sustainable Futures, Wales, UK, drew on Wales’ experience, describing one model used to integrate sustainable development into the Government of Wales’ legislation. He highlighted the value of: public consultation and engagement; reports to inform decision making and the public about progress in achieving their own set of seven goals; and small steps leading to practical action.

Discussant Brigitte Johanne Trauernicht-Jordan, SOS Children’s Villages International, called for directly involving children and youth in the evaluation and implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. She highlighted the importance of effectively communicating the complex development agenda and fostering engagement throughout the process.

On communication, discussions addressed how to: translate the SDGs into sectoral policies; build on existing country-level sustainable development initiatives; relate the SDGs to the wellbeing of individual citizens; address the goal on climate change especially for SIDS; frame the SDGs in terms that can be effectively communicated at the national level; make messages concise and simple; and communicate an “exciting and inspiring” future with messages tailored to different stakeholder groups.

Further discussions highlighted women and gender as a crosscutting issue, calling for including women at all levels of decision making. Delegates considered ways to integrate the SDGs into national policies and debated the role of stakeholder consultation in this process.

Responding on whether the SDGs are flexible enough to accommodate migration, panelists said it is clear that “we live in a global village and are all affected by refugee crises.” They underscored that every affected country has to produce its own internal policy to answer refugee crises and that cooperation from the very beginning and across ministries is needed, while maintaining a mid- to long-term perspective.

Delegates also raised: the importance of involving children and youth at all levels and providing a space for them to participate; how to address inequities between and within countries; and the difficulty of prioritizing the SDGs in terms of national implementation.

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“OUR HLPF IN THE NEXT 15 YEARS”

ECOSOC Vice-President Oh Joon, Republic of Korea, introduced the session, recalling the main mandates of the HLPF in providing political guidance and recommendations on the follow up and review of the implementation of sustainable development commitments. He highlighted the main issues still to be answered with respect to the HLPF’s functions, including: the reviews’ format and preparation; whether the annual focus should be on a small cluster of SDGs or on cross-cutting themes; how the Forum can support national efforts to accelerate implementation; and how to better engage a wide range of actors.

Oyun Sanjaasuren, Chair of UN Environment Assembly (UNEA), and Minister of Environment and Green Development, Mongolia, highlighted the role of UNEA as the global environmental authority within the UN providing policy guidance on the environmental dimension of sustainable development. She further highlighted the significant scope for UNEA and the HLPF to work together in the follow up and review of the SDGs. She said that for the HLPF to deliver on the review of post-2015 development agenda, it must consolidate its work, create linkages and forge partnerships.

Tun Tun Naing, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of National Planning and Economic Development, Myanmar, stressed the review of implementation and progress needs to build on practical and country-level experiences. He emphasized that coordination between relevant government officials, civil society, academia and the private sector at country level is key. He also noted that delivering on the SDGs requires, *inter alia*, timely access to data at all levels, in addition to cooperation and coordination with global mechanisms.

Riaz Hamidullah, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangladesh, said that at the global level, the HLPF should balance the expectations of its outcomes and ensure that the highlights of the GSDR and the experiences of HLPF are given due recognition at the national level.

Silvana Koch-Mehrin, Chair, Women in Parliaments Global Forum, cautioned that the SDGs need to be seen “from a different angle” so that members of parliament are ready to participate with and communicate the topic. Methods to do this, she said, include discussing the SDGs domestically.

Discussant Pio Wennubst, Assistant Director General, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, highlighted the HLPF session under the auspices of the UNGA “in 2019” as a landmark event. He further noted that the HLPF meeting in 2016 should create space for sharing experiences and lessons between member states, including on national plans for the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, and for discussions focusing on a group of goals and targets.

Discussant Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General of the UN, and Deputy Executive Director, Intergovernmental Support and Strategic Partnerships, UN-Women, underscored that the follow up and review of implementation in the context of the HLPF must include gender equality commitments, fully in line with the highest global standards on gender equality. She further highlighted the commitment in terms of follow up and review under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Discussant Daniel Lang, Sutherland Global Services Inc., stated that the sourcing industry will soon require their suppliers to prove they have a responsible “sourcing plan and sustainable development goals” defined within individual companies, and noted the role the UN can play in setting standards and guiding best practices in the sector. He stressed as key for responsible sourcing: human dignity commitments; social impact commitments; and environmental protection commitments.

Discussant Naiara Garcia da Costa Chaves, Beyond 2015, Brazil, said that the HLPF should be people-centered and people-owned to allow ownership of its agenda at all levels. She underscored the need for a commitment to outreach and communication.

In the ensuing discussion, delegates addressed: supporting and promoting UN-system wide coherence with respect to follow up and review; using thematic approaches to establish the HLPF’s agenda; and increasing participation of children and youth.

Further discussions covered: an independent bureau functioning all year around; the need for a single, integrated secretariat to organize HLPF sessions; the value of learning from other platforms and partnerships; innovative, bottom-up approaches; CBDR; the questions of how to address and coordinate targets with no formalized platforms and how to engage everyone in this process; avoidance of increased bureaucracy and reporting burdens; the need for the HLPF to be positive not punitive; an annual HLPF agenda that promotes integration; development of a roadmap for a successful programme of work; recognition that it will take time before the HLPF is fully functioning; the question of how parliamentarians can “spontaneously self mobilize”; and new and innovative indicators to measure factors leading to transformative change.

Panelists and discussants emphasized: utilizing existing structures, for example the UNEA; carefully assessing regional indicators; providing political and strategic guidance without being punitive; assessing how ECOSOC and the HLPF will be organized in the long term; looking at how thematic layers and clusters are organized under the HLPF; valuing the role of statistics; engaging national actors outside the sphere of development and foreign policy; engaging stakeholders through partnerships; and providing a progressive, but quick, approach to build up capacity for the HLPF.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The general debate of the ECOSOC’s high-level week began on Tuesday afternoon, where statements closely mirrored the discussions held during the penultimate day of the HLPF.

The morning discussion under the HLPF highlighted the important roles of individual nations in both communicating and implementing the post-2015 development agenda. As expressed by one delegate, “because implementation is voluntary, national ownership is especially important to communicate the agenda nationally.” Still, many felt that in order to successfully merge national and regional actions at the global level, a strong HLPF framework is required, which formed the topic of the afternoon’s discussion under the ECOSOC.

With the structure and function of the HLPF not being completely delineated at present, one delegate warned that for the HLPF to meet its high expectations, it should not be overburdened or, as another pointed out, a “talk shop” or a forum to “name and shame.” As the afternoon closed, one delegate surmised, “a fine balancing act—one that integrates existing platforms, levels of engagement and a number of stakeholders—is needed going forward in order to have a robust HLPF that maintains strong coherence across the breadth of topics and agendas.”

ENB SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS: The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of HLPF 2015 will be available on Saturday, 11 July 2015, online at: <http://www.iisd.ca/hlpf/2015/>