

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: 9-18 July 2018

Governments will begin the annual eight-day long High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at UN Headquarters in New York today, to take stock of progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda).

Expectations for the Meeting

Each year, the HLPF focuses on thematic issues, reviews progress on select Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and conducts voluntary national reviews (VNRs). This year, the overarching theme is “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.” Investing in and financing SDGs, advancing science, technology and innovation for SDGs, and progress in “leaving no one behind” will also be considered.

Along with the presentation of an annual progress report on the SDGs by the UN Secretary-General, five Goals will be reviewed in more detail: SDG 6 (water and sanitation); SDG 7 (energy); SDG 11 (sustainable cities); SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production); and SDG 15 (terrestrial ecosystems). SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals), which is reviewed annually, will also be considered.

This year, 47 countries will present their VNRs – the highest number so far. A high-level segment of ECOSOC from 16-18 July 2018 will include ministerial statements and culminate with the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration.

Origins of the HLPF

The HLPF was established in July 2013 by UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 67/290 as the main forum for sustainable development issues within the UN. The HLPF is one of the main outcomes of the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20). HLPF replaced the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which was established at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit). The UNGA resolution calls on the HLPF to meet under the auspices of the ECOSOC every year, and under the auspices of the UNGA every four years (the next session under UNGA will be 2019), to:

- provide political leadership, guidance, and recommendations for sustainable development;
- follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments;
- enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development; and

- have a focused, dynamic, and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges.

In September 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Summit adopted “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (2030 Agenda), a package that included the 17 SDGs, 169 targets, and a framework for follow-up and review of implementation. The 2030 Agenda calls on HLPF to take on a central role in the follow-up and review process at the global level, and to carry out voluntary, state-led national reviews to provide a platform for partnerships.

Key Turning Points

First Session of the HLPF: The one-day inaugural session of the HLPF, on 24 September 2013, was held under the auspices of the UNGA, and followed the closing session of the CSD. Heads of State and Government articulated a number of concrete proposals on the role of the HLPF, which should include stakeholders, emphasize accountability, review the post-2015 development agenda and the implementation of the SDGs, and examine issues from scientific and local perspectives. There was general agreement on the need for a genuine balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development, and for the HLPF to seek to integrate these dimensions throughout the UN system.

2014 HLPF Session: The second HLPF session (30 June - 9 July 2014) featured numerous dialogues around the key theme of “Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and charting the way for an ambitious post-2015 development agenda including the SDGs.” As participants awaited the adoption of the post-2015 agenda, the Ministerial Declaration adopted at the end of the Forum focused on overcoming gaps identified in the implementation of the MDGs; and on reaffirming commitment to a strong, ambitious, inclusive, and people-centered post-2015 agenda.

2015 HLPF Session: The third session of the HLPF (26 June - 8 July 2015) was once again described as a “placeholder” meeting awaiting the adoption of the post-2015 agenda. It focused on “Strengthening integration, implementation and review – the HLPF after 2015.” In addition to discussions on issues such as the future of the HLPF, supporting national action through HLPF outcomes, and keeping science involved in SDG implementation, the Ministerial Declaration called on the ECOSOC President to issue summaries of the discussions held during the Forum as a contribution to the upcoming Third International Conference on Financing for Development (FfD3) and the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 agenda.

2016 HLPF Session: The fourth session of the HLPF (11-20 July 2016) was the first to take place after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. It was also the first session that included VNRs – 22

countries shared their experiences with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This session was also the first where elements of the Ministerial Declaration were put to a vote – a controversial paragraph relating to the Paris Agreement on climate change remained intact following the vote.

2017 HLPF Session: In-depth reviews of the SDGs were initiated in this session (10-19 July 2017), focusing on six goals: SDG 1 (no poverty); SDG 2 (zero hunger); SDG 3 (good health and well-being); SDG 5 (gender equality); SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure); and SDG 14 (life below water). SDG 17 (partnerships for the Goals) was also reviewed and will be reviewed annually. The number of countries presenting VNRs nearly doubled, with 43 countries presenting. Once again, two elements of the Ministerial Declaration – relating to occupied territories and the multilateral trade system – were put to a vote. While the Declaration was adopted with both paragraphs receiving overwhelming support, a number of countries abstained from voting, protesting that the voting process itself diluted a strong political signal from the HLPF.

Intersessional Highlights

Workshop for the 2018 VNRs: This workshop in Geneva (4-5 December 2017) focused on experience-sharing between countries in preparing VNRs, with sessions on: format, content, and presentation; determining national priorities and areas of progress; creating ownership, enhanced coordination and coherence; and stakeholder engagement. Discussions also took place on the voluntary common reporting guidelines, the regional fora, and knowledge exchange.

Expert Group Meetings: Four expert group meetings (EGMs) were organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) at UN Headquarters in New York.

- At the EGM on interlinkages and common themes at the HLPF 2018 (25-26 January 2018), participants were encouraged to reach beyond their respective areas of expertise, explore interactions across goals and targets, map pathways that leverage progress in multiple areas, shape an understanding of common challenges and shared approaches towards achieving overarching outcomes, and produce recommendations on new and innovative ways in which diverse actors can work together towards these ends.
- The EGM on SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production; 3-4 May 2018) focused on interlinkages with other SDGs, and discussed sustainable consumption and production in the context of climate action, sustainable transport, ocean actions, plastic pollution in the ocean, and food loss and waste.
- The EGM on SDG 15 (terrestrial ecosystems; 14-15 May 2018) considered progress towards its individual targets, while taking into account obstacles, challenges, enablers, and interlinkages through various crosscutting lenses deriving from social and economic dimensions.
- The EGM on SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals; 12 June 2018) focused on the theme of “multi-stakeholder partnerships to drive transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies,” and considered elements and systemic issues from SDG 17 that can support sustainable and resilient societies.

In addition, EGMs were held on SDG 7 (energy), with a meeting on SDG 11, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on 11 February 2018; and a “global SDG conference” in Bangkok, Thailand, from 21-23 February 2018.

- The EGM on SDG 7 facilitated dialogues on the challenges and opportunities for furthering progress on this goal, its contributions to the advancement of other SDGs, and the issues pertinent to respective regions and countries in special circumstances such as least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, and small island developing states.

- The EGM on **SDG 11** (sustainable cities) focused on ways that cities contribute to the theme of the 2018 HLPF, and how urban actors can contribute to and engage in the 2018 HLPF and beyond.

FfD Forum: The annual ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development follow-up (FfD Forum; 23-26 April 2018) featured a Special High-level Meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions, the World Trade Organization and the UN Conference on Trade and Development; ministerial round tables; general debate; thematic discussions on the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA) and other FfD outcomes; and a dialogue with stakeholders. The major substantive input to the FfD Forum is prepared by the Inter-agency Task Force (IATF) on Financing for Development, in the form of its annual report on progress in implementing the FfD outcomes and the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The outcomes of the Forum will be presented to the HLPF.

STI Forum: As a component of the technology facilitation mechanism (TFM) mandated by the 2030 Agenda and the AAAA, the Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI Forum) provides a venue for facilitating interaction, matchmaking and the establishment of networks between relevant stakeholders, and multi-stakeholder partnerships, to identify and examine technology needs and gaps. At its third meeting (5-6 June 2018), the STI Forum focused on: the impact of rapid technological change on the achievement of the SDGs; realizing the full potential of local and indigenous knowledge; homegrown innovations for the achievement of the SDGs; national STI roadmaps for the SDGs; and capacity building. In addition, the STI Forum considered STI for the five SDGs under consideration by the 2018 session of the HLPF. The Co-Chairs’ summary will be presented to the 2018 session of the HLPF.

Regional Fora: In preparation for HLPF 2018, five regional fora were held:

- Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Regional Forum, 1-2 March 2018, in Geneva, Switzerland;
- Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (ESCAP), 28-30 March 2018, in Bangkok, Thailand;
- Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) Regional Forum, 18-20 April 2018, in Santiago, Chile;
- Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, 24-26 April 2018, in Beirut, Lebanon; and
- Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Regional Forum, 2-4 May 2018, in Dakar, Senegal.

Key messages from these fora will be presented to the HLPF session.

Informal Consultations on the Ministerial Declaration:

Informal consultations on the zero draft of the Ministerial Declaration, circulated by co-facilitators Gillian Bird (Australia) and Masud Bin Momen (Bangladesh), began with a first reading on 21-22 June 2018 at UN Headquarters in New York. Initial suggestions voiced by Member States included:

- a focus on solutions, not only challenges;
- “unpacking” references to means of implementation in line with the structure of the 2017 Declaration and 2030 Agenda;
- reflection of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities;
- reference to people living under foreign and colonial occupation and the right to development;
- stronger references to climate change, human rights, and stakeholder participation;
- avoiding repetition or renegotiation of issues covered by the FfD Forum;
- emphasis on the voluntary nature of VNRs; and
- avoiding references to technology.