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HLPF 2015 HIGHLIGHTS: FRIDAY, 26 JUNE 2015

The third meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) opened on Friday, 26 June 2015, at UN Headquarters in New York. An opening plenary adopted the agenda of the HLPF, followed by two moderated dialogues on “Shaping the world for 2030: from vision to transformative action” and “The role of business in implementation.”

OPENING PLENARY

Martin Sajdik, President of ECOSOC, opened the HLPF session, sending condolences to Kuwait and Tunisia for the recent terror attacks. He introduced the draft agenda (E/HLPF/2015/1), which was adopted by acclamation.

Noting that 2015 is a crucial juncture for sustainable development, Sajdik said that it must not only be a year when people and leaders share a dream, but also the year to mobilize and attain that dream. He underscored the current HLPF session is imperative in preparing for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda, saying that the HLPF can assist implementation so that “we hit the ground running.”

Rudolf Hundstorfer, Austrian Federal Minister for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, outlined the work that has taken place thus far in, *inter alia*, defining SDGs. He said that the HLPF should play a key oversight role in implementing the SDGs, underscoring the importance of adequate social policies for implementation.

Thomas Gass, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, on behalf of Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, stressed the review of the architecture of the post-2015 development agenda to ensure SDGs are transformed into tangible action, emphasizing the roles of the HLPF and ECOSOC. He also underscored the importance of stakeholder involvement.

Kadir Topbaş, Mayor of Istanbul, Turkey, highlighted the commitment of local governments and sub-national authorities for implementation of the post-2015 development agenda and its follow up and review starting in 2016. He outlined the importance of multilevel cooperation and coordination for the success of the implementation of the agenda and the inclusion of vulnerable groups.

Frances Zainoeddin, Grey Panthers New York, representing aging stakeholders, emphasized the need to account for people of all ages in the HLPF agenda through strong stakeholder consultation, stressing “all people count and should be counted.”

To form inclusive policies and programmes for all social groups, she called for disaggregated data on, *inter alia*: income; gender; age; race; ethnicity; and geographical location.

To ensure a sustainable future for all generations, Hirotaka Koike, Japan Youth Platform for Post-2015, for CHILDREN AND YOUTH, conveyed the importance of taking ecological footprints and planetary boundaries into account in the implementation and monitoring of the post-2015 development agenda. He noted the need for committee-based assessment with comprehensive reporting and stakeholder inclusion to ensure sustainable outcomes are actually achieved.

“SHAPING THE WORLD FOR 2030: FROM VISION TO TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION”

Noting that the SDGs will be universal, David Donoghue, Co-Facilitator of the negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda and Permanent Representative to the UN, Ireland, stated that the HLPF is seen as being at the apex of a global review process for the SDGs. He underscored that the work of the HLPF should be carried out in an inclusive manner and be informed by annual progress reports and the Global Sustainable Development Report.

Henry Bonsu, International Broadcaster, Ghana, moderated the discussion, asking panelists to address three questions: how well have intergovernmental processes captured the ambition level needed for sustainable development; what are the key issues for the success of the global vision and transformative action; and how can the HLPF’s work be supported at the country level.

Juan Manuel Gómez Robledo, Deputy Foreign Minister for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights, Mexico, stressed that the SDGs are being negotiated, in comparison to the MDGs, emphasizing their universality and inclusiveness, as well as the inclusion of crosscutting aspects, such as migration. He noted the need for regional approaches and the importance of policy evaluation at national and local levels.

Mayacine Camara, Ministry of Economy, Finance and Planning, Senegal, and Chair of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, underscored that although the MDGs have contributed to achieving goals related to poverty, health and education, inequalities have nonetheless persisted and increased, in particular among young people.

Babatunde Osotimehin, Executive Director, UN Population Fund, outlined a number of key issues to address youth in the post-2015 development agenda: leveraging the opportunity to engage the demographic dividend; including the three “E’s” of education, empowerment and employment; developing comprehensive data to support implementation and monitoring;

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and paying attention to both national and subnational programmes to ensure no one is left behind, and that women and children benefit from all of the SDGs.

Discussant Marwan Bishtawi, Pax Romana, for CHILDREN AND YOUTH, highlighted the importance of monitoring and accountability to ensure sustainable development becomes a reality. To create “a future we can all celebrate,” he stated this process should include children and youth and account for, *inter alia*: achieving development within planetary boundaries and carrying capacity; respecting gender; eradicating poverty; and respecting the dignity of the human person.

In response to a question, Bishtawi emphasized the importance of acknowledging how resource allocation determines representation and who is being left behind.

During discussions, Post-2015 Co-Facilitator Donoghue suggested that having inputs from Major Groups and other stakeholders has been vital to discussions on the post-2015 development agenda.

Addressing the question of effective coordination between UN agencies and programmes, Osotimehin said that coordination at the country level is vital for achieving tangible differences.

Deputy Foreign Minister Robledo, on the future function of the HLPF, suggested that following the completion of national level reviews of implementation, the HLPF could be used as a platform for exchanging best practices.

Camara said that financial assistance will be needed for implementing the post-2015 development agenda, but noted a need to assess gaps to establish where to target funds.

During discussions, participants stressed: transparency and participation in the preparatory process; reflection of the interests of developing countries and the most vulnerable; technology facilitation mechanisms; engagement of youth; ways to streamline follow up and review; the role of institutions; ways to translate goals into action without losing their meaning or depth; participatory processes at the national and local levels to engage citizens; and how to improve the communication of the post-2015 development agenda.

“THE ROLE OF BUSINESS IN IMPLEMENTATION”

ECOSOC President Martin Sajdik, opened the session, noting the important role of business and industry in shaping “the sustainable future we want.” He outlined messages from the ECOSOC Partnerships Forum, which took place on 28 May 2015, at UN Headquarters in New York, including that multi-stakeholder partnerships should be aligned with the SDGs and build on existing partnerships.

Discussion Moderator Amina Mohammed, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning, introduced the panel discussion on the role of business in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda.

Mark Moody-Stuart, Chairman, Foundation for the Global Compact, stressed that for business to overcome barriers and to contribute to achieving the post-2015 development agenda, there is a need for regulations that encourage business creativity, and for recognizing the limits of the market in delivering this agenda.

Toshio Arima, Director and Executive Advisor to the Board, Fuji Xerox, Japan, emphasized close linkages with customers and NGOs as fundamental for developing collective action opportunities for companies to contribute to the sustainable development agenda.

Jeff Seabright, Chief Sustainability Officer, Unilever, UK, outlined the critical role of the private sector in realizing the SDGs both being an engine of innovation and a large source of global capital. To capitalize on the potential of the private sector, he stressed the need to, *inter alia*, build understanding and pathways for engagement around partnerships through platforms and coalitions.

Jean-François Zinsou, Permanent Representative to the UN, Benin, and Chair of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), recognized the need for: investment in clean technology and technology transfer; increased foreign direct investment; application of multi-stakeholder approaches; effective public investment complemented by private sector investment; and more affordable facilities to attract private sector investment in LDCs.

Annika Lindblom, Ministry of the Environment, Finland, said interactions on sustainable development with business used to be defensive, but now governments and the private sector see themselves as allies in the battle for sustainable development. She stressed that partnerships between business and governments must be built on mutual trust.

Discussant Francis Gurry, Director General, World Intellectual Property Organization, addressed challenges, calling for identifying ways to join the imperatives of UN sustainable development processes with assurances for the private sector regarding involvement. While noting asymmetries in distribution of technology, he underscored that in a knowledge economy asking for technology transfer is asking specific companies to transfer or eliminate their competitive advantage.

Diego Azzi, International Trade Union Confederation, Brazil, stated that a key point in the discussion is how business can create decent work, noting that public and private sector interests are not always aligned. He said that the private sector has the potential to contribute to social and economic development strategies through encouraging social dialogue.

In the ensuing discussion, delegates stressed: that business and the private sector will be a source of innovation for implementing the SDGs; the role of public-private partnerships; and that certain basic services should always be provided for by the state.

Delegates also raised issues including: ways to incentivize companies to join initiatives such as the Global Compact; how to ensure that voluntary approaches will not result in human rights abuses; whether planetary boundaries are recognized; how to develop management capabilities for multi-stakeholder organizations; ways to balance relationships between the state and the private sector; standards of transparency; how to ensure access to human rights, particularly for women and child workers; how development and growth fit together; and more impactful and transformational changes.

Chair Sajdik restated the private sector is needed “to break through the walls” to make the post-2015 development agenda a real success.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The first day of the HLPF opened with many delegates readying themselves for discussions on the future function and shape of the HLPF. Many were heard commenting that there is general consensus that the HLPF, going forward, will be an “apex body,” largely concerned with follow up and review, as is currently reflected in the most recent version of the zero draft of the outcome document for the post-2015 development agenda negotiations.

Some delegates, however, expressed caution saying that there is still uncertainty on the future function of the HLPF given that the post-2015 development agenda negotiations are ongoing. As one seasoned delegate was heard saying, “everything we say now could be wrong in a few years.” Another countered, however, that even though at this stage there are more questions than answers, trying to answer them means there is an opportunity for future success.