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HLPF 2015 HIGHLIGHTS: THURSDAY, 2 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 Thursday, 2 July. In the morning and afternoon, moderated discussions addressed: “Sustainable consumption and production”; “Investing in the future we want—what will it require”; and “Tracking progress through existing mechanisms.” A brief wrap up session brought the first part of the HLPF to a close.

“SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION”

ECOSOC Vice-President María Emma Mejía Vélez, Colombia, opened the morning session, saying SCP is a cross-cutting issue and a key aspect of achieving sustainable development. She stressed that strides forward have already been made, but noted support for further implementation is required.

Outlining the successes achieved through the 10YFP programmes, Ulf Jaeckel, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety, Germany, and Chair, 10YFP Board, described the 10YFP as a concrete structure for implementation that has been constructed by many partners. He underscored remaining challenges, including: strengthening high-level national political support; accessing adequate funding for programmes and activities; and strongly engaging stakeholders, placing particular emphasis on further mobilizing the private sector.

Carolina Tohá Morales, Mayor, Santiago, Chile, stressed the important role that cities play in achieving SCP, describing them as laboratories. She underscored the need for: local governments as drivers of change; public policies that focus on citizen involvement and promote shifts in cultural mindsets; and increased availability of multilateral support, especially for developing countries who cannot afford to impede growth.

László Borbély, President, Committee for Foreign Policy, Romanian Parliament, said that having adopted the 10YFP and embedded SCP into the SDGs, it is now essential to identify how to implement SCP. He noted that by educating young people, journalists, parliaments, local governments and communities, SCP can become more understandable.

Discussant Swati Shresth, Center for Grassroots Development, and The Global Forest Coalition, for WOMEN, reiterated the need for national and global political support, and called for prioritizing marginalized groups, including women. She emphasized recognizing local knowledge, in part to avoid misguided interventions based on incorrect notions.

In the ensuing discussion, one delegate noted the multi-stakeholder nature of the 10YFP, stating that the programme can be used to help deliver more integrated SDGs. Another underscored the relevance of the 10YFP to SIDS, outlining efforts to mainstream the SCP agenda. Delegates also highlighted how SCP can be used to relate global SDGs to local levels.

Other topics addressed included: SCP becoming business-as-usual; information dissemination; flexible programmes that take national circumstances into account; replication of successful models; and green infrastructure to support implementation.

Discussions also highlighted suggestions for implementing SCP, including: an additional programme under the 10YFP on sustainable food systems; continued support for the 10YFP at global, regional and local levels; and a new economic model based on wellbeing and sustainability, in addition to growth. Delegates further called for accounting for context-specific capacity and difficulties faced by countries.

In response to questions, 10YFP Board Chair Jaeckel stressed avoiding “one size fits all” approaches, noting that the HLPF is a good platform to exchange views, identify opportunities and scale-up solutions. Tohá Morales underscored education and awareness raising on SCP, particularly in developing countries due to growing consumption rates. Borbély emphasized cooperation, political will, accountability and communication.

“INVESTING IN THE FUTURE WE WANT: WHAT WILL IT REQUIRE?”

ECOSOC Vice-President Mohamed Khaled Khiari, Tunisia, introduced the session.

Moderator James Zhan, UNCTAD, said that the challenge in financing the SDGs is “how,” since there are numerous demands for financial resources. He noted a study stating that US\$3.9 trillion is needed for developing countries to achieve the SDGs, but only US\$1.4 trillion is currently available.

Hazem Fahmy, Secretary General, Egyptian Agency of Partnership for Development, stressed the importance of partnerships, and South-South and triangular cooperation for achieving the SDGs. He said that successful models of partnership do not need large amounts of financial resources, but that through efforts such as training and capacity building, partnerships can have positive multiplier effects.

Hildegard Lingnau, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, on what it will take to “leave no-one behind,” stated that financing to achieve the SDGs cannot solely be in the form of grants, but loans and other forms of finance will need to be sought. She called for focusing on risk, resilience and conflict to achieve the post-2015 development agenda.

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Discussant Stefano Prato, Society for International Development, Italy, highlighted the centrality of public policy when investing in the future, with the state holding a central role. He emphasized the need to transform the global economy by investing in “vibrant” and localized economies and that the involvement of the private sector must be accountable, playing a complementary role to government regulation.

Delegates then discussed: that ODA should be an enabler for achieving the SDGs and not a way to erode past commitments; the non-financial side to investment in the SDGs, involving partnerships and leveraging incentives; that illicit flows of capital from developing to developed countries is a current challenge; clear guidelines for, and assessment of, private investment; and how to link accountability between regional and national levels.

Discussions also stressed how to leverage private funds to complement domestic funds and ODA, and called for a global body to follow-up on taxation issues.

In response, panelists stressed the HLPF represents an opportunity to debate unresolved issues, and queried how to leverage other resources, better direct investments, and ensure the private sector pays taxes.

In closing, Moderator Zhan suggested considering an “aid for SDG financing,” and technical assistance supported by a multi-UN agency and multilateral development bank consortium to advise and help countries to establish policies and programmes to mobilize and channel funds into SDG sectors and ensure positive impacts.

“TRACKING PROGRESS THROUGH EXISTING MECHANISMS”

ECOSOC Vice-President Oh Joon, Republic of Korea, opened the afternoon session, emphasizing that coherence and linkages between different platforms are needed to track implementation of, and organize an effective review process for, the SDGs.

Moderator Thomas Gass, UN Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, described the HLPF as the “apex” or core platform for tracking implementation of the SDGs, underscoring that: the UN system plays an important role in supporting inclusive thematic reviews conducted by the HLPF; existing platforms should be drawn on and strengthened; and ECOSOC plays a key role in fostering coherence between different review platforms.

Gerda Verburg, Chair, Committee on Food Security (CFS), and Permanent Representative to the Rome-based Agencies, the Netherlands, drew on the experience of the CFS to demonstrate how review platforms can be truly inclusive and transparent. While stressing the importance of building trust in multi-stakeholder platforms, she recognized that it takes time.

Adam Bouloukos, Director, UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, reported on the process leading to the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) 2015-2030 at the Third UN World Conference on DRR in Sendai, Japan, in March 2015, noting strong stakeholder engagement during the consultation. He emphasized that the seven global targets of the Sendai Framework interlink with the SDGs, highlighting that several SDGs touch on DRR.

Petra Bayr, Member of Parliament, Austria, presented on parliaments’ role in monitoring progress and implementation, saying that strong, well-equipped parliaments enshrine effective institutions that could play a strong role in implementing the post-2015 development agenda and the SDGs. She also noted that parliaments are able to establish the necessary bodies tasked specifically with monitoring implementation.

Charles Radcliffe, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, noted lessons can be drawn from existing human rights review mechanisms and standards, such as the Human Rights Council Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UPR,

he said, is state driven, voluntary, peer reviewed, and based on universality, participation and accountability, and should be integrated into the SDGs’ review and monitoring mechanisms.

Discussant Caleb Otto, Permanent Representative to the UN, Palau, and Chair, Pacific Island Forum, outlined actions taken by the Pacific Islands to monitor implementation of sustainable development policies, saying that they have established a peer review mechanism, which includes voluntary assessments from Pacific Island peers as well as other partner countries.

Discussant Louise Kantrow, International Chamber of Commerce, underscored the business community’s significance as a stakeholder, especially in discussions around financing and implementation. She called for continued inclusion of the business community in agenda setting and implementation, citing that the Global Business Alliance for Post-2015 is acting as a coordinated voice for the private sector as a stakeholder within UN processes.

Delegates addressed how to integrate cross-cutting issues, including DRR and gender, and how to integrate the SDGs into work plans more generally. Effectively addressing “orphan issues,” such as oceans was also raised, with one delegate recommending a global oceans conference to help in this process.

Panelists then highlighted: the role and function of the open-ended intergovernmental expert working group on indicators, and terminology relating to DRR; the value of shadow reports and peer reviews for parliamentarians in providing different angles and focus, and of parliamentary networks on different issues and topics such as gender equity and child marriage; ways to capture and interconnect all available information in a meaningful way, involving all groups; establishment of a procedure for moving forward with the HLPF; timelines and setting for HLPF thematic reviews; and avoidance of duplication of other platforms’ work.

Panelists further discussed: not focusing on SDGs as silos; minimizing the reporting burden; facilitating ownership of the SDGs at the individual level; engaging in a rigorous, challenging review process; building a new global partnership based on trust and openness; and inviting the poor to the table.

WRAP UP SESSION

Closing the first part of the HLPF, ECOSOC President Martin Sajdik, Austria, emphasized the HLPF should not be overburdened, stressing its central objective is to provide high-level political guidance and should use ECOSOC to mobilize the rest of the UN system around various agendas. He thanked panelists and delegates for a fruitful session that he characterized as “open minded and creative.”

IN THE CORRIDORS

Prefacing the Ministerial Segment, the first five days of the HLPF covered a wide range of pertinent topics relating to the future structure and function of the HLPF. While the inclusive nature of these sessions drew on broad input from Major Groups and other stakeholders, delegates were still left with questions about how “the will for inclusion will translate into actual HLPF structure and function.”

Others expressed concern that the wide range of topics being discussed may present a “too packed” agenda for the HLPF to deal with, resulting possibly in a “house of cards.” Some cautioned that this may be revisiting the ghost of the Commission on Sustainable Development, particularly if a thematic two-year cycle approach is used to deal with all the issues that need to be addressed.