



Earth Negotiations Bulletin

HLPF 2015
#7

iisd Reporting Services

A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations
Online at <http://www.iisd.ca/hlpf/2015/>

Vol. 33 No. 16

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Tuesday, 7 July 2015

HLPF 2015 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 6 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 Monday, 6 July. The ministerial segment of the HLPF commenced with an opening plenary, the launch of the MDG Report and messages from the five-day segment. In the morning and afternoon, panels addressed “A transformative integrated agenda—how can governments, societies and the UN rise to the challenge” and “Thinking ahead—emerging issues that will matter in the future.”

OPENING PLENARY

ECOSOC Vice-President Oh Joon, Republic of Korea, opened the session, highlighting opportunities for the HLPF, as the “apex” for follow up and review, to act as a vibrant new platform under ECOSOC and the UNGA. He called for an integrated vision, alongside an integrated agenda, to build coherence and effectiveness at all levels and engage all stakeholders.

UNGA President Sam Kahamba Kutesa, Uganda, underscored the imperative for all countries to work together constructively to adopt and implement the post-2015 development agenda, stressing that implementation must occur at all levels, with robust follow up and review.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson emphasized that effective policies must be crosscutting and avoid silos in order to achieve a transformative, sustainable future. He stressed that the HLPF should be both visionary and practical, noting that it provides an opportunity for reform within ECOSOC and the UN system, to make them more effective in facilitating and assessing implementation.

Vladimir Cuk, Executive Director, International Disability Alliance, for MAJOR GROUPS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS, called for recognizing Major Groups and other stakeholders not just as beneficiaries but as partners, and avoiding perpetuating discrimination and existing barriers to participation.

LAUNCH OF THE MDG REPORT

ECOSOC Vice-President Oh Joon said the MDGs set in motion extraordinary efforts involving all countries and stakeholders at all levels, to inspire institutions and revolutionize the way we see the sustainable development path.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, via video link, underscored that the MDGs have contributed to saving millions of lives and improving the lives of many more. But he also

stressed that progress has not reached everyone and concerted effort is required to “finish the job” started by the MDGs, and deliver “our shared responsibility of leaving no one behind.”

President Paul Kagame, Rwanda, via video link, said that the MDGs have shown that collective action to improve the wellbeing of the population is possible.

Prime Minister Erna Solberg, Norway, via video link, stated that it is crucial that the SDGs, *inter alia*, are communicated in an understandable manner, move beyond a sectoral mindset and work with local partners to ensure positive impacts at the local level.

Jeffrey Sachs, Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General, and Director, Earth Institute, Columbia University, outlined progress made by the MDGs, saying that “where we tried, we succeeded; where we did not try, we did not succeed,” and underscored that the MDGs brought focus to the plight of the poor.

MESSAGES FROM THE FIVE-DAY SEGMENT

Courtenay Rattray, Permanent Representative to the UN, Jamaica, said that discussions underscored the importance of communication, partnerships, the role of parliaments, and UN system-wide coherence for optimum functioning of the HLPF.

Paul Seger, Permanent Representative to the UN, Switzerland, described: the role of existing UN and non-UN forums to support thematic reviews under the HLPF; the HLPF acting as an overarching platform for science-policy dialogue occurring at all levels; and the GSDR acting as a tool to inform policy.

ESCWA Executive Secretary Rima Khalaf called for integration across geography, sectors, actors and activities. She said the national level should be seen as a starting point for implementation, while the regional level acts as a vital link between the national and global levels.

“A TRANSFORMATIVE INTEGRATED AGENDA: HOW CAN GOVERNMENTS, SOCIETIES AND THE UN RISE TO THE CHALLENGE?”

Moderator Scott Vaughan, President and CEO, IISD, highlighted the need for a bold and ambitious agenda based on transformative and integrated policies, and for coherent intergovernmental processes.

Karmenu Vella, EU Commissioner for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries, emphasized the need for one overarching framework covering all SDGs and their review in order to ensure accountability, and to define the role of the HLPF in this.

This issue of the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* © <enb@iisd.org> is written and edited by Olivia Freeman, Sandra Gagnon, Ph.D., Kate Louw and Anna Schulz. The Digital Editor is Francis Dejon. The Editor is Pamela Chasek, Ph.D. <pam@iisd.org>. The Director of IISD Reporting Services is Langston James “Kimo” Goree VI <kimo@iisd.org>. The Sustaining Donors of the *Bulletin* are the European Union, the Government of Switzerland (the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)), and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. General Support for the *Bulletin* during 2015 is provided by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, SWAN International, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Japanese Ministry of Environment (through the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies - IGES), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Funding for translation of the *Bulletin* into French has been provided by the Government of France, the Wallonia, Québec, and the International Organization of La Francophonie/Institute for Sustainable Development of La Francophonie (IOF/IFDD). The opinions expressed in the *Bulletin* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IISD or other donors. Excerpts from the *Bulletin* may be used in non-commercial publications with appropriate academic citation. For information on the *Bulletin*, including requests to provide reporting services, contact the Director of IISD Reporting Services at <kimo@iisd.org>, +1-646-536-7556 or 300 East 56th St., 11D, New York, NY 10022 USA. The ENB team at HLPF 2015 can be contacted by e-mail at <anna@iisd.org>.



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Salifou Dembélé, Minister for Youth, Professional Training and Employment, Burkina Faso, underscored the importance of transformative programmes that address decent and sustainable employment and training for young people.

Lisel Alamilla, Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and Sustainable Development, Belize, said that Belize is a young, developing nation, emphasizing that they have to investigate economic growth opportunities while addressing how resources can be used sustainably and recognizing limitations exist.

Joseph Severe, Union des Amis Socio Culturels d'Action en Développement, Haiti, stated that discussions should focus on achieving development that is attainable and applicable, and urged for the post-2015 development agenda to be a transformative, integrated agenda.

The ensuing discussion addressed: focusing on planning and implementation with the emphasis on “how”; integrating the SDGs into governments’ plans; providing funds for implementation, especially for developing and post-conflict countries; being realistic about what is achievable with available resources; focusing on subnational levels and promoting inter-ministerial coordination; seeing private sector investment and public private partnerships as playing key roles in implementation; and recognizing the challenge of policy coherence.

During discussions, delegates underscored: the need for political awareness and political will to ensure management plans, policies and programmes in all sectors and at all levels take sustainability into account; ways to articulate institutional arrangements to involve stakeholders and implement the SDGs; and the mobilization of domestic resources versus accessing ODA.

They further noted: children and youth should not only be involved in implementation, but also in the drafting of the post-2015 development agenda; that affordable water and sanitation should be a right; targeted funding arrangements need to be established; and the importance of gender equality as a cross-cutting issue.

Responding to comments, EU Commissioner Vella stressed circular, sustainable economies and the link between nature and the economy, as well as economic possibilities for the sustainable use of oceans. Dembélé highlighted the importance of mobilizing resources and finance, in particular through taxes, and having a social protection floor. Alamilla said the implementation framework will vary according to the conditions of each country.

“THINKING AHEAD: EMERGING ISSUES THAT WILL MATTER IN THE FUTURE”

ECOSOC Vice-President Vladimir Drobnjak, Croatia, introduced the session. Keynote speaker Kazuyuki Nakane, Parliamentary Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Japan, said prior investment in DRR and emergency response and recovery is essential for sustainable development, as well as to “build back better” infrastructure that is more resilient than before. He proposed observing World Tsunami Day on 5 November.

Moderator Irene Khan, Director-General, International Development Law Organization, emphasized the importance of ensuring that balanced and integrated development policies are informed by all relevant actors in order to maximize positive outcomes. She noted emerging issues such as demographic challenges and war-caused migration, and social inclusion and social justice.

Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany, described how scientific findings can support policy making and help ensure ecological justice, develop sustainable lifestyles, decarbonize the world

and provide healthy lives for children. She noted scientific data demonstrates that four planetary boundaries have already been crossed, but technical solutions also exist, or are being developed, to address some of the damage done.

Abdul Hamid Zakri, Science Adviser to the Prime Minister of Malaysia, and Chair, Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, outlined emerging areas of concern, including global health and sustainable ocean and biodiversity conservation. He suggested that the HLPF is in a key position to leverage resources and make the UN system more “impactful” when dealing with these issues.

Alfred Kammer, Deputy Director, Middle East and Central Asia Department, International Monetary Fund, outlined key emerging issues, noting an increasingly fragmented global landscape and suggesting that a new “multilateralism” that addresses regional cooperation and global governance may be necessary. He also underscored the increasing influence of non-state actors.

Discussant Ibrahim Thiaw, Deputy Executive Director, UNEP, underscored some of the challenges the SDGs should address, emphasizing: resource efficiency to address planetary boundaries alongside a growing population; Africa being a catalyst for or obstruction to global economic growth; broken bridges in the science-policy interface; and the HLPF becoming a mechanism to align governance in order to facilitate sustainable development, instead of just being a series of meetings.

Risnawati Utami, CBM, and Chair, Indonesian National Consortium for Disability Rights, Indonesia, underscored the necessity of accounting for the disabled and elderly, especially in the context of DRR. She emphasized that to make “no one being left behind” a reality, disabled and aging persons should be included as participants in the creation and implementation of the SDGs, highlighting the need for the HLPF to be a truly participatory global monitoring platform.

The panelists underscored the importance of strengthening dialogue with the scientific community, and encouraging their participation and contribution to the HLPF.

Delegates also discussed: migration, war-induced migration and refugees, and how it is being addressed in the SDGs; a flexible, transparent framework; access to knowledge and data; innovation and intellectual property rights; best practices for sustainable agriculture; and a programme of action to promote efficient integration of land-locked countries into global markets.

Panelists further addressed inequality, empowerment of women, social justice and inclusion, and how to achieve their implementation on the ground, and the need for new multilateralism in decision making.

In closing, panelists reminded that the SDGs should be implemented in a balanced, holistic manner.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The ministerial segment opened with a room full of delegates ready to assess the tone of the discussions. While some said that they expected substantial contributions that would lay the groundwork to assess implementation of the post-2015 development agenda after September 2015, others were still in a “wait-and-see” mode.

The ensuing high-level discussion left many with the feeling that concrete progress in defining the structure and function of the HLPF will be made only after the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda in September.

Others reflected that the participatory nature of the post-2015 development agenda processes, including the HLPF, has been one step in the right direction. All, however, recognized there is still a long way to go.