

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development: 9-19 July 2019

As the first cycle of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and review comes to a close this year and Member States gear up for the SDG Summit, along with other high-level meetings focused on sustainable development in September, the 2019 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) will gather at UN Headquarters in New York to take stock of the last five SDGs to be reviewed and 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 SDGs, and conducts voluntary national reviews (VNRs). The overarching theme for the 2019 session is “Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.” The SDGs that will be reviewed in more detail are:

- SDG 4 (quality education);
- SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth);
- SDG 10 (reduced inequalities);
- SDG 13 (climate action);
- SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions); and
- SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals), which is reviewed annually.

This year, 47 countries will present their VNRs (seven for the second time). A high-level segment of ECOSOC from 16-19 July 2019 will include ministerial statements, and sessions on, *inter alia*, visions and projections for the future of the SDGs; and empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality.

At the SDG Summit, when the HLPF will convene under the auspices of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 24-25 September, the outcome document from both 2019 HLPF sessions will be adopted. A four-year review of HLPF will take place during the 74th session of UNGA (September 2019 - September 2020). In anticipation, the July session will include discussions on lessons learned from the first HLPF cycle and from implementing the SDGs.

Origins of the HLPF

The HLPF was established in July 2013 by 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) and replaced the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), which was established in 1992. 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, 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,” 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-centred 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 and 22 countries shared their experiences with the 2030 Agenda. This session was also the first where elements of the Ministerial Declaration were put to a vote—a 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 at 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 is reviewed annually. Forty-three countries presented their VNRs. 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.

2018 HLPF Session: This session (9-18 July 2018) focused on the theme of “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.” Five goals were reviewed in addition to SDG 17: SDG 6 (water and sanitation); SDG 7 (energy); SDG 11 (sustainable cities); SDG 12 (sustainable consumption and production); and SDG 15 (terrestrial ecosystems). Forty-six countries presented their VNRs. A Ministerial Declaration was adopted, following voting on the text as a whole, and specifically on means of implementation and global partnerships; peace and security; and gender equality.

Intersessional Highlights

Expert Group Meetings: Six expert group meetings (EGMs) on the SDGs under review were organized by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) in collaboration with other partners, to: take stock of progress; share knowledge on success stories, good practices, and challenges; identify particular areas of concern; and suggest ways forward in terms of policies, partnerships, and coordinated actions at all levels.

- The EGM on SDG 4 (quality education; 3-5 December 2018, Brussels), organized in collaboration with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), also called the “Global Education Meeting,” agreed on the Brussels Declaration. The Declaration notes that the world is not on track to achieve the SDG 4 targets by 2030 despite some progress, while reaffirming the centrality of education for achieving the SDGs.
- The EGM on SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth; 3-5 April 2019, Geneva) was organized in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO).
- The EGM on SDG 10 (reduced inequalities; 2-3 April 2019, Geneva) focused mainly on within-country inequalities. The outcome document lists potential solutions including, *inter alia*, legal reforms and investments in human capital.
- The EGM on SDG 13 (climate action; 1-3 April 2019, Copenhagen), organized in collaboration with the Secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), also called the “Climate and SDGs Synergy Conference,” highlighted, *inter alia*, the timeframe up to 2030 as crucial for

both the SDGs and keeping global average temperature rise within 1.5°C.

- The EGM on SDG 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions; 27-29 May 2019, Rome) was organized in collaboration with the International Development Law Organization.
- The EGM on SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals; 12 April 2019, New York) focused on “Harnessing Means of Implementation through Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships to Build Inclusive and Equitable Societies.”

In addition, an EGM on the lessons learned from the first four-year cycle of the HLPF was organized on 6-7 May 2019 in New York. Participants discussed the role of the HLPF and opportunities for improvement; the VNRs; HLPF themes and thematic reviews; multistakeholder participation; and plans for the review of the HLPF during the UNGA session beginning in September.

FfD Forum: The annual ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development follow-up (FfD Forum; 15-18 April 2019) in New York was attended by ministers and high-level representatives, who agreed on a set of conclusions and recommendations. They recognized progress in the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda but noted that the mobilization of sufficient financing remains a major challenge for the 2030 Agenda, and progress has not been shared even within and among countries.

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) convened for its fourth meeting from 14-15 May 2019 in New York. The STI Forum discussed the challenges and technology solutions with transformative impact on the SDGs that will be reviewed at HLPF 2019. Good practices and policy recommendations, as well as challenges, were identified, with a view to facilitating the development, scaling up, and dissemination of relevant technologies for sustainable development. The Co-Chairs’ summary will be presented to the HLPF.

Regional Fora: In preparation for HLPF 2019, five regional fora were held:

- Economic Commission for Europe Regional Forum, 21-22 March 2019, in Geneva, Switzerland;
- Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, 27-29 March 2019, in Bangkok, Thailand;
- Arab Forum for Sustainable Development, 9-11 April 2019, in Beirut, Lebanon;
- Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, 16-18 April 2019, in Marrakech, Morocco; and
- Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development, 22-26 April 2019, in Santiago, Chile.

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

Informal Consultations on the political declaration of the SDG Summit: Informal consultations on the political declaration, which will be the outcome document for the HLPF session under ECOSOC and the HLPF session under UNGA in September, began with a first reading on 7 June 2019 at UN Headquarters in New York. Commenting on the zero draft circulated by Co-Facilitators Sheila Carey (Bahamas) and Olaf Skoog (Sweden), Member States called for references to be added on, *inter alia*: land degradation neutrality; gender equality; human rights; good governance; rule of law and access to justice; the importance of multilateralism; and the 1.5 and 2°C commitments of the Paris Agreement. There was broad agreement that the declaration should be concise, based on the findings of the Global Sustainable Development Report and SDG progress report, and that it should be adopted by consensus.