

HLPF 2019 Highlights: Thursday, 11 July 2019

HLPF 2019 continued into its third day with a thematic review on empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality, focused on the perspectives of society. A session on science-policy interface followed, with a briefing from the independent group of scientists on the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR). In the afternoon, a review of implementation and interrelations among Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused on SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).

Thematic Review on Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality

Perspectives of society: This session was chaired by Kira Christianne Danganan Azucena, Vice-President, UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was moderated by Paola Simonetti, Co-Chair of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) Steering Group and Katarina Popovic, Education and Academia Stakeholder Group (EASG) representative.

Addressing guiding principles for strengthening the follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda, including HLPF reform, Panelist José Viera, World Blind Union, highlighted the need for: inclusivity; a focus on results-based actions; and space for civil society involvement.

In a discussion on the guiding principles, CHILDREN AND YOUTH said citizen-generated data should complement state-generated data in follow-up and review, and tokenism and “tick-boxing” in involving civil society must end. WOMEN called for investments in healthcare, childcare, and protection against gender-based violence. INDIGENOUS PEOPLES called for enabling environments, freedom of speech, outreach for the indigenous peoples furthest left behind; meaningful participation; rights to territories and resources; and access to justice.

ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL CSO ENGAGEMENT MECHANISM urged a just and equitable transition to sustainable economies, saying 70% of workers in her region are employed in the informal sector, without access to labor rights or social protection. The PHILIPPINES reported involvement of civil society in their voluntary national review (VNR) process through workshops. AZERBAIJAN and MOROCCO highlighted regional and national efforts to involve civil society. KENYA described devolution of SDG implementation to county governments. The EU called for well-organized participatory processes to ensure civil society

involvement that enable ownership of SDG implementation efforts. BELGIUM called for greater participation of youth from the South at HLPF meetings, saying they provide new and important perspectives.

Addressing integration with other crosscutting and thematic processes such as Financing for Development (FfD), Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI) Forum, Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction; and how to strengthen the interplay between global and regional processes, Panelist Pooja Rangaprasad, Civil Society FfD Group, urged an honest assessment of how global processes can address systemic risks and called for greater coherence at the global level to support national efforts such as domestic resource mobilization.

Warda Rina, Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Engagement Mechanism, highlighted the need to address inequality of wealth, power, and access to resources, and called for better linkages between regional forums and the HLPF.

In a discussion, MEXICO supported CSO engagement in regional processes while urging a shift from experience sharing to concrete actions. The LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANSSEXUAL, AND INTERSEX (LGBTI) stakeholder group, reporting back from a discussion on the SDGs and human rights under the UN Human Rights Council, called for a declaration on SDGs and human rights. The NGOs called for engagement with the CFS and a focus on the “lived experience” of those affected by food insecurity. WOMEN urged moving from “rose tinted” messages to a more critical review of progress, and more space for civil society to present alternative reports.

Addressing how to ensure vibrant participation and effective dialogue in the VNR process at national and global levels, Panelist Donovan Gutierrez, Major Group for Children and Youth, observed that good examples of CSO participation in the VNR process are more the exception than the rule, while calling for redesigning spaces for collaboration between civil society and governments.

In a discussion, NORWAY expressed concern over human rights abuses of environmental defenders around the world, while calling for their protection. SWEDEN supported active participation of all age groups in SDG implementation. GUATEMALA called for protection and support for regional civil society spaces. WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS said the role of the private sector should not outweigh the role of other sections of civil society during VNR consultations. Expressing dissatisfaction at the level of civil

society engagement in VNR processes, CHILDREN AND YOUTH said governments should be seeking involvement in the plans and processes of youth instead of the other way round. The CZECH REPUBLIC supported integration of civil society feedback into VNRs.

In concluding remarks, panelists agreed that: the regional level could be the best place to discuss systemic obstacles to CSO participation and to seek solutions and regional reviews of SDG implementation could provide important insights; and the dialogue between governments and civil society should be made more effective and action-oriented.

Science-Policy Interface

This session was chaired by ECOSOC Vice-President Azucena and moderated by Romain Murenzi, World Academy of Sciences.

Panelist Peter Messerli, GSDR Co-Chair, said the 2019 GSDR, which will be launched at the SDG Summit in September, sounds alarm bells, indicating uneven progress in the achievement of the SDGs and highlighting the need to scale-up and accelerate implementation. He noted that 67 scientific assessments and UN flagship reports have confirmed the inter-related nature of SDGs and called for integrated implementation approaches. Listing six entry points for transformation identified in the Report (human wellbeing and capabilities; sustainable economies; energy decarbonization and access; food systems and nutrition; urban and peri-urban development; and global commons), he said strong institutions could serve as levers of change for these transformations.

Panelist Endah Murniningtyas, GSDR Co-Chair, said the 2019 GSDR demonstrates that science can identify emerging issues beyond the Goals, and that scientific institutions should be engaged in resource planning.

Panelist Heide Hackmann, International Science Council, called for: effective integration between natural, social, and technical sciences; and effective science-policy coordination in response to the transformative imperative of the 2030 Agenda.

Emphasizing the role of data analytics in policy formulation, Panelist Meera Joshi, outgoing Commissioner, New York City Taxi and Limousine Commission, urged empowering local governments with the information, tools, and resources necessary to obtain meaningful results.

Lead discussant Virginia Murray, Public Health England, called for the standardization of hazard definitions, enhanced data sharing to support reporting, and making science usable for all stakeholders.

Lead discussant Stephan Contius, Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety, Germany, said the GSDR provides an important argument for more ambitious and integrated policies in areas where progress is lacking.

In the discussion, FRANCE called for a focus on building scientific infrastructure as a complement to focusing on science in primary and secondary education. NORWAY highlighted efforts to bring the SDGs “into lecture halls”. SWITZERLAND said a reference to the GSDR in the political declaration of the SDG Summit would enable its use as a resource by policy makers. JAMAICA noted the importance of arts along with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

Providing additional comments, panelists highlighted the need to: secure access to data and knowledge especially in low-income countries; use big data to facilitate interdisciplinarity in SDG implementation; and create partnerships between local governments and the private sector to use big data to improve people’s lives.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES said new technologies need to be affordable, available, and accessible for all, including for persons with disabilities. The DOMINICAN REPUBLIC underscored the need to establish links between the research conducted in universities and governments to enable evidence-based policy making. WOMEN said the GSDR is a “gender blind” report and proposing public-private partnerships to reduce inequality “totally misses the mark”, as the private sector has contributed to the gap.

The REPUBLIC OF KOREA said the GSDR places too much emphasis on the environmental pillar of sustainable development and called for more proportionate weight to the economic and social pillars. SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY highlighted the role of science and technology in the achievement of the SDGs. GHANA called for technology transfer and knowledge sharing. SOUTH AFRICA called for building local capacity for STI. The EU underlined the need for specificity regarding national circumstances in SDG implementation.

SWEDEN commended the GSDR for proposing cooperation between academia and governments. RWANDA called on the international community to support the creation of STI hubs in developing countries to reduce brain drain and spur local innovation. The BAHAMAS described a national visa programme to attract professionals to advance innovation and development of priority sectors. KENYA described coordination mechanisms between the government and science and technology stakeholders.

In concluding remarks, panelists addressed the need for: the public sector to find incentives to attract and retain talent without competing with the private sector on salaries, and integrating local, traditional, and indigenous knowledge.

Review of Implementation and Interrelations Among SDGs

SDG 10 (reduced inequalities): This session was chaired by ECOSOC Vice-President Valentin Rybakov, and moderated by Sarah Cliffe, New York University.

Presenting a global statistical snapshot of SDG 10, Benjamin Rae, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, said income inequality is on the rise, with the bottom 40% receiving less than 25% of overall income, and an increasing share of income going to the top 1% in many countries. He said 39% of women lack decision-making power at work and home; only 20% hold managerial positions; and 50% of those affected by extreme poverty are children below 14 years.

Panelist Edwin Cameron, Constitutional Court of South Africa, said SDG 10 requires the elimination of discriminative laws and policies that criminalize marginalized groups such as the LGBTI community and persons living with HIV, while noting that stigmatization and social exclusion impact the security, health, livelihoods, and wellbeing of these groups.

Panelist Martha Chen, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing Network, called for policies and laws that embrace, rather than stigmatize and criminalize, the poor in the informal economy, who she said are denied social services, housing, secure work places, and business licenses.

She highlighted the principles of “leaving no one behind” and “nothing for us, without us” as essential for achieving SDG 10.

Panelist Máximo Torero Cullen, Food and Agriculture Organization, called for improving access to markets and diversification of income sources for the poorest to tackle income inequality.

Panelist Eun Mee Kim, Ewha Womans University, Republic of Korea, said inequalities in education undermine poverty alleviation efforts, and called for the elimination of systemic and institutional barriers in the education sector.

In a discussion, REPUBLIC OF KOREA, for the Group of Friends of SDG 10, highlighted progressive fiscal policies, coupled with social protection and partnerships with the private sector, to promote social inclusion. ISRAEL noted improvements in its justice system for the representation of minorities. FINLAND supported wage standards and collective rights to reduce inequality. ZAMBIA said cash transfer programmes are important for reducing poverty among the most impoverished.

FRANCE and the DOMINICAN REPUBLIC urged moving beyond a monetary notion of poverty, to a multidimensional poverty index. NORWAY highlighted the importance of centralized wage bargaining in ensuring even income distribution. POLAND stressed the importance of childcare benefits in reducing inequality. THAILAND reported progress in reducing inequality through a focus not only on the poor, but also on vulnerable groups such as the elderly and people with disabilities. The NETHERLANDS identified inequality within the national education system as a “big concern”.

INDONESIA said earmarking funding for rural areas was an effective way of decreasing urban-rural inequality. Identifying ways to tackle inequalities, SWEDEN highlighted social protection floors; policies enabling inclusive and sustainable growth; and multilateral cooperation on migration. BANGLADESH described efforts to reduce the transaction costs of migrant remittances to below 3% by 2030.

Lead discussant Jane Barratt, International Federation on Ageing, stressed the need for all age groups to be actively involved in SDG implementation, and called for addressing the stereotypes that marginalize ageing people.

Lead discussant Nalini Singh, Fiji Women’s Rights Movement, underscored the need to eliminate systemic discrimination based on age, gender, sexual orientation, and disability through measures that address income discrimination.

Matthew Martin, Development Finance International, presented an analysis showing that the majority of countries “vastly ignore” SDG 10 in their national development plans, and called on the UN to appoint an SDG 10 focal point.

Providing comments, panelists called for a focus on employment in urban areas to reduce inequality; and proposed innovative solutions for social inclusion, such as thinking of informal settlements as industrial hubs.

NEPAL called for support from the international community in addressing SDG 10, particularly for vulnerable countries. The CZECH REPUBLIC supported effective social transfers and affordable access to social services. ZIMBABWE reported a commitment to use 3% of national revenue for social protection.

SOUTH AFRICA highlighted efforts on social protection and job creation. UZBEKISTAN described subsidies for low-income families, and a social protection agency.

MEXICO supported disaggregation of data, to identify groups affected by inequalities. SWITZERLAND reported successes in social integration of persons of foreign origin. The EU described its commitment to policies that foster inclusive growth, reduce inequality, and address discrimination. NIGER reported on gender policy reforms, noting co-benefits for improved child welfare. NGOs called for policies that ensure decent wages while combating xenophobia, corruption, racism, and gender and sex-based discrimination. The LGBTI community cited injustices due to discrimination, including violence, homelessness, bullying, and low life expectancy.

GUATEMALA listed food security and education as key to reducing vulnerability. SPAIN described a national policy to combat poverty and social exclusion through investments in training, education and health. MOROCCO described a national monitoring mechanism that utilizes data based on different social and economic categories of the population to reduce inequalities. INTERPOL stressed its commitment to tackle illicit financial flows and corruption. VIETNAM noted policies to reduce inequality, such as preferential access to credit and social welfare benefits to 2.6 million people.

ECUADOR emphasized human mobility in urban and rural development strategies and called for a focus on how migration interacts and shapes inequalities. CHINA stressed the need to stand firm for multilateralism and against protectionism. GERMANY highlighted that reducing inequality is more important for eradicating poverty than economic growth.

The PHILIPPINES recommended collaborations with stakeholders, giving the example of a collaboration with the private sector to integrate people with disability into the economy through job creation. NGOs called for progressive taxation to address wealth concentration and increasing inequality. WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS underscored addressing the needs of workers in the informal sector to tackle inequality. EDUCATION AND ACADEMIA said quality education should not depend on economic status, and current educational systems are failing potential learners.

In conclusion, panelists highlighted the role of policies and disaggregated data in reducing inequality.

In the Corridors

A flurry of pink scarves around the HLPF venue, distributed by the Women’s Major Group, sought to remind participants of the insidious structural discrimination that continues to dominate processes at all levels. However, noted an astute observer, that discrimination appears markedly reduced in certain specific situations: the morning’s discussion on the meaningful inclusion of civil society in SDG-related processes, for instance, was prominently dominated by the voices of women. The female voices were welcome, said the observer, but they also need to be heard in other spheres, such as discussions on business and the private sector, where male voices continue to dominate. In other monochrome corridors of power as well, perhaps a dash of colour can serve to make the obvious a little more visible.