

HLPF 2024 Highlights: Tuesday, 16 July 2024

On the second day of the ministerial segment of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), deliberations on reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises demonstrated the plurality of actors engaged in the process, ranging from sub-regional actors to the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA).

Taking place in parallel sessions throughout the day, countries continued to exchange experiences and lessons learned from implementing the 2030 Agenda, drawing on nine Voluntary National Review (VNR) presentations. Major Groups and other Stakeholders also continued to play a prominent role, offering a reality check of the evidence presented and raising questions about country priorities moving forward. Taken together, these deliberations offered a timely reminder that multiple actors have taken ownership of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Messages from the UN Environment Assembly

Abdullah Bin Ali Amri, Chairman, Environment Authority, Oman, and President, seventh meeting of UNEA, reminded HLPF delegates that they gather not only as Member States, “but as stewards of our planet, united by a common target to achieve the 2030 Agenda.” He underscored the vital role of healthy ecosystems in eradicating hunger and poverty and fostering more equitable societies, and highlighted UNEA’s leadership in:

- spearheading multilateral action to tackle the triple planetary crisis, such as the recently adopted Global Framework on Chemicals, and negotiations towards a legally binding agreement on plastic pollution; and
- promoting the One Health approach to addressing human and planetary wellbeing.

Citing the recent UN Environment Programme preliminary assessment on the environmental impact of the conflict in Gaza, Amri challenged delegates to tackle the root causes of conflict, posing the question: “what good is working on sustainable development if children and women are killed every day?”

Messages from the Five Regions

The Political Declaration adopted at the 2023 SDG Summit reaffirmed the role of the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development organized by the five UN Regional Commissions. Paula Narváez, President, UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), introduced this segment.

Said Mohammed Al-Saqri, Minister of Economy, Oman, and Chair, 2024 Arab Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, highlighted a commitment to peace, security, and justice, and the need for a comprehensive reform of the multilateral system,

including implementation of a UN resolution on Gaza. He called for legislation to address the use of technology as a tool of war, including a global mechanism on the use of artificial intelligence.

Ester-Anna-Liisa Shiwomwenyo Nghipondoka, Minister of Basic Education, Arts and Culture, Namibia, and First Vice-Chair, Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, highlighted the impact of debt on domestic investment, and noted the growing number of people living beneath the poverty line. She called for the Summit of the Future to be inclusive, accelerate the adoption of a Global Digital Compact, and enhance the international financial architecture.

Radim Sršeň, Deputy Minister of Regional Development, Czechia, and Co-Chair, 2024 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UN Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), discussed opportunities to advance information technology, youth engagement, and climate awareness. He underlined the role of the Summit of the Future as an opportunity to strengthen multilateralism, promote digitalization, and involve municipalities and regions. Co-Chair Vahan Mostanyan, Armenia, called for ambitious climate action.

José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs, Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and Coordinator, UN Regional Commissions, presented the report from the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development. He called for increased investment in social protection and for economic opportunities at the global and regional levels, reporting that participants had called on the international community to strengthen measures on biodiversity, disaster risk reduction, and the vital participation of young people.

Lead discussant Alberto Jaramillo, National Worker’s Union of Mexico, on behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation, underlined that digitalization and regional integration, including through development of regional production chains, will guarantee decent work and help reduce countries’ indebtedness.

In the ensuing discussion, CHILE noted cooperation with ECLAC has helped countries better understand local and regional realities and explore solutions “that are adapted to our needs.” INDONESIA urged strengthening institutional capacities for enhanced resilience to global challenges. ITALY underlined policy coherence for sustainable development as a useful tool for integrated SDG actions, especially for SDGs 16 (peace, justice, and strong institutions) and 17 (partnerships for the Goals). INDIGENOUS PEOPLES OF THE CARIBBEAN called for transparent and institutionalized consultation and participation mechanisms.

The STAKEHOLDER GROUP FOR COMMUNITIES DISCRIMINATED ON WORK AND DESCENT called for a

resolution on global standards and protections for communities facing discrimination, as well as development of regional and national mechanisms to identify and support vulnerable groups. The INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF THE FRANCOPHONIE discussed the link between language barriers and SDG achievement, highlighting challenges in accessing digital technologies and funding information.

Rola Dashti, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, stressed that Arab least developed countries (LDCs) need help with basic connectivity and financing. She highlighted the Arab Debt Management Group which helps countries manage their debt through, among others, peer exchange.

Claver Gatete, Executive Secretary, Economic Commission for Africa, lamented the region's limited access to concessional funding for development, resulting in high indebtedness. He called for urgent reforms of global financial architecture and the G20 Common Framework for Debt Treatments.

Salazar-Xirinachs suggested addressing three elements concurrently: countries' strategies, plans, and measures; institutional arrangements; and investment and financing need.

Tatiana Molcean, Executive Secretary, ECE, called for: significant investment in green and decent job creation; promotion of sustainable agriculture; and development of climate risk assessment and response plans. She linked financing for development to climate action.

Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, Executive Secretary, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, outlined support provided to Member States in relation to, among others: applying human-centered design in disaster risk reduction programmes; accelerating inclusive digital transformation; and piloting innovative public-private sustainable financing mechanisms.

In her concluding remarks, Narváez lauded regional institutions for acting as a fundamental pillar of multilateralism, supporting countries to translate international commitments into tangible actions.

Voluntary National Reviews

In the morning, Ivan Simonović, ECOSOC Vice-President (Croatia), chaired a session during which two countries presented their first VNR reports. In the afternoon, seven countries presented second, third, and fourth VNRs in consecutive sessions chaired by Paula Narváez, ECOSOC President.

SOUTH SUDAN: Augustino Ting Mayai, Chair, National Bureau of Statistics, South Sudan, presented his country's first VNR report, contextualizing South Sudan's emergence from conflict and transition towards development. Reporting limited progress overall, with regression on poverty and child food security, he noted some improvements in: maternal mortality rate; child vaccination; adult literacy; secondary education enrolment rates; and gender parity. Mayai outlined the revised national development strategy, Vision 2040, as an example of improvements in the policy environment that would set the stage for increased investments.

Discussion: Following questions from the UK and the WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP, Mayai noted challenges in collecting data due to instability and poor institutional capacity. He highlighted initiatives to facilitate South Sudan's transition from humanitarian to development assistance, including frameworks to attract investment and ensure proper resource management. Mayai further noted that available oil resources will be channeled towards agriculture to increase food security.

YEMEN: Waed Abdullah Badhib, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Yemen, presented his country's first

VNR. He underlined persistent challenges arising from the ongoing conflict, noting it had led to declining public revenue, and increased corruption, poverty, and food insecurity. Badhib outlined efforts to: create employment and economic opportunities; early warning systems; rebuild physical and digital infrastructure; strengthen statistical and legislative capacities; and address external debt.

Discussion: In response to interventions by MOROCCO, the PHILIPPINES, and the NGOs MAJOR GROUP, Badhib underscored that the conflict had channeled the labor force away from the agriculture and fisheries sectors towards frontline sectors, and increased the number of internally displaced persons. He noted the importance of civil society organizations (CSOs), highlighting their role as a partner in peacebuilding and development.

COLOMBIA: Alexander López, Director of National Planning, Colombia, presented his country's fourth VNR report. He reported that Colombia had made progress on 58% of the SDGs, while noting persistent challenges in closing inequality gaps. López stressed the defense of life, peace, and equality as Colombia's priorities, with poverty, hunger, and inequality as the main focal areas for achieving these. He further highlighted ongoing peace efforts and agriculture reforms to formalize territorial agreements, noting 2023 had the lowest rate of deforestation in the last 20 years.

Discussion: López responded to questions from NORWAY, GERMANY, and the MAJOR GROUP FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH. He highlighted establishment of government-civil society dialogues for each sector of government; and the transition to using a multidimensional indicator of poverty. Stressing the impacts of the country's long history of conflict, López reiterated their commitment to fully implement existing peace agreements.

GUINEA: Ismael Nabe, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Guinea, presented his country's second VNR report. He outlined efforts to integrate the SDGs into national and sectoral policies, and the development of a financial plan to support their implementation. Nabe reported progress in: reducing food insecurity and chronic child malnutrition; promoting the rule of law and equal access to justice; and tackling gender-based violence.

Discussion: Responding to questions from SIERRA LEONE, MALI, and the NGOs MAJOR GROUP, Nabe underlined deep solidarity with neighboring countries. He pointed to critical water resources in his country that directly impact the region, and called for support from the international community to preserve these resources. Nabe further outlined the importance of civil society in the VNR process.

LIBYA: Presenting the country's second VNR report, Mohamed Al-Zaidani, Minister of Planning, Libya, noted the participation of local administrations and CSOs in the review process. He reported initiatives providing basic incomes to vulnerable groups; reducing maternal and infant mortality rates; increasing access to safe drinking water; and combating illegal fishing. Al-Zaidani emphasized the importance of cooperation at all levels in delivering on the 2030 Agenda, and stressed his country's determination to continue progressing towards peace, security, and stability.

Discussion: In response to an intervention by the NGOs MAJOR GROUP, Al-Zaidani stressed that CSOs played a key role in the VNR process, and highlighted regulations that ensure CSOs' independence. He pointed to a national expenditure survey with available statistics for poverty levels in Libya, and outlined anti-corruption regulations that increase financial oversight.

HONDURAS: Eduardo Enrique Reina García, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Honduras, presented the country's third VNR report, underlining the new government's "historic commitment" to build a socialist democratic state that fosters human rights. Among planned structural changes, Ana Karen Vallecillo, Vice Minister for Planning, enumerated investing in cash transfers and other social protection measures, boosting agricultural production, and introducing a universal school feeding programme.

Discussion: Responding to questions from BRAZIL, SPAIN, the NGOs MAJOR GROUP, and BOLIVIA, the presenters identified specific SDG acceleration initiatives, including:

- embarking on energy sector transformation;
- launching solidarity actions targeted at Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, among other marginalized groups; and
- launching a process to align planning systems at the three levels of government.

SIERRA LEONE: Kenyeh Barlay, Minister of Planning and Economic Development, Sierra Leone, presented her country's fourth VNR report. She discussed the SDG acceleration roadmap that is aligned to the "Big Five Game Changers" national planning framework, with a focus on SDGs 1 (no poverty), 2 (zero hunger), and 10 (reduced inequalities). Among positive indicators identified in the VNR, she noted more women in governance; fewer incidents of gender-based violence; investments in social protection; and local civil society engagement. On remaining gaps, she highlighted data challenges, limited economic diversification, and a weak private sector.

Discussion: Responding to questions from GUINEA and CIVIL SOCIETY, Barlay said a key lesson learned was the need for a timely start to the VNR process, and to mobilize sufficient resources and capacities for robust data gathering and analysis.

SOLOMON ISLANDS: Rexon Ramofafia, Minister, National Planning and Development, Solomon Islands, presented their second VNR report, noting that while his country has made some progress against the five SDGs being reviewed at this HLPF, this progress is uneven, and some indicators remain seemingly unattainable. He underlined ongoing crises and structural issues as implementation barriers, with access to energy, water, and sanitation remaining beyond the reach of many citizens. Ramofafia further noted the Solomon Islands' preparation for graduation from the LDC category in 2027.

Discussion: In response to questions from AUSTRALIA, PAPUA NEW GUINEA, FIJI, CHINA, and the INDIGENOUS PEOPLES MAJOR GROUP, Ramofafia stressed structural challenges due to the islands' geography that hinder connectivity, transport, and basic service provision. He reported that the SDGs are embedded in the review of the national development strategy; highlighted SDG 17 (partnerships) as a priority; outlined strategies to improve data collection and availability; and highlighted planned relocation guidelines for disaster-affected communities.

COSTA RICA: Maritza Chan-Valverde, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN, presented her country's third VNR report, underlining good progress in 59% of indicators, particularly SDGs 1 (eradicating poverty), 7 (energy), and 9 (industry). She outlined achievements, namely the 2023 relaunch of the National Pact for the Advancement of the SDGs, and SDG localization through the SDG Cantons Network. On next steps, Chan-Valverde highlighted: continued monitoring of national SDG targets to enable decision making for continuous improvement; maintaining strategic oversight of planning instruments linked to the 2030 Agenda; and strengthening the role of local stakeholders.

Discussion: Responding to interventions by ECUADOR, COLOMBIA, and the WORKERS AND TRADE UNIONS

MAJOR GROUP, Chan-Valverde reiterated efforts to include local governments in the VNR process. She noted the development of a data collection platform to monitor the SDGs at the national level; highlighted instances of blue diplomacy, pointing to the co-hosting with France of the UN Ocean Conference in June 2025; and underlined her commitment to "build more bridges" and improve stakeholder participation processes.

General Debate

In the afternoon, the high-level general discussion reflecting on the path from the SDG Summit to the Summit of the Future resumed, chaired by Bob Rae, ECOSOC Vice-President (Canada). There were contributions from 34 Ministers, Vice-Ministers, Permanent Representatives to the UN and their deputies, and other officials.

Some delegates noted that the multilateral system is at an inflection point, underlining the crises of foreign occupation, terrorism, war crimes, and genocide alongside demands for international action on the triple planetary crisis and the SDGs. Several contrasted the current historical period against that in which the 2030 Agenda was agreed.

It was observed that pre-existing vulnerabilities are being exacerbated by geopolitical and financial crises, as countries seek to build a bridge from the SDG Summit in 2023 towards the Summit of the Future. Looking to the Summit of the Future, speakers called for a restoration of trust, and the protection of human rights and the rule of international law. Several noted that continued political fractures will make the achievement of the SDGs impossible.

There were calls for leadership and renewed commitments to gender equality and the protection of vulnerable groups including children and young people. Equally, interventions emphasized the need for meaningful youth participation and a recognition of the hope that they bring to the table. The role of localization, namely through the participation of regional bodies and local authorities, was underlined as a way of bridging local realities with the global agenda.

Many further called for reform of the financing for development architecture, debt relief, and the eradication of poverty. There were declarations of support for the UN Secretary-General's SDG Stimulus initiative, operationalization of the Fund for responding to loss and damage, and for commitment towards a just global order free from cruel, inhumane, and unilateral economic sanctions.

In the Corridors

On the penultimate day of the 2024 HLPF, some CSO delegates shared that they hoped to use their presence at the HLPF to push for their registration at the upcoming Summit, a process that became a little more complicated for CSO Focal Points in the lead-up to the HLPF. One delegate shared her concern that "it's expensive to bring our delegation all the way here," hinting at some uncertainty regarding the purpose and expected outcomes of the Summit.

Indeed, these questions are being raised both within and outside the ECOSOC halls. Why this apparent fixation on "the next new thing or summit", when we have good work already underway? Why not channel our resources towards improving SDG outcomes?

The *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* summary and analysis of HLPF 2024 will be available on Saturday, 20 July 2024 at: enb.iisd.org/high-level-political-forum-hlpf-2024

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