

MAJOR GROUPS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS' RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND POST- 2015 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOVERNANCE:

ANALYSIS OF ONLINE SURVEY AND FINDINGS
OF THE WIDER HLPF CONSULTATION



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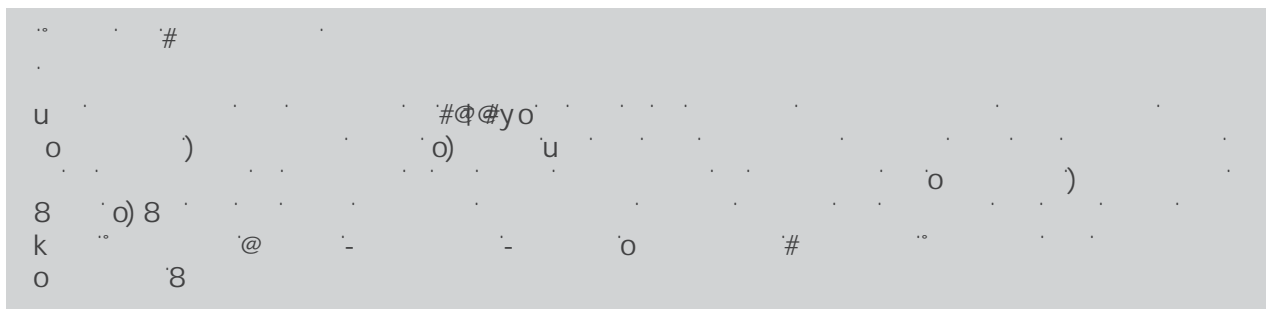


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2015 sees the culmination of an extensive process of dialogue and consultation on sustainable development and agreement on a new set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the next 15 years. The new goals are expected to offer a 'transformational' agenda to set the world on course to end poverty and climate change and enable a more socially just and environmentally balanced approach to development. The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), established in July 2013, is expected to be the apex body within the United Nations system to review sustainable development processes in the future, including the SDGs. [UN General Assembly \(UNGA\) Resolution 67/290](#), outlines the shape, structure, purpose and functions of the HLPF, and gives the representatives of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) a number of specific participatory privileges and responsibilities.

While the HLPF resolution outlines the general agreement on the HLPF, there is still much to be defined and operationalized. To make use of this opportunity, a consultation was carried out in the period March to June 2015, to gather Major Groups and other Stakeholders views and recommendations on the HLPF and their participation and engagement with the HLPF. The consultation on the HLPF was run in partnership with the HLPF Working Group of Major Groups and other Stakeholders¹ and is supported by the governments of Finland and Switzerland. Co-sponsors include the governments of Lichtenstein, Brazil and Panama. The SD2015 project is managed by CIVICUS in collaboration with UNDESA, and supported by the European Commission.

The consultation included: a) an online survey to gather a wide range of views; b) key workshop discussions at regional UN commission meetings; c) presentation and discussion at workshops in New York at UN headquarters.

The report aims to bring together the views expressed in the consultation and includes a clear set of findings including:

1. There are differing degrees of knowledge about the HLPF amongst stakeholders
2. There is a need for information, awareness-raising and capacity building about the HLPF for Major Groups and other Stakeholders
3. The HLPF annual review process should provide comparable national and thematic reviews
4. There is real interest in citizen-led monitoring and Major Group and other Stakeholders participation in the HLPF review, including by supporting citizen generated data
5. The HLPF review process should make clear links to; and learn from; other UN review mechanisms
6. Information should be provided in a timely and accessible format
7. There should be simple processes to facilitate contributions of Major Groups and other Stakeholders at global, regional and national level reviews
8. It is crucial to identify and support appropriate networks to reach different types of stakeholders

BACKGROUND

2.1 Background: The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

The idea of balancing economic development with the need to provide social support and maintain core ecosystems across the planet has been on the agenda of the UN at least since the 1980s. In 1987, the Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as *"development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."*² The ultimate goal of sustainable development is to improve the quality of life for all members of a community and, indeed, for all citizens of a nation and the world including those not yet born, while ensuring the integrity of the life support systems upon which all life, human and non-human, depends.

¹ The primary objective of the Working Group is to ensure broad and inclusive participation in the HLPF. Membership is open to organizing partners of the nine major groups or their designated representatives, and to representatives of broad-based constituencies with clear thematic and/or regional identities. See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/hlpf>

² World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) Our Common Future, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p. 43

In 2012, the Rio+20 outcome document acknowledged the need to further mainstream sustainable development at all levels, integrating economic, social and environmental aspects and recognising their interlinkages, so as to achieve sustainable development in all its three dimensions - the social, economic and environmental. It also called upon the HLPF to further mainstream the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the United Nations system.

As described above, the High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was established in July 2013 to provide the apex body within the United Nations system to review sustainable development processes in the future, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). [UN General Assembly \(UNGA\) Resolution 67/290](#), outlines the shape, structure, purpose and functions of the HLPF, and gives the representatives of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) a number of specific participatory privileges and responsibilities.

According to the resolution, the agreed purpose of the HLPF,³ is:

“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 in a holistic and cross-sectorial manner at all levels and have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, and; ensure the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges.”

The resolution also states that:

“Major groups and other civil society stakeholders active in areas related to sustainable development will autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms for participation in the high-level political forum⁴.”

The HLPF’s substantive functions include:

- Agenda-setting
- Integration of objectives
- Implementation of goals
- Monitoring and review, including the annual Global Sustainable Development Report
- Identifying emerging issues
- Strengthening the science-policy interface
- Promoting evidence based decisions

2.2 Background: The SD2015 HLPF Consultation

This HLPF consultation was carried out in March-June 2015. It included an online survey which was widely distributed amongst the stakeholder community, as well as four regional side events alongside the UN regional commissions. The purpose of these side events was to enable regional dialogue and reflection about the core role and engagement opportunities with the HLPF.

The consultation was run in partnership with the HLPF Working Group of Major Groups and other Stakeholders⁵ and is supported by the governments of Finland and Switzerland and co-sponsored by the governments of Brazil, Lichtenstein and Panama. The SD2015 project is managed by CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum in collaboration with UNDESA, and supported by the European Commission.

Previously, in late 2014, CIVICUS and SD2015 programme partners set out to assess and evaluate civil society experiences at the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sixty-three percent of the respondents felt that their experience of engaging with the OWG were positive or very positive and that the modalities implemented during the OWG to enable civil society engagement should be strongly considered and even enhanced for the HLPF. Seventy-five percent of the respondents were encouraged about the role of civil society in the HLPF, based on their experiences and engagement with the OWG. These findings of the OWG survey provided a good basis for this HLPF survey.

³ According to paragraph 2 of operational paragraphs in the UNGA resolution 67/290

⁴ From paragraph 16, UNGA Resolution 67/290

⁵ The primary objective of the Working Group is to ensure broad and inclusive participation in the HLPF. Membership is open to organizing partners of the nine major groups or their designated representatives, and to representatives of broad-based constituencies with clear thematic and/or regional identities. See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/hlpf>

In 2014, [CIVICUS](#) also carried out a survey on a number of selected Intergovernmental organization's (IGOs) engagement with civil society as a part of [the State of Civil Society Report 2014](#). The outcome reflected the following concerns and obstacles to civil society engagement with IGOs:

1. Member States overriding civil society voices;
2. Consultations without concrete outcomes;
3. Need for better outreach mechanisms.

In summary, while there was significant engagement with the Open Working Group over a number of years, it is not clear if this will be carried through to the HLPF. The survey aimed to understand how this engagement may be taken forward.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Online Survey

An online survey was designed to provide an opportunity for a wide range of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) to share their views and recommendations on their participation and engagement with the HLPF. It provided a key opportunity to understand the views of stakeholders on how to support a well-functioning HLPF, to ensure strong institutional governance around sustainable development and the SDGs, for successful implementation, monitoring and review.

The questions were initially developed by CIVICUS and Stakeholder Forum, and then shared for comments with UNDESA, representatives of the Finnish and Swiss government partners as well as all with the HLPF Working Group of Major Groups and other Stakeholders. These partners were invited to send their comments in writing. After receiving the comments, the survey was updated accordingly and finalized.

The English version of the survey was then posted on the SD2015 webpage on 27 March using SurveyMonkey. It was translated into French and Spanish, posted on 6 April and later into Russian, posted 15 May. The survey was available until 27 May and a reminder was sent to the SD2015 and Beyond 2015 mailing lists one week before the closing date. The survey aimed to reach a full cross-section of representatives of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) from all regions that have been engaged in the post-2015 process, and was promoted through the following channels:

- SD2015 webpage and Twitter account (reaches over 12,000 people)
- SD2015 monthly newsletter, April (reaches 1300 people)
- The HLPF Working Group of Major Groups and other Stakeholders
- Members of the Beyond 2015 mailing list (reaches 1810 people)
- The Affinity Group of National Association (AGNA) members
- Organising Partners (OPs) for all Major Groups Organizing Partners were asked to follow-up with their members
- Members of the action/2015 campaign
- Members of regional engagement bodies
- Promoted in a launch event in New York on 28 March, with 150 participants from CSOs, UN and governments present.
- Promoted during SD2015 regional HLPF workshops/side events: Santiago de Chile, 4 May 2015, Geneva 16 April 2015, Bangkok 21 May 2015 and Addis Ababa, 15 June 2015

Survey Respondents

The online survey was taken by 295 respondents: 240 in English, 39 in Spanish, 11 in French and 5 in Russian. Although this survey is not a representative sample of MGoS, it nonetheless secured considerable breadth of respondents in geography, gender, age and Major Group or other affiliation. Each respondent was asked for basic biographical information, which allowed us to obtain an overview of the participants, please see full details in

[available here as a downloadable spreadsheet.](#)

3.2 Regional side events

The regional side events on the HLPF took place in April-June 2015. The side events were arranged in collaboration with UN DESA and the respective UN Economic and Social Regional Commissions. The side events took place on the following dates and locations:

- Latin America and the Caribbean, 4 May 2015 at the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UN ECLAC), Santiago de Chile
- Europe, 16 April 2015 at the UN Economic and Social Council Europe (UN ECE) in Geneva;
- Asia and the Pacific, 20 May 2015 at the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), in Bangkok;
- Africa, 16 June 2015, UN Economic Commission for Africa (UN ECA), Addis Ababa.

The purpose of the regional side events were to bring in the voices of civil society in all regions about the role of- and their engagement with the HLPF. The locations and times were chosen during the annual Regional Forums of the Regional Commissions since those were opportunities when the member states were considering regional engagement on sustainable development, including the role of the HLPF. These timings and locations were also chosen because many members of regional civil society were attending the forums, and this would make it possible to reach out to a fairly large number of members of civil society.

The regional side events were promoted through the following channels:

- SD2015 webpage and Twitter account (reaches over 12,000 people)
- SD2015 monthly newsletter, April and May (reaches 1300 people)
- NGO Major Group email list
- Via email to The Affinity Group of National Association (AGNA) members
- Members of regional bodies and networks

The number of participants varied from the different events, with 40 participants at the consultation in Santiago, Chile, 17 participants in Geneva, 75 participants in Bangkok, 35 in Beirut and 45 in Addis Ababa. In total, approximately 200 people attended the regional consultations.

ONLINE SURVEY ANALYSIS

This section presents the findings of each of the questions provided in the online survey. This is done by presenting the findings and analysis of each of the twelve questions, in numerical order split into two sections, Section 1: The purpose and function of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable development, and Section 2: Ensuring Major Groups and other Stakeholders engagement with the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

In order to understand the scope of the survey, a full analysis of each question follows. Firstly, the ranking of the answers are outlined, and under some of the questions some alternative free text answers are also presented; then analysis and recommendations are presented for each question.

SURVEY SECTION 1: THE PURPOSE AND FUNCTION OF THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

In this section of the survey, the respondents were asked four questions regarding the purpose and function of the High-Level Political Forum. The questions in this section were designed to present an opportunity for participants to have a say on how to enhance and support a well-functioning HLPF.

Question 1. Please fill in your key information

In this question the intention was to understand the profile of respondents and to capture the basic details of their identity. As has already been noted there was a very diverse sample of respondents, in terms of gender, geography and constituency.

Question 2. What is your current knowledge of the functions and role of the HLPF? Please choose one:

As has already been noted the survey clearly shows that there are differing degrees of knowledge of the functions and role of the HLPF among the respondents, with 43 percent of respondents having very good or good the HLPF. While a combined total of 40.9 percent stated that they have good or very good understanding of the HLPF, at the same time 43 per cent have very limited knowledge or only general understanding. It is therefore clear that there is still a pressing need to raise awareness of this process and to communicate in an effective way with the full range of stakeholders.

Q2: What is your current knowledge of the functions and role of the HLPF? Please choose one:

| Answer Options | Response Percent | Response Count |
|--------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Very limited knowledge | 8.3% | 31 |
| General understanding | 34.7% | 82 |
| Fair insights | 16.1% | 35 |
| Good understanding | 28.5% | 64 |
| Very good understanding | 12.4% | 25 |
| Not sure/not applicable | 0.0% | 1 |
| <i>answered question</i> | | 239 |
| <i>skipped question</i> | | 56 |

This response also highlights that the survey was able to reach a wide range of perspectives, from those with a close working knowledge of the HLPF as well as those with a limited awareness. Therefore, the survey can be seen as successful in drawing out a range of different views and to identify trends from those both inside and outside the process.

Question 3. In your opinion, how important are the different functions of the HLPF (Please rate in order of importance 1 being not very important and 5 being very important):

The respondents were asked to rank each of the seven different functions, which have been agreed by the UN General Assembly in Resolution 67/290, which establishes the HLPF. All seven functions were ranked as very important or important by the majority of the respondents (80 percent). This shows that all the functions of the HLPF which have been agreed in Resolution 67/290, are perceived as very important or important. It can further be seen as a sign that the respondents find the role of the HLPF, as agreed by the member states, to be important to sustainable development governance and that its key functions are essential if its ambitious agenda is to be achieved. When taking a closer look at the data, the function that was ranked as most important was option 2 *“Follow up and review of progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments,”* with 190 out of 231 respondents, 74.5 percent ranking it as very important or important. This demonstrates that the HLPF role in monitoring and review in a comparative annual process is seen to be of crucial value by the stakeholder groups that participated in this survey. Furthermore, this suggests that a wider role for the HLPF in providing oversight beyond the SDGs to include other sustainable development commitments across the UN system.

However, while there was a very even spread of preferences, there is also clearly a demand for greater participation of stakeholders in the future process, as the second highest ranked function was option 5 *“Provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders,”* with 176 out of 231 respondents ranking it as very important or important.

Question 3

In your opinion, how important are the different functions of the HLPF (Please rate in order of importance 1 being “not very important” and 5 being “very important”):

| Answer Options | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Response Count |
|--|----|----|----|----|-----|----------------|
| 1. Political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development | 15 | 12 | 31 | 40 | 133 | 231 |
| 2. Follow up and review of progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments | 13 | 8 | 21 | 62 | 128 | 232 |
| 3. Enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectorial manner | 9 | 9 | 44 | 63 | 105 | 231 |
| 4. Ensure the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges | 8 | 14 | 34 | 78 | 98 | 231 |
| 5. Provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders | 14 | 13 | 26 | 55 | 121 | 231 |
| 6. Provide a dynamic platform for regular dialogue and for stocktaking and agenda-setting to advance sustainable development | 9 | 6 | 35 | 60 | 121 | 231 |
| 7. Strengthen the dialogue on science and policy by examining documentation, bringing together dispersed information and assessments | 7 | 26 | 49 | 72 | 74 | 228 |
| <i>answered question</i> | | | | | | 232 |
| <i>skipped question</i> | | | | | | 63 |

Question 4. The HLPF is responsible for the development of an annual Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) presented as the flagship report for the UN on sustainable development. What would you prioritise to include in the Global Sustainable Development Review? (Please rank in order of priority. Rank 1-5, 1 being your first priority and 5 being your last priority.)

The respondents ranked all the options as more or less equally important. A few respondents added a comment to say that it is not possible to rank the different options as they are all equally important. However, ‘review progress by member states towards the SDGs’ received the most votes, with 71 respondents out of 231. This suggests that there is a recognition that the key opportunity for implementation rests with Member States and therefore a regular review of their delivery will be crucial. The options ‘review scientific information on sustainable development’ and ‘synthesis of inputs from HLPF Review Mechanisms’ was ranked as the least important option with only 36 out of 232 respondents ranking it as their first priority.

More interestingly, several respondents provided their recommendations for ‘other’ aspects to be included or considered in the Global Sustainable Development Report.

The comments given fall into the following broad themes:

- A recognition of the fact that the HLPF has a large mandate and must include many different functions as part of its activity, in order to successfully follow-up and review commitments on sustainable development:
- Importance of connecting the HLPF review process with other existing review mechanisms and efforts. The importance of including and making use of existing human rights review mechanisms was mentioned. It was also mentioned that already existing models and successful efforts should be scaled up.
- Include review of progress made by other actors, including the private sector and UN agencies, towards achieving the SDGs.
- How to include review of cross-cutting issues, such as gender.

- e) How to assess investment requirements and shortfalls for implementation, and implement a strategy to address fundraising for SDGs.

Question 5. In your view, how should the reviews of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national, regional and global levels be carried out to ensure progress at all levels is fully accounted for? (Please check all the options that you believe should be included)

The respondents were presented five options on methods to review the SDGs at the national, regional and global levels to ensure progress at all levels is accounted for.

The following options were available to the respondents:

- Publication of all national reports;
- Regional reports offering comparative review;
- Global comparative index highlighting progress over time in each country;
- Citizen-led monitoring included in wider-feed back to HLPF;
- Shadow-reporting by civil society;
- 'Other', please specify.

It is particularly interesting that 76.5 percent of the respondents supported the notion of a global comparative index, which highlights progress over time in each country. This clearly shows that MGoS would like to see transparency on progress, measured in each country in a comparative way to show progress alongside other countries. This would be important to be able to hold member states to account and would enable the possibility to recognise countries that have made good progress and draw lessons from their work for other countries. Furthermore, 77.4 percent of the respondents believe it is important that the reviews of the SDGs at the national, regional and global levels include citizen-led monitoring in the wider-feedback to the HLPF. This is a clear indicator of MGoS recognition of the importance of citizens' key role in the follow-up and review of the agenda and their role to hold member states to account for the commitments that have been made.

Additionally, under question 5, the respondents were asked to provide additional options to ensure progress at all levels. 26 respondents provided 'other' options. Several respondents provided suggested actions that would ensure participation.

These 'other' options included suggested actions to ensure participation:

- *Support for non-governmental actors in monitoring: participatory processes that include the voices of the most marginalised people.*
- *Youth must play an active part in the process.*
- *Would be best if civil society were a part of the (official) review itself – as peer-review or similar.*
- *Peer review of country implementation as (a) core function of HLPF*
- *Conduct feedback surveys at the grassroots level to monitor efficacy and efficiency.*

SURVEY SECTION 2: ENSURING MAJOR GROUPS AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS ENGAGEMENT WITH THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The UNGA Resolution 67/290 establishing the HLPF includes several references to major groups and other relevant stakeholders⁶. The intention of this is to involve stakeholders at all levels. In this section, respondents were asked to present their views and recommendations on how the involvement of stakeholders can best be achieved.

Question 6. What do you need to better understand and to be more involved in the HLPF? Please rank in order of priority (1-4, 1 being your first priority and 4 being your last priority).

The relatively large number of respondents to the HLPF survey showed that there is a growing interest in the HLPF coming from MGoS. When asked what they need to better understand and become more involved with the work of the HLPF, only 21 people, 12.5 percent, said that they don't want to be involved in the HLPF. This is a clear indication that MGoS want to be engaged.

6 See paragraph 14 of UNGA Resolution 67/290

We asked the participants to rank, in order of priority what they needed to better understand and be more involved in the HLPF. More than 50 percent (104/207) said that their first priority would be that they welcome the idea of having training workshops and capacity building in regards to the HLPF and its functions. An additional 93 respondents said that they would need more regular information, reports and updates on the latest developments at the HLPF as well as capacity building through accessible information and webinars.

The conclusions which can be drawn from this is that there is indeed a clear appetite to better understand and engage the HLPF. In order for this to be realised, there is a need to build MGoS capacity through the sharing of information and training at all levels: global, regional, national and local.

Question 6. What do you need to better understand and to be more involved in the HLPF? (Please rank in order of priority. 1-4, being your first priority and 4 being your last priority)

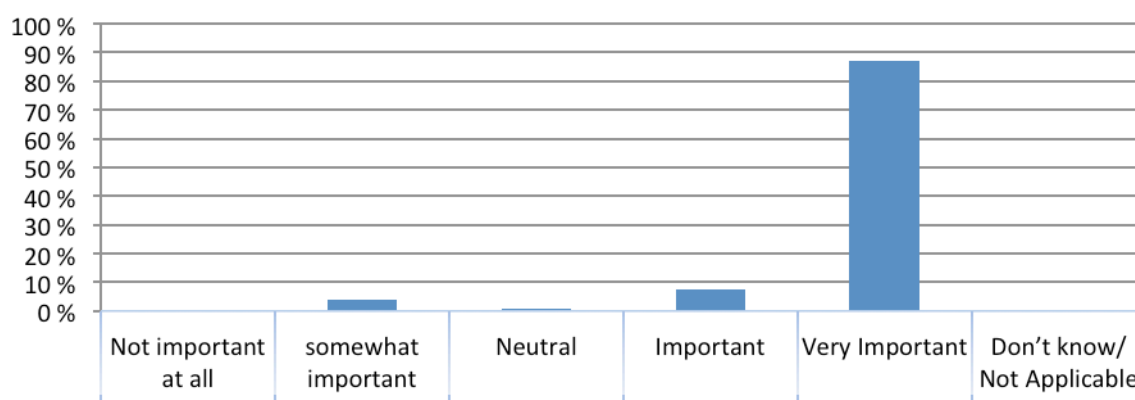
| Answer Options | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Response Count |
|---|-----|----|----|-----|----------------|
| I don't want to be involved | 21 | 9 | 14 | 119 | 163 |
| Capacity building through accessible information in forms of documents and webinars etc. | 93 | 57 | 38 | 20 | 208 |
| More regular information, reports and updates on the latest news about the HLPF | 93 | 63 | 37 | 15 | 208 |
| I will involve my organisation, and welcome the idea of having training workshops and capacity building | 104 | 46 | 39 | 18 | 207 |
| <i>answered question</i> | | | | | 211 |
| <i>skipped question</i> | | | | | 67 |

Question 7. In your opinion, how important is it that major groups and other civil society stakeholders contribute to the political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development?

Eighty-seven percent of the respondents stated that it is very important for MGoS to contribute to the political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development. This is a strong indication of the importance placed on participation by MGoS. This is supported by the HLPF resolution (67/290) paragraphs 15 and 16, which states that MGoS should have the right to participate and engage in the HLPF. Questions 8 and 9 further look into options on what actions could be taken for this participation to be ensured.

Question 8. How would you rank the most important elements for engaging stakeholders in the HLPF? (Please rank in order of importance, 1 being not very important and 5 being very important)

Question 7. In your opinion, how important is it that Major Groups and other civil society Stakeholders contribute to the “political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development”?



The respondents were asked to rank the different ways for engaging stakeholders in the HLPF. The options provided were those agreed and listed in the adopted HLPF resolution 67/290. Based on the answers to this question, it is clear that all agreed elements for engaging stakeholders were viewed as being very important. Seventy percent of the respondents listed all options as 5 or 4, on a scale from 1-5 with 5 being very important and 1 not very important. The top three ranked priorities were ‘the ability to make recommendations’ (relating to relevant decisions), ‘the opportunity to input into annual review mechanisms’, and ‘the ability to submit documents and present written and oral contributions’.

These results give a clear indication that MGoS are ready to be engaged and participate in the HLPF. They are ready to play a full and active role as set out by the HLPF resolution that was adopted by member states. There is a clear demand for a proactive role as decision-shapers in the process to ensure that the expertise that stakeholders can bring is fully incorporated in the ongoing process.

It would therefore be helpful that the HLPF 2015 and HLPF 2016 consider this role and finalise effective mechanisms and modalities for engaging stakeholders in the HLPF. Major groups and other stakeholders can bring real expertise and they are requesting to be more than just observers, they are calling to be seen as key actors, in order for the HLPF, to be successful in reviewing and following up on key commitments on sustainable development.

Question 9. Rank the most important actions which can be initiated for the HLPF to effectively reach- and be accessible to all stakeholders including those working at the regional, national and local levels. (1 being not very important and 5 being not very important).

The responses to this question allow us to present some important suggested actions which can be initiated for the HLPF to effectively reach out and be accessible to all stakeholders, particularly at the regional, national and local levels.

The respondents were asked to rank in degree of importance actions which can be initiated for the HLPF to effectively reach and be accessible to all stakeholders – including those working at the regional, national and local levels. The graph below shows the full list of responses. Based on this, “focus on local, national and regional outreach” received the highest number of respondents ranking it a 4 and 5, being important and very important. In total 167 respondents out of 205, 81.4 percent ranked this option as important or very important. This is an important point, and one that has been voiced by MGoS throughout the post-2015 process. It is particularly important to engage stakeholders at the regional, national and local levels since the implementation of the SDGs will mainly happen at these levels. It will be key for the successful implementation of the SDGs that stakeholders at all levels are able to engage and hold their governments to account for the commitments that have been made. In order for the HLPF to effectively follow-up on the SDGs, effective mechanisms and modalities need to be established to gather information and create engagement at the regional and national levels.

The second highest ranked option was to “*focus on identifying appropriate networks to reach different types of stakeholders*,” with 164 respondents, 80 percent, ranking it as important or very important, 4 or 5. This is a crucial point as it shows that there is a clear appetite for a specific effort to make sure that diverse and representative stakeholders are included in the work of the HLPF. This can be seen as a clear recommendation to reach beyond the ‘usual suspects’ and include stakeholders which often do not have access to UN processes, including smaller civil society organisations and grassroots activists from the global South and at the national and local levels.

Other options that came out with strong support from respondents were to ensure outreach to stakeholders in different languages and to make sure that there is funding available to enable stakeholders to participate in the HLPF.

Question 9. Rank the most important actions which can be initiated for the HLPF to effectively reach- and be accessible to all stakeholders – including those working at the regional, national and local levels. (1 being “not very important” and 5 being “very important”)

| Answer Options | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | Response Count |
|---|----|----|----|----|------------------|----------------|
| Focus on local, national and or regional outreach | 8 | 8 | 22 | 60 | 107 | 205 |
| Focus on identifying appropriate networks to reach different types of stakeholders | 9 | 3 | 29 | 53 | 111 | 205 |
| Online platform accessibility | 6 | 12 | 35 | 47 | 102 | 202 |
| Decentralised stakeholder outreach strategy | 6 | 15 | 43 | 56 | 84 | 204 |
| Outreach in different languages | 9 | 10 | 26 | 45 | 113 | 203 |
| Strengthen capacity of stakeholder focal points | 7 | 12 | 26 | 52 | 107 | 204 |
| Ensure an accessible stakeholder accreditation process | 9 | 13 | 37 | 54 | 90 | 203 |
| Funding to enable stakeholders to participate in HLPF official meeting | 11 | 10 | 26 | 44 | 115 | 206 |
| Do you have other suggestions on how to ensure participation of regional civil society in the regional HLPF meetings? | | | | | to organisations | 52 |
| answered question | | | | | | 210 |
| skipped question | | | | | | 85 |

The survey continued to ask respondents to suggest their own alternatives on ways to ensure participation of civil society in the regional HLPF meetings. 52 responses were given. The top themes to emerge in this section were the following:

- Importance of civil society networking to enable joint monitoring and advocacy;
- Sufficient resources to cover travel costs of participation;
- Importance of timely and accessible information;
- Opportunities for capacity-building to ensure awareness among marginalised communities

Question 10. Which of the following actions would you prioritise to enable effective major groups and other civil society stakeholder’s participation in the HLPF? (Please rank in order of your priority 1-5. 1 being your first priority and 5 being your last priority)

104 out of 206 respondents said that their first priority, in order to enable effective MGoS participation in the HLPF would be to ensure *“Open access for civil society organisations, including those without ECOSOC status, particularly those from the most marginalized communities”*. An additional 76 out of 207 respondents said that *“improved online technology for remote participation”* would be their priority to enable more effective participation.

These findings are in line with the recommendations above, under question 9 on how to ensure regional and national civil society stakeholder’s participation and engagement with the HLPF. Further, it shows that there is a perceived need to further develop the current system for institutionalised access for civil society organisations. This is especially important to make sure that UN processes are open to a wider range of actors and not just those more recognized, who have the capacity to go through the ECOSOC accreditation process. This is a call to the UN to work together with stakeholders to improve the current modalities for engagement. The need for improved online technology confirms an emerging trend; that with all the new communication technology, there is a need to be innovative and look at how to better use the tools that are available. At the same time it will be important to ensure that the use of online engagement does not exacerbate the exclusion of certain communities, due to the ‘digital divide’ and lack of access in many countries. This is something that has been underlined throughout the whole post-2015 process, and where all actors can come together to develop and support new ways of engagement.

Question 11. Rank what you believe are the most important actions to ensure participation of regional major groups and civil society organisations in the regional HLPF meetings? (1 being not very important and 5 being very important)

The respondents were asked to rank the importance of a list of actions which could be taken, in order to ensure participation of regional major groups and civil society organisations in the regional HLPF meetings. They were asked to rank the below options from 1-5, with 1 being not very important and 5 being very important.

The respondents were presented with below options:

- Timely information is distributed about the meetings;
- Outreach in different languages;
- Ensure funding for participation;
- Strengthen capacity of regional stakeholders;
- Ensure an accessible and transparent stakeholder accreditation process.

The highest ranked option was *'timely information is distributed about meetings'*, with 126 out of 206 respondents ranking this as very important. The second most important action, according to the respondents was to *'ensure funding for participation'*, with 103 out of 204 respondents ranking it as very important. Finally, the action that received the third most number of very important was *'to ensure an accessible and transparent stakeholder accreditation process'*, with 100 out of 205 respondents ranking it as very important.

The respondents were also given the option to provide their own suggestions for 'other actions' which could be taken. A few of these are highlighted below.

Some of the additional recommendations of 'other actions' include:

- Not just about timely distribution of information; the information needs to be accessible and easily understandable too.
- Establish a comprehensive database at national and regional levels.
- Extend invitations to scholars that have significant contributions in the area.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that a first step to ensure participation is to make sure that the information around engagement opportunities also reaches those at the regional and national levels and that it does so in good time. This allows stakeholders to plan for, and properly prepare, their engagement. To provide sufficient time allows stakeholders to consult with their constituencies before engaging and also ensures better coordination amongst those participating. The question on the need for funding to enable regional civil society engagement is a central concern, based on the responses to several of the questions in the survey. It is safe to say that many stakeholders, especially in the global South, are struggling with securing sufficient financial resources. This is a real issue, which needs to be tackled, in order to ensure that civil society can engage in dialogue and collaboration for implementation of the goals. This needs to be addressed in relation to the HLPF, if it is going to achieve the ambitious promises of engagement, as set out in the HLPF Resolution, GA 67/290.

Question 12. In your opinion, what do you think would be the most useful step to enable evolution of the Major Groups and other Stakeholders system to guarantee maximum participation and inclusivity? (1 being not very important and 5 being very important)

Paragraph 16 of GA resolution 67/290 on the HLPF *'Encourages the major groups identified in Agenda 21 and other stakeholders, such as private philanthropic organizations, educational and academic entities, persons with disabilities, volunteer groups and other stakeholders active in areas related to sustainable development, to autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms for participation in the high-level political forum and for actions derived from that participation at the global, regional and national levels, in a way that ensures effective, broad and balanced participation by region and by type of organization.'*

With this in mind, and with the adoption of an ambitious and transformative agenda for sustainable development, this could be a good time to look at what steps should be taken to enable the evolution of the current Major Groups and other Stakeholder system. Therefore, respondents were asked what options would be most useful to ensure this evolution. The respondents were provided with below options, but also given the choice to provide their own 'other' answer.

Options provided:

- Permit the formation of additional major groups based upon defined criteria;
- Recognize and support other forms of organizing within the major groups framework including the use of caucuses or clusters based upon the "self-organizing" principle;
- Make the process more relevant for participation of social movements (which do not fit within the current major groups framework);
- Provide adequate, predictable and timely funding for stakeholder participation in HLPF;
- Provide better administrative support for major groups/other stakeholders by establishing an independent secretariat separate from the UN through a multi-donor trust fund rather than relying on the voluntary commitment of Organising Partners;
- Provide stronger capacity building and training programmes;
- Offer peer to peer support and learning.

23 people also provided their own 'other' answer, of which a few are highlighted here.

- Ensure that the 'other stakeholders' listed in Resolution 67/290 have the same status in their participation in the HLPF as the Major Groups.
- Most important is a mechanism for civil society recommendations to be included in formal review, ideally through participatory monitoring
Existing Major Groups does not cover all of society. So Local Groups might be added.
- Consider the need to review the Major Group framework in light of emerging civil society needs and capacities.
- Recognise stakeholders and ensure that the UN has adequate mechanisms to support and co-ordinate. Reforms of the major group system should be a high priority.

Here it is particularly interesting to note that the option that received the highest ranking, with 133 out of 179 respondents ranking it as either 5, very important or 4, important was to *"Provide better administrative support for major groups/other stakeholders by establishing an independent secretariat separate from the UN through a multi-donor trust fund rather than relying on the voluntary commitment of Organising Partners"*. This can be seen as a clear call to the UN and member states to show their commitment to Major Groups and other Stakeholders, by providing resources and providing resources for its own independent secretariat. By moving from the current model of voluntary commitments by Organizing Partners, this would enable a real independent structure for stakeholder engagement.

Secondly, 125 out of 182 respondents said that it was very important or important to *"recognize and support other forms of organizing within the major groups-framework, including the use of caucuses or clusters based upon the "self-organizing" principle"*.

These findings show that that the HLPF is an important opportunity to review and make improvements to the current systems and mechanisms for stakeholder engagement. It is a recognition that much has changed since the Major Groups and Other Stakeholder System was originally designed in 1992. Certain improvements could be made by increasing support for engagement by providing resources, such as an independent secretariat; but it is also equally important to review the key constituencies and recognize the role of a number of other specific stakeholder groups alongside the nine existing major groups. The HLPF provides an opportunity to establish a more flexible, transparent process that also enables participation of other groups that may not have a permanent constituency in New York or previously had access to the UN system.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

In April-June 2015, there were also five regional consultations, hosted by SD2015, UNDESA and key regional partners; which provided physical forums for dialogue between stakeholders and UN regional commissions as well as an opportunity to gather wider views on the overall process for engagement.

The consultations were opportunities to inform stakeholders about the HLPF and to gather knowledge and experiences from the regional, and to some extent, national levels. Based on these regional experiences, a number of key recommendations were expressed. This part of the report presents the key recommendations of the regional consultations. For full reports of the consultations, see the Annex.

1. The HLPF needs to be given higher status and the resources to ensure strong secretariat support

Many participants raised the point that the HLPF has a wide and ambitious mandate and in order to successfully play that role, the Forum needs to be given a higher-level status within the UN system and be well-resourced. Others raised the concern that while the Forum is called “High-Level” there is a lack of clarity on how this high level participation will be ensured and what this implies. Concerns were also raised on the fact that there is currently no special Secretariat devoted to the HLPF.

On the point of the status of the HLPF, participants highlighted that it is important to ensure relevance of the HLPF as a key body within the UN system. One speaker also mentioned that it would be important to learn from the earlier body, the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UN CSD), which was seen by many as unsuccessful.

Two concrete actions were presented:

- Member states should agree to provide the HLPF with a dedicated, permanent and independent secretariat;
- The HLPF should be accompanied by rapporteurs and expert advisory groups, to be established on key thematic components of the framework.

2. The HLPF should build on- and create coherence with existing review mechanisms

Many participants highlighted the importance of not trying to ‘reinvent’ the wheel when looking at the role of HLPF. A number of existing review mechanism on international agreements were highlighted as good examples. Participants underlined that it would be good to build on these good examples. A few participants also underlined the importance on developing greater coherence between existing monitoring mechanisms, for example the monitoring mechanisms at the UN Human Rights Councils and the post-2015 framework in New York.

- The Universal Periodic Review on Human Rights was mentioned as a good existing mechanism for regular and participatory review. Many expressed that this model should be promoted;
- For many other areas, the UN has assigned independent Special Rapporteurs⁷. This was promoted by a few participants as a successful model to bring attention and resources to key areas.

3. A call for bottom-up review and guarantees for stakeholder participation

There was a widespread demand for HLPF reviews to be bottom-up and include guarantees for civil society participation. Others highlighted the need to respect the diversity of civil society and movements and to make a special effort to include those most marginalized in follow-up and review. Others raised the importance of respecting CSO’s autonomy and capacity to organise at all levels.

One speaker suggested that the HLPF should build on the positive and inclusive experiences of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG) and the post-2015 intergovernmental processes, and provide a strong, transparent and inclusive space for participation of civil society and people’s representatives.

There was some criticism of the system of Major Groups and other Stakeholders as leading to fragmentation and competition among stakeholders; while other participants felt that consolidating and strengthening participation and dialogue spaces is needed.

⁷ UN Special Rapporteurs: the system of Special Procedures is a central element of the United Nations human rights machinery and covers all human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political, and social. As of 27 March 2015 there are 41 thematic and 14 country mandates. See more here: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/SP/Pages/Welcomepage.aspx>

A few suggestions on how to achieve this were presented:

- Put in place a bottom-up model for gathering data from other UN bodies, governments and civil society;
- Ensure community participation by funding, communication and capacity building;
- Establish Peer-Review and Monitoring Mechanisms;
- Institutionalised agreements on stakeholder engagement with UNGA, similar to what has been established with the ECOSOC;
- Ensure that stakeholders have access to all official documents and information;
- All reports presented by Member States and other stakeholders to the HLPF should be published *on line and available in accessible* format and different languages;
- Stakeholders should be given inclusive and meaningful opportunities to engage, including defining the agenda and establish joint working groups;
- MGoS should have speaking slots in the official meetings, and this should be done through open selection of speakers;
- Create mechanisms that facilitate for stakeholders that have been engaged in the post-2015 agenda to remain connected and engaged.

4. Prioritize engagement at the regional and national levels

Several participants underlined that follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals will need to happen at the regional and national levels. Many welcomed a regular regional HLPF. Others mentioned that it is easier for CSOs at the regional and national level to engage with the UN and their member states at the regional level than at the global level and in New York. Examples were given where regional engagement with the UN have worked well, like the civil society engagement with the Aarhus convention, the 'Beijing plus' regional platforms and the regional dialogue which were a part of the UN CSD.

As a positive example, representatives from UNECE joined the meeting in Geneva and underlined that the UNECE will work to contribute to the implementation of the SDGs by translating the global goals and targets into norms, standards and regulations at the national level. This is a useful suggestion and could be done in coordination with other Regional Commissions

5. Need to strengthen UN Regional Commissions engagement with civil society at the regional level

The degree of satisfaction with the current state of engagement and dialogue with the UN Regional Commissions varied between the regions. Some said that for the HLPF to work at the regional level, there needs to be a review and update of the engagement mechanisms for CSOs with the UN Regional Commissions to enable a more coherent system to take shape that connects the national, regional and global levels.

In the consultation at ECLAC, several participants said that there is a perceived lack of a CSO engagement mechanism within ECLAC itself and this needs to be improved. In ECLAC, a few current perceived weaknesses were mentioned: information not always available in multiple languages, lack of clear selection criteria for CSOs, agenda of meetings not always available to CSOs. At the event in Geneva, one of the speakers mentioned a few good example where UNECE has worked well on engaging civil society, such as the Aarhus Convention⁸ and the 'Beijing plus' Regional platforms every five years, but that besides that UNECE has not yet attracted wider civil society participation. This argument can be supported by the fact that only 20 participants from civil society joined the event. However, at the event in Geneva, representatives of UNECE themselves underline that they wanted to strengthen its engagement with CSOs.

6. Learn from existing mechanisms and good examples of civil society engagement at the regional level

It was clear from the engagement with the different regional side events that the UN Regional Commissions engagement mechanisms for CSO engagement varied in the different regions.

⁸ **Aarhus Convention:** The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) [Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/aarhus/), the Aarhus Convention was adopted on 25 June 1998. The Convention establishes a number of rights of the public (individuals and their associations) with regard to the environment. The Parties to the Convention are required to make the necessary provisions so that public authorities (at national, regional or local level) will contribute to these rights to become effective. The convention defines clear guidelines for the right to information and participation in environmental processes. Read more here: <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/aarhus/>

While members in the side events in Latin America and the Caribbean and Europe expressed a lack of formal engagement mechanisms, members in Asia and the Pacific wanted to highlight their engagement mechanisms as a positive example. One of the ideas that were presented in the Asia and the Pacific consultation was the suggestion for more learning opportunities for UN Regional Commissions and civil society in the different regions to learn from each other's work and promote well-functioning models for engagement.

The CSO Regional Coordination Engagement Mechanisms in Asia and Pacific (RCEM-AP) was established to ensure that constituencies most relevant to the region are recognized and provided equitable space for engagement with the UN system in the regions. It aims to ensure that the people in the region are better represented by civil society and social movements in global negotiations and have a stronger, coordinated, and more effective voice in regional processes.

The RCEM-AP builds upon the work of the Major Groups and other Stakeholder structure, while expanding it with additional constituencies and sub-regional groups. The RCEM-AP works together with UNESCAP to formalise CSO engagement with regional UN processes. The RCEM-AP consists of 17 constituencies and 5 sub-regional groups.

7. Need for capacity and knowledge building for CSOs about the HLPF

At all the side events, there was a general demand to ensure that the HLPF became well-known amongst stakeholders and to enable participation channels to be inclusive, accessible, clear and transparent. Several participants underlined that there is a strong need for capacity building, in order for them to be able to participate and engage fully in the work of the HLPF. Several people asked for special training and specialised courses on the SDGs, their implementation and their monitoring. Others raised the point that the HLPF is not yet well defined and not always well known outside of New York.

8. Need for review and reform of the Major Groups and other Stakeholder (MGoS) system

At the ECLAC side event in Chile, participants raised criticism of the current system of Major Groups and other Stakeholders. Someone said that the current system risks fragmenting engagement, and that there is a need to consolidate and strengthen participation and that space for dialogue is indeed needed.

On the other hand, at the ESCAP side event in Bangkok, participants presented the idea of formalizing major groups at the regional level too, while at the same time recognizing the contributions of other organized constituencies at the regional levels.

Therefore there is an opportunity to re-visit the format of the MGoS system at this point and ensure that it is flexible enough to accommodate different constituencies that have self-organised since the Rio 92 Earth Summit. It would be a welcome moment to update the terms of reference of the Major Groups and also enable additional participation of new constituencies.

CONCLUSIONS & NEXT STEPS

The recommendations in this paper were shared at key side events at the HLPF in July 2015, as well as on the occasion of the SDG Summit in September 2015. These recommendations will also be shared widely with relevant Member states and stakeholders so that the recommended changes can be implemented over the coming year ahead of the next HLPF.

Considering the online survey and face-to-face consultations, these are the key findings:

1. There are differing degrees of knowledge of the HLPF amongst stakeholders

The survey and regional dialogues show that there are very variable levels of knowledge of the functions and role of the HLPF amongst the respondents, with 40.9 percent of the respondents having very good or good knowledge about the HLPF and 43 percent stating that they have very limited or general understanding. This shows that the central role of the HLPF is still not fully understood by a large number of stakeholders.

2. There is a need for information, awareness-raising and capacity building about the HLPF for Major Groups and other Stakeholders

Due to limited knowledge, there is clearly demand for greater capacity building in regards to the HLPF. This is clear when looking at the results of several of the questions. For example, in question number 6 more than 50 percent of the respondents said that their first priority would be to have training workshops and capacity building on the HLPF. An additional 93 out of 207 respondents said that they would need more regular information, reports and updates through accessible information in terms of simple documents in multiple languages. The conclusion which can be drawn from this is that there is indeed a clear need for capacity building and information regarding the HLPF and that there is a demand to build this capacity through training programmes and through the sharing of information and knowledge at all levels.

3. The HLPF annual review process should provide comparable national and thematic reviews

When respondents were asked what should be included in the reviews and in the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), which is presented as the flagship report for the UN on sustainable development, 30 percent of the respondents said that it would be most important to review progress by member states towards the SDGs. It is suggested that the GSDR should allow for comparable national reviews and for regional and global comparison of progress. This also suggests that there is support for the idea that the Global Sustainable Development Report should be the main mechanism for Member States to review annual progress towards the goals and targets. Additionally, over 75 percent of the respondents of the online survey answered that they supported the idea of a global comparative index, which highlights progress over time in each country.

4. There is real interest in citizen-led monitoring and Major Group and other Stakeholders participation in the HLPF review, including by supporting citizen generated data

In Question 5, we asked the respondents for their views on how reviews of the SDGs at the national, regional and global levels should be carried out so as to ensure progress at all levels is accounted for fully. 77.4 percent of the respondents stated that it is important that the reviews of the SDGs at the national, regional and global levels include citizen-led monitoring in the wider feedback to the HLPF. This was supported by the regional dialogues and provides a clear indicator of MGoS recognition of the importance of citizens' key role in the follow-up and review of the agenda and their role of holding member states to account for the commitments that have been made.

5. The HLPF review process should make clear links to; and learn from; other UN review mechanisms

A key theme within the consultation was to identify best practices from other existing processes of review at global and regional level. There were some useful suggestions in this area from the survey and also from the regional dialogues.

In question 4, we asked respondents what they would suggest to be included in the Global Sustainable Development Report. A number of respondents suggested 'other' additional options to be included. A number of the responses specifically suggested that the HLPF review must make clear links and build on other UN review mechanisms and efforts, such as making links to existing UN human rights review mechanism under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council. Furthermore there could be ways to scale up models of successful efforts that could be implemented elsewhere, such as the Asia Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism (RCEM).

6. There are differing degrees of knowledge of the HLPF amongst stakeholders

Throughout the consultation, there was a clear message that stakeholders should be given access to relevant information in good time and in a format and language which is accessible to them. This includes ensuring key documents are provided online in multiple languages and enabling stakeholders to contribute to written review processes.

In question 11, the highest ranked option was ‘timely information is distributed about meetings’, with 126 out of 206 respondents ranking this as very important. In the same question, additional comments stated that this information should be not only timely but also presented in an accessible format to enable full engagement.

7. There should be simple processes to facilitate contributions of Major Groups and other Stakeholders at global, regional and national level reviews

In order to support stakeholder engagement in the HLPF process a number of suggestions were made through the consultation. These include: a) global level - simplify the accreditation process for annual HLPF meetings and ensure the right of MGoS to make oral and written contributions; b) regional level - develop a regular programme with key opportunities for stakeholder views to be included; c) national level - ensure annual review process includes input from stakeholders online and in-person.

81.4 percent of the respondents of the online survey ranked focus on local, national and regional outreach as the most important option. This shows that it is particularly important to engage stakeholders at the regional, national and local levels since the implementation on the SDGs will mainly happen at these levels. It will be crucial for the successful implementation of the SDGs that stakeholders at all levels are able to engage and hold their governments to account for the commitments that have been made. It is equally important to enable stakeholder engagement between levels to ensure expertise is shared and information flows where it is more needed. Furthermore, in order to reach the views of the most marginalised constituencies it will be essential that resources are provided to enable participation at meetings at the regional or global level.

8. It is crucial to identify and support appropriate networks to reach different types of stakeholders

When respondents were asked to rank the importance of actions which can be initiated for the HLPF to effectively reach and be accessible to all stakeholders – including those working at the regional, national and local levels, 80 percent of the respondents answered that it would be important or very important to “*focus on identifying appropriate networks to reach different types of stakeholders*,”. This shows that there is a clear demand for a specific effort to make sure that diverse and representative stakeholders are included in the work of the HLPF.

This can be seen as a clear recommendation to reach beyond the ‘usual suspects’ and include stakeholders which often do not have access to UN processes, including smaller civil society organisations and grassroots activists from the global South and at the national and local levels. According to a number of the regional dialogues, this would also require adjustment to the Major Groups and other Stakeholders system to accommodate new forms of engagement and different constituencies.

ANNEX: REPORTS FROM REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS

Meeting Report: ECLAC

**Capacity building workshop on civil society engagement in intergovernmental processes related to sustainable development and the post-2015 development
ECLAC, 4 May 2015, Santiago de Chile, Chili**

The Economic and Social Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) Division for Sustainable Development organised a capacity building workshop on civil society engagement in intergovernmental processes related to the post-2015 development on 4 May 2015, in Chile. SD2015 was invited to present its [advocacy toolkit](#) produced last year and other related tools.

Among the different presentations and activities, discussions groups discussed notably of civil society's roles and engagement in the implementation and follow up of the sustainable development goals. This led to comments on the lack of engagement mechanism within the ECLAC itself, and on how the current system for civil society participation in the post-2015 negotiations would need to be improved. For instance, the question of language used, unclear selection criteria for participation, or lack of communication of the programme make it difficult for CSOs to engage fully on the post-2015 agenda. The system of Major Groups was also criticised as fragmenting civil society, while participants felt that consolidating and strengthening participation and dialogues' spaces is needed. For civil society to participate fully at the three suggested levels of the agenda and HLPF's review (national, regional and global), trainings and specialised courses on SDGs, their implementation and their monitoring should be offered by UN agencies to civil society organisations, and governmental staff. Some participants also referred to the review mechanisms of the International Labour Organisation as a concrete positive example of mechanisms including the voices of civil society. The question of funding was raised as well, especially if it should be allocated according to a thematic focus.

Lotta Tahtinen, DESA coordinator of the Major Groups Programme, highlighted that a general reflection of the Major Groups system is indeed needed and that a meeting on this theme is planned mid-June in New York.

Meeting Report: UNESCAP

Meeting notes: Setting the stage for the HLPF: Civil Society's recommendations for Asia and the Pacific, 20 May 2015

Note that these notes are from the question and answer section of the meeting.

Program

9.00: Mr. Paul Quintos, IBON: Introduction and welcome

9.05: Mr. David le Blanc, Senior Sustainable Development Officer, Division for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs: The mandate of HLPF and impacts of CSO engagement with the HLPF

9.25: Ms. Hanna Hansson, CIVICUS: The HLPF – short background. How can we make it work? Structure and role of HLPF – possibilities and modalities for civil society participation.

9.45: Ms Siti Khoirun Nikmah, INFID: Accountability within the HLPF

10.05: Ms. Kate Lappin, Asia-Pacific Women, Law and Development: A Regional CSO perspective

10.20-10.40: Questions and comments from the participants, facilitated by Mr. Paul Quintos, IBON

Questions & Answers

Rezaul Chowdhury, Equity BD/COAST, Bangladesh: We currently hardly see any accountability of UN bodies and bilateral decisions at the national level. There should some multi-stakeholder forum at the national level, like the UN forum in New York and APFSD at the regional level. Especially UN agency officials and bilateral should have open face to face dialogue such forums at the national level, otherwise accountability will hardly at work. We must also define and demystify accountability and underline the fact that accountability is mutual and not unilateral. Accountability must be a trinity including states, business sector and CSOs, to create a power balance between these trinity factors.

Sepali Kottegoda, Women & Media Collective and Asia Pacific Women's Watch, Sri Lanka: There has been very little discussion on the post-2015 agenda at the national level in Sri Lanka. We are arranging a consultation on the post-2015 agenda and its implementation with participation of ministers and CSOs.

Olga Djaneava, Rural Women's Association, Kyrgyzstan: There has been a process in Kyrgyzstan to produce the Universal Period Review (UPR). This was a good process with participation of civil society with methods that worked. The SDGs constitute an opportunity to use a similar methodology and process as with the UPR.

Representative from APWLD, India: CSOs in India are coming together to hold government to account at the national level, including pushing governments to participate in meetings, pushing for ambitious implementation and claiming the right to information.

Carol Kidu, APWLD and High Level Task Force on ICPD: We need to look at the political global architecture and recognize that we are divided in regions and sub-regions. One of these is the Pacific with its 22 countries, which is surrounded by the high seas. I want to make a statement that the high-seas in the Pacific region should belong to the Pacific and not to other parts of the world to exploit.

Gomer Padong, Philippines Social Enterprise Network, Philippines: Suggests that civil society participation at the national level is formalised and ensured and that the accreditation process in the Philippines must be improved. Suggests that a task force is set up at the national level for accreditation of civil society, which would make sure that an organisation that is accredited to engage with one department or ministry is accredited to engage with all departments. Also highlighted that there is a committee on the Millennium Development Goals in the parliament in the Philippines, however this is lacking transparency and civil society participation.

Representative from Kyrgyzstan: A new law has been passed in Kyrgyzstan which has led to the creation of a “watch-dog function” in each ministry and public council. The law states that at least fifteen CSO representatives should be included in each of these. This is a good practice for monitoring and accountability.

Gani Serrano, Social Watch, Philippines: I’d like to ask what the following questions: what has changed and how inclusive is inclusion? Why would the HLPF be game changing? The Earth Summit 1992 was called the “participation spring” and I am not sure much has improved since then. Accountability is currently not connected to development commitments, as an example of that the MDGs are not achieved and the world is more unequal than ever. We keep talking about the importance of the participation at the highest level in the HLPF. Let me state the opposite: we can have no accountability if there is no participation at the lowest level, the grassroots level.

David le Blanc, UNDESA: The national level will be key to a successful implementation to the SDGs, the implementation cannot be done at the global level or by the UN. The national level must commit to this. 2014-2015 is a transition time where we discuss the agreements on the SDGs and the HLPF. This is the time to have your say in this. The HLPF 2015 should discuss the forms and methods of work and other stakeholders must engage in this. The HLPF needs a program which decides what is going to talk about, what topics/goals should be tackled and what methods are needed to address the different topics.

Aaron Ceradoy, Asia Pacific People’s Mission for Migrants: In the current stakeholder system at the UN, migrants are not considered a stakeholder group. At the national level, Migrants are not included in these processes and are often not considered citizens, they exist in a vacuum.

CSO representative from Japan: Want to bring in an example of CSO engagement in Japan. After the natural disaster in Japan a few years ago, a mechanism was created to discuss disaster risk reduction. Civil society participated in this, as a result of this a national energy coalition was created with participation of government representatives and other stakeholders, including civil society.

Member of parliament, Bangladesh: The parliament has already passed a strategy for sustainable development in Bangladesh. This strategy does not include the SDG, so will have to be adopted accordingly.

Kate Lappin, AWID: A few points for reflection. We need to ask ourselves what the results have been on all our efforts on the post-2015 agenda. Was it worth our work and time? For example, we will see a goal on inequality in the SDGs. But we need to make sure it goes from words to real change and impact. We must align with national government to ensure real impact. Further, while civil society is often invited to UN sessions, but I think we can all agree that civil society is often not invited when the real power and decisions are discussed.

Hanna Hansson, CIVICUS: Thank you for the very interesting remarks, questions and examples from the national and regional level. We welcome any written input as a follow up to this. Please remember to take the online survey on the HLPF before 27 May.

Regional Consultation Event SD2015
Setting the stage for the HLPF – NGO recommendations
Wednesday 15 April 2015
UNECE-Geneva

Agenda:

8.30: Leida Rijnhout, Director Global Policies and Sustainability at EEB, NGO Major Group: Introduction and welcome

8.40: Mr. Christian Friis Bach, Executive Secretary of the UNECE: Expectations and regional ambitions, overview of civil society engagement.

9.00: Leida Rijnhout: The HLPF – short background and how can we make it work? Structure and role of HLPF – plus modalities for civil society participation.

9.20: Reflections from civil society on the HLPF from representatives of the UN Major Groups and other stakeholders: Including input by Renate Bloem (Civicus) and Victoria Elias (WWF-Russia)

This side event is part of a [broader and inclusive consultation](#), online via the SD2015 website, to promote further awareness of the HLPF and to collect the views of civil society and other non-government actors on what measures, architecture and engagement mechanisms would enable an ambitious, effective and inclusive HLPF in 2015 and beyond.

Meeting Notes

Leida Rijnhout welcomed the participants and the **Executive Secretary of the UNECE, Mr Christian Friis Bach** especially. It was noted that his time is really appreciated during the busy days of the UNECE-66th session days. She also explained in summary the importance of the HLPF, and what it means for civil society engagement.

If we aim for successful implementation of the SDGs, we should emphasise our focus on the HLPF, as this will be the main body to oversee the implementation and reviews. Most of the engagement should be done at the regional, national and local levels.

Major Groups and Other Stakeholders have been asked to give ideas on the HLPF agenda and are therefore preparing position papers. SD2015 launched an online consultation for broader participation online. The website:

<http://www.sustainabledevelopment2015.org/index.php/engagement-tools/consultations>

Presentation slides included:

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|  <h3>What is the HLPF?</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The High Level Political Forum is a hybrid body that functions under the UN GA and ECOSOC• It will support member states to provide oversight and strategic guidance for implementation, follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals• Functions Include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">– • Agenda-setting– • Integration of objectives– • Implementation of goals– • Monitoring and review, including the annual Global Sustainable Development Report– • Identifying emerging issues– • Strengthening the science-policy interface– • Promoting evidence based decisions <p>www.SD2015.org</p> |  <h3>Why does it matter to you?</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• According to Resolution 67/290 there is a clear right for civil society partners to engage with the HLPF: <i>"Stakeholders active in areas related to sustainable development will autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms for participation in the high-level political forum"</i>• The HLPF will provide an annual review mechanism• The process will include national and regional monitoring and review• This should enable wider engagement for civil society in the monitoring and review of the sustainable development agenda• Stakeholder inputs into the annual 'Global Sustainable Development Report' <p>www.SD2015.org</p> |
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First question to Mr. Friis Bach: what are the ambitions of the UNECE for implementation of the SDGs on a regional level, and which kind of review and follow up mechanisms can be used?

Mr Christian Friis Bach (Executive Secretary UNECE):

He shared his gratitude to the organisers for hosting this UNECE-Civil Society dialogue, and stated that the UNECE wants to strengthen its engagement with CSOs. He stressed that he is keen to see this meeting as a starting point. He has been very involved in the SDG process since its inception.

So, yes, he stated that it is important for the UNECE to ensure implementation of the new goals. On review: they are familiar with the UPR mechanism for the Human Rights Council. In their view the Aarhus Convention also has interesting accountability mechanisms; one of the tasks of UNECE is to globalise this convention.

In his view the UN (NY) is giving more attention to the regional level, to design the monitoring mechanisms, like regional performance reviews. At the regional level there is also more trust and more similarities among the countries, thus it is more acceptable for member states to conduct such reviews in the region than at the global level. One remaining problem is how to add up the regional results to provide a global level review. Perhaps the EPR is a model that can be used; it is also mentioned in the SG report.

UNECE will contribute to the implementation of the SDGs by translating the global goals and targets into norms, standards and regulations at the regional level. And will assist with capacity building. See also the high-level statement endorsed at the Commission Session http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/2015/E_ECE_1475_en.pdf
The UNECE will definitely seek input from civil society.

The MDG experiences and studies show that when the goals are nationalised, it is indeed difficult to obtain comparable data at the regional level. The European Conference of Statisticians will also help to improve capacities for data collection and the comparability of data.

Leida Rijnhout gave a short explanation of the recent updated NGO position paper with reference to the HLPF, she highlighted that for the NGO Major Group it is very important to ensure the relevance of the HLPF as a key body within the UN-system. She referred back to the earlier upgrade of the Commission for Sustainable Development, which had the intention to put Sustainable Development much higher on the agenda, and make it the overall framework for all UN-activities in this area.

She also suggested that another important issue is the paradigm shift surrounding the core concept of development; related to that the decrease of the Aid and Trade Agenda; to be replaced with a Human Rights based and equality agenda, within the limits of the planet. She detected some weak points of the HLPF, but with political will this can be solved. See annex for the whole powerpoint.

Renate Bloem (Civicus): Thanked the Executive Secretary, M. Bach, and Leida for the comprehensive introductions.

She set out that CIVICUS works on input to the post 2015 agenda on many fronts, at national and international levels, and is glad to see the momentum for the development of a strong regional platform provided by the UNECE. She was encouraged by the opening yesterday morning –that without having yet an institutional voice – civil society participants could just speak and generate some discussion on the role of Civil Society. She also thanked the UNECE for its determination to increase the visibility of civil society, this has so far mainly occurred through the Aarhus Convention and the very participatory ‘Beijing plus’ regional Platforms, every 5 years, otherwise the UNECE has not yet attracted wider civil society participation. This morning’s discussion is about civil society recommendations for the HLPF and what it entails, and about monitoring, follow up, review, reporting or accountability –robust mechanisms to make the SDGs real.

She stated that CIVICUS is a lead body on this Online Survey on the High-level Political Forum and Post – 2015 Sustainable Development governance to which Leida made reference and which also contains the recommendations, visions and priorities of Major Groups, including the NGO vision we have just heard. So we are totally in agreement with the expressed positions.

But when talking about creating strong mechanisms for review and implementation, she reminded participants what already exists and originated here in Geneva, –in particular the universally recognized UPR, Universal Periodic Review, which looks at all UN Member States’ human rights record.

She set out that CIVICUS believes it is central to the development of any effective monitoring and evaluation that prevailing UN human rights processes should be integrated. To this end, it is critical that we develop greater cohesion between existing monitoring mechanisms at the UN Human Rights Council and ongoing efforts to develop a post-2015 monitoring framework in New York.

She remembered former President of Switzerland, Micheline Calmy Rey, requesting at the High-level Opening of the Human Rights Council to create a UPR mechanism for the SDGs.

Finally, she set out a few words on civil society participation at the HLPF. The HLPF was created with resolution 67/290 and will meet on a yearly basis during the ECOSOC HLS and every 4 years at UNGA Level. Civil society has institutionalized (Charter based) arrangements with ECOSOC but not with UNGA. While so far civil society has been treated in a satisfactory way during the OWGs and also now during the Governmental negotiation processes, thanks to the goodwill of the Co-Conveners of these processes, we do not yet have guarantees for the HLPF, particularly as we do not know what will become out of this hybrid body.

She stressed once more the example of the Human Rights Council, highlighting that it was upgraded from an ECOSOC Commission to an UNGA body. We achieved, however, in the **instituting resolution** to put down Civil Society participation as full stakeholders according to ECOSOC existing rules plus good practices arrangements, not depending on the moods of Chairpersons or co-conveners. This could also be remembered for the HLPF, where we advocate strongly maintaining the agreed language of the Rio+20 outcome document, in which Major Groups and Other Stakeholders are fully recognized.

Monika Linn (UNECE): Stated that this dialogue is good and helps to sharpen the vision of UNECE about what can be done concretely at the regional level. The High-level Political Forum is mandated to be the main intergovernmental body at the global level to monitor and review the implementation of the SDGs. Implementation and monitoring & accountability will have to happen mostly at the national level, but regional commissions can play a bridging function between the national and global levels.

It was clear that Member States supported this view during the 66th session of our Commission. There is also a lot of support for regional commissions to conduct peer reviews at the regional level, the results of which would then be presented at the global level at the HLPF. UNECE has experience with peer reviews in several areas of its work, in particular Environmental Performance Reviews. However, these reviews are very resource intensive. We need to discuss how this methodology or certain elements can be used for conducting regional SDG peer reviews. Such reviews could be held in the framework of the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development.

Mark Halle (IISD)

Mark made a clear point that he hopes that the HLPF will not be a repetition of the CSD, as he feels that it did not deliver; it had no accountability mechanism, and the position of the CSD under ECOSOC was not high; this we have to avoid. We call the HLPF 'high level', but how high is this? There is a disturbing lack of clarity, and the UN is not really supporting the secretariat. The UN synthesis report of the SG is quite strong on accountability. But many member states do not want this, and the discussion until now in New York also does not focus on this either.

Review is very expensive, OECD spends 0,5 million dollars per country per review. If ECOSOC wants to ensure regular review, there should be a bottom up model; gathering data from other UN bodies, governments representatives and civil society as a critical way to widen the results. He stated that in his view the UNECE region is not the problem. But what does "universality" mean for us? Are we ready to be judged by others? The accountability is mutual and universal.

On Finance for Development: in his view the approach will be ODA *plus* innovative funding. Civil Society needs to focus on the review of the whole UN system, this is possible through the HLPF. And the "whole system" includes the national and regional levels.

Victoria Elias (WWF- Russia)

In general she observed that there is currently not a lot happening from the NGO side in Eastern Europe and Central Asia on the SDG discussions. Their work is more related to direct hot spots, and not very focused on the international processes. They don't always have the possibilities or priority to go to New York for negotiations meetings. For them the UNECE level is much more appropriate, like their engagement in the Aarhus convention. A regional HLPF dialogue would be very welcome from the side of regional NGOs (like the Regional consultation that was included in the official CSD-process). They are also keen to support the globalisation of the Aarhus Convention.

On reviews: she felt that a good model could be the EPR, and in her view it is not a problem that this has an environmental focus.

Daniel Wermus (BioVision/Millennium Institute)

He explained that his organisation works in 3 African countries with multi stakeholder assessments. Those are pilot projects. In this model they work with ministries, environmental organisations, development organisations, farmers, private sector, cooperatives and universities. This model is very promising. It creates an interesting database gathering. For more info please have a look here:

http://www.biovision.ch/fileadmin/pdf/e/services/downloads/changing_course_download/ShortBrief_Multi-StakeholderAssessmentsPost-2015.pdf

Irena Zubcevic (UNDESA)

UNDESA does not use the word “monitoring”, only review and follow up. The role of the regional commissions is absolutely crucial. On reviews, the UPR and the Aarhus mechanisms are good examples. Aarhus is related to a convention, thus it is obligatory, this is not the case with the SDGs. But in her view the UPR model could be promoted. The SG synthesis report is bold in stating that accountability mechanisms are crucial and is counting on the national levels.

She stated that UNDESA and NGLS are doing well in facilitating CSO engagement; Member States are very happy. It is important to keep on talking about the HLPF, as it will be an important meeting. Member States should know that too.

The outcome of this ECE meeting will be an official document that will contribute to the HLPF negotiations. The same will occur for the individual Major Group positions.

Abbreviations:

SG: Secretary General

UNGA: UN General Assembly

HLPF: High Level Political Forum

CSD: Commission of Sustainable Development

UPR: Universal Periodic Review

EPR: Environmental Performance Review

ODA: Official Development Assistance

CSO: Civil Society Organisations

List of Participants:

| Name | Organisation |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Christian Friis Bach | Executive Secretary UNECE |
| Leida Rijnhout | EEB (European Environmental Bureau) |
| Renate Bloem | CIVICUS |
| Mark Halle | IISD |
| Daniel Wermus | BioVision / Millennium Institute |
| Dao Nguyen | WWF International |
| Irena Zubcevic | UNDESA |
| Valeria Bicheluvia | MMM – NGO CSW |
| Hyun Seung Lee | CIVICUS |
| Sinmyung Park | CONGO |
| Luke Pye | Unitar |
| Katherina Rok | ICC |
| Victoria Elias | WWF Russia |
| Natasha Zuinen | Walloon Region - Belgium |
| Andrew Allimadi | Regional Commissions |
| Michael Kunz | UNECE |
| Monika Linn | UNECE |