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SUMMARY OF SIDE EVENT | HLPF 2016 ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT THEMATIC REVIEWS FOR AN INTEGRATED, INCLUSIVE AND PARTICIPATORY FOLLOW-UP & REVIEW OF THE 2030 AGENDA



Monday, 11 July 2016, 1:15--2:30pm | Conference Room 8, Conference Building, UNHQ
Summary by: SDG Project Team and Global Soil Forum, IASS

HLPF FOLLOW UP AND THEMATIC REVIEWS

At the beginning of 2016 the countdown to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was set in motion. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda will mainly take place at the national and local levels but a determinant for success will be the follow-up and review processes; whose frameworks should be effective, participatory and integrated to help countries “*maximize and track progress in implementing this Agenda in order to ensure that no one is left behind*” (UN GA A/RES/70/1 2015, Para 72). A main challenge ahead (at national and also global levels) is to design reviews and follow up to account for existing linkages and interdependencies between different SDG goals and targets. This implies that not only synergies between goals and targets are highlighted, but also that potential conditionalities and trade-offs are identified and governed. At the global level, the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is expected to follow up on the implementation of sustainable development and member states have actively been engaged in discussions to determine the best design for it to fulfil this role. In particular, the Agenda 2030 calls for global thematic reviews to be conducted under the HLPF.

Thematic reviews can allow for a crosscutting examination of progress on goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda as an undividable set. This will require the cooperation of many actors, including between UN agencies and non-UN actors, in ways that allow for exchange and effective integration of different sources of knowledge and expertise. Including civil-society stakeholders in this process will help ensure that thematic reviews go beyond quantitative assessments to integrate contextual and localized perspectives and knowledge, and safeguard that no one is left behind.

CHAIR

Alexander Müller – Managing Director TMG, Member of the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), Study Lead TEEBAgriFood (hosted at UNEP)

SPEAKERS

Ambassador José Alberto Sandoval Cojulún – Permanent Representative of Guatemala to the UN

Marianne Beisheim – Senior Associate, German Institute for International and Security Affairs

Layla Saad – Deputy Director and Policy Advisor of the World Centre for Sustainable Development

Chantal Line Carpentier – Chief, UNCTAD New York Office

Reinhard Krapp – Minister and Head of the Economic Department of the German Mission to the UN



PROCEEDINGS

The Chair opened this Side Event with presenting the main six messages of the High-Level Event “Towards Thematic Reviews for an Integrated, Inclusive and Participatory Follow-Up and Review of the 2030 Agenda”, which took place a few days earlier on 7-8 July, NYC. This meeting had brought together close to one hundred representatives from Member States and delegates from UN Organisations, ministries, science and academia, civil society and the private sector. In his introduction **Müller** stated that thematic follow up and review mechanisms at global levels are necessary to support national and regional level reviews, and reminded that the complexity of such endeavors necessitates further thinking on how to design and make best use of them. The six messages invited speakers (and commentators who attended the earlier meeting) elaborated on were the following:

1. The Agenda 2030 is highly ambitious, faces unprecedented challenges in terms of transforming development pathways, and requires novel approaches for implementation;
2. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda can therefore only be successful, if it is organized as a collective learning process;
3. We acknowledge that the Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda will not take place on a level playing field;

4. Development pathways of member states are connected in this globalized world, and hence to live up to the principle of universality Follow up and Review mechanisms need to account for interlinkages;
5. The integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda entails unprecedented levels of complexity for its operationalization, hence Follow up and review processes need to help navigate this challenge while balancing various contextual and statistical parameters; and,
6. The points above imply that there are various contributions to be made to global Follow up and Review processes, necessitating multi-stakeholder engagements and collaborations on the diverse aspects of themes through preparatory processes.

Following the brief summary of above-listed messages by Chair, **Ambassador José Alberto Sandoval Cojulún** highlighted the importance of ensuring rule of law and presented Guatemala's first steps and in implementing the Agenda 2030 at the national level. He also pointed out that Goal 16 "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions" is of particular importance to his country's context which resembles those of many other geographies in the world, and that sustainability cannot be achieved without stability and social opportunity. On her part, **Marianne Beisheim** emphasized that conducting thematic reviews within the HLPF framework can serve to support in depth analyses and integrating perspectives on causal linkages between the different SDGs, however, we should clarify how these differ from other existing review mechanisms e.g. INDCs. Referring to the proposal for understanding the Follow up and Review processes as a mutual, continuous and accumulative learning process, she stated that there is a need for a decentralized approach, bottom-up designs, and learning loops that build on local knowledge and network preparatory processes that feed into and converse with the HLPF.

Layla Saad elaborated on the third message emphasizing that people are the agents of implementation of the Agenda 2030 and possess valuable knowledge that should be harvested. While acknowledging that Follow Up and Review will not take place on a level playing field, these can open the door for meaningful participation at both global and national levels. She noted that reports should share their data and open it for more holistic and transparent analyses, clearly state how the principle of 'leaving no one behind' is being tackled, and that a key prerequisite to success will be accountability to upholding human-rights principles through empowerment of citizens. She closed her intervention with emphasizing that the Follow up and Review processes are an opportunity for governments to regain the confidence of citizens and share the path to more sustainable living. These points were picked up later on in the discussion by **Jan-Gustav Strandenaes**, Stakeholder Forum, who argued that there is a need 'to practice what we preach' and act on the recognition that without enabling civil society organizations and groups to be among lead players in the Follow up and Review processes the latter will be ridiculed by shortcomings in accountability, failing the faith of people and the aspirations expressed by the 2030 Agenda. While he remains an optimist about potentials of Thematic Reviews, he said these are threatened by frameworks of the HLPF which in their current arrangements are not well conductors of confident and meaningful participation of civil society.

Building on the strategy of achieving equality through access to opportunity, **Chantal Line Carpentier** pointed that discussions over international trade should be at the center of SDG implementation, as it is important to account for effects of large corporations and capital networks on and between countries. She reminded that the global community should re-assess and calibrate its definitions and standards e.g. what constitutes 'fair trade', tightening policies and legislation around violators of labor rights. Continuing on the preceding arguments, **Reinhard Krapp** emphasized that citizens should be able to understand the meaning of the SDGs with regards to their own lives; that academic and political jargon are not helpful at local levels where the change needs to happen. Quoting a journalist stating that "everything is interconnected with everything" is No headline", he reminded that operationalizations of the SDGs must account for clear communication, and that the

HLPF should help create and deliver concrete and tangible messages and guidelines that can help countries labor engaging social contracts for people, collectively as well as individually.

Ambassador Vandi Chidi Minah, Permanent Representative of Sierra Leone to the UN (who was also among speakers at the preparatory meeting the earlier week), reminded that civil society is facing real, physical threats and obstacles, and warned that the failure or success of the 2030 Agenda depends strongly on whether early steps of implementation include the most vulnerable and marginalized. He encouraged thinkers, initiatives and organizations represented in the room to search for disruptive discourses that help integrate and communicate work and knowledge in both directions: from and by people to governments and international fora, and vice versa. He said that current power structures of 'donor' and 'donee' and their synonyms in societal understandings (interpretations) are critical elements threatening the 2030 Agenda, and daily urgencies render current paradigms of 'townhall meetings' questionable. He closed with noting that current global migration trends are expressions of generations hoping and searching for opportunity, and that brain- and labor-drain are heavily weighing on developing and conflict-burdened countries. Hence, new mechanisms that give people a sense of purpose and accomplishment need to be created, not 'for them' but 'with them'; and this is one of the main challenges that the HLPF Follow up and Reviews should address.

Several other comments followed from attendees of this Side Event, which reiterated the urgency for detailing the 'how' in regards to reviews and reports, the importance of helping civil society hold the feet of governments to the fire, and the quintessence of designing mechanisms that accelerate the translation of findings into education discourses to raise more informed generations – about the impacts of their behaviors and their power as citizens. In addition, discussions reminded of the importance of advancing knowledge and policy interlinkages to natural resources particularly in relation to changing climates, rising pressures, rehabilitation, adaptation and disaster mitigation. Attendants voiced support for the six messages put forth, and encouraged the proposal of the organizers to further discussions and strategies among interested civil society organizations and groups on potential designs, guidelines, and preparatory processes in support of the HLPF Follow up and Review processes.

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