

Summary of HLPF Side Event, 3rd July 2014

Building Capacity to Implement the Post-2015 Development Agenda and Global SDGs

Chair and Panelists

Farooq Ullah, Executive Director of Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future (Chair)

Darren Swanson, Novel Futures

H.E. Kunzang Namgyel, Bhutanese Ambassador to the UN

Annika Lindblom, Ministry of Environment, Government of Finland

Seleshi Bekele, Division of SD, UNDESA

Emmanuel Guerin, Sustainable Development Solutions Network

Summary of Panelist Discussions

This engaging side event brought together a diverse range of government, UN and stakeholder SD practitioners to discuss various methods, trends, and programmes directed at increasing international, regional, national, and local capacity to implement the Post-2015 Development Agenda. Darren Swanson began the event describing the SDPlanNet 2.0 initiative, which will operate on a regional basis to support government SD practitioners and other stakeholders with sustainable development planning, policy and monitoring in the context of post-2015. Originally formed in response to a growing need for sharing innovative practices for effecting sustainable development, the initiative undertakes a range of capacity building and knowledge sharing activities across three communities of practice: 1) strategy making and multi-stakeholder processes 2) Integrated policy, planning, and budgeting 3) Monitoring and reporting. SDPlanNet currently operates in three regions: Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

Ambassador Namgyel then briefly discussed the much- acclaimed Bhutanese development model centred upon Gross National Happiness (GNH). Moving beyond traditional development indicators, GNH focuses on holistic indicators such as conservation and the environment, preservation of culture, health, education, ecological realities, living standards, and psychology or mental well-being. Overseeing these efforts is a national GNH Commission, with programmes at the sub-national and local levels. Operating within the 11th five-year development plan, 16 key national areas are synchronised and linked together. Many at the UN and other development actors have discussed GNH as a positive move beyond GDP, as the traditional but limited measure of development and well-being. A GNH screening tool has been developed to evaluate projects and plans for congruence with GNH principles.

Finland's Annika Lindblom discussed the challenges that Finland faces in translating development plans into action, although the nation has had a sustainability Commission for twenty years. In 2013 the nation adopted a "national commitment for sustainable development." Emmanuel Guerin of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network followed up discussing the SDSN thematic groups and the establishment of dozens of regional and national networks across five continents. SDSN has launched centres in China, Australia, and India, with the goal of creating and implementing analytical strategies to reach global sustainable development goals. Seleshi Bekele of UNDESA discussed the

challenges of integrating silos of development into a cohesive, holistic model. A major challenge remains bringing together environmental and sustainability planning from national levels to sub-national and local levels.

Comments and Questions

A variety of commentary and questions were offered by attendees. Annika Lindblom described a divide in language and practice between traditional development practitioners and sustainable development professionals. Andrew Wilson of Stakeholder Forum followed those comments speaking to a general divide often between important phrasings at the multilateral levels and experts in various fields on the ground, such as changing “peer-review” to “expert-led” or “monitoring and evaluation” to new terminology, which could impact coordination of sustainable development work in different locations.

The Ambassador of Bhutan weighed in on the importance of focusing on the means of implementation at the national and sub-national level. However, Rob Wheeler from the Global Ecovillage Network noted that state and national officials are not aware of nor aligned to work with global development goals and agreements, a particular challenge to moving sustainable development to sub-national levels. Emmanuel Guerin noted as far as capacity-building that 15 countries have shown success in building capacity through creating national level plans aligned with a global carbon budget and the Deep Decarbonisation Pathways Project. Katherine Pearce of the World Future Council noted that identifying effective institutions at national levels is important, and that the Budapest Conference in 2013 brought together institutions to share best practices and formed a memorandum and network for international stakeholders and NGOs to collaborate.

Guerin also spoke of obstacles to monitoring and evaluating SDGs, as indicators do not always have adequate data extant. Darren Swanson also spoke to monitoring and evaluation, specifically observing that in the United States there is a high capacity for monitoring and evaluation but it exists more at local and not national levels.

Final comments centred on the need to create more global and public awareness of sustainable development issues. Swanson commented that lessons in marketing could be learned from the advertising community in effective outreach. Guerin also commented on this topic, speaking about the recent advent of free online sustainability courses and other education initiatives that may increase public access to information and increase citizen action.