

Expert Group Meeting on

Lessons learned from the first cycle of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

6-7 May 2019
New York

I. Introduction

Since 2015, the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), created in Rio+20, has established its role as the core platform to review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as decided in the Agenda. While there is enthusiastic engagement around the HLPF, there is also much reflection on how to enhance its review of progress in implementing the SDGs.

At its 74th session, the General Assembly will review the implementation of the resolutions on the HLPF ([A/RES/67/290](#) and [A/RES/70/299](#)) in order to take stock of the work of the HLPF since 2016. This will aim to strengthen and ensure it delivers fully on its ambitious mandates to promote and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and maintain the momentum on the implementation of the SDGs. In this context, the European Commission and the Office of intergovernmental support and coordination for sustainable development (OISC) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) organized an expert group meeting, which took place from 6 to 7 May 2019 in UNHQ in New York with the aim to bring Member States, the UN system, academia and other stakeholders together to prepare the discussions of the 74th session.

As such, participants had the opportunity to take stock of lessons learned from the first cycle of the HLPF, notably on the Voluntary National Reviews and thematic reviews. They considered ways to improve the peer learning element in VNRs, and the comparability and impact of the VNRs on national processes. Participants also considered ways to have a better reflection on interlinkages and tradeoffs among goals, reflect country realities and ensure follow-up and results. Best practices and lessons drawn from similar review processes and ways to strengthen the contribution and participation of stakeholders to HLPF were also discussed. Lastly participants identified possible recommendations on how to enhance the work of the HLPF and its various reviews and maximize the Forum's impact on progress towards realizing the 2030 Agenda.

The following sections reflect the discussions that took place during the two-day meeting.

II. Has the HLPF fulfilled its role?

Participants remarked that in certain aspects, the HLPF has been quite successful in carrying out its mandate to provide a platform for discussion at the global level and maintain the momentum of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Many said that resolutions 67/290 and 70/299 clearly specify the mandates of HLPF against which it should be reviewed.

Due to the Forum, Member States are producing higher quality reports on the implementation of the SDGs, using better data than before, and addressing more systematically the follow up to the 2030 Agenda and the full set of SDGs. Also, more attention is being paid to the integrated nature of the 2030

Agenda, though perhaps not enough. The high-level of enthusiasm in terms of number of ministers, other participants from countries, UN system and other international and regional organizations, intergovernmental organizations and major groups and other stakeholders (MGoS) as well as the number of countries coming to the Forum and presenting their Voluntary National Review (VNR) building on solid national preparations, even though it remains a voluntary process, is testament to its success.

At the same time, it was argued that the Forum has only partially fulfilled its mandate to provide political leadership, recommendations and guidance - key elements missing from the Ministerial Declarations thus far. The declaration should be more ambitious and reflect actual discussions at the HLPF rather than being agreed upon before HLPF. It should better reflect the multistakeholder nature of the HLPF. There is scope to improve the HLPF to truly become action oriented and a platform for transformative action and creating synergies.

A participant underlined that criteria of performance are traditionally set before a process begins, not after, as is the case with the Forum. Furthermore, bearing in mind that individual Member States are tracking their own progress through the VNRs and that every country is different, it would be challenging to come up with more detailed guidelines on VNRs, without looking at the contextual level of each country/region and their implementation efforts.

There was overall agreement that the HLPF is a tool and not a means to an end. Some participants expressed concern that the large number of side events, exhibitions and special events are taking away attention from the main sessions. But side events could also be utilized for technical discussions. Others stressed that despite the challenges to multilateralism, the ambition or momentum to fulfill the 2030 Agenda should be kept alive and the HLPF can help do just that.

Challenges

Ever since the negotiations on the 2030 Agenda, there were those who wanted more rigorous and regulated follow-up and review and those who believed that it was for the national level to deal with it, taking into account particular circumstances of each country. Thus, a middle ground should be found, and a challenge is to see how to support countries in their follow-up and review and yet do it in such a way that all countries find it useful and do not see it as interfering in their internal affairs.

Participants also pointed out that due to their high numbers, reports from all relevant stakeholders and intergovernmental bodies have limited visibility during the Forum as they are only uploaded on websites. Moreover, a wealth of knowledge comes out of regional meetings and EGMs on specific SDGs, that they are not properly utilized. Also, other intergovernmental bodies have their own timeline and theme, which render harder aligning the themes and recommendations as well as the timely submission of inputs to the HLPF.

Another challenge is how to address a key principle of the 2030 Agenda of leaving no one behind (LNOB). It is referred to quite often, including in the VNRs, but there is no evidence how actually LNOB is being addressed. The whole-of-society approach is important here not just to reach those populations, but to empower them and give them access not just to basic services, but also to give them opportunities. Equity and sustainability should be a rolling agenda item of the HLPF in order to leave no one behind and should be discussed every year.

Opportunities

Several opportunities for the Forum to deliver on its functions were mentioned. The HLPF has a broad scope and unique potential to draw on a wide range of sectoral inputs from various intergovernmental bodies. However, it would be important to better articulate HLPF demands on these bodies and in return to utilize them more during HLPF discussions. Focusing more on cross-cutting and cross-regional issues, and the SDGs that are falling behind would also demonstrate that a comprehensive approach has been adopted in terms of implementation. It would be important also to look at global issues. The growing popularity of VNRs is also putting more pressure on other countries to volunteer for a review, which can help present a greater overview of the 2030 Agenda's implementation.

The lessons learned at the regional level should be also considered more. Human rights should be also integrated in all efforts behind the Agenda.

Impact

Participation in the HLPF, and especially the preparation process for a VNR presentation, has spurred the setting up of coordination mechanisms at the national level, the identification of synergies and the convening of all actors connected to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This has generated positive impacts in the view of some countries. The second cycle VNRs are the opportunity to improve the preparatory process. Moreover, the Forum has an important role to play in fostering interlinkages, but it does not automatically lead to more coherent policies. In this regard, it is difficult to measure the level of the positive impact on SDG implementation and whether progress is due to or despite of the Forum.

III. Thematic reviews

There was agreement among participants on the importance and usefulness of thematic reviews. Many participants supported the clustering of SDGs as it has increased policy coherence, although alerted to the need to have more discussions on gaps, trade-offs, emerging trends, interlinkages and cross-cutting issues such as leaving no one behind, human rights, financing, data, monitoring and evaluation. Others were of a view that grouping goals may have produced good results in the first cycle including by increasing coherence and mobilizing communities around individual SDGs, but going forward, they felt it would be better to discuss all SDGs through themes or cross-cutting issues, interlinkages and synergies. Some felt grouping the Goals had led to siloed approaches.

The GSDR is a very good entry point for evidence-based work that needs greater visibility. The thematic reviews should be prepared more systemically drawing from various inputs to ensure discussions are evidence-based and avoid diluting technical reviews of specific SDGs. It was also noted that there is a disconnect with EGMs on specific SDGs as discussions at the Forum do not necessarily build on their outcomes and recommendations. It was noted that panelists should be from various backgrounds to achieve greater integration and rapporteurs should also be used more systematically. The panels should also be structured based on the interlinkages. In general, all three dimensions of sustainable development should receive equal attention. Many also felt that new and emerging issues should be given more prominence.

The importance of having a cross-cutting and engaging people to participate in order to have a real positive impact was also highlighted. As such, having a different theme every year can be challenging, whereas some felt that having the recurring theme of e.g. "Transforming our world" might allow member

states and the UN system to focus on issues of particular interest to them and to the transformational challenges.

IV. The Voluntary National Reviews

Participants concurred that the VNRs were overall successful and highlighted elements that could be strengthened to truly move from reporting to review, from information to genuine exchange and action. While the VNRs were not intended to be a 'perfect' instrument at their inception, the reviews are evolving and have generated not only lessons learned on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda but also momentum for the latter. Some thought that the voluntary nature of the VNRs was one of the limitations of the HLPF in fulfilling its mandate and questioned whether it should be maintained or not. However, they also acknowledged that changing this aspect would probably not receive the wider support of the membership. Another challenge is the limited time allocated to VNRs that does not allow for sufficient time for presentations, interactive dialogue and peer learning. In addition, tracking progress and identifying the areas in need of special attention at the global level is not an easy task.

Horizontal and vertical coordination and coordinated policy making, policy coherence and synergies, trade-offs, alignment with budget, engagement of stakeholders, financing and data were among the most common challenges identified by VNRs.

Impact of the VNRs

The impact of the VNR process on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is intrinsically linked to, first, the structure of the VNR process and whether there is a meaningful preparatory and follow-up process for the presentation at the HLPF. Several participants highlighted that the VNR process triggered the establishment of coordination mechanisms to prepare the reviews and which, in many cases, remain in place after the VNR presentation at the HLPF, thus supporting national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Examples shared include technical working groups and inter-ministerial committees. Moreover, it was noted that the integration of the SDGs in state budgets and related reporting obligations would have been difficult without the momentum that was created through the adoption of the 2030 Agenda by Heads of State and Government and the VNRs.

Second, the content of the VNRs reflects a process of political prioritization and, in some cases, revealed new priorities, e.g. the need to focus on youth. Third, the alignment of the 2030 Agenda and other political agendas was considered critical to maximize synergies and to ensure coherence, as well as to avoid the burden of double or triple reporting. Examples include alignment with the European integration process and with the African Union's Agenda 2063 as well as plans of actions for countries in special situations (least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States).

Countries that already have presented two VNRs noted that the first review was a key moment to galvanize political will and support to the implementation of the SDGs at the national level. It further constituted an opportunity to strengthen national planning and partnerships, including through the mapping of actors and sectoral responsibilities and, in many cases, led to either an update of existing national sustainable development strategies or the development of the latter. Participants stressed, in this regard, that the value of the VNRs lies in its process which is much more than the 15-minute presentation at the HLPF: the VNRs require a thorough and inclusive preparatory process prior to the HLPF and follow-up actions upon return from New York. The latter may include interim reports on SDG

implementation at the national level to maintain momentum between VNR presentations at the HLPF including presenting such reports to the parliament.

Awareness raising among government officials and the broader public needs to be fostered to truly anchor the 2030 Agenda in national realities. Examples shared by participants include developing training manuals on the SDG implementation strategy as well as mandatory reporting by Ministries on SDG action every six months. Institutionalization of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, its follow-up and review, is also important for long-term engagement, particularly when there is a change of government. The VNR report was considered a comprehensive document on the SDG implementation efforts undertaken and hence would allow for effective hand over to the next government.

It was also underlined that VNRs should present a realistic picture of implementation. They should identify areas where support is needed. The Secretariat should create a repository of possible support countries can tap in for the VNR. It can facilitate interaction between countries and institutions that could be of help.

Strengthening peer learning and partnerships

The VNRs are considered an important opportunity to collaborate within society and beyond national borders. Stakeholder participation is considered key for a truly inclusive VNR process. However, the development of mechanisms for effective and meaningful stakeholder engagement beyond ad hoc measures remains challenging in many countries. Several participants noted the general lack of awareness of the 2030 Agenda four years into its implementation. As implementation happens at the local level, the creation of ownership by subnational and local authorities is key. Similarly, the private sector is considered an important partner in achieving the SDGs. Innovative examples for private sector engagement include the development of a “SDG corporate tracker” in one country. It was noted, however, that the contribution of the private sector needs to be transparent and respect human rights standards. Stakeholder participants further stressed the importance of dialogue and called for providing a space to share shadow reports as part of the inputs to the HLPF. The Secretariat noted that adequate mandates need to be in place.

The regional sustainable development forums convened by the UN Regional Commissions were considered as an opportunity to exchange more in depth on individual VNRs. It was suggested that countries could submit their interim VNRs to the regional forums, receive comments and subsequently submit the final reports to the HLPF. The regional forums could also be valuable platforms to address transboundary issues. Linking the national, regional and global levels better to approach sustainable development more strategically was considered as a challenge that should be addressed moving into the next cycle of reviews.

It was felt that 15 minutes for the presentation of the VNR itself is sufficient, but that more time should be devoted to the interactive discussion following the presentation. To strengthen the peer learning character and the accountability aspect of the VNRs, it was suggested to collect written questions and allow written replies. The appointment of rapporteurs was considered another possibility to strengthen the interactive discussion following the VNR presentation. Moreover, the Group of Friends of VNRs launched by the ECOSOC President for 2019 HLPF is aimed to foster dialogue and peer learning around the reviews. While peer learning may be easier among countries of a given region, participants stressed the value of peer learning exercises between regions and countries at different levels of development.

The VNR Labs, launched at the HLPF in 2018, further seek to provide a platform for peer learning on cross-cutting issues among Member States, the UN system and stakeholders. The VNRs' mandate to foster partnerships and matchmaking to bring solutions and support to address the challenges needs to be strengthened in a collaborative effort from both countries and the UN system. In this regard, the lessons learned from the VNRs thus far should be compiled in a collective tool box for the benefit of all actors.

Subsequent VNRs

In many cases the first VNR constituted a baseline assessment driven by the government, whereas the second VNR focused on a whole-of-government and a whole-of-society approach. For subsequent reviews, participants shared several ideas on how to strengthen the peer learning element of the VNRs, including a "peer drafting process", i.e. working with other countries on a specific chapter of the VNR report. Countries coming to present for the 2nd or 3rd time should show what has been accomplished since the 1st VNR and also present trends and policies that worked, based on evidence. Many talked about monitoring and evaluation as an important part of measuring progress.

It was stressed that safe spaces need to be created for governments to share their experiences. Participants invited the Secretariat to update the Secretary-General's voluntary common reporting guidelines to provide guidance on the preparation of second and third VNRs. There were also suggestions for the Secretariat to create a repository of good VNR practices that countries could utilize. Impact reporting could be incentivized for effective follow-up and continued commitment. Going forward, second and third VNRs should clearly outline the follow-up actions taken to preceding reviews. VNRs should better address and evaluate interlinkages and capture progress over time.

Making VNRs more rigorous

To make the VNRs more rigorous, participants highlighted that data and statistics should receive more attention at the HLPF whether in a cross-cutting manner or as a dedicated session to emphasize the importance of disaggregated data that informs evidence-based policy making. It was stressed that the VNRs provide an opportunity to strengthen data collection, e.g. through the development of a digital platform into which different government institutions could feed data. Evaluation would also be key to explain the data collected.

It was noted that the SDG targets and indicators are often missing in the discussions on the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda. The review of goals is challenging in cases where a majority of indicators is still missing. Moreover, the VNRs should better reflect the three dimensions of sustainable development and become more solution oriented. In terms of financing of implementation efforts, the VNRs may be a vehicle to identify gaps in costing and thus could contribute to the development of integrated financial frameworks.

Participants further encouraged countries to reflect on whether they are putting in place the transformative measures that are required to achieve the 2030 Agenda. VNRs could showcase the actions that are being taken and their results as compared to a business-as-usual trajectory. Countries should also think about the long term and anticipate where they would like to be by 2030. This would allow to identify milestones and report on them throughout until 2030.

V. Lessons learned from similar processes

At the meeting, participants had the opportunity to discuss existing review processes, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Peer Review process, the Universal Peer Review Mechanism (UPR) under the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM).

Lesson learned from the OECD DAC Peer Review process included the need for a clear theory of change, a clear methodology, and clarity on the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders and how they should engage in HLPF. The role of the Secretariat is crucial, as it has unparalleled access and insight. The importance of making the most out of inputs in the form of case studies and repositories of good practices was also highlighted. To this end, the Secretariat should synthesize trends across reviews and identify bottlenecks and potential. However, it was also recognized that sufficient funding needs to be secured to implement mandates without adding strain.

To enhance accountability, it is key to move from reporting to reviewing and from information to action. All participants agreed on the need for some sort of accountability. Some participants called for accountability structures to be reviewed in the context of multilateralism to maximize their impact. The Friends of VNRs and shadow reporting were suggested as possibilities. At the global level, a gradual benchmarking within and across the SDGs was proposed. Furthermore, at the local level, the need to localize SDGs, while ensuring the process is inclusive was called for. It was also proposed that the reviews could be launched in a parliamentary setting to promote transparency, visibility and ownership. However, a participant recalled that there were many sensitivities concerning accountability when the 2030 Agenda was negotiated in order that VNRs not be perceived as finger pointing exercises.

Some participants highlighted the reporting at the regional level for both the 2030 Agenda and relevant regional development strategies as well as the importance of engaging different stakeholders in them. Mapping as well as monitoring and evaluation should be integrated in these processes.

Some participants pointed out that the UPR is a very time-consuming process, and it would not be therefore appropriate to apply the same methodology to the VNRs. There is room to better organize VNRs, and support countries in implementing the SDGs, while keeping it simple not introducing disputed or complicated elements or mechanisms. Moreover, some participants cautioned against overburdening Member States with heavy report preparing processes. The need for safe spaces for learning and deep and insightful discussion of at least 1 hour was also emphasized.

VI. Pathways to expand multi-stakeholder participation

The critical role of multi-stakeholder engagement in inter-governmental decision-making processes was underscored by all participants. It should not be a “reactive” relationship, but they should be part of a decision-making process. Recalling prior UN experiences with mandated multi-stakeholder dialogues, in particular within the context of the annual meetings of the Commission for Sustainable Development (1997-2002), it was noted that important lessons could be learned from the structured engagements of the past.

Reflecting on the experiences gained over the past four years since the establishment of the HLPF, some participants appreciated Member States’ commitment to major groups’ participation in the HLPF. However, a decline of stakeholder engagement in the HLPF over the years was noted, which called for clearly defined avenues for providing inputs to inter-governmental deliberation processes. Also needed

more dedicated champions for stakeholder participation within DESA and among Member States, including funding and staff support, as key components to make stakeholder engagement more productive and meaningful. One participant also remarked that multi-stakeholder representation at the HLPF should be more balanced, observing an under-representation of stakeholders from developing countries.

Participants took stock of the HLPF engagement experience to-date focusing, in particular, on issues that hindered effective multi-stakeholder participation as well as making suggestions for improvements. Generally speaking, many participants recognized that much progress had been made over the past decades concerning stakeholder engagement at the UN. Going forward, those achievements needed to be preserved and, if possible, expanded, in light of the perception of a prevailing climate in which space for participation by non-state actors was shrinking and engagement not always meaningful.

Participants also identified funding for travel and the need for capacity building, especially for representatives of marginalized and vulnerable groups, as among the biggest obstacles to meaningful participation of stakeholders. The meeting was informed that a capacity building workshop as well as on line webinars have been developed, in consultation with representatives of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS), to enhance the capacity for effective engagement in inter-governmental processes among stakeholders in the HLPF.

A particular area of concern was the role of stakeholders in VNR processes, either as active contributors to national review processes or as participants in the VNR sessions of the HLPF. Experiences in this area were mixed, with some countries promoting stakeholder engagement while others viewed the VNR as solely government-driven process. Joint VNR reviews that combined the assessments and views of governments, businesses, civil society and academia, with particular focus on those left behind, were preferred by several participants. Sending a stronger signal on the expectations for and value of stakeholder participation in VNR processes was seen as potentially helpful in this context.

In general, participants favored an expansion of multi-stakeholder engagement to all aspects of the HLPF, including stakeholder's ability to take the floor, including during VNRs, broadening the stakeholder base, participating in consultation on the outcome document. Other areas where stakeholder engagement could be strengthened included improved communication and information sharing, including by creating a dedicated space for multi-stakeholders on the HLPF website, and the publicizing of "shadow reports" prepared by stakeholders. To improve stakeholder engagement more broadly, it was suggested to streamline the different modalities for multi-stakeholder engagement that existed across multiple UN bodies.

In order to strengthen multi-stakeholder engagement, it was proposed to: conduct a survey to document country experiences in engaging stakeholders; call on UN Member States or groups of States to fund participation of stakeholders; create more open spaces for discussion at the HLPF; respect and strengthen the rights of Major Group and other stakeholders as defined in UNGA resolution 67/290 including the right to intervene in official meetings, submit documents, and make recommendations; and involve stakeholders in VNR preparation, presentation and follow-up. A participant announced that an online survey on VNRs has been circulated to Major Groups and other stakeholders to collect their input on the VNRs.

On the participation of local governments, it was discussed how some cities are preparing voluntary local reviews.

Regarding funding, some donor governments actively supported the participation of non-state actors, including representatives from third countries, a practice that was laudable and should be replicated.

Challenges affecting meaningful participation in the Forum included language barrier, insufficient funding to support stakeholder participation, including those coming from developing countries whose countries are presenting VNRs at the respective HLPF, the shrinking space for civil society participation at the national and global levels, the lack of visibility and use of stakeholder reports prepared for the HLPF, and the lack of opportunities given to stakeholders to make oral contributions.

VII. Next steps

In an effort to make the review as easy as possible, suggestions were made that do not require a change of mandate. For example, it was proposed to systematize the preparation of the thematic reviews through the improvement of inputs, to better coordinate thematic meetings, and collate the inputs submitted, which should form the basis for discussions and to build better on the preparatory EGMs. These changes can be introduced by the Secretariat without a new mandate or resources. Other changes such as strengthening the comparability of VNRs will require more time. Strengthening the focus on interlinkages and improving multi-stakeholder participation can also provide the necessary lens to help the Forum fulfill its mandate.

The need to provide DESA with enough time regarding the theme and the set of goals to be reviewed at the 2020 HLPF was also underscored. It was suggested that a theme for 2020 HLPF should be decided as an interim solution. This would not prejudge the review of resolutions on the HLPF but would help planning the 2020 session. Some participants were open to this idea, while others would prefer to leave the decision on Member States. A possible theme could be the same as in 2016: “Ensuring that no one is left behind.”

In the interest of time, it was suggested the co-facilitators to lead the negotiations on the review of the HLPF be appointed by the President of the General Assembly as soon as possible in order to start approaching different groups and stakeholders to already hear their views. The preparations for the HLPF review could be supported by a questionnaire distributed to Member States and stakeholders with feedback to inform the deliberations. The base premise of discussion should be to neither weaken the Forum in terms of mandate or participatory character nor to open the door on renegotiating agreed language of the 2030 Agenda.

There was concern among participants about the timeline of negotiations on the Forum’s review. It was suggested starting the negotiations already in the fall of 2019, in the margins of the work of the Second Committee, to reach an agreement in a timely manner to allow adequate time to prepare the HLPF. Some participants though cautioned that not all delegations have the capacity to participate in parallel in negotiation. As such, some felt that negotiations should start in January or February 2020, which could call for deciding the 2030 theme/SDGs earlier.

Considerations for the next cycle

Some Member States may want harmonized, rigorous arrangements, while others will continue to want space. It was however agreed that reaching an agreement on the modalities of the next cycle through consensus would be of outmost importance.

Key ideas included:

A. Format:

- More days should be allocated to the HLPF. Alternatively, the thematic reviews can take place in the spring and the VNRs in the summer in two separate meetings.
- The allocated time for VNR presentations and discussions should be extended.
- The interactive nature of the Forum should be enhanced.
- A panel-type approach with particular themes rather than extensive presentation of national achievements should be considered for the second and third rounds of VNRs.
- For each cycle, countries should only present VNRs once, and wait for the next cycle to come back with a more in-depth analysis.
- The general debate and panel discussions are useful and should be maintained. The former allows Member States to provide political guidance on how to implement the SDGs, and the latter allows all actors to discuss concrete actions.
- Multi-stakeholder engagement should be further outlined and strengthened, including the financial resources for their participation. Geographical balance in the representation of multi-stakeholders, with more space given to those from developing countries, should be pursued.

B. Substance:

i. *General*

- More focus should be put on challenges and bottlenecks, synergies, and emerging issues.
- The HLPF should focus on the interlinkages among Goals and levels (national, regional and global), while addressing the three dimensions of sustainable development, and less on progress thus far. The right incentives and guidance should be put in place to tease-out the interlinkages between the SDGs.
- It is important to unpack “leave no one behind” and put a face to those groups and populations that are most impacted by revisiting this core principle.
- More focus should also be given to countries in special situations by exploring ways to increase financial support and technical transfer to enhance their capacity to implement the SDGs.
- The 2030 Agenda is based on human rights and thus, some lessons and recommendations from human rights treaty bodies can be utilized especially when they address the 2030 Agenda.
- For the HLPF to remain as the central platform for follow-up and review, it needs to perform the role of accountability of the SDG implementation.
- The peer learning and peer review component of the Forum should be strengthened.
- The themes and discussions should be evidence-based. The interface with the Statistics Division should be strengthened to this end.
- The role of regional fora should be better defined. More sessions should include the regional perspective by better integrating the outcomes of regional fora.
- Knowledge management is crucial. The HLPF discussions should be well informed by all inputs, while the VNRs should be published earlier to ensure they are read in time for the Forum.
- Ways to better integrate the outcomes of meetings and all reports into the HLPF should be identified. This can be achieved by providing more detailed guidance on the type of targeted inputs required to have maximum impact.
- Policy and normative frameworks should be better leveraged to ensure their benefits trickle to the national level.
- It is essential to link this process to the UNDS reform. The new UNDAF guidance is the framework for action by the UN System. As such, addressing gaps with concrete actions in the UNDAF would increase the level of impact of dialogues at global level have on the country level.

ii. Thematic reviews

- Further consideration should be given on whether clustering of SDGs should continue in the next cycle or whether focus the sessions on bottlenecks, lessons learned, national planning and budgeting etc.
- Participants called for the single thematic reviews and the thematic review of cross-cutting issues to be reoriented to address cross-cutting issues, while others supported that looking at individual SDGs has proved very powerful in mobilizing interests in certain issues and mixing certain constituencies.

iii. VNRs

- More countries should be encouraged to elaborate on lessons learned, best practices and strategies to achieve results, and not mainly on actions in terms of national coordination arrangements. Addressing the macroeconomic context and fiscal constraints of countries has been weak too.
- The sense of urgency in addressing and monitoring implementation seems to be missing in the VNRs so far and should be emphasized.
- The gender perspective, the human rights perspective and constructive criticism is missing from VNRs.
- To ensure countries have sufficient financial resources to prepare the VNRs, it was suggested using the SDG Trust Fund.

C. Outcome:

- There is a need for action-oriented outcomes and for more systematic analysis in terms of recommendations to make them more useful.
- It is critical to foster ownership of the 2030 Agenda and a more widespread understanding of the process. This can be achieved by having clear and understandable outcomes.
- The Ministerial Declarations should take multi-stakeholders' recommendations for actions into account.