
Meeting of Major Groups and Other Stakeholders
With H.E Mr. Frederick Musiiwa Makamure Shava, President of ECOSOC
10-11 am, 14 February 2017
United Nations Headquarters

Remarks by the MGoS HLPF Coordination Mechanism co-chairs

On behalf of the Coordination Mechanism of Major Groups and other Stakeholders I want to use this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, for the chance of a candid dialogue with us. We appreciate your time and interest to engage with us. We welcome this first meeting and we see it as a good practice that could be established from now on in the preparations towards the HLPF: as you can see, we like to be ambitious in our dreams, but we also like to be pragmatic in the way we want to achieve them.

We look forward to following up on what comes out from this meeting and to ensuring we have timely inputs to the HLPF program, particularly because from experience last year, we have many positive recommendations to use the time in a way that best supports achievement of the agenda. Maybe to enhance different ways of communication, we would like also to suggest that in the next months we could consider holding a meeting with you and the Buro to go deeper into the exchange of views regarding operational details and modalities, so that we can have an opportunity to ensure a meaningful participation of MGoS.

You will find in the MGoS a diversity of actors with a rigorous technical expertise and a strong will to engage in the processes needed for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the different levels (since we're coming from grassroots to large organizations), regions and sectors. This is an important space for different constituencies to come together and identify commonalities, recognizing of course the rich diversity among civil society, rightsholders and stakeholders who are working on Sustainable Development. Going back to our experience in previous years, and to make the best out of this plurality, we would like to suggest that we have the draft agenda in our hands with plenty time in advance, so that all actors are fully prepared to engage in their full capacity.

As you will hear from the interventions that follow, we are fully committed to bring to the center of the discussion core and substantive issues, to maintain the HLPF in a relevant dimension for meaningful discussion, to promote the highest standards for implementation, monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda under the human rights framework, with gender equality and sustainability criteria as cross-cutting principles. For instance, we look forward to seeing a coherence between the work of HLPF and the different processes while maintaining the integrity of each, such as the FFD Forum or enhancing the importance of Science, Technology and Innovation in the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, to mention a few. Another example will be found in Voluntary National Reviews, because they for sure should be a vehicle to unify work and break silos, and in that process civil society, rightsholders and stakeholders should be involved, not only for the global process, but also at the regional and national level in every stage of the preparation of the VNR's. From our point of view as citizens, if we're not present, the VNR lacks legitimacy, and this has to be said clearly. On the other hand, as you will hear, the MGoS have devised many proposals for achieving all this, and therefore I will stop here thanking you once again for your disposition to engage in this dialogue with the hope that this is the first of many fruitful conversations that the Coordination Mechanism of MGoS will have with you this year.

Remarks on Thematic Reviews

- Thank you for giving us this opportunity to meet with you in an effort to find common ground for the purpose of not only ensuring adequate stakeholder participation but also ensuring the effectiveness of the HLPF.
- In 2016, there was one substantive item on the HLPF agenda, namely the theme "Ensuring that no one is left behind". For this one item, there was a total of 10 official documents, within which there were 11 reports from MGOS and 5 from the regional commissions. No recommendations were made on any of the documents except for the Global Sustainable Development Report – and the recommendations addressed its scope, frequency, methodology and relationship with the SDG progress report. Nothing of substance.

- In 2016, 6-1/2 days were provided for 21 panel discussions from which there were no reported recommendations. **We would respectfully ask that the usefulness and effectiveness of such panels be reviewed, with respect to their input into the role and mandate of the HLPF in terms of providing political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development, in accordance with resolution 67/290, as reiterated in the 2016 Ministerial Declaration. In other words, how would the findings and discussions of the panels find their way into policy guidance and recommendations from the HLPF?**
- In 2016, only 1-1/2 days were provided for consideration of the 22 Voluntary National Reviews. This year, there will be 43 Voluntary National Reviews. My colleague, Jeff Huffines, will address this issue.
- This year, **we would like to see more items on the agenda to allow for organized in-depth discussions of the theme and implementation of the 7 sustainable development goals, discussions that will lead to policy guidance and recommendations. How will the HLPF consider all the reports before it, from organizations of the UN system, other intergovernmental decisions and resolutions, as well as reports from MGOS, as requested in the 2030 Agenda? What measures will be taken to allow for meaningful interactive exchanges from Member States, the UN system and from stakeholders? My colleague Cristina Diez will address the issue of stakeholder engagement.**
- **We would like to have a better understanding of the expected outcomes of the HLPF meeting this year and therefore would like to see adequate deliberations on all reports, in order to arrive at those expected outcomes.**
- The success of every intergovernmental body can be demonstrated by its ability to provide leadership, guidance, and recommendations. It is not enough to discuss and exchange information. The reputation and effectiveness of HLPF are dependent upon action-oriented recommendations that lead to positive outcomes as a result of its role in the whole sustainable development process.
- Implementation of the 2030 Agenda is a daunting task at the national level. It is also a daunting task at the global level, where the HLPF is tasked with its follow-up and review.
- **We believe that the HLPF report and the Ministerial Declaration should be useful tools to provide policy guidance and recommendations for subsequent action at the global, regional and national levels.**

- The Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, in playing their part in implementing the 2030 Agenda, are fully aware of all the challenges faced by the HLPF and look forward to working together with you to ensure the effectiveness and value of the HLPF.

Remarks regarding Voluntary National Reviews by Member States

On lessons learned from last year's HLPF, the Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations (IDDRI) reviewed the 22 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) made at the 2016 HLPF, and concluded:

- Only six of the 22 countries have defined a body responsible for SDG coordination and steering.
- Few of the 22 VNRs provided details on the modalities for stakeholder involvement.
- Countries had not clarified how their strategic SDG documents, such as national sustainable development strategies and national development plans, will be used to transform actions and achieve the SDGs.
- Few countries had reported on gap analyses; stakeholder involvement varies widely; and mechanisms for monitoring progress and commitments are “still at an embryonic stage.”
- Countries had “made little headway in the use of SDG indicators and targets to assess progress to be made, to define public action priorities or to monitor progress over time.”

What are the expected outcomes of the voluntary national reviews? What do reporting Member States expect in terms of way forward, recommendations and guidance from the HLPF? (Didn't read this section since Frances had covered it already.)

- What do Governments expect from their submission of the VNRs? International recognition of action taken at the national level to ensure that no one is left behind? Understanding by other governments of challenges faced? Sharing lessons learned/best practices? Seeking guidance? Seeking funding to increase and strengthen national capacity?
- The 2016 HLPF Ministerial Declaration (E/HLS/2016/1, para. 2) emphasizes that “the high level political forum is called to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for the implementation of sustainable development commitments.” Yet

the 2016 HLPF Ministerial Declaration and HLPF report was largely procedural in nature. In 2017, both the HLPF report and Ministerial Declaration should include specific recommendations based on the findings of all the VNRs submitted to the HLPF.

- The HLPF needs a more comprehensive agenda that includes an agenda item for the consideration of MGoS reports on implementation as mandated in the 2030 Agenda.

How can the participation of MGoS on VNR presentations be enhanced? How can the HLPF programme of work be organized in a way that maximizes the opportunity for dialogue between countries presenting their national reviews and other Member States and MGoS?

- At the ECOSOC retreat, Member States found 80% of the benefit of the VNRs at the HLPF last year was in the preparation at the national level, while 20% was the presentation in New York. The VNRs facilitate the adoption of legislation, create national machinery and coordinate with UN country teams, civil society and private sector in the implementation of national development plans.
- Governments at the national level need to establish official formal mechanisms for stakeholder participation, specifically for contributing to the national voluntary reviews, that includes shadow reporting by the MGs. A timeline should be set and publicly shared. A database could be put together to identify focal points amongst the most marginalized populations.
- Online consultations should be organized as well as face-to-face discussions where MGoS can directly bring their perspectives to the report preparation. After the HLPF, governments should organize a debriefing at national level, to review the process and inputs received and plan next steps in addressing main challenges.
- MGoS participation should take place both in the preparation of the VNRs at country level as well as at the VNR presentations. MGoS representatives should be part of the official country delegation to the HLPF.
- All VNRs should be made available on the UN DESA web site as early as possible.
- VNRs at the regional and national levels need to be strengthened and fed into the HLPF.

- VNRs should take place throughout the entire HLPF.
- More time should be allocated for VNR discussions. VNR countries should participate in side-events, thematic discussions, town hall meetings, informal dialogues with major groups and other stakeholders – prior, during and after the HLPF.
- Last year very few countries volunteered to ask questions, so we should have panels on specific topics that feature VNR country representatives. Also use electronic means to include the participation of stakeholders outside of New York.
- We need to better integrate the participation of NGOs into ECOSOC and coordinate its events throughout the year to feed into the HLPF, that includes the FfD Forum, STI Forum as well as functional commissions, Partnership Forum, Youth Forum, and the Integration Segment.

Remarks on Enhancing the participation of Major Groups and Other Stakeholders in the High-level Political Forum

Enhancing broad, open, transparent and inclusive participation of Major Groups and other stakeholders in the High Level Political Forum is imperative for the successful and effective implementation, follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development. Meaningful participation should be protected and enhanced annually building on reviews of the strengths, weaknesses, resources and impact of the modalities for participation in previous years.

With meaningful participation civil society is at the service of ECOSOC to help Member States and the UN System fulfill the pledge to leave no one behind and reach the furthest behind first. Participation of Major Groups and other stakeholders should, in the end, result in the improvement of the lives of the people we have committed to serve and be measured by the impact it has on these lives.

Conditions for meaningful, inclusive and transparent participation.

Representation

We hope the Forum will be a space where independent civil society organizations from the South, including from Least Develop Countries and SIDS are duly represented.

We commit to bring, among other, the voices, experience and knowledge of the most vulnerable and marginalized people, those who the Forum is committed not to leave behind.

There are conditions that need to be fulfilled so that we can deliver this commitment.

Funding

Small organizations, especially from the South, grassroots organizations, people's movements, indigenous organizations and people with disabilities experience many barriers to participate including lack of funding. Priority should be given so that these organizations and their interests are represented at the HLPF, for example, through a dedicated trust fund.

Sufficient time and accessibility

Participation to be meaningful, pertinent and useful in the context of Voluntary National Reviews requires sufficient time to organize and prepare. It should start at the national level and build towards regional and international levels. Some organizations may need support to build capacity of their members, others may need additional measures to make sure that information and meetings are available and barriers are addressed.

Enhancing participation of Major Groups and other stakeholders in the HLPF includes promoting and ensuring actual access and attendance to meetings, access to all documents, including agendas, background documents and outcome documents, and opportunity to make timely interventions during deliberations and negotiations, including in the setting of the agendas and the negotiated outcome documents.