

Balancing the pillars: Eradicating poverty, protecting the planet and promoting shared prosperity

Together 2030 Written Inputs to the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2017

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Summary:

At the HLPF 2017, governments should clearly report on how they are implementing their integrated promises and commitments; mainstreaming the SDGs into their national plans and budgets and working towards eradicating poverty and hunger everywhere, realizing human rights, ensuring fair and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems, and combating inequalities well before 2030. Furthermore, governments must share how they are generating effective and inclusive institutions for SDG delivery. At the HLPF, members states should focus on four main themes: *1) Poverty eradication that leaves no one behind; 2) Prosperity shared in a people-centered economy; 3) A planet that is protected; and (4) Institutions at all levels that are participatory, transparent and accountable.* Approaches to poverty alleviation shared at the HLPF must include concrete budgeted policies that promote women's rights and gender equality, children's rights, overcoming barriers for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, migrants, minority ethnic groups, young and older persons and others.

The HLPF needs to proactively build on existing mechanisms and functional bodies to deliver on its mandate of policy coherence, particularly on thematic issues. The HLPF is an opportunity to (i) assess gaps in existing mechanisms and identify which population groups are not properly reviewed vis-a-vis SDG progress and (ii) define proper mechanisms to overcome such gaps. With regards to the Voluntary National Reviews, we expect presentations to clearly: (i) outline how inclusive the national process has been at country level; (ii) address comprehensive, coherent implementation of the 2030 Agenda and (iii) explain how the accountability framework surrounding VNRs will be progressively strengthened. Preparatory events around thematic reviews should be supported and rest on contributions by all stakeholders.

VNR countries should state when they plan to volunteer again and an accountability cycle should be continually in place until 2030, providing regular and predictable spaces for interaction, review and participation.

Governments should report on the creation of clear, open, coherent, transparent and regular spaces for the participation of stakeholders in the planning, implementation and accountability of the 2030 Agenda at all levels. Any country that leaves the most marginalized, vulnerable and disadvantaged 'outside the door' of their national discussions cannot be said to 'leave no one behind'.

So far, civil society experiences of participation vary and, in several countries, efforts to include civil society still appear to be tokenistic or there is still a perception that government officials are uncomfortable with building working relationships with civil society.

Funding continues to be a major barrier for the participation of civil society together with lack of capacity to understand the Goals and their interlinkages. Efforts should also be undertaken at all levels to engage stakeholders beyond the "usual suspects" and consultation has to be cross-sectoral and country-wide, not restricted to capitals and other centers of power.

In some developed countries, it has been a challenge to engage domestic stakeholders beyond environmental and development-focused NGO. Engaging subnational government bodies is still a challenge, due to unawareness or the perception of the SDGs as an “external agenda”.

Paragraph 89 of the 2030 Agenda calls on major groups and other relevant stakeholders to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda and this is still a missing piece of the global follow up and review architecture. UN Member States and the President of ECOSOC should establish clear and meaningful mechanisms – beyond online platforms - to collect, publicize and analyze reports on the contribution of civil society and stakeholders to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels. Finally, the HLPF ministerial declaration should encourage governments to partner with civil society and stakeholders in developing capacity building and awareness programs on the 2030 Agenda.

Comprehensive contribution:

I – Balancing the pillars of sustainable development

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF)’s theme this year "*Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world*" – is an invitation for attending Governments to reinforce the “political will” on the ground – to reflect, within national contexts, the global support of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) demonstrated in 2015. Governments should present plans and policies on poverty alleviation and eradication and on all the goals, as well as the interlinkages among the goals that are part of the thematic focus for this year’s HLPF.

It is therefore time for governments to clearly report on how they are implementing their integrated promises and commitments; mainstreaming the SDGs into their national plans and budgets and working towards eradicating poverty and hunger everywhere, realizing human rights, ensuring fair and sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems, as well as combating inequalities well before 2030. Furthermore, governments must share how they are generating effective and inclusive institutions for SDG delivery – what can be considered the “fourth pillar” of sustainable development. These institutions must themselves also ‘leave no one behind’.

It has been reaffirmed time and time again that poverty will only be eradicated if prosperity is equitably shared, social protection is a reality and if the planet is protected. Integrating and balancing the three pillars of sustainable development (social, environmental and economic) lies at the core of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and is a key element of the HLPF discussions.

(1) Poverty eradication that leaves no one behind

Developing countries have experienced advances in the past decades. Hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty and some 1.1 billion escaped extreme poverty. However, 1.6 billion adults live in multidimensional poverty and one in nine people still go to bed hungry, even as studies show that

three-quarters of extreme poverty could be eliminated now, through better, progressive taxation whilst cutting down on military and other regressive spending¹.

Poverty eradication demands tailored approaches that equally address the multidimensional aspects of poverty and the need to reduce inequalities within societies. Children, especially girls, are disproportionately affected by poverty and even more so by extreme poverty. Falling into poverty in childhood can last a lifetime; there are no second chances for a healthy start in life or to access education.

Approaches to poverty alleviation, then, must include concrete budgeted policies that promote women's rights and gender equality, children's rights, overcoming barriers for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, migrants, minority ethnic groups, young and older persons and others. Strong investment in quality education for all ages is an essential element for sustainable development and the eradication of poverty. Furthermore, governments must take appropriate measures to ensure accessibility in the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, both in urban and in rural areas, to allow for the inclusion of persons with disabilities.

(2) Prosperity shared in a people-centered economy

The type of prosperity to be promoted is the one that can be shared and benefit the whole society and not only the richest, as is the current trend. The private sector should be a responsible partner in the promotion of sustainable development and businesses, at the heart of a market yet people-centered economy and should work for the benefit of the whole society in order to allow prosperity to become a reality beyond shareholders. Instead, public-private partnerships (PPPs) present pitfalls that are leaving people behind due to lack of transparency and accountability and governments failing or lacking capacity to monitor the PPPs. PPPs should therefore be implemented in line with country-driven priorities with appropriate risk management and regulatory frameworks. Measures to regulate the private sector and alternative approaches such as the Social and Solidarity Economy, development of cooperatives and social enterprises will be essential to achieve the SDGs.

(3) A planet that is protected

The economic pillar of sustainable development should be promoted in an integrated approach that includes Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP), as stated on Goal 12. Protecting nature and ensuring equitable access to environmental resources also supports vulnerable and marginalized groups' continued enjoyment of their rights to life, health, food and water. Moreover, the impacts of climate change on poverty eradication, hunger and sustainable development are clear and those linkages must be brought to the HLPF discussions. The HLPF brings an opportunity for governments to share ideas on which broader measures of progress (beyond GDP) are being established (para 48) and how economic growth is being decoupled from resource consumption and environmental degradation (Target 8.4). This

¹ https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-summ-en.pdf

will be critical for a revitalized analysis of the multiple dimensions of poverty and of how prosperity is not only being promoted but also shared.

(4) Institutions at all levels that are participatory, transparent and accountable

Governments truly accountable to each of their citizens, including the most vulnerable and marginalized – those they pledged not to leave behind – are critical if all this is to happen. Enabling civic spaces generate opportunities for the poorest and most vulnerable, particularly women, children, youth and older persons, persons with disabilities and others to engage in decisions that affect their own lives, expressing challenges and devising solutions and strategies. The ‘left behind’ need to be known and made statistically visible as a valuable resource at the global, national, and subnational scales.

Civil society groups have demonstrated their impact through the sector’s high degree of responsiveness and flexibility to changing political and social landscapes, their ability to stimulate action through public engagement, and their ability to provide a voice to a collective set of values that is deeply rooted in communities, but still scalable to partnerships and networks. With this level of expertise and connection, governments should explore the role of civil society organizations as partners in developing subnational and national indicators, contributing data, and ensuring funding is available, including through international cooperation, to enable such organizations to participate fully in indicator development, data collection and monitoring.

II. Strengthening the accountability cycle

The HLPF, as a forum for follow up and review needs to reflect the integrated character of sustainable development challenges, in particular by proactively building on existing mechanisms as mandated by the 2030 Agenda. Existing functional commissions and other bodies provided substantive inputs at HLPF 2017. This is very important if the HLPF is to deliver on its mandate of policy coherence, particularly on thematic issues. These functional bodies address issues related to specific population groups where they bring to the forefront particular issues regarding these groups and most importantly how SDGs are impacting their lives.

Furthermore, for policy coherence, the HLPF is an opportunity to (i) assess gaps in existing mechanisms and identify which population groups are not properly reviewed vis-a-vis SDG progress and (ii) define proper mechanisms to overcome such gaps. It must be noted that children are one such group requiring particular attention, even as no functional body or forum exists for children and their issues within the ECOSOC system. No process has been set up that can allow for the HLPF deliberations and decisions to be informed by such inputs across a spectrum of groups and issues.

(1) Voluntary National Reviews:

(a) VNR presentations at the HLPF should clearly outline how inclusive the national process leading up to the VNR has been at country level, by responding to the following questions:

- Was there a multi-layered review system focusing on whether national plans are matching the global ambition, the gaps, opportunities and commitments to action?
- Was civil society and other stakeholders included in all phases of the review cycle, including for VNRs, from planning to the presentation at the HLPF and at national debriefing and planning after the HLPF?
- Was there a clear, open and inclusive process to prepare the VNR established at national level and was information about how stakeholders could participate extensively exchanged? What was the timeline and was it publicly shared?
- Were there online consultations organized as well as face-to-face discussions where civil society and stakeholders could directly bring their perspectives to the report preparation?
- Are stakeholder representatives part of the official country delegation to the HLPF?
- Will governments organize a debriefing at national level, to review the process and inputs received and plan next steps in addressing main challenges after the HLPF review?

(b) VNR presentations should directly address comprehensive, coherent implementation of the 2030 Agenda, that reflects the global ambition including responding to the following questions:

- Are internal synergies being created?
- Is policymaking coherent?
- How are silos being avoided?
- Are there multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms in place for planning, implementation and accountability of the SDGs?

(c) The accountability framework surrounding VNRs should be progressively strengthened

The governance arrangements for national SDG accountability should be detailed by countries volunteering for national reviews (VNR) and a clear accountability cycle should be presented, including how the outcomes of the HLPF discussions will be brought back to the national level.

Additionally, VNR countries should state when they plan to volunteer again and bring a national report to the global level, in order to facilitate planning and follow up. An accountability cycle should be continually in place until 2030, providing regular and predictable spaces for interaction, review and participation for civil society and stakeholders, be the result of inclusive national discussions and part of a multi-layered review system.

To be a meaningful space, governments should not only use the HLPF to present their own commitments and achievements but also to contribute to constructive and robust review of the commitments of others, including civil society stakeholders and the private sector, maximizing this opportunity for mutual learning and long-term global progress. The HLPF can be a space where global principles and the outline for multi-stakeholder partnerships are established. It should also be a space to review good (and bad)

examples, discuss patterns, challenges and opportunities, including on how civil society and other stakeholders are being engaged.

Systematic review of how the global partnership for sustainable development best enables fulfilment of the SDGs, including global poverty alleviation, should be undertaken. Developed countries must look beyond official development aid (ODA) and bilateral development assistance to their country-level trade and finance policies and their contributions to specific aspects of international cooperation and reform, including systemic issues identified in the SDGs, in particular Goal 17. Commitments and progress in all these respects should be reviewed and followed-up country-by-country at and beyond the HLPF.

(2) The role of Thematic Reviews to increase inclusion and the integration of different perspectives

By looking at a sub-set of goals from within a specific theme, thematic reviews under the HLPF provide a tool for an integrated implementation of the SDGs. They can provide ideas for cross-thematic collaboration and cooperation between UN agencies, knowledge institutions and civil society, and most importantly, between citizens and their governments. HLPF 2017 represents a milestone as the first global forum to review specific goals.

Preparatory events to the HLPF that focus on thematic reviews should be supported and it should be encouraged that their implementation rests on contributions by all stakeholders. Review processes at the global level can support national processes to ensure that the principles of the 2030 Agenda are upheld. Clear options to conduct thematic reviews in a way that lives up to the principles of the 2030 Agenda should be developed and disseminated.

(3) Meaningful participation at all levels

Participation by stakeholders is both a means and an end in the context of Agenda 2030. Reflecting this, governments should report on how they are creating clear, open, coherent, transparent and regular spaces for the participation of stakeholders in the planning, implementation and accountability of the 2030 Agenda at all levels. As a *means*, participation allows the expertise and contributions of all groups to speed up and enhance the quality of delivery on the SDGs, delivering better policies with greater support and ownership. Participation is also an *end*. Participation and inclusion at all levels are part of the goals and targets themselves and a space for accountability and public scrutiny of commitments is fundamental to follow up and review.

(a) At national and subnational level

Any country that leaves the most marginalised, vulnerable and disadvantaged ‘outside the door’ of their national discussions cannot be said to ‘leave no one behind’.

So far, civil society experiences of participation vary from country to country and from goal to goal. In several countries, efforts to include civil society still appear to be tokenistic and there is still a perception

that government officials and bureaucracy are uncomfortable with building working relationships with civil society.

Funding continues to be a major barrier for the participation of civil society together with lack of capacity to understand the Goals and their interlinkages – including having access to translated materials – and on how to engage with the national and local response. Efforts should also be undertaken at regional, national and local level to engage a wider range of stakeholders beyond the “usual suspects”. Within countries, consultation and awareness raising has to be cross-sectoral and genuinely country-wide, not restricted to national capitals and other centers of power.

In some developed countries, it has been a challenge to engage domestic stakeholders beyond environmental and development-focused NGOs to promote the implementation of the SDGs at the national level. In both developed and developing countries, some of the challenges identified include the lack of coordinated spaces for CSO engagement or the lack of an official national structure to facilitate the processes related to the 2030 Agenda. Self-organized structures for CSO engagement are important at all levels, especially at the local, national and regional levels and those should feed into global processes and structures. The principles of self-organization and subsidiarity are critical for civil society in order to avoid instrumentalization, which damages both the intrinsic values and extrinsic effectiveness of civil society.

Despite their enormous contribution to sustainable development, CSOs may lack the capacity to properly register and share their experiences, hence the need to strengthen capacities at all levels. Capacity building efforts should comprise not only information about the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs but also results-based management, monitoring, evaluation and multi-stakeholder collaboration. The UN Country Teams have a role to play in promoting capacities, identifying, registering and disseminating those experiences.

There has also been a challenge engaging subnational government bodies in a national framework even though jurisdictional responsibilities over relevant resources dictate clear dependence on subnational performance for national achievement of the SDGs. Yet in some countries, government officials may be still unaware about the SDGs and the national commitment towards their implementation, or see them as an “external agenda”, impacting on the establishment of inclusive processes for planning, implementation and accountability.

(b) Stakeholders contribution to the Implementation and the global level

Paragraph 89 of the 2030 Agenda calls on major groups and other relevant stakeholders to report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda. This is a strategic opportunity for civil society to showcase their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda and the SDGs and it is still a missing piece of the global follow up and review architecture.

UN Member States and the President of ECOSOC have not yet established clear and meaningful mechanisms to collect, publicize and analyze reports on the contribution of civil society and stakeholders to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels. Such mechanisms need to go beyond online platforms and incorporate systems and technologies that reach out to multiple levels, including local and grassroots levels, and that generate capacity for those experiences to be shared and scaled up at the global level.

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At this initial stage of planning and implementing the SDGs, the HLPF ministerial declaration should encourage governments to invite civil society and stakeholders to partner with them in developing capacity building and awareness programs on the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Recommendations from civil society and stakeholders' reports must be taken into account when discussing and negotiating the HLPF Ministerial Declaration. Finally, the HLPF venues should be made fully accessible for persons with disabilities as well as for children.