

**Concept note for the Expert Group Meeting on the high-level political forum
New York, 3 - 4 April 2013**

Background

A major outcome of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (or Rio+20) was the decision to establish a universal, intergovernmental high-level political forum (HLPF). This forum is to build on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development, and subsequently replace the Commission. According to the Rio +20 outcome document¹, the high-level political forum shall follow up on the implementation of sustainable development. It should avoid overlap with existing structures, bodies and entities in a cost-effective manner.

The outcome document also stipulates that the forum could:

- (a) Provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development;
- (b) Enhance integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels;
- (c) Provide a dynamic platform for regular dialogue, and for stocktaking and agenda setting to advance sustainable development;
- (d) Have a focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges;
- (e) Follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments contained in Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Barbados Programme of Action, the Mauritius Strategy and the outcome of the present Conference and, as appropriate, relevant outcomes of other United Nations summits and conferences, including the outcome of the Fourth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, as well as their respective means of implementation;
- (f) Encourage high-level system-wide participation of United Nations agencies, funds and programmes and invite to participate, as appropriate, other relevant multilateral financial and trade institutions and treaty bodies, within their respective mandates and in accordance with United Nations rules and provisions;
- (g) Improve cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system on sustainable development programmes and policies;
- (h) Promote transparency and implementation through further enhancing the consultative role and participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders at the international level in order to better make use of their expertise, while retaining the intergovernmental nature of discussions;
- (i) Promote the sharing of best practices and experiences relating to the implementation of sustainable development and, on a voluntary basis, facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned;
- (j) Promote system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies;

¹ A/RES/66/288

- (k) Strengthen the science-policy interface through review of documentation bringing together dispersed information and assessments, including in the form of a global sustainable development report, building on existing assessments;
- (l) Enhance evidence-based decision-making at all levels and contribute to strengthening ongoing efforts of capacity-building for data collection and analysis in developing countries.

An open, transparent and inclusive negotiation process has started under the General Assembly to define the format and organizational aspects of the high-level forum under the leadership of the two co-facilitators, Permanent Representatives of Brazil and Italy appointed by the President of the 67th session of the General Assembly.

This expert group meeting (EGM) aims at providing thinking on the various aspects of the HLPF and its role in the wider institutional framework for sustainable development by different experts in the area of governance to inform decision-makers, UN system and other relevant stakeholders. It is not meant to prejudge or preempt the negotiations in any way.

Programme of the EGM

The EGM will last for two days. The programme will consist of 7 sessions of 1 hour and 30 minutes in duration and an opening and closing sessions. Interactive discussion among participants will be kick-started by two panelists.

Participants

Representatives of Member States, UN system organizations and other relevant international organizations, major groups and other relevant stakeholders.

Outline of topics to be discussed at individual sessions

The programme covers global, regional and national aspects of the work of the forum as well as thematic issues, the forum's link to other bodies and processes and the involvement of all relevant actors, both state and non-state. It is based on the fact that Rio+20 has launched a rethink of development, aimed at achieving shared prosperity on a shared but finite planet. This rethink will hopefully lead to a post-2015 development agenda with sustainable development at its heart. It needs a strengthened institutional framework for sustainable development.

Perhaps the most important achievement of Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) was that it provided a distinct "home" for keeping the sustainable development agenda under active review. In strengthening institutional framework for sustainable development of which HLPF is part, it is important to think through how HLPF will do justice to the functions defined in the Rio+20 outcome document while also delivering the functions performed by the CSD.

The discussions at the EGM aim to provide insight to this thinking process

Topic 1: Correcting shortcomings in international governance for sustainable development: positioning and role of the High-level political Forum (HLPF)

A broader picture of the global international governance for sustainable development needs to be taken into account when looking at the HLPF. It would be important to reflect on what could be its role to strengthen the framework and help respond to current challenges in order to strengthen mainstreaming and implementation of sustainable development. The discussions should focus what functions the HLPF should discharge that could potentially improve global sustainable development governance and how it should be best placed in the UN architecture in order to fulfill this role.

Topic 2: From local to national, regional and global: towards more integrated governance

One of the perceived deficiencies of the existing framework for sustainable development was that the link among the different levels has not been strong enough. Work at the local, national and regional levels was not sufficiently taken into account at the global level. Conversely, the global work was not fully implemented at these levels perhaps due to a lack of ownership and policy decisions not sufficiently action-oriented. How to engage all levels through strengthened institutions and partnering in building capacity for their meaningful involvement is a critical issue. The discussions should focus on how this could best be done and how the HLPF could contribute to this more integrated governance.

Topic 3: Keeping the compass on the SDGs and the Post-2015 development agenda: what role for the HLPF

It is largely accepted that the Post-2015 development agenda needs to have sustainable development as its basis. It is, therefore, essential that Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will be a large part of this agenda. . It is, therefore, essential that they address and incorporate in a balanced way all three dimensions of sustainable development and their interlinkages, as stipulated in the Rio+20 outcome document. The HLPF could be a natural platform to review and follow-up on SDGs, thus bringing all three dimensions on sustainable development together in an integrated way. The discussion should focus on how best HLPF could engage all the relevant actors successfully help deliver on SDGs follow-up and how it can best connect with the Post-2015 development agenda.

Topic 4: Positioning the HLPF in relation to other Rio+20 follow-up processes (Sustainable Development financing strategy, Sustainable Consumption and Production, technology transfer, effort to strengthen the science-policy interface, and the Global Sustainable Development Report)

The HLPF has to be discussed in relation with other outcomes of Rio+20. All the processes launched in Rio+20 will need a follow-up mechanism in order to take them further. The discussions should focus on the role of the HLPF in this regard. The need to strengthen the science-policy interface was also one of the outcomes of Rio+20. A Global Sustainable Development Report as mentioned in paragraph 85(k) of the outcome document would be one of the ways to contribute to this goal, by providing an integrated picture of what science is saying of the issues under consideration. The

discussion should focus on the most useful way to provide a bridge between scientific findings and policy makers.

Topic 5: Integrating the 3 dimensions of sustainable development in the HLPF (agenda setting, leadership arrangements, decision-making, reviewing commitments, coordination and coherence, and engaging all relevant actors)

The lack of integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, in particular regarding implementation of decisions taken at CSD was one of the major deficiencies pointed by all. This was observed both within the UN system and for national implementation. The UN system did not look for guidance from the CSD. Equally, at the national and regional level, CSD decisions were largely disregarded. In particular, national reporting was weak. Lack of ownership of these decisions except from the environmental community was underlined as one of the main reasons. The discussion should focus on how to enhance the agenda-setting role of the HLPF compared to the CSD, both for the UN system and at the national level, including through improving participation from relevant economic and social actors to the Forum. A possibility of national reviews and presentations could also be examined.

Topic 6: Spurring implementation of policy decisions - what have we learned from CSD (UN system, partnerships, voluntary commitments, and voluntary national reviews, outcomes)

One of the main deficiencies of the CSD that has been pointed out was the lack of implementation of its policy decisions and the inability to fully seize the opportunity to involve all actors more meaningfully. Even though a partnership fair was part of the official program of the CSD, the follow-up was weak. It would be important to focus discussions on how HLPF can involve all relevant actors, both state and non-state at all levels as well as from the UN system organizations in order for them to take ownership of these decisions and implement them in their work, as well as ways how to increase the role of partnerships and voluntary commitments in order to enhance implementation.

Topic 7: How to increase the role of major groups and other non-state actors in the HLPF

The outcome document of Rio+20 repeatedly stresses the important role of major groups and other non-state actors in achieving sustainable development. There is overall agreement that the role of major groups has to be strengthened, building on CSD practices. The discussions should focus on how major groups and other non-state actors can be more involved in the work of HLPF while at the same time preserving the intergovernmental nature of the forum.