

**The Role and Place of the High-Level Political Forum in Strengthening the
Global Institutional Framework for Sustainable Development***

by

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* The views expressed here are solely those of the authors and should not be attributed to DESA or any other UN entity.

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1) INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

This report's purpose is, "to assess ways for strengthening the institutional framework for sustainable development and how the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) could be designed and structured to put it in the best possible position to serve as a centre-piece of global governance on sustainable development" (from the Terms of Reference). The report will be guided by UNGA Resolution A/RES/67/290 (UNGA 2013a) on the format and organizational aspects of the HLPF and by the mandate for an HLPF as outlined in the Rio + 20 Outcome Document, "The Future We Want," adopted by UNGA Resolution A/66/288 (UNGA 2012). It will review and develop options and mechanisms through which that mandate might be actualized. It also includes a conceptual analysis of how to understand and situate the HLPF's role and functions within the broader institutional framework for sustainable development.

The HLPF's political mandate (UNGA 2012, paragraph 85 and UNGA 2013a, especially para.2, 7-8, 15 and 20) includes the following goals and functions:

- Provide high-level political leadership and guidance for sustainable development while avoiding overlap and duplication;
- Agenda-setting with multiple sources of input through dialogue and stocktaking with governments, major groups, and stakeholders more broadly;
- Implementation of a focused, dynamic agenda that can also consider emerging challenges;
- Enhance integration and coherence of the three dimensions of sustainable development within the UN system, across global governance institutions more broadly, and at all levels of decision-making;
- While retaining the intergovernmental nature of the Forum, allow a variety of modes of participation by representatives of major groups and other relevant stakeholders;
- Follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments "of all the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields, as well as the respective means of implementation..." (UNGA 2013a, para.7 (d));
- Strengthen the science-policy interface "by examining documentation, bringing together dispersed information and assessments, including in the form of a global sustainable development report...." (UNGA 2013a, para.20).

These points cover all the functions specified in A/RES/67/290. While the Rio+20 outcome document lists additional desirable features of what the HLPF "could" do, these functions can either be considered under the points above or will be referenced as appropriate in relevant portions of the analysis below.

This report also takes into account that while states have agreed on the format and organization of the HLPF, two important related processes are ongoing: ECOSOC reform and development of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the post-2015 development framework. Thus, this

report will present options where appropriate without prejudice to the outcome of those processes. It also considers that the HLPF will “take into account the work of the Development Cooperation Forum, as well as other activities of the Economic and Social Council relating to the integration and implementation of sustainable development” (UNGA 2013a, paragraph 7 (e)).

Another important context is that the HLPF will replace the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). On the one hand, continuity with the CSD is the HLPF’s default position: A/RES/67/290 mandates it to incorporate the functions and strengths of the CSD and continue its work. On the other hand, the HLPF emerged following concerns expressed by governments, stakeholders, and analysts about the CSD’s ability to fulfill its mandate or respond to new challenges of sustainable development. Its high-level positioning and mandate to consider “new and emerging sustainable development challenges,” among other additional features, can be read as designed to respond to shortcomings and weaknesses of the CSD.

The political context of the HLPF also drives this analysis. The mandate for the HLPF is suitably ambitious for it to follow up the CSD as the lead organization to champion and orchestrate (Abbott and Snidal 2009) the review and implementation of the outcomes of sustainable development related UN conferences, including Rio+20. The conferences, declarations, and meetings delineated in the Rio+20 outcome document and preamble to the HLPF resolution lay out an extremely broad agenda for sustainable development. This challenge presents an enormous political opportunity for the United Nations; it also raises expectations (e.g., Strandenaes 2013).

The HLPF’s legitimacy, which will be essential for it to carry out its mandate, will depend in part on how governments and stakeholders judge its operation and ability to produce or catalyze progress on sustainable development in and beyond the UN system. Since sustainable development is a fundamental norm of the multilateral system – recognized explicitly by states as “a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities” – the legitimacy of the UN and multilateralism can also be enhanced to the degree the HLPF successfully pursues its mandate (UNGA 2013a, preamble). Thus, it has potential systemic importance.

The report is organized as follows. Section two reviews the CSD’s strengths, weaknesses and lessons for the HLPF. Section three identifies conceptual and institutional foundations of an HLPF. Section four reviews the format, organization, and decision-making model of the HLPF and options going forward. Section five addresses the HLPF’s functions, focusing on means to link form to function. Section six examines linkages of an HLPF with other parts of the United Nations and the broader sustainable development governance architecture.

2) BUILDING ON STRENGTHS AND ADDRESSING SHORTCOMINGS OF THE CSD

The Rio+20 outcome mandates the HLPF to “[build] on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development” (UNGA 2012). Resolution A/RES/67/290 also emphasizes the need for the HLPF to “address the shortcomings of the current system.” In everyday language, the new Forum should do everything the CSD did and more.

This section draws primarily on the Secretary-General's report on lessons learned from the CSD (UN 2013a) to highlight the strengths of the CSD that the HLPF will be expected to build upon and to suggest ways in which its mandate, format, and organization might best respond to the CSD's shortcomings. Later sections will address how the HLPF can incorporate these lessons.

Strengths

The CSD, especially in its early years, played a significant leadership role in ensuring sustainable development's prominent position on the international agenda. This strength waned in recent years as it attracted fewer officials or high-level participants outside of environment ministries. The HLPF's very premise builds on this strength, with a mandate to operate at the highest political level in order to provide, "political leadership, guidance and recommendations for sustainable development" and to have greater flexibility to "[ensure] the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges" (UNGA 2013a, para. 2). Specifically, the HLPF will be convened at the level of Heads of State and Government every four years under the auspices of the UNGA. It will also be universal as opposed to the 53 member CSD. In other years, the HLPF will be convened for eight days under the auspices of ECOSOC and include a three-day ministerial segment.

The HLPF will be the primary intergovernmental body to follow up on the Rio + 20 outcomes, as well as play an important role in the follow-up to sustainable development aspects of other UN conferences. Based on the experience in the UN system, follow-up occurs best when a specific intergovernmental body champions the issues and provides specific modalities rather than leaving it to ECOSOC and the UNGA with their very broad agendas. For example, the 2012 report of the Secretary-General on the modalities for follow-up of the Financing for Development process (A/67/353) attributed a loss of political momentum in recent years in part to the lack of a champion in the UN system. Thus, the HLPF – like the CSD before it – can follow up and provide leadership in areas that otherwise lack an intergovernmental champion.

For example, the CSD has been "the sole forum to review the implementation of the outcomes of global conferences on small island developing States" (UN 2013a, para.40). The key consequence of that attention was demonstrated in the so-called "SIDS Day", a dedicated session of each CSD session addressing the respective themes but given from SIDS perspectives. Additionally as a follow up to Barbados and Mauritius conferences the SIDS Unit in the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the inter-agency Consultative Group on Small Island Development States, which includes both UN and non-UN organizations were established. These types of initiatives highlight the need for the HLPF to continue to lead on issues championed by the CSD. In this case, the HLPF is specifically mandated to continue to "devote adequate time" to discuss the sustainable development challenges facing small island developing states, as well as other vulnerable developing countries (UNGA 2013a, para.11).

The CSD also made important contributions through launching initiatives that eventually led to significant political responses in other forums. For example, its work on persistent organic pollutants led to the Stockholm Convention on POPs, on prior informed consent to the

Rotterdam Convention on PICs, and on oceans to the United Nations Open-ended Informal Consultative Process on Oceans and the Law of the Sea. Its work on forests, after a number of failed treaty negotiations and governance initiatives, led to the UN Forum on Forests in 2000. While there is some debate on the overall effectiveness of some of these initiatives, particularly on forests (Rayner, Buck, and Katila 2010), these examples identify progress on issues otherwise unaddressed, or addressed with limited progress, in other forums.

Another area of strength is the CSD's inclusiveness among governments, major groups and other relevant stakeholders. The lessons learned report identifies the CSD's modalities of participation for civil society, business, experts and other stakeholders as among its greatest strengths. It has provided for multi-stakeholder dialogues, official papers from stakeholders and experts, and the ability of civil society representatives to intervene at meetings. Governments and stakeholders generally perceive the "perspectives and expertise" of these groups to be "essential" for informed deliberations (UN 2013a, para.57). However, the report also notes the uneven impact of these various modes of participation (UN 2013a).

The CSD also "showed great potential as a platform for dialogue and exchange of best practices between stakeholders of all types" including those with significant experience as implementers in the field (UN 2013a, para.57, also para.31). Moreover, side events, although sometimes uneven, provided a "platform for showcasing implementation, networking and enlisting support for partnerships" (UN 2013a, para.63).

The report notes more mixed success on the science-policy interface. Some member states found the documentation prepared for the CSD useful and relevant to issues on the sustainable development agenda. However, others felt scientific findings did not sufficiently inform policy decisions because scientists had little opportunity to interact with policy makers (UN 2013a, para.47).

Responding to the CSD's Shortcomings

Despite early success in placing sustainable development into intergovernmental discussions, the CSD's legitimacy and effectiveness diminished over time, especially in regard to translating discussions into action, policy impact and implementation throughout the UN system. Notably, many of these shortcomings stemmed not from the CSD's mandate or lack of early accomplishments, but from its limited ability to attract the involvement of ministers and high-level policy makers over time, especially from the economic and social sectors. This difficulty, among its other consequences, militated against a close relationship with international financial, development and trade institutions and limited its impact at the national level in many countries.

In terms of its agenda, the adoption of a multi-year program of work following the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development had the unintended consequence of being too rigid, "preventing the Commission from addressing critical contemporary challenges and new and emerging issues" (UN 2013a, para.42). A 2012 independent review of progress on implementation of Agenda 21 and the Rio Principles highlights how the agenda, largely driven by the sectorally-based Agenda 21, also hamstrung the CSD in its ability to address the interconnectedness of various goals (Stakeholder Forum 2012: 8-9). Moreover, it lacked a

mandate to examine the economic dimension because its work did not include an examination of the economic system or economic drivers, such as the role of multinational corporations or trade in sustainable development (Stakeholder Forum 2012: 8).

Limited participation among non-environment ministers compounded these problems because the work program's focus on integration of policies, along with the more general goal of integrating the three pillars of sustainable development in its work and outcomes, required interaction of ministers and officials from other sectors. This mismatch of the integration goal and lack of high-level participation manifested through the clustering of too many issues in a given year, which led to broad discussions with limited impact. The lack of high-level participation may also have contributed to the problem that, despite participation of UN agencies, "Neither the governing bodies [of UN operational agencies] nor their secretariats sought guidance from the Commission" (UN 2013a, para.32).

In recent years, the CSD also had difficulty reaching agreement. In response to these shortcomings, governments mandated the HLPF specifically to develop a "focused, dynamic and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges" (UNGA 2013a, para.2).

The lessons learned report also noted the CSD's limited ability to follow up or monitor progress on its own decisions – despite notable exceptions, usually when it tasked a specific agency or coordinating body (e.g., UN Water – following CSD-17) for follow up on decisions and implementation (UN 2013a, para.30). More generally, reviews were uneven, not comparable, and not mandatory either at national or global levels. Nor did the CSD adequately monitor or review progress on agreements related to the means of implementation – finance, technology and capacity building. The net result is that reviews had little effect within countries, utility for lessons learned, or ability to systematically identify gaps in national or global action. Moreover, while 109 countries as of 2009 have developed sustainable development strategies, and data on strategies is made available to Member states on an annual basis, "the Commission has never dedicated time to a systematic review" (UNGA 2013a, para.24). Section 5 below, especially the subsection on review and monitoring, discusses the HLPF's mandate and options that could address these concerns.

3) CONCEPTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE HLPF

This section reviews the conceptual and institutional underpinnings of the HLPF, discusses possible interpretations of its mandate including goals such as coherence and integration, and, based on these understandings, the challenges it faces in responding to CSD shortcomings and fulfilling its mandate. This conceptual discussion serves as the background for Section 5's elaboration of the practical means and options for the HLPF to achieve its mandate.

Meaning of Sustainable Development, Scope and Purpose

The scope of the sustainable development agenda is extremely broad, as are its conceptual and normative foundations. The Brundtland Commission's definition, "development that meets the

needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” – remains the consensus definition of the concept (WCED 1987: 43). The normative foundation for operationalizing and implementing sustainable development has emerged over the last 20 years through a wide range of negotiations and processes, the outcomes of which include the 27 principles of the 1992 Rio Declaration, Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Rio + 20 outcome document. A number of UN agencies have also drawn on these norms in their mandates and policies. Together, these documents provide a large body of normative text, as well as a number of specific goals, including poverty eradication, sustainable management of natural resources and sustainable patterns of consumption and production. The “Future We Want” and the UNGA resolution on the HLPF’s format and organizational aspects also specifically identifies the “three dimensions” of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental – and the HLPF’s mandate to enhance their integration “in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels” as a guide for the operationalization and implementation of sustainable development policy (UNGA 2013a, para.19).

The framing of discussions and consultations around SDGs as well as the post-2015 development framework includes a fourth dimension of sustainable development: good governance and peace and security. For example, the UN System Task Team Report on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2012) includes “peace and security” in its suggestion to reorganize the conceptual underpinnings of any post-2015 goals. Similarly, the Leadership Council of the Sustainable Development Research Networks report to the UN Secretary General (2013) on the SDGs, in Section 1 on the “Four Dimensions of Sustainable Development”:

...fully supports the Rio+20 vision of sustainable development as a holistic concept addressing four dimensions of society: economic development (including the end of extreme poverty), social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and good governance including peace and security.

These documents and discussions around the SDGs in particular also make clear that the agenda for sustainable development is global, with shared responsibilities for all countries and stakeholders, in accordance with capabilities, a view most clearly expressed by the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013) in describing the basis of a “new global partnership for development.” That report also recommends “one sustainable development agenda,” which includes core goals of eradicating extreme poverty, eliminating hunger and preventable deaths, but in so doing to “start countries on the path to sustainable development” through a merging of the dimensions of sustainable development in policies for all countries and bringing production and consumption “into balance.” The panel writes:

The need for a single agenda is glaring, as soon as one starts thinking practically about what needs to be done. Right now, development, sustainable development and climate change are often seen as separate. They have separate mandates, separate financing streams, and separate processes for tracking progress and holding people accountable. This creates overlap and confusion when it comes to developing specific programs and projects on the ground. It is time to streamline the agenda. (High-Level Panel 2013: 5)

This framing of sustainable development also resonates with the scientific literature on a wide range of environmental threats linked to basic life-support systems, such as to water supplies,

food production, ecosystem loss, and ocean acidification, many exacerbated by climate change (Griggs et al. 2013).

The challenge for the HLPF with a mandate to provide leadership on a very broad and inclusive concept like sustainable development is one of scope and focus. In this regard, one important contribution of current exercises to develop SDGs and a post-2015 development agenda is that they can potentially add a framing vision for the HLPF going forward, even as it in practice will build on the broad sustainable development agenda that has developed over the last 20 years. The articulation of SDGs is the logical culmination of current attempts to focus the sustainable development agenda, and can serve as a motivating set of more specific purposes to guide the work and scope of the HLPF.

While the HLPF includes a broader mandate for follow up and review of implementation of “all the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and environmental fields” (UNGA 2013a, para.7 (d)), the call for a “focused” and “action-oriented” agenda resonates with the need for a core framing vision that SDGs can provide.

Linking Organizational and Institutional Reform

Academic literature on global governance differentiates institutional and organizational reform (e.g., Young 2008). The former refers to rights, normative goals and principles including those related to purpose and substance, rules, and decision-making procedures. The latter refers to specific administrative and organizational arrangements. This relationship maps onto the practical concern governments frequently express in reform debates that form should follow function; that is, the specific administrative and organizational arrangements should follow the broader set of rules and norms that define functions and how they can be put into practice. In summarizing a 10-year research project on the Institutional Dimensions of Global Environmental Change, Oran Young has commented that, “A major finding... is that organizational reform in the absence of efforts to devise appropriate and effective institutions is of limited value” (Young 2008: 15).

What should be clear from the broad Rio+20 outcome and agreed mandate for the HLPF is that no single organization will emerge to define the rules and carry out the mandate of sustainable development. The leadership challenge for the HLPF will be to work with that complexity while building the necessary vision and legitimacy that will link sustainable development goals more clearly and directly to the organizational, financial and other levers that can deliver or facilitate it at different levels and in different settings.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy will be fundamental to the HLPF’s ability to achieve its mandate. The United Nations historically has provided collective legitimation at the international level (Claude 1966; Bernstein 2011). Its unique potential to do so is still widely recognized (The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda 2013: 21-22). As Pascal Lamy, outgoing director-general of the WTO, has put it: “Where the UN has an undeniable comparative advantage is in terms of legitimacy. The United Nations are the only truly global organization,

the only organization that represents the universe of State interests” (Lamy 2011). Lamy made these remarks in a speech calling for greater cooperation among the G8/G20, WTO and Bretton Woods institutions, and the UN in global economic governance. While Lamy specifically endorsed an enhanced role for ECOSOC, the mandate for the HLPF specifically resonates with Lamy’s suggestions for how to take advantage of the legitimacy of the UN system to pursue joint sustainable development goals coherently. The HLPF, especially to the degree it can work synergistically with the full machinery of ECOSOC, has the potential, as Lamy puts it: “to provide a long-term strategic policy framework and policy direction in order to promote stable, balanced, and sustainable development; to ensure consistency between the activities and policy goals of the various international organizations dealing with economic, social and development issues, including the Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO.”

The UN’s legitimacy rests not only on its universal participation or ability to reflect collective interests, but because it embodies norms widely held to reflect legitimate social purposes of global governance. To the degree understandings of legitimate global governance increasingly rest on the balancing and integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development as opposed to unfettered laissez-faire liberalism, the UN system as embodying those norms remains an essential institution.

Legitimacy and legitimation, especially in sustainable development governance, also increasingly depends on civil society and multi-stakeholder processes, participation and accountability mechanisms. Thus, “The Future We Want” includes a strong endorsement of the norms embodied in Rio Declaration Principle 10, on access to information, participation and access to justice, using language from the principle to promote transparency, participation, and effective engagement by people, civil society and business in all levels of decision making. It also specifically calls on “major groups and other relevant stakeholders” to be partners in promoting “transparency and implementation” (paragraph 85 (h)), while “retaining the intergovernmental nature of discussions” in the HLPF. Other relevant sections include paragraphs 13, 31 (in reference specifically to participation of women in the economy, society and political decision-making), Section C (paragraphs 42-44, especially 43), paragraph 58 (in the context of the green economy), paragraph 76 (h) specifically on institutional reform, and in a number of the paragraphs later in the document on responses to specific sustainable development challenges.

The inclusion of “other relevant stakeholders” in the HLPF mandate is notable as it reflects ongoing debate over whether the UN Major Groups format is sufficiently inclusive, limits participation of small or marginalized groups within particular categories, is too rigid, or artificially defines groups in ways they find poorly identifies their constituency (Adams and Pinget 2013: 11-13). Weighing into this debate is beyond the scope here, but the more inclusive language in the HLPF’s mandate highlights the challenge of ensuring inclusive and fair access and the need to engage and attract the widest range of relevant stakeholders if the HLPF is to be legitimate and effective.¹

¹See Adams and Pinget 2013 for a detailed discussion of this debate and a range of options to improve participation and respond to dilemmas of the Major Groups framework.

These various aspects of legitimacy are related: the more legitimate and relevant the HLPF appears to states and stakeholders, the more it will attract their engagement, energy and resources to achieve sustainable development. An independent review of stakeholder participation in UN Sustainable Development activities, for example, notes that as many groups became less enthusiastic and confident about the ability of the CSD, and multilateralism more generally, to deliver on sustainable development, they more they turned attention to other forums, such as the G20, or to transnational networks, regional or national settings (Adams and Pingeot 2013: 17). As discussed below, the HLPF has an opportunity to be a leader on re-engaging civil society in meaningful participation.

Coherence

The promotion of system-wide coherence in sustainable development policies is part of the HLPF's mandate and a strong theme that runs through *The Future We Want* (UN 2012; UNGA 2013a, para.7 (d)). Many UN agencies, regional organizations, the World Bank and WTO, as well as a wide variety of partnerships and relatively autonomous non-state or hybrid governance systems already have mandates, resources, and are increasingly also making their own commitments to address sustainable development (*Sustainable Development in Action* 2013). Thus, the HLPF's value added will likely be primarily as an orchestrator (Abbott and Snidal 2009) that can provide leadership, guidance, knowledge, and political authority, but largely work through or in cooperation with intermediaries to build coherence and integration across the system and at multiple levels.

While the need for improved coherence has long been identified in efforts to improve the institutional framework for sustainable development, it is rarely defined. One possible reason is that the vast array of issues and problems associated with sustainable development do not easily lend themselves to treatment under a single comprehensive governance system.² Thus, coherence cannot be equated with harmonization on a fixed or unified set of prescriptions. While fragmentation in practice has likely contributed to negative consequences for coherence, academic and policy literatures debate whether greater centralization of authority best responds to this problem (Biermann et al. 2009). Some suggest that the complexity of the governance system reflects the nature of the sustainability challenge and redundancy and diversity in the institutional architecture can be a virtue. For example, a more complex system may be more adaptive and resilient in the face of emerging challenges or changed political circumstances, and can provide multiple points of entry to address problems or channel resources if one particular avenue becomes less politically viable or proves ineffective (Haas 2004: 3; Young 2008: 18-19; Rayner et. al. 2010). The challenge created by fragmentation and complexity is how to improve coherence of purpose towards legitimate ends and increase administrative simplicity, shared knowledge, and access to financial and other relevant resources so the system as a whole operates more effectively and consistently.

Substantively, in the context of sustainable development, coherence refers to the systematic promotion of mutually reinforcing policies across the three dimensions. This definition contains

² This comment extrapolates from Young (2008:18), who describes this situation within global environmental governance, as opposed to some other issue areas such as trade that more easily lend themselves to a common set of basic rules (such as most-favored nation or national treatment).

institutional and ideational components. Institutionally, coherence means organizations that address similar goals work synergistically instead of at cross-purposes. There ought to be means and mechanisms to learn, coordinate and address conflicts across institutions as well as among other implementing actors, organizations and partners. Coherence also requires inter-institutional coordination to develop mechanisms for monitoring the impact of overlapping policies, assessments of progress in implementing agreed commitments or common goals, and mechanisms for addressing poor or negative performance. For example, the HLPF could link with inter-agency coordination processes within the UN system by providing high-level political leadership and support for integration and coherence in the work of agencies throughout the system and in mainstreaming sustainable development into policies and programs. At the same time, inter-agency coordination must be augmented by efforts to improve coherence in the wider architecture of sustainable development governance as it grows in complexity. Coherence must not only be concerned with intergovernmental machinery and among policies at the global, regional, and national levels, but also among partnerships and the voluntary commitments that have become a major feature of that architecture (Sustainable Development in Action 2013).

Ideationally, coherence means the goals or purposes of institutions reflect a common and acceptable normative framework or, conversely, recognize tensions and trade-offs and provide mechanisms to address them. Since coherence is normatively neutral – perfectly coherent policies and institutions could be formulated around undesirable goals – it must be linked to legitimate purposes. Again, in this regard, the SDGs can play a major role. The HLPF should both operate in the context of those purposes and can facilitate building support for those purposes, publicizing them, and facilitating their review and updating in response to emerging sustainable development issues and challenges. Coherence then makes it simpler and more efficient for states to both implement commitments and take advantage of resources to build national capacity and nationally appropriate sustainable development strategies.

In this context, coherence does not mean one-size-fits-all policies. The challenge of building institutional and policy coherence is that it must be done in a way that still recognizes “diversity of contexts and challenges within and among countries” (UNTT, para.52). Such diversity is especially important at the national level and should also reflect a participatory model of sustainability and transformation (ibid). This idea is already well-entrenched in the evolving post-2015 development framework, and could be reproduced in the HLPF. For example, as a learning platform, the HLPF could share experiences of building policy coherence at multiple levels, taking into account different contexts and circumstances. At the same time, it can use its authority to articulate visions of coherence that might be influential on major international policies such as trade or development financing.

Orchestration and Integration

Two other mandates of the HLPF are as follows: 1) providing high-level political leadership to drive a broad sustainable development agenda, while avoiding overlap and duplication; and 2) to integrate sustainable development within the UN system, across global governance institutions more broadly, and at all levels of decision-making. While the importance of political leadership is implied in all aspects of the HLPF’s work, how that leadership will lead to implementation is

an important question. Orchestration and integration of sustainable development are key concepts in this regard.

With an already complex and overlapping institutional architecture, the form of political leadership needed can best be characterized as what Abbott and Snidal (2009) call “orchestration.” They introduced the term specifically in the context of polycentric (Ostrom 2010) or complex governance or sovereignty (e.g., Rayner, Buck and Katila 2010; Grande and Pauly 2005; Abbott 2012). Issue and institutional complexity increasingly characterize many areas of global governance, including sustainable development (UNGA/ECOSOC 2013, para.5). Orchestration is especially relevant to the position of HLPF in this environment, given its very design links it closely to other bodies that have implementation levers, its own status as a forum rather than organization, and its broad mandate of integration and coherence.

Orchestration occurs when:

An [international organization]³ enlists and supports intermediary actors to address target actors in pursuit of IGO governance goals. The key to orchestration is that the IGO brings third parties into the governance arrangement to act as intermediaries between itself and the targets, rather than trying to govern the targets directly. More generally, one actor (or set of actors), the Orchestrator, works through a second actor (or set of actors), the Intermediary, to govern a third actor (or set of actors), the Target. (Abbott et al. 2013: 2, emphasis in original).

Orchestration is increasingly relevant in contemporary global politics at a time when international organizations “have ambitious governance goals but moderate governance capacity.” While an HLPF could hypothetically pursue more traditional modes of governance – such as making or monitoring international law, directly delegating authority to other organizations, or through collaboration – indirect governance through orchestration is likely to be the dominant mode. In such “soft” modes of governance, legitimacy is especially important since orchestrators “must mobilize and facilitate [intermediaries] voluntary cooperation in a joint governance effort... towards shared goals that neither orchestrator nor intermediaries could achieve on their own” (Abbott et al. 2013: 3).

Contributors to Abbott et al.’s project provide a wide range of examples of orchestration, many of them in the sustainable development area. For example, the Basel Convention, Whaling Convention, and the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species “all enlist environmental NGOs to help monitor state compliance.... UNEP and the UN Global Compact orchestrated the formation of the Principles of Responsible Investment.... The World Health Organization facilitated the creation and hosted the operation of public-private partnerships – such as Roll Back Malaria and Stop TB – funded *inter alia* by the Gates Foundation” to combat particular diseases (Abbott et al. 2013: 3). Many of the examples above of the CSD’s accomplishments also fit this description, such as the creation of the UNFF. As these examples show, the intermediaries can be intergovernmental, but are often non-governmental organizations or partnerships. The CSD experience with partnerships clearly resonates with these examples, which again makes orchestration a particularly salient mode of governance for sustainable development as it has been practiced in the UN system.

³ Orchestration is a generic term that can apply to any governance institution, including the state. Abbott and Snidal’s main focus, however, is orchestration by international organizations.

The HLPF's increased political weight, compared to the CSD, is especially relevant in this regard to the degree the HLPF can present a unified and independent voice for sustainable development. While there are important differences between the HLPF and the G20, on this count the similarities are instructive: both forums can operate at the highest political level, but have little independent capacity as organizations. For example, Viola (2013) points out that the G20, which had limited capacity to directly manage the 2008 financial crises, used its political weight principally to “to limit overlap and increase synergies among the numerous IGOs dealing with the crisis – including the Bretton Woods institutions, Bank for International Settlements, Financial Stability Board and multilateral development banks” (Abbott et al. 2013: 11).

A second component of implementation is integration. In practical terms, integration means the mainstreaming of sustainable development – both among and of the three dimensions – into the work and policies of organizations throughout the UN system (UNGA 2012, para.3, 91 and 93).

The Secretary-General's report on sustainable development mainstreaming (UN 2013a) takes stock of how the three dimensions of sustainable development have been integrated into the work of the UN system to date. While it documents a wide number of UN agency initiatives to integrate sustainable development into operations, strategic planning and programs, it concludes:

Overall, sustainable development is not only about ensuring economic, social and environmental perspectives are reflected in strategic planning process of UN organizations, but that these perspectives together form a holistic way of “doing business”; a process of thinking at all levels that guides the kind of strategic planning and operational choices that follow. Using an integrated and sustainable approach for decision-making in the UN system is currently unevenly applied, revealing an institutional gap between policy and practice (UN 2013a, para.32).

It also cites a 2012 QCPR survey that shows that “environment and sustainable development” are “ranked by governments as the most important area among the UN's contributions at the country level.” Thus the mandate to mainstream sustainable development is extremely strong both within the UN system and nationally (UN 2013a: para.33).

One possible early task of the HLPF would be to decide where it fits into such processes, how it can support or build upon as opposed to duplicate or complicate mainstreaming processes already underway, and whether there are lessons to be learned from other experiences of mainstreaming, such as of human rights and gender.

One important example in this regard is the UN Environmental and Social Sustainability Framework already underway.⁴ It began as an interagency initiative through the Environmental Management Group (EMG) to promote environmental and social safeguards across the system. However, it faced pushback from a number of agencies primarily over concerns about applying across the board models that may not be appropriate for their work. It evolved into the current “framework,” and aims to provide a platform to strengthen the integration of sustainable development into strategies and policies, operational activities and programs, and administrative decisions such as facility management. However, it does not cover the economic dimension of

⁴ <http://www.unemg.org/index.php/a-framework-for-advancing-environmental-and-social-sustainability-in-the-un-system>.

sustainable development. The tensions and slower than expected progress have played a part in a decision to move the initiative from the Environmental Management Group, after consultations are complete, to the Chief Executives Board (CEB) at the end of 2013 for implementation. There are also signs the initiative has gone from a focus on safeguards in operations and programs to one that focuses, at least initially, only on internal management systems and administration. As the Secretary-General's mainstreaming report notes:

An interagency review of UN practices related to environmental and social impact assessments revealed that the lack of a system-wide standard has produced an ad hoc approach with varying levels of thoroughness and rigor. Further, there appears to be a varied understanding of the purpose and benefits of applying environmental and social sustainability measures as well as different expectations of what such measures can deliver (UN 2013b, para.27).

While in principle the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in the work of the UN could be facilitated by guidance from standing bodies such as the UNGA, ECOSOC, as well as governing bodies of UNEP and other relevant UN organizations, the Secretary-General's report on mainstreaming found "that consideration of sustainable and/or integrated development approaches has not been systematic" (UN 2013b: para. 57). The systemic problem is "complicated by each UN system organization having its own governing body," and because decisions by executive boards of funds, programmes and bodies do not systematically incorporate sustainable development (UN 2013b: para.60).

ECOSOC has long had the potential to lead on integration of the three dimensions, especially in its role as the body responsible for integrated and coordinated implementation of major UN conferences. Without prejudice to ongoing consultations on ECOSOC reform to strengthen its ability to promote integration, Rio+20 recognized that an HLPF would be very well placed to provide a focused and unified message to all UN organizations on sustainable development. As the mainstreaming report puts it, the Forum, "would help Member States to send a unified message to UN system organizations, including through their respective governing bodies, on the need to take an integrated approach to economic, social and environmental policies and actions" (UN 2013a, para. 63).

The experience in other areas of mainstreaming lends support to the idea that having a lead focused organization – like the Division for Sustainable Development under the political guidance of the HLPF – can be an important element of success. For example, UN Women, with political leadership from the Commission on the Status of Women (within ECOSOC) has been the lead organization on promoting gender mainstreaming in the follow-up to various UN conferences. Its work led to a System Wide Action Plan (SWAP) on gender mainstreaming within internal operations of UN organizations (approved by the CEB in 2012), UN country team performance indicators, and accountability mechanisms for actual mainstreaming in delivery of programs and results at the country level (UN 2013b, box 9).

This last point is highly relevant since the ultimate purpose of integration and mainstreaming is to integrate the three dimensions into decision making and policy at multiple levels, including at the national and local level. Thus, integration also links to capacity building, sharing of best

practices, and a knowledge platform for national sustainable development strategies, a point picked up in section 5 on HLPF functions, below.

4) ORGANIZATIONAL AND DECISION-MAKING FORMAT OF THE HLPF

The HLPF is an intergovernmental forum with universal membership that will meet annually for 8 days under the auspices of ECOSOC, with a 3-day ministerial segment, “to be held in the framework of the substantive session of the Council, building on and subsequently replacing the annual ministerial review as from 2016” (UNGA 2013a, para. 7 (a)). The outcome of these meetings will be a negotiated ministerial declaration, preferably agreed by consensus, “for inclusion in the report of the Economic and Social Council to the General Assembly” (UNGA 2013a, para.5 and 7 (g)).

Every four years it will meet under the auspices of the UNGA for two days at the beginning of the Assembly session. Resolution A/67/290 also enables meetings convened under the UNGA “on other occasions, on an exceptional basis, upon a decision by the Assembly” (UNGA 2013a, para.6 (b)). The outcome of these meetings will be a “concise negotiated political declaration to be submitted for the consideration of the Assembly” (UNGA 2013a, para.6 (d)).

This hybrid organizational structure suggests the HLPF will need to balance its mandate to “provide political leadership” and “agenda setting” that attempts to provide an independent high-level voice for sustainable development with its close organizational and political relationship to ECOSOC and the UNGA. This positioning presents both opportunities and challenges. A universal model of high-level decision making has the advantage of widespread legitimacy, but has a limited capacity for deliberation and diffuses peer pressure. This concern is mitigated if there is a robust preparatory process and follow-up mechanism, independent agenda setting process that generates a focused agenda, and strong secretarial support and continuity between sessions. The limited frequency of high-level meetings raises a challenge of addressing emerging and ongoing issues and having a dynamic agenda, although the provision for special sessions can mitigate this concern. Thus, the HLPF might consider meeting in such special sessions when sustainable development emergencies or urgent issues arise.

In this regard, the Secretary-General’s report on ECOSOC reform has suggested the power granted to it by UNGA resolution 61/16 to meet in ad hoc sessions be used “more effectively” to “address global development emergencies, raise awareness and serve as a high-level policy platform for coordination of actors working on specific emergency situations” (UNGA/ECOSOC 2013, para.28). This raises the possibility that, although not specifically mandated in the originating UNGA resolution for the HLPF, ECOSOC reform efforts might consider the possibility of such sessions to include convening the HLPF at the ministerial level (and invite appropriate ministers) if the issue appropriately falls under its mandate.

Secretariat

Secretarial functions of the HLPF will be “supported by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the [UN] Secretariat in close cooperation with all relevant entities of the United Nations system, including funds and programmes, multilateral financial and trade institutions, the secretariats of the three Rio conventions and other relevant treaty bodies and international organizations within their respective mandates” (UNGA 2013a, para.23). A full discussion of the administrative apparatus needed to support the Forum is beyond the scope of this report, but a few comments on the context and scope of support needed can be made based on the HLPF’s mandate and experience of the CSD.

First, in practice, secretarial support will come primarily from staff in the Division for Sustainable Development, but also includes consultants and support from other parts of the UN system tasked with providing expertise, analytic work, and administrative support for specific initiatives that HLPF engages in.

Second, the question of appropriate support should be linked directly to the very broad mandate of the HLPF and its role in coordinating across the UN system. While the Division for Sustainable Development is arguably the only place in the system that has the necessary interdisciplinary substantive expertise to integrate decision-making and coordinate the wide range of issues related to sustainable development across the UN system, an analysis might be undertaken of whether it has sufficient resources to live up to the requirements for doing so. The mandate of the HLPF has grown in comparison to the CSD, for example in its review function and on the science-policy interface, including the production of a global sustainable development report (see below). The lessons learned report on the CSD suggests the HLPF’s secretariat should be both “strong enough to be a link with the scientific community” and “have a sufficient capacity to help respond to country needs for support related to their engagement in the forum” (UN 2013a, para. 84). Thus, the question an analysis of secretarial capacity should address is: how many and what type of additional resources would be needed to live up to the expectations for the Forum?

Preparatory Process

Resolution A/67/290 does not lay out an exact preparatory process, but identifies a wide range of inputs that should be considered for each session. In particular, paragraph 22, “*Requests* the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Economic and Social Council to coordinate with the Bureau of the Council and with the bureaux of the relevant committees of the General Assembly to organize the activities of the forum so as to benefit from the inputs and advice of the United Nations system, the major groups and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.” In addition, paragraph 7 (f) calls for regional preparatory meetings, which if read in conjunction with paragraph 13, would best be facilitated through UN regional commissions. Such meetings would ensure the importance of regional dimensions of sustainable development are taken into account, and would include the involvement of regional entities, major groups and stakeholders.

Lessons learned from the CSD suggest that a robust and inclusive preparatory process can help to “avoid protracted negotiations at the forum [that] would undermine the impact of its

outcomes” and also generate “ownership” from the “bottom up”, which is important for generating legitimacy and implementation through multiple means (UN 2013a, para.66).

Other recommendations of the lessons learned report emphasize the importance of country-level engagement and participation that focus both on Forum participation and implementation. Stakeholders also identified inadequate funding for both participation and group capacity building as the most significant impediment to fuller engagement in the CSD (Adams and Pingeot 2013). Thus, strengthening national and stakeholder capacities to participate should be emphasized going forward. In this regard, states have agreed to pay from the UN regular budget for a representative to attend from each least developed country. They also agreed to carry over trust funds from the CSD and to create a new Forum voluntary trust fund to facilitate the participation of least developed and developing countries and representatives of major groups and stakeholders in the HLPF and preparatory processes (UNGA 2013a, para. 24 and 25).

Participation in and Modalities of Meetings

The HLPF will be intergovernmental in character but builds on the significant strengths of the CSD in encouraging broad civil society input and participation. It will include participation from UN agencies, funds and programmes, the Bretton Woods institutions and the WTO, as well as other multilateral financial and trade institutions (in accordance with relevant UN rules).

The HLPF incorporates lessons learned from the CSD on stakeholder participation. Specifically, representatives of the major groups and other relevant stakeholders will be allowed to attend meetings, have access to information and documents, intervene in official meetings, submit documents and make oral contributions, make recommendation and organize side events (UNGA 2013a, para. 15 (a-f)).

The CSD lessons learned report highlighted its great potential as a platform for dialogue and exchange of best practices of stakeholders (UN 2013a, para.57). Much of this exchange took place in side events. The challenge for the HLPF will be to maximize the quality of side events, which were “uneven” under the CSD (UN 2013a, para. 62).

The CSD also experimented with innovative modalities of exchange among stakeholders and between stakeholders and governments. An independent report on these modalities offers a variety of lessons for the HLPF (Adams and Pingeot 2013). For example it details the experience of stakeholder dialogues, initiated following the 1997 UN General Assembly Special Session to review the implementation of Agenda 21. Initially, the CSD incorporated two-day dialogue segments into its annual sessions. Stakeholders viewed this period (1998-2002) as a “golden age” for the CSD. The conditions for successful dialogues included the preparation of peer reviewed papers by each major group prior to the dialogue to generate high quality and researched positions; opportunities for governments to challenge stakeholder group ideas; and the moderation of the dialogues by the Chair of that session of the CSD (Adams and Pingeot 2013: 5).

However, the report notes a more mixed experience of dialogues after 2002, when the CSD reduced the sessions to 90 minutes and initiated other “entry points” for stakeholder

interventions at the CSD plenary sessions. While stakeholders initially supported the opportunity for more direct input into intergovernmental discussions, they became critical after 2003 when they found, “the interactive value of the dialogues was to a large extent lost due to the reduced time” (Adams and Pinget 2013: 8). The CSD lessons learned report similarly finds a need to improve the “mixed, and at times limited and indirect” impact on decision-making of stakeholder dialogues, official papers and interventions at meetings (UN 2013a, para. 56), which suggests learning from the strengths of the most successful dialogues in the 1998-2002 period.

Partnership Fairs, to showcase their role and importance in implementation, were another potentially useful innovation, best suited for sharing experiences and best practices. However, they came under criticism in the CSD report for being timed to overlap with Commission sessions, which limited any review of their contribution or the ability of the Commission to provide guidance.

Building on the HLPF mandate and CSD experience the following recommendations can be considered:

- While the new voluntary trust fund can help address lack of funding as a reason for low participation of least developed countries and Southern NGOs, equally important is the need to publicize the HLPF’s work on integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in preparatory and agenda-setting processes to demonstrate its relevance and avoid a perception of too exclusive a focus on the environment that limited interest in the CSD among both governments and NGOs. Publicity should be aimed to make visible to states and stakeholders the utility of engaging and contributing to the development of its themes and focus.
- Stakeholders also identified the following factors that could contribute to greater engagement and participation: Timely dissemination of preparatory and HLPF inputs and meeting documents, greater outreach and information about UN processes, more use of local language and quick translation of documents which is especially important at the regional level, and a greater emphasis on the regional and national level and their integration with the global level (Adams and Pinget 2013: 15).
- Paragraph 16 of the UNGA resolution on format and organizational aspects of the HLPF encourages stakeholder groups to “autonomously establish and maintain effective coordination mechanisms for participation.” This places a strong burden on groups that may have limited capacity. Assistance in facilitating such mechanisms, especially at the regional level, should be a priority. One suggestion is to organize intersessional workshops for major groups and stakeholders to, “build capacity and broker activities, exchange good practices and lessons learned [on organization, accountability and participation as well as implementation] might also be discussed” (UN 2013a, para. 91).
- Ensure the preparatory process is multi-stakeholder in nature “so that recommendations to be considered by policymakers also benefit from inputs of major groups as was done at the ministerial level multi-stakeholder dialogues held by the CSD” (UN 2013a, para. 88), keeping in mind the perceived advantages of the pre-2002 dialogue experience
- Experiment with innovative modes of participation, especially of the private sector. One suggestion is to create an advisory group linked to the HLPF (UN 2013a, para 89). Other

models include those adopted by the FAO Committee on Food Security and by the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (Ibid.)

5) HLPF MANDATED FUNCTIONS

This section builds on the above three sections to identify ways the HLPF might operationalize its mandated functions delineated in A/RES/67/290 on format and organizational aspects of the HLPF and in the “The Future We Want” (UNGA 2012, para. 85). Some functions are grouped together to avoid repetition. The discussion also draws on other post-2015 development framework analyses and processes, various expert and high-level input to date into those negotiations, as well as academic literature that speaks to connections between institutional form and function.

High-Level Political Leadership, Agenda-Setting, and Addressing Emerging Challenges

The HLPF’s organization aims to ensure high-level participation, multiple inputs to produce a “focused and action-oriented” agenda, and a specific mandate to address emerging issues, correcting a shortcoming of the CSD. One clear option in this regard is for its agenda to be guided, at least in part, by any future SDGs. This option has obvious advantages for coherence and focus. At the same time, the SDGs cannot drive the whole HLPF agenda, which must be open to new issues and bottom-up input from stakeholders and experts, especially at the regional level. Also, its thematic focus should be “in line” with the activities of the ECOSOC and UNGA respectively when meeting under their auspices and consistent with the post-2015 development framework, which will necessarily be broader than the SDGs (UNGA 2013a, para. 7 (c)).

It can bring focus to the sustainable development agenda specifically in terms of implementation, articulating how to operationalize integration, and how to work with other parts of the UN system, other intergovernmental organizations, and non-state governance mechanisms. Especially important will be its working relationship with ECOSOC and the Development Cooperation Forum to ensure a consistent and mutually supportive agenda, and avoid duplication. For example, while ECOSOC will retain its mandate as a lead organization for coherence across the system, the HLPF is best placed to undertake a strategic discussion of implementation of the SDGs. Building links with the G20, Bretton Woods Institutions and WTO, and regional development banks, and engaging with processes to develop adequate finance mechanisms, technology facilitation and capacity building are all important in this regard.

The resolution on format and organizational aspects of the HLPF leaves open the precise organization of the agenda of meetings. Various approaches, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive, are possible.

One approach is to set part of the agenda in advance, possibly driven by the SDGs or elements from previous UN conference or summit outcomes. But, it could balance that predictability with a dedicated portion for new and emerging issues. The CSD lessons learned report, for example, suggests, “there could be a 2-3 year advance agenda and a dedicated item for addressing new and emerging issues” (UN 2013a: para.82). Another approach is to address, on an annual basis, a cross-sectoral theme that could generate interest from line ministries and relevant agencies in the UN system (UN 2013a, para. 76). Such issues might be identified by the SDGs and/or the Rio + 20 outcomes. A third approach is to focus on clusters of critical themes, “such as water, energy, climate change, food, or agriculture... [and] any theme should be reviewed from the vantage point of the three dimensions of sustainable development and that the forum should focus on interrelationships among issues and possible trade-offs” (UN 2013a, para. 77).

Recalling that the CSD filled a need on some important issues not well addressed elsewhere in the system, the HLPF’s choice of themes, while coordinated with ECOSOC, might be driven by areas not being addressed sufficiently elsewhere in the system, following on many of the examples of success in the CSD’s early years (UN 2013a, para. 78). Similarly, it should devote dedicated time in each session to address sustainable development challenges facing small island developing states (SIDS) in particular, and more generally ensure items that focus specifically on sustainable development challenges identified by vulnerable countries as well as challenges facing middle income countries, as mandated in UNGA 2013a, para.11.

Arguably the meetings under the auspices of the UNGA should be broader in scope to allow for more forward oriented discussions related to overall assessments of progress on implementation, strategic discussions related to implementation and updating or revising the overall sustainable development agenda for the UN, and a focus on addressing political hurdles and proposing action on urgent issues. Also, as mentioned above, the HLPF’s format also allows for special sessions to respond to urgent emerging issues or crises.

Coherence and Integration

The HLPF is well-placed to take the macro-view appropriate for most major global sustainable development challenges including, but not limited to, poverty, climate change, food security, sustainable consumption and production, and sustainable management of natural resources. Addressing these challenges requires system-wide coordination across international institutions and between international institutions and national sustainable development strategies. It could help avoid the illusion of coherence in policy silos, where most of these problems are currently addressed. Only a macro-view can highlight and address wider disjunctures in global governance more generally. For example, at the macro-level, trade, finance, environment and development are inextricably linked in the global economy, yet the regulatory environment for these domains is fraught with contradictions and competing competencies. There are also fundamental, unresolved disagreements about the relationship between substantive social, economic and environmental goals and the appropriate mechanisms to achieve them. Incoherence can also exacerbate suspicion among developing countries that developed countries lack serious commitment to resolve fundamental disparities and distributional issues (Scott and Wilkinson 2011; Vickers 2012).⁵

⁵ These tensions are particularly evident in the WTO’s Doha Development Round.

Recent high-level and inter-agency reports on the post-2015 development agenda provide broad examples of where coherence might be focused. For example, the UNTT (2012: 8, paragraph 25) highlights that the post-2015 development agenda could: “include some general guidelines for policy orientation and coherence, and could highlight some of the key success factors of effective development processes. This might involve, for instance, policies that foster productive investment and decent work, and greater consistency of macroeconomic policies with broader developmental objectives, including, among others, poverty reduction, full employment and decent work, and sustainable food, nutrition and energy security.”

Two existing coherence mandates are also instructive for an HLPF as much for their limits as for the direction they provide. One is the WTO coherence mandate on macroeconomic policy. The HLPF is in a strong position to revisit this mandate, which originated with the 1994 Ministerial Declaration on Achieving Greater Coherence in Global Economic Policymaking. Although it, and subsequent Ministerial declarations in Doha and Hong Kong, focused on the relationship between the WTO and Bretton Woods institutions, the coherence mandate has evolved significantly toward a sustainable development agenda.⁶ In particular, The Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) – designed primarily to provide technical assistance for developing countries during accession, for negotiations, and trade support and facilitation – and Aid for Trade (AfT) – the provision of official development assistance for trade-related programs and projects – have become its most promising elements. While these programs have been criticized for being too market driven and insensitive to the needs of least developed countries (Qureshi 2009; Grabel 2007), arguably one reason is that the coherence mandate evolved without attention to broader sustainable development goals. Although the initiatives grew out of cooperation between the WTO, Bretton Woods institutions and the UN organizations, including UNCTAD and UNDP, there was no explicit sustainable development mandate.

As Lamy’s comments above suggest, the HLPF would be in a much stronger and legitimate position to articulate what coherence means in the context of sustainable development than the WTO – though the WTO would need to be intimately involved in supporting and implementing an expanded coherence agenda.

The second is the Delivering as One initiative (Evaluation Management Group 2012; UN 2006), which grew out of The UN High-Level Panel on System-Wide Coherence (UN 2006). A comprehensive evaluation of the 8-country pilot phase – which showed the program has had moderate but not strong success overall – recommends strengthening national coordination mechanisms and links between line ministries (for trade, aid, debt, agriculture, environment, labor employment, health and education) and individual UN organizations to build and improve upon the modest successes in cross-cutting areas such as gender equity. Thus, the report finds, “there could be new opportunities for cooperation in other cross-cutting areas with broad sectoral and thematic dimensions, e.g., economic development and the environment.” In identifying this opportunity, the report also acknowledges that such coordination, and coherence that integrates the environment into delivery of programs, has not occurred (Evaluation Management Group 2012).

⁶ For a detailed discussion of the WTO coherence mandate, see Bernstein and Hannah 2012.

Thus, the HLPF might have a role to play in working with the UN Development Group (UNDG) and other relevant coordinating bodies to provide guidance for the further implementation of Delivering as One. Such guidance could improve consistency, support national sustainable development planning and strategies, more effectively deliver technology support and capacity building, and administratively simplify and/or streamline requirements of, and support for, implementation of multilateral environment agreements and related commitments.

An important caveat in considering the HLPF's coherence mandate is that while strengthening coherence often requires positive, possibly even collaborative, rule-making, in other circumstances, pursuing coherence will entail carving out negative policy space (at the national or lower levels of governance) or regulatory space (especially for sustainable development policy innovation internationally and transnationally for countries and firms willing to sign on). Policy and regulatory space means allowing other institutions with more competency or legitimate social purpose to construct rules in those areas (Bernstein and Hannah 2008, 2012). In this vein, principles of policy space, subsidiarity and functional differentiation (Cerny 2013; Rayner et al. 2010) in global sustainable development governance can also contribute to improving coherence.

This idea also fits with the idea of orchestration where existing bodies with competencies can be engaged that fill governance gaps. For example, the HLPF could help provide guidance relevant to the work of ISO and the ISEAL alliance, which acts as a standard setter of standard setters in the transnational social and environmental certification and labeling arena to encourage best practices and the uptake and recognition of sustainable development in the marketplace and nationally. This proliferation of sustainable development standard setting in areas like forests, commodities and apparel, human rights, environmental reporting initiatives, or for climate finance and offset projects, to name just a few, pose both challenges and opportunities for the pursuit of sustainable development. An orchestrator like the HLPF could help ensure standard setting adheres to basic norms of sustainable development, facilitates trade in sustainable goods and services, is fair, follows accepted democratic procedures, and ensures access and participation of developing countries and does not disadvantage them. These bodies are better placed than an HLPF or the WTO (which also relies on them) on their own to help ensure such standards do not unduly restrict trade but also follow best practices of international standard setting. The ISEAL alliance in particular has focused on developing best practices for the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in standard setting.

A caution is also warranted. While the thematic consultations on environment for the post-2015 agenda have generated an “overwhelming call for environmental sustainability to be at [its] heart,” the experience with MDG-7 suggests this is an especially daunting challenge (UNEP/UNDP 2013: i). The final draft report notes that progress on environmental targets “have been particularly poor” (UNEP/UNDP 2013: 10). Thus, engagement with UNEP is especially institutionally important for mainstreaming sustainable development, building links to Multilateral Environmental Agreements, and facilitating transformative change toward sustainability that the SDGs are supposed to catalyze.

Orchestration and Coordination

Operationally the “action-oriented” part of the HLPF’s mandate is likely to fit under the categories of orchestration and coordination, not a traditional hierarchical model of international policy or programs usually associated with a functional agency or treaty body (even as they too might combine modes of operating).

Some examples of the kind of orchestration an HLPF can provide have already been identified above. The high-level panel on the post-2015 development agenda (2013: 24) presents a very ambitious vision in this regard. It notes that states already come together in a number of forums – ranging from the G7/8 and G20 to the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation to a number of regional forums – that provide leadership on sustainable development, but often do so in parts. For example, the G20 has had success in leading on financial stability and food and energy security, while the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation has helped countries establish effective partnerships with stakeholders. An HLPF could recognize the work of these forums, help diffuse these ideas, as well as help encourage coherence with their work. This goal can also be furthered by including such work in its broad reporting mandate.

Another possible related function, though not explicitly articulated, is that an HLPF could act as a problem solving forum to provide political direction on impasses driven by the cross-cutting nature of sustainable development challenges in other forums. For example, it could provide political direction on questions of intellectual property and green technology diffusion outside of the particular forums (in this case the WTO/TRIPs and UNEP) where competing visions might be articulated, or sponsor analytic work in this regard. While the same states might participate in all three forums, the context of sustainable development might be helpful in bridging the work of those different organizational settings.

The HLPF can also play a general role in operationalizing institutional and policy coherence between the UN system, Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO, especially on macro-economic policy and building on existing linkages and forums. The HLPF should focus on mutually supportive policies, rules, and norms for sustainable development (e.g., on finance for development, technology transfer and innovation, intellectual property, standard setting and technical barriers to trade, market access for environmental goods and services, etc.). Such an effort requires some *modus operandi* regarding joint meetings or other ways of creating direct linkages and dialogues with relevant organizations. While resolution A/RES/67/290, para. 17 already includes an invitation for participation of these institutions, the HLPF can potentially bring focus and follow up to discussions initiated in other sustainable development forums or ECOSOC’s annual joint session with the Bretton Woods Institutions and the WTO. Such meetings could be moved to overlap with the 8-day period in which HLPF meets under the auspices of ECOSOC, for example, or special sessions added as appropriate.

Stakeholder and Major Group Participation, Partnerships, Voluntary Commitments and Implementation

Earlier sections detailed ways in which the HLPF will engage stakeholders in contributing to agenda setting, preparations, and deliberation of the Forum – the input side. This section focuses specifically on how the HLPF can learn from the CSD experience to maximize ways in which

participation and interaction of governments and stakeholders can build and exchange knowledge, improve practices, and implement sustainable development at multiple levels – the output side.

The CSD lessons learned report finds that participation of stakeholders in learning processes, side events, and sharing of best practices were particularly valuable. For example, side events, although not part of the official CSD sessions, “provided a platform for showcasing implementation, networking and enlisting support for partnerships, although their quality may have been uneven” (CSD 2013a, para. 62). Recommendations above on support for stakeholder involvement, an increased role for regional commissions, support for autonomous stakeholder coordination mechanisms, and dedicated staff to work with stakeholders on side events can contribute to their overall quality and links with the themes of particular sessions.

The introduction of learning centres at the CSD, which offered courses designed to impart practical knowledge on sustainable development and implementation of specific policies, received mixed reviews in the lessons learned report (UN 2013a, para. 61). One recommendation is to encourage such courses to be more forward looking: rather than simply showcasing existing initiatives, they might focus on conditions for replicability and scaling up, for example.

More generally, the HLPF should be a platform for innovative approaches to learning, especially those that bring together a range of stakeholders who can learn from each other about cause-effect relationships of particular policy instruments to achieve sustainable development goals. This shifts the focus from lessons learned to problem-focused learning based on scientific inputs as well as learning about the effects of policy choices or instruments on different stakeholders or how they can produce both intended and unintended consequences. For example, the experience of market actors, land holders, and local resource users and communities might reveal different effects and consequences of particular policies or initiatives in a case like forestry. One state consulted for the CSD lessons learned report recommended the creation of an interactive “sustainable development knowledge management platform and database for sharing practices and lessons learned” (UN 2013a, para. 69).

Since the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, states and the CSD have promoted voluntary multi-stakeholder partnerships to implement sustainable development policies. Rio + 20 formally recognized and promoted an additional mechanism: voluntary commitments by stakeholders and networks “to implement concrete policies, plans and programmes, projects and actions...” (UNGA 2012, para. 83). There, 730 commitments totaling over an estimated \$530 Billion were announced (Sustainable Development in Action 2013). States and stakeholders also have made clear that partnerships and voluntary commitments cannot be substitutes for intergovernmental commitments (Sustainable Development in Action 2013: 4). Their importance nonetheless suggests the need to build on lessons learned in 10 years of experience with partnerships in terms of participation, monitoring, mobilizing resources, coherence and effectiveness.

For example, the HLPF could improve on monitoring and review compared to the CSD. A scholarly review of the experience with registered partnerships – based on large-n statistical

analysis, a series of case studies and a review of the literature – notes the lack of an institutionalized review mechanism and that most partnerships lack clear quantifiable goals or yardsticks by which to measure their performance (Backstränd et al. 2012: 133-141; see also UN 2008). Thus, a more robust review and monitoring process should be established as well as improvements in the database since information on the performance of partnerships is currently difficult to acquire. This is especially important since studies of effectiveness suggest wide variation among partnerships, with case study research suggesting that those that “have precise and binding norms that are strictly monitored and enforced” perform better, especially for service and standard-setting partnerships (as opposed to those focused primarily on research and knowledge exchange). Underfunding and lack of capacity are also common problems (Backstrand et al. 2012: 134-137). Improved monitoring and review are also important for accountability, transparency and legitimacy.⁷

An initial promising step to respond to earlier criticisms of the partnership registry is the launch of a unified Sustainable Development in Action Registry at the United Nations Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform.⁸ The registry contains information on voluntary initiatives, all remaining 198 partnerships for sustainable development, and links to other registries that compile commitments, such as the Every Woman Every Child initiative.⁹ Keeping the registry up to date, with ongoing input from stakeholders, is essential (Sustainable Development in Action 2013: 31). Given the experience with the previous partnership database, this will require pro-active monitoring and coordination with partnerships, action networks, stakeholders, and other registries.

Partnerships and voluntary commitment fairs or other forms of sharing of best practices might also be scheduled prior to or after official meetings of the HLPF so they do not compete with official proceedings. They are best thought of as learning opportunities rather than as mechanisms for review. Specific suggestions for review and monitoring of partnerships and voluntary commitments are discussed in the next section.

Review Role and Mechanisms

The need for an improved mechanism for review of progress on sustainable development was a major driver behind the creation of the HLPF. The High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (2013: 21-22) put it this way: “The United Nations can lead in setting the agenda because of its unique and universal legitimacy and its ability to coordinate and monitor globally. But the UN system has yet to fully realise the vision of ‘working as one.’” To do so requires a “single locus of accountability for the post-2015 agenda that would be responsible for consolidating its multiple reports on development into one review of how well the post-2015 agenda is being implemented.” Similarly, the Secretary-General’s report on mainstreaming (UN 2013b, para.88), states that, “While many processes and mechanisms are in place to help facilitate the integration of sustainable development, there is currently no common

⁷ Among legitimacy concerns, only 1 percent of partnerships involve women’s groups, indigenous peoples, youth and children, and farmers as partners while the other major groups are much better represented, although the former are influenced by partnership decisions (Bäckstrand et al. 2012: 139; UN 2008).

⁸ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdinaction>.

⁹ <http://www.everywomaneverychild.org/>.

capability to assess impact or measure progress of the integration of sustainable development including into programming and projects” (p. 20, 2013a). Moreover, it states that the HLPF “could have a key role in reviewing the SDGs and the post 2015 development agenda and in spurring integrated approach to economic, social and environmental dimensions throughout the UN system bodies and organizations. The UN system must mobilize to support its role in the most effective way.”

These calls overlap both the explicitly mandated review function of the HLPF, which focuses on state-led reviews of countries’ and UN entities, and the decision of states that the HLPF will produce a “global sustainable development report,” discussed further below in the context of the science-policy interface (UNGA 2013a, para. 20). These two aspects of review will be discussed in turn though in practice they might inform each other.

In terms of country and UN entity review, governments decided not to follow the high-level panel’s recommendation for peer review,¹⁰ but instead to conduct voluntary reviews, starting in 2016, “on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives, including those related to the means of implementation, within the context of the post-2015 development agenda” (UNGA 2013a, para. 8). These reviews will also replace the voluntary country presentations currently part of the annual ministerial-level review of ECOSOC, and the AMR starting in 2016 will move to the ministerial session of the HLPF.

The voluntary reviews will include both developed and developing countries as well as UN entities, will be “State-led, involving ministerial and other relevant high-level participants,” and will provide “a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other relevant stakeholders” (UNGA 2013a, para. 8 (a-c)). The HLPF resolution leaves the exact format, requirements, and number of reviews per session open ended, but states that they will build on the experiences and lessons learned from the AMR process.

In that context, the Secretary-General’s report on ECOSOC reform suggests strengthening the ministerial review, but generally reports favorably on it as a tool to monitor progress on development goals, including the MDGs, and to share lessons and best practices. Other analyses also laud it for its openness to stakeholder and expert input, and the broad-based discussion during national presentations. The Secretary-General’s report also finds that the selection of annual themes worked well to bring focus to the reviews (UNGA/ECOSOC 2013, para. 12 and 25).

Other analyses, however, raise questions about the broad thematic focus, and suggest moving to reviews based on the establishment of goals, targets and indicators, possibly linked to the SDGs. They also argue that while the AMR had the potential to systematically address the three dimensions of sustainable development, ECOSOC has not done so in a systematic or uniform way. Among their recommendations are that reviews be more systematic and rigorous with more peer involvement. They also suggest greater time to present results and discuss might lead to more integrated and constructive feedback and generate more ideas to help diffuse best practices and scale up sustainable development (Beisheim 2013; Pinter 2013; Lingán and Wyman 2013).

¹⁰ On possible models of peer review, see OECD 2003 and UNCSO 2011.

Participation in the reviews has also been low, even when the annual theme generated considerable interest. For example, a consultant's report on ECOSOC reform notes that the employment-themed review in 2012 had only nine delegations headed by a minister and received almost no media attention. This, despite many countries facing a jobs crises since the 2008 financial crisis and other forums generating significant political attention and action plans on jobs and growth, including the G20 (Steven 2012).

To strengthen the AMR, the Secretary-General's report calls for a change from voluntary country presentations to voluntary "mutual reviews," that would be "based on a common platform and a robust analytical framework and would also include formal follow-up" (UNGA/ECOSOC 2013, para. 75 (a)). While short of peer review, this model, which the HLPF could institute when it takes over the AMR, suggests greater mutual sharing of information, input, and constructive feedback than the current presentation format and would strengthen the current mode of country presentations.

The HLPF resolution also leaves open-ended precisely what should be reviewed. Based on the rest of the HLPF mandate, reviews should at a minimum contribute to policy coherence and integration of the three pillars as well as specific assessments of progress and gaps in implementing sustainable development goals and policies.

Building on these analyses, the following are options for the focus of the HLPF's annual review, singly or in combination:

- 1) Move to the "mutual country review" model described above, but include a more rigorous review of progress on specific SDGs, with indicators, as a focal point. In addition to country reviews, UN entities could be invited to participate in a similar "mutual" review process on their own progress and contribution to progress or implementation of policies related to the goal(s) or themes, with a particular focus on coherence, coordination, and gaps in the system.
- 2) Follow the current pattern of annual cross-cutting themes, with the review covering sustainable development goals and national strategies as well as UN Conference follow-up related to the theme.
- 3) Review of the decisions or declarations of the HLPF, or ECOSOC and its subsidiary machinery as related specifically to sustainable development policies and programs. This focus would respond to the concern expressed by many member states that the CSD had "limited success in analysing implementation of its own decisions" (UN 2013a, para. 30).

The second component of monitoring and review refers to reporting on progress toward various measures of sustainable development and fits closely with the mandate of reporting and assessment of the global sustainable development report. While the report is meant mainly to be a broad scientific assessment of knowledge about the state of sustainable development to enable evidence-based decision-making, it should be based on "information and assessments" of sustainable development. In this regard, it seems the logical place to report on the progress, develop indicators and measures, and collect data on the degree to which agreed goals of sustainable development are being met.

However, the HLPF contains no specific language on monitoring or reporting on any future set of SDGs, or the division of labor between ECOSOC and HLPF. There is also ambiguity over whether the annual review process will feed into such assessments or whether the global sustainability report will also include monitoring of progress on the SDGs. In this regard, UN DESA's Division for Sustainable Development, which prepared a prototype of the report for the HLPF this fall, has already noted that the report, "could periodically report on global progress in the achievement of the SDGs" (UN-DESA 2013). It could also provide an integrated review of progress and contribution of any mechanisms states agree to establish to facilitate the achievement of SDGs (e.g., financing strategy or technology facilitation mechanism).

Work on the report should therefore build on the mandate originally articulated in Agenda 21 to develop indicators for sustainable development, continuing the work program on indicators the CSD adopted in 1995, and further revised in a series of consultative processes, the latest in 2006. The CSD lessons learned report (UN 2013a, para. 25) notes that while, "a number of countries compile data on these indicators for use in decision-making processes... the lack of systematic monitoring and interaction between national and international levels has hampered assessments of how effective national sustainable development strategies and indicators have been in supporting the implementation of agreements on sustainable development."

The report by the UN System Task Team on the Post 2015 UN Development Agenda on Statistics and Indicators (UNTT 2013) provides a detailed assessment of current sustainability measures and approaches. It will undoubtedly feed into the decision-making process on how best to monitor progress toward the SDGs, but also on indicators for sustainable development more broadly in a sustainable development report (see especially chapter 3). While a complete discussion of the progress and challenges in developing and reporting on indicators is beyond the scope here, a few points are worth highlighting.

First, sustainability measures and indicators pose particular challenges because of their integrative nature, multiple drivers of (un)sustainability, and interactions and linkages. While there has been significant progress on measurement in many areas related to sustainability – ranging from the environment and natural resource base, to climate change and biodiversity loss, to sustainable consumption patterns, to relationships between hunger and poverty and provision of ecosystem goods and services – the challenge comes from both scientific and value assumptions about the relationships. For example, the MDG targets are based on the assumption of "reverse the loss" without sufficient attention to how regeneration occurs or the contribution of ecosystem services to health or well-being (UNTT 2013, para 100-101). Similarly, there may be political and value judgments behind the optimal relationship between, say, population and economic growth and environmental resources. Thus, despite advances in measurement, "there remains a need to collate, analyzes, and synthesize this experience and lessons learned in the areas of resource use, waste management, soil and biodiversity and climate change mitigation, adaptation, risks and resilience coupled with other socio-economic output and outcome indicators." In this regard, the country and UN agency implementation reviews and lessons learned can be an important input not only in generating data, but in feeding back into improving measures and monitoring.

Second, strong political guidance and consensus is required to generate buy in and participation in monitoring and data collection. The development of SDGs can be an important part of that process by identifying priority areas of sustainability that should be measured and monitored. While work on indicators and measures will build on existing efforts, political decisions on goals are important for overcoming sensitivities around particular measures and what they might imply about political, social, environmental or economic purposes or values. The UN task force sums up the problem this way:

[I]t has been the experience thus far that sustainability targets going beyond descriptive measures will be hard to achieve in this politically fraught area. Even the selection of benchmark and target dates for sustainability indicators is controversial, as environmental damages have accrued over a long period and their long-term trajectories, say to 2050 and beyond, may be much more critical, even catastrophic, than a trend over 5-10 years would suggest.” (UNTT 2013, para. 110)

Third, monitoring of sustainability should not focus only on indicators, but also drivers of change and their interactions. Thus, work on sustainability scenarios should also be supported that focuses on drivers and their interactions with socio-economic-governance factors in addition to a focus mainly on material measures. Moreover, not all drivers are easily quantifiable. While production, consumption and population may be quantifiable, for example, fragility, security, and vulnerability may be less so and have high data requirements. Also, a focus on interactions and critical uncertainties – system analysis – may be required to capture interactions and possible non-linearities or tipping points (Levy 2013). This kind of reporting and monitoring might also pay attention to leverage points in the system when assessing possible interventions and transformative capacity. Work on scenario construction and socio-economic-governance interactions are important to consider.

Following from the discussion in the previous section, a global sustainable development report might also include summaries of existing review and accountability reports of partnerships, voluntary commitments, and sustainable development action networks. This fits with the mandate of the report to base its findings on “information and assessments” of sustainable development, but to avoid duplication with other efforts. For example, the “Every Women Every Child” action network already has a number of accountability mechanisms that report on resources and results. These include the “Keeping Promises, Measuring Results” report of the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women’s and Children’s Health that set up a framework for global reporting, oversight and accountability; reports of the independent Expert Review Group on the Global Strategy for Women’s and Children’s Health that report’s annually to the Secretary-General and follows the Commission’s recommendations on tracking commitments and progress; and reports of the Partnership for maternal, Newborn and Child Health.¹¹ Similarly, the Global Compact encourages reporting and monitoring from stakeholders through a dedicated website. Assembling key findings and links to full reports in one place could not only increase transparency and accountability, but also provide quick and comprehensive access to models of reporting and review given the wide range and variety of partnership and voluntary commitments.

¹¹ See Sustainable Development in Action (2013: 11-15) for a summary and links to reports of these initiatives.

This part of the report could take the form of a special section consisting of a proposed annual report of the Sustainable Development in Action Newsletter, or it could appear as a supplement to the report. Its proposed content would summarize progress on initiatives in the registry based on self-reporting and dialogue with relevant stakeholders (Sustainable Development in Action 2013: 31). In addition, it could include summaries of commissioned independent “third-party” reviews of commitments and partnerships, or reviews from existing self-funded initiatives such as the Natural Resources Defense Council’s “Cloud of Commitments.”¹² Third-party reviews are especially important for legitimacy and credibility as they provide an independent accountability mechanism rather than relying solely on self-reporting or politically mediated mechanisms (Sustainable Development in Action 2013: 31). However, active encouragement, technical support and financial resources for such independent reviews might be necessary to institutionalize this practice over time, especially if such reviews are to include representation from developing country stakeholders and perspectives from the more marginalized major groups.

Science-Policy Interface

Governments have mandated the HLPF to strengthen the science-policy interface by, “... bringing together dispersed information and assessments, including in the form of a global sustainable development report, building on existing assessments, enhancing evidence-based decision-making at all levels and contributing to the strengthening of ongoing capacity-building for data collection and analysis in developing countries” (UNGA 2013a, para. 20).

Challenges related to the relationship between scientific assessment and policy have already been discussed when it comes to sustainability indicators, monitoring and review. The broader challenges are to produce usable knowledge to inform evidence-based decision making, to get buy-in and participation from countries and UN agencies that must generate most of the data and assessments for the report, and to establish consistency and synergies in terms of data, analytic tools, and measurement.

In this regard, the development of the report and work on indicators and data should be in close cooperation with the UN Statistical Division and the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators or its successor group if established for the SDGs. Its experience, including in liaising with national statistical agencies, will be especially valuable. The UNTT (2013) report also notes a number of specific challenges related to gaps, political sensitivities and, especially, the need for capacity-building in lower income developing countries, as well as the need for transparency and publicity to generate participation and accountability.

While the final form of the global sustainability report will be decided by the HLPF, a prototype report is already in preparation to inform the HLPF’s agenda setting. Based on a summary of this report (UN-DESA 2013), it will do the following: take stock of available evidence on sustainable development from within the UN but also from science and social scientific sources; identify gaps in knowledge and in responses to threats, challenges and opportunities; flag and

¹² <http://www.cloudofcommitments.org/>.

analyze emerging challenges; and synthesize knowledge and lessons on addressing existing challenges.

The report will be an important source of knowledge for an integrated understanding of the three dimensions of sustainable development, responding in particular to the need to synthesize large amounts of data and inputs and examine interactions and integration among these dimensions in a number of areas. It thus fills an important gap in knowledge within the UN system.

The science policy link also could include social scientific analyses of policy tools and interventions, for example in linking means of implementation such as finance, technology and trade, with making progress on sustainable development. One important element, suggested above, is the development of scenarios, or “storylines” that link drivers to outcomes, while taking uncertainties into account, thus identifying possible pathways toward sustainable development and interaction of possible policy interventions with those pathways (UN DESA 2013).

Finally, the science-policy nexus should also include policy science. An important lesson learned from the CSD, and repeatedly emphasized in this report, is the centrality of developing knowledge-sharing, lessons learned, diffusing best practices and creating easy access to and capacity to integrate such knowledge. Fostering learning processes about cause-effect relationships, both of human-environment-economic interactions and about policy choices and instruments, will be essential for effective and integrative sustainable development policy. Thus while the global sustainability report can possibly collect some of that knowledge, the building of accessible databases and knowledge platforms, as well as the various learning and review processes discussed earlier should be considered important aspects of the science-policy interface. Opportunities for feedback and mutual learning among the scientific community and the various learning forums and review processes should also be encouraged.

6) LINKAGES, RELATIONSHIPS AND LEVERS

Relationships to ECOSOC

Regardless of the outcome of ECOSOC reform, a close cooperative relationship with the HLPF will be necessary, as will agenda coordination and coherence of decisions across the HLPF and the Council. As put in the Secretary-General’s report on ECOSOC reform, “...it is important for the two bodies to have a close relationship with each other to maximize the potential of each. This is an historic opportunity for designing the intergovernmental bodies to govern as one, in order to ensure that sustainable development challenges are effectively addressed” (UNGA/ECOSOC 2013, para. 49).

In terms of division of labor, the UNGA resolution on the HLPF’s format and organizational aspects reaffirms, “the commitment to strengthen [ECOSOC] as a principal organ in the integrated and coordinated follow-up of the outcomes of all major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields, and recognize[es] the key role of the Council in achieving the balanced integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development” (UNGA 2013a, preamble). However, during the same session the UNGA adopted

resolution A/67/290, which, in addition to the functions already listed, “reaffirms that the [ECOSOC] is a principal body for policy review, policy dialogue and recommendations on issues of economic and social development and for the follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals” (UNGA 2013b, para. 5).

The apparent overlap on the review function in particular suggests that the HLPF’s review and follow-up functions, conducted under ECOSOC’s auspices, will contribute directly to ECOSOC’s charter mandate. While legally the HLPF is subsidiary to ECOSOC, its universal membership ensures some autonomy from the 54-member ECOSOC and means its ministerial declaration will simply be included in ECOSOC’s report to the UNGA and not be debated further within ECOSOC.

On this reading, ECOSOC remains, along with its subsidiary bodies, the overarching body to coordinate policies and ensure coherence and integration among the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the UN system. ECOSOC also retains its general governance functions as described in the charter vis-à-vis functional agencies, funds and programs, as well as coordinating and making recommendations to specialized agencies.

Relationship with Other UN Bodies

There are other obvious special relationships an HLPF should develop. For example, a close working relationship with the new UN Environment Assembly and UNEP would be required to integrate UNEP’s work into work strands on integration of sustainable development. The relationship can be two-way, with the HLPF learning from UNEP and drawing on its scientific expertise, and also providing political support and leadership on how UNEP’s work on core cross-cutting themes, such as the Green Economy, can be coherent with other parts of the system. Similarly, its relationship to the UNDP, the lead UN organization on the ground in developing countries, and the Development Cooperation Forum (DCF), the lead political body to coordinate the development work of the UN, will be important. These bodies are especially important in coordinating and facilitating work within countries, including capacity building and developing national sustainable development strategies. In addition, mainstreaming sustainable development into “delivering as one” presents an important opportunity for the HLPF, which will require coordination among these bodies. The HLPF can also advise the DCF on how development cooperation can best support sustainable development.

Interagency Coordination:

The starting point for interagency coordination is the environmental and social sustainability framework. Broader institutional reform is beyond the scope of this report. However, the HLPF can respond to the challenge of integrating sustainable development into the various interagency coordinating bodies by providing the high-level political support needed to encourage serious engagement with initiatives that might appear as threatening or challenging to existing agency framings or understandings of their missions. The HLPF can also invite chairs of staff of the coordinating bodies to its meetings, regularly liaise with them on core initiatives, and support analyses and reviews of initiatives – including of Delivering as One – where integration of

sustainable development is essential, but so far lacking. A close relationship with the UNDG in particular is thus essential.

The Secretary-General's mainstreaming report on sustainable development (UN 2013b) elaborates on the importance of the Chief Executive Board (CEB) in integrating sustainable development both within the system and facilitating its uptake and integration at the national level since the agencies represented work to assist countries to incorporate sustainable development and develop national strategies. Especially important are the specialized sub-groupings including UN-Energy, UN-Water, UN-Oceans, the High-level task Force on Food Security and the HLCP Working Group on Climate Change.

Links with the Bretton Woods Institutions and WTO

ECOSOC is the current platform for policy coherence across the UN, Bretton Woods, and other economic institutions. However, its influence has been limited on macroeconomic issues. The challenge is on two fronts. First, international financial institutions have not engaged on questions of macroeconomic coherence even with the WTO, and doing so with ECOSOC and other UN agencies has been traditionally even weaker. Moreover, the governing bodies of those institutions have not pushed them to do so. Second, it has been a challenge to overcome what many perceive as a divide in the orientation of these two sets of institutions (Thérien 2007). While there has been a kind of rapprochement and increased participation in joint meetings and initiatives following the MDGs and finance for development initiatives, the high-level dialogues arguably still reflect that divide. Could an HLPF on sustainable development – since it could in theory attract finance ministers and other senior economic leaders – be seen as above such a divide and thus help bridge it? Its format already includes an invitation for the BWIs, World Trade Organization, and other relevant intergovernmental organizations to contribute to discussions in the forum (UNGA 2013a, para. 17).

One possibility to raise that relationship to the next level would be to include some configuration of an HLPF in the annual high-level policy dialogue convened by ECOSOC with the BWIs, WTO, and UNCTAD in order to improve coherence and integration of sustainable development across these institutions. As mentioned earlier, while there is little sign an HLPF could adjudicate policy disputes, it could bring conflicts related to sustainable development outside of their usual institutional setting and provide a more coherent lens for finding innovative solutions.

These linkages are also extremely important politically. Coordination and mutual enforcement of policies to build coherence between the UN and major economic institutions, and now also the G20, matters precisely because these institutions operate at similarly high political levels and are developing their own initiatives that overlap significantly with the HLPF mandate. While the earlier discussion of possible merits of redundancy in a complex global governance system may apply, those benefits are undermined if policies work at cross-purposes. One theme of this report has been the importance of establishing the ability of the HLPF early on to generate legitimacy through its high-level participation and focus so that it other powerful institutions in the system will see benefits of working with it.

With Regional Commissions

The relationship with regional commissions should be both “up” in regard to preparatory meetings as well as “down” in terms of follow up and review. Following the discussion on the relationship with ECOSOC above, UN regional commissions are likely to be the key conduit for supporting links of HLPF reports, policy decisions and other outcomes to regional and national decision-making on sustainable development policies and planning. They can also be the primary forums for bringing country views and experiences together, promote regional analyses and activities, and provide input into HLPF meetings (South Centre 2013).

The HLPF could also provide direction and support for regional commissions to develop a follow-up framework on the outcomes of sustainable development summits and meetings – including Agenda 21, the outcome of the Rio + 20 conference, and any future SDGs – and then could report to the HLPF on regional activities.

Linkages to Non-State Governance Entities

Linkages are also important to the broader polycentric system. The new attention to global commitments and the unified Sustainable Development in Action Registry suggest immediate ways in which the HLPF will link to the broader web of activities and commitments. More broadly, to the degree that the HLPF can facilitate learning forums, identify possible intermediaries in whatever form they occur in the system, and then engage, support, and report on their ability to implement and scale up sustainable development, it will provide a more robust and less rigid and hierarchical understandings of partnership than those promoted following the 2002 WSSD. It could also coordinate with UN initiatives that reach out to the private sector, such as the UN Global Compact. This approach would better foster innovation in governance and would be further recognition of the polycentric nature of sustainable development governance.

At the same time, the HLPF provides an important focal point that links such initiatives and commitments back to commonly agreed goals and government responsibilities and commitments. Governmental responsibility and commitment still provide the necessary foundation to pursue sustainable development internationally, regionally, and nationally. Governments can thus use the HLPF as a platform to engage and promote commitments from a wide range of actors on specific goals and implementation challenges to make the HLPF more than a platform for voluntary initiatives. It can promote new initiatives much the way the Muskoka G8 Summit launched the Muskoka Initiative for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health. Expected to mobilize more than \$10 Billion, this initiative links government commitments, several private foundations, and international organizations as a key component of the Every Woman Every Child sustainable development action network. For example, the HLPF could take a leadership role as an orchestrator for green economy initiatives. The Rio + 20 Conference acted as the HLPF could in the future by promoting the Green Economy concept, which led to a variety of platforms, forums, funds, mechanisms and specific implementation initiatives. Each initiative has its own lead, whether an international organization, network, or private initiative such as the Green Growth Action Alliance led by the World Economic Forum. Going forward, the HLPF as a political body with a macro perspective can work on building coherence, communication, and coordination where appropriate among these initiatives.

SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

- The HLPF's high-level political status, strong mandate, ability to address emerging challenges, and inclusiveness with respect to states, organizations inside and outside the UN system, and stakeholders make it well placed to build on the strengths of the CSD and respond to its shortcomings. With the centrality of sustainable development in the overarching normative framework for UN activities, the HLPF has systemic importance. It should be a dedicated home for sustainable development in the UN system.
- It should focus specifically on its value added rather than trying to cover every aspect of sustainable development. Any future SDGs could serve as a motivating and legitimating set of specific purposes to guide the work and scope of the HLPF. It is a logical lead focal point for the promotion, review and implementation of SDGs, in cooperation with ECOSOC.
- It should continue the CSD's work in championing and following-up on issues and implementation of decisions that otherwise would be orphaned in the UN system.
- Its mandated role to generate coherence and integration can best be accomplished though being an "orchestrator," building links to intermediaries within the UN system, including ECOSOC, UN programs, funds and specialized agencies, as well as other international organizations, private and hybrid networks, and stakeholder initiatives in the broader sustainable development governance architecture.
- Inclusiveness and openness are likely to be among the HLPF's greatest strengths. Financial, technical, and capacity-building support, including at the regional level, will contribute to increased participation and engagement of least developed countries and developing country stakeholders. Equally important, the HLPF should publicize its work on integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in preparatory and agenda-setting processes to demonstrate its relevance and avoid a perception of too exclusive a focus on any one dimension of sustainable development.
- Timely dissemination of preparatory and HLPF inputs and meeting documents, greater outreach and information about UN processes, more use of local language and quick translation of documents will also improve participation and engagement.
- It should ensure the preparatory process is multi-stakeholder in nature, keeping in mind the perceived advantages of the pre-2002 dialogue experience.
- It should experiment with innovative modes of participation, especially of the private sector.
- The HLPF can become the lead political champion of mainstreaming sustainable development in the UN system, supported by UN DESA's Division for Sustainable Development.
- The global sustainable development report should be forward looking and useful to policy makers. It should focus not only on progress but provide evidence-based analytic work on gaps in policies and develop scenarios that link drivers of (un)sustainable development to outcomes as well as analytic work on interventions and other critical uncertainties that interact with drivers to create sustainable or unsustainable pathways.
- The HLPF's proposed work on the science-policy interface and collection of data and assessments across the system and from experts makes it, facilitated by its Secretariat in

cooperation with other relevant parts of the UN bureaucracy such as the UN Statistics Division, well placed to oversee the production of a monitoring and progress report on any future SDGs. Support for work on improving measures of sustainability and linking political goals to indicators, drivers, and their interactions should be a priority regardless of which body the UNGA designates to lead on monitoring the SDGs.

- The science-policy interface should build on the CSD experience as a learning and best practices-sharing platform, with a focus on cause-effect learning on policies and instruments for sustainable development.
- While a number of options to improve on the AMR were presented, increasing mutual assessment and guidance from the SDGs stand out as promising options.
- Review, monitoring and accountability processes should be supported pro-actively for voluntary commitments and partnerships, and third-party reviews supported to increase accountability and legitimacy.
- The HLPF is well positioned to better integrate sustainable development into global economic governance and policies in order to improve the legitimacy and sustainability of the international economic order. In particular, it can reinvigorate and build on the WTO coherence mandate and joint meetings and dialogue with global economic institutions should be encouraged.

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