

## **Advancing the 2030 Agenda: Interlinkages and Common Themes at the HLPF 2018**

Expert Group Meeting

25-26 January 2018

### **Closing remarks by Under-Secretary-General Liu Zhenmin**

#### **[INTRODUCTION]**

Dear Colleagues,

We have reached the end of a very fruitful and constructive two-day meeting.

I want to thank you all for your contributions. Your insights and recommendations will undoubtedly enrich the review at the HLPF in July.

I was in Davos and unable to join you till now. But my staff has kept me updated of the very dynamic discussion you have had so far.

I want to applaud you also for your willingness to reach outside of your comfort zones.

A meeting like this—focusing on linkages, where you are asked to look beyond individual areas of expertise and examine the connections, the co-benefits and the possible tradeoffs - requires open minds and even some courage!

#### **[HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE MEETING]**

As we begin the third year of implementation for achieving the SDGs, we already recognise the need to work across silos.

Now we need concrete ways to put this into practice, not just in one or two cases, but consistently across the SDGs, and in ways that will be responsive to the local context.

We must develop long-term strategies based on holistic thinking about how to leverage the interlinkages across goals and targets.

We want to give policy makers the knowledge and perspective to make effective decisions – in synergy rather than in silo.

In some cases the decisions are straightforward. The choices are clear when a policy intervention to advance one SDG has accompanying benefits in other SDGs.

For example, an investment in girls' education has clear collateral benefits in economic growth, equality, health, and strong institutions.

In other cases, however, choices may be less clear-cut: for example, ensuring short-term food security for a growing population could risk offsetting actions around terrestrial biodiversity, sustainable land management, and marine protection.

In all cases, however, policy makers need to draw upon nuanced understanding when deciding how to allocate resources across what may appear to be competing needs.

#### [KEY MESSAGES]

I have had the opportunity to review the many rich and innovative presentations that you have given here over the last two days. Seven key points stand out for me:

1. **Evidence based knowledge**, that draws upon empirical observation and scientific assessment, is crucial for understanding interlinkages and connecting them to transformative actions. Indeed this knowledge-building process itself can fuel the policy convergence process at all levels.
2. We need to use this knowledge to **set priorities**, taking a critical and creative approach to deciding what investment is needed, and where.

Because the 2030 Agenda is integrated and indivisible, some may say that prioritization is taboo. But that is simply not realistic in a world of limited resources and multiple vulnerabilities. Prioritization is necessary, and should address specific national and local circumstances.

3. That is the third point I want to emphasize.

Prioritization and policy choices are always **context-specific**.

Many government officials talk about the need to “domesticate or localize” the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, to bring it in line with national strategies and plans.

Likewise, we need to “domesticate or localize” our understanding of interlinkages and interconnections.

Local communities, municipal governments, and national leaders—they all bring important knowledge and perspectives to the table, and our implementation strategies must accommodate these specificities.

For example, we were reminded during the meeting that the Asia-Pacific region has the lowest per capita water endowment in the world—and this will affect policy priorities.

The local context is therefore an important—and natural—foundation for decision making at all levels.

4. Recognizing the interactions and relationships among the SDGs is only half the battle. **Adjusting governance structures** to reflect the inter-relationships will be an important concrete step toward capitalizing on positive synergies and reducing or eliminating negative outcomes.

Governance reforms may be the greatest challenge of all—overcoming institutional inertia and realigning incentives can be a huge struggle. But armed with evidence and a strong will, advocates for integrated policy making will be able to make their case.

5. Which brings me to my fifth point—the **need for high quality, reliable, timely and disaggregated data**. The 17 SDGs, with their 169 targets, are unprecedented in their scope and the global indicator framework provides a rigorous basis for measuring progress.

At the same time, complementary data to guide decisions is now also available from many sources – remote sensing, mobile phone usage, administrative records, citizen monitoring and many others – and must be used. I agree with the views expressed by many experts that open source and open access data is the way forward.

6. Sixth, I would like to echo what many of you acknowledged in your presentations. The SDGs **touch everyone and must engage everyone**. Their achievement will be a **multi-stakeholder endeavour**, with important cultural and societal elements that cannot be ignored.

Not only governments, but also individuals and communities, will make decisions that can make or break the SDGs.

The private sector—companies of all sizes—will also need to commit to the transformative vision of the SDGs, and to choices for long-term sustainability that will be good for business and the planet, evolving beyond an ethos of short-term profit.

7. Finally, let me emphasize the need for continuous **communication, dialogue and learning**.

As experts in our own areas, we are often sure of what we know, but we have to reach out to policy makers and a host of other actors to understand their perspectives and challenges, and put our knowledge to work for them. This requires humility and patience, but is an essential part of our endeavour.

[CONCLUSION]

In closing, I would like to thank you again, and to assure you that the United Nations, and my Department of Economic and Social Affairs will be your willing and energetic partners as you continue your work in research, practice and outreach.

We see your work as supporting ours in many different ways – let me mention just three:

**First**, it will inform the High-Level Political Forum in 2018, where Member States will come together to decide on actions to accelerate progress towards the SDGs;

**Second**, it strengthens our continuing work in enhancing the science-policy interface, a critical component of which supports the Global Sustainable Development Report for 2019.

In that connection I am particularly pleased the two members of the Independent Group of Scientists tasked with drafting the report, Peter Messerli and Parfait Eloundou-Enyegue, have been able to join us. Peter is also one of the co-chairs of the group.

**Third**, it helps us further elaborate and refine our work in building capacity in developing countries for implementing the SDGs.

I wish you all safe travels and a healthy and productive 2018.