



High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

Reporting on Regional Forums

Monday, 16 July, 3:00-3:30 p.m., Trusteeship Council Chamber (TRI)

Ambassador Michael Gerber, Switzerland

Chair of the 2018 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region

[650 words = approximately 5 minutes @ 130 words per min.]

Madame President,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to be with you today to report on the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE Region, which I had the honour to chair in Geneva on 1 and 2 March this year.

The full report is available as an HLPF document (E/HLPF/2018/2/Add.1) and contains many details I cannot touch upon. As I have five minutes, I would like to focus on five key messages:

1) Practical peer learning

The UNECE region has been off to a good start into the SDGs. However, progress needs to be further accelerated.

The Regional Forum therefore focused on practical peer learning. Taking some time to discuss what works – and what does not work – helps strengthen the momentum for SDGs.

At the heart of the Regional Forum was a series of 10 peer learning round tables:

- Ensuring universal access to water and sanitation and balancing competing water needs (SDG 6)
- Improving energy efficiency and transforming the energy system (SDG 7)
- Financing the transition to sustainable cities and communities and promoting their resilience (SDG 11)
- Reviewing successful approaches regarding Sustainable Consumption and Production and moving towards a circular economy (SDG 12)
- Promoting sustainable forest management and biodiversity (SDG 15)

About 50 case studies were submitted and presented, highlighting concrete and innovative solutions on each topic. A compilation of all case studies is available on the meeting website. I encourage you to take a look as some of them might be relevant to your government or organization.

2) Universality of SDGs

The Regional Forum showed that domestic SDG implementation in the high- and middle-income countries of the region is taken seriously. Many of them have started their SDG journey by defining national priorities, strengthening interministerial coordination, and involving various stakeholders.

The commitment by UNECE member States is also exemplified by the strong participation in the VNR exercise. Since 2016, about one third of all VNRs have come from the UNECE region, and 15 out of the 47 VNRs you are hearing this week, including Switzerland for the second time.

3) Regional platform to connect governments and other stakeholders

The Regional Forum has grown into a platform that brings together the key owners - member States - with other stakeholders that offer their expertise. Participation has been unprecedented this year, with over 600 registered participants and almost all member States represented.

UNECE convenes the Regional Forum in close cooperation with the regional UN system. Many other international and regional organizations also contributed.

Civil society organizations held a preparatory consultation and emphasized that they stand ready to participate not only in global and regional discussions, but also in developing and implementing policies at the national and local levels.

An important topic was also how to strengthen the science-policy interface. After all, science of all disciplines can provide us with the evidence needed for our policy decisions.

As the Regional Forum took place in Geneva, allow me to also stress the important role of International Geneva as a regional and global SDG hub.

4) SDG interlinkages

The 2030 Agenda calls for initiatives that reflect the linkages between different goals and targets. Not only do we need to identify these linkages, but we also need to understand their nature and strength. In what areas do policies and investments have most impact across the SDGs? Where are the most sensitive trade-offs? The Regional Forum dedicated an entire session to connect the dots between the different SDGs and to discuss cooperation across different sectors.

5) Transboundary dimension

The Regional Forum covered many issues that have impacts across borders – actions of one country affecting SDG progress in other countries. One example is transboundary water cooperation. Many transboundary issues can be addressed through initiatives and cooperation frameworks at the regional and subregional level, which can provide additional momentum for SDG implementation in the countries concerned.

I thank you for your attention.