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**Lessons learned from the first cycle of HLPF**  
**Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations,**

**Thursday, 18 July 2019, CR 4**

Madam President of the Economic and Social Council  
 Excellencies,  
 Distinguished Delegates,  
 Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to share with you lessons learned from the first cycle of the High-level Political Forum on sustainable development. First, I will highlight a few points based on the experience of DESA as the secretariat of the HLPF, and on what we have heard from the Member States in the past four years. Then, I will introduce the results of the survey that DESA conducted during the past two weeks.

Excellencies,

The HLPF has achieved a lot. Over the last four years, it has had an in-depth review of all 17 SDGs, and engaged communities around these goals. Its reviews have built on extensive preparations supported by DESA and others.

The HLPF has heard 142 countries presenting their voluntary national reviews – an unexpectedly high number. It has built on the outcomes of vibrant regional forums on sustainable development, and ECOSOC's FFD and STI Forums. It has received important inputs from intergovernmental bodies throughout the UN system, and has received rich contributions from major groups and other stakeholders. We have seen some 150 side events and special events, over a hundred Ministers, and participants from all walks of life.

But various aspects of the Forum can certainly be improved. We look to your guidance when the General Assembly reviews its resolutions on the HLPF, during its upcoming session.

We have heard that the political guidance of the HLPF should add more value to the 2030 Agenda, for example, what high-level policy guidance should be given to the acceleration of the SDGs.

It is also said that the reviews of the HLPF should address better, the interlinkages among the SDGs.

There have been many suggestions on improving the VNRs. For example:

1. Countries could be more systematically encouraged to report on all 17 SDGs, rather than on the SDGs under review that year.
2. The VNRs could include more in-depth, evidence-based analysis of progress and the impact of measures taken.
3. VNRs could include not only successes but also challenges, and areas where the countries need assistance.
4. It is also felt that the exchange of experiences and lessons learned could be improved. The President took an important first step this year with the group of friends of VNRs.
5. It would also be good to have more time to take stock of what comes out of the combined VNRs. This would allow to identify good practices that can be emulated, as well as challenges and emerging trends in SDG implementation. We need to find a way to ensure that the VNRs lead to mobilizing partnerships and support. The contribution of major Groups and other stakeholders could also be strengthened.

We also need to address whether the review of the themes of the HLPF have been useful. And, how the HLPF should continue to review the SDGs in its second phase. Some countries feel that focusing on a few selected SDGs every year has led to creating silos.

Excellencies,

Now, let me turn to the findings from the survey conducted by DESA. We have received a total of 234 responses in six UN languages, including 77 Member States, 20 UN System colleagues, 115 stakeholders and 22 others.

Given the short time available, I will share preliminary findings of the English version of the survey, only. A more in-depth analysis of the results will be posted on our website.

The vast majority of respondents believe that the HLPF has been successful in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Generally, respondents believe that the HLPF has fulfilled its various functions in the following areas:

1. the thematic reviews of the SDGs seemed to have been the best fulfilled,
2. the Voluntary National Reviews served its preliminary purpose,
3. the identification of trends and emerging issues,
4. the role of the HLPF as a Platform for partnerships, and
5. the promotion of UN system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development policies
6. the results also suggest that many see room for improvement, including for an improved Science-policy interface, and in the provision of high-level political leadership and guidance for sustainable development.

Your Excellencies,

Many respondents consulted several inputs to the HLPF, as you can see on the slide. The most consulted were Voluntary National Reviews of countries, the SDG Progress Report, and the Global Sustainable Development Report. Clearly, we can do better to make the other inputs to the HLPF more visible.

Many of you also agree that the HLPF:

- has brought together participants from all walks of life, working in all three dimensions of sustainable development, and
- has helped to take stock of SDG progress.
- The HLPF had discussions that were well-prepared and based on evidence, data and analysis.
- Its reviews of the SDGs sufficiently discussed interlinkages among the Goals and the three dimensions of sustainable development
- It showcased good practices for SDG implementation,
- identified challenges and emerging trends for SDG implementation,
- showcased solutions to address these challenges, and
- has helped to mobilize partnerships for the SDGs.

Many also believe that the VNRs have been useful for the following, in order of importance:

- Sharing lessons learned and experience gained
- Sharing SDG implementation challenges
- Advancing national implementation, and
- Mobilizing partnerships.

And many respondents believe that there was meaningful engagement of major groups and other stakeholders.

As for the way forward, the majority indicated that the HLPF should continue to review a set of SDGs every year, as well as the theme. A vast majority thinks that more specific guidance needs to be provided on the preparation of the VNR, including content and approach. A majority also agrees that more time needs to be allowed for VNR presentations. This would help to make them more conducive to exchanging lessons learned and peer learning.

The majority also believes the HLPF could discuss reviews by businesses, cities, and others on their own contributions to implementation. And a majority strongly agrees that the Ministerial Declaration should better reflect the discussions held at the HLPF.

I believe that these issues could be taken care of in the review of HLPF in the forthcoming General Assembly.

Concrete suggestions further include to continue to develop the forum and that the VNRs could be presented at the Regional Forums before being presented at the HLPF.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The upcoming review of the resolutions concerning the format, and organizational aspects of the HLPF, provides all of us an opportunity – but also the responsibility – to make the HLPF as effective as possible for implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The survey provides interesting insights on the lessons learned from the first cycle of the HLPF, and possible areas for improvement. It will help inform the Member States along with stakeholders, in their in-depth reflection, and in the negotiations.

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs will continue to support all Member States and stakeholders, to bring ideas and suggestions.

I look forward to a fruitful discussion on the issue.

Thank you.

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