

Summary of Measure What Matters HLPF Side-Event:

Harmonising existing measurement efforts under the HLPF's review function

UN HQ, New York, 30th of June, 2014

Chair and Panelists

Chair: Farooq Ullah, Executive Director, Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future
Dr. Marianne Beisheim, Global Issues Division, German Institute for International and Security Affairs
Oliver Greenfield, Convenor, Green Economy Coalition
Pietro Bertazzi, Senior Manager - Policy and Government Affairs, Global Reporting Initiative

Summary

During the first day of the second meeting of the UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the Measure What Matters (MWM) initiative convened a side-event that focused on tracking sustainable development progress and harmonizing the indicators used to do so. The side event panelists discussed measurement of indicators both within the context of current initiatives and also future Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within the context of the Post-2015 Development Agenda. A special emphasis was placed on increasing the alignment of such efforts across myriad stakeholders and levels of organization.

Dr. Marianne Beisheim began the panel discussion referring to the UN General Assembly Resolution 67/290 from July 2013, which mandated measuring and encouraged reporting sustainable development indicators through a voluntary, state-driven and state-led process, involving ministerial and other high-level participants. Moreover, this would replace national voluntary presentations in the context of the Annual Ministerial Review used for tracking progress on the MDGs. Resolution 67/290 also called for such a process to treat developed and developing countries equally and provides a platform for partnerships such as those with major groups and other stakeholders.

In order to reach these goals, it is important to fit such reviews into the allotted days of meetings and conferences, develop secretariat services for preparation and follow-up, and integrate existing reviews and reports (DCF, UPR, UNFCCC, UNCAC, WTO, G20, APRM, APEC). Such an accountability framework must translate the SDGs into national level sustainable development plans, interventions, and measurement systems. However, there is a data gap, with up to 80 percent of data for global development indicators not being available.

Oliver Greenfield explored the dialogue on the private sector's involvement in sustainable development and whether agreements should be voluntary, as they are currently under the Global Compact, or mandatory. SDGs according to Greenfield help define what the green economy can do for society, especially the elements of well-being and quality of life as well as the state of the natural world. In looking at the possibility of mandatory sustainable development goals or targets for private sector entities, Greenfield brought up the point that such mandates are difficult to justify for the private sector if many targets are voluntary for governments. Greenfield also covered the need for aligning private sector and government efforts, interventions, and measurement of progress, asking us to "Imagine a world where societal and business goals align."

Regarding governments, he discussed moving the measurement of development from simplistic proxy indicators such as GDP to more holistic measures that assess complete development. Given that there are many interlocking systems, which we are measuring and operating through, it is important to define clearly how indicators will be measured and synthesize and coordinate such systems. The SDGs should be measured nationally and be integrated into national plans. Finally,

Greenfield introduced the “Measure What Matters” initiative, which examines measurement at multiple levels of scale (global, national, and business levels), evaluating the “triple-bottom line” of social, environment, and economic indicators, and a specific mechanism to explore issues of measurement and data alignment. Through this work, the Green Economy Coalition hopes to help the private sector to strengthen sustainable practices and reporting.

Pietro Bertazzi briefly explained the Global Reporting Initiative, a widely used sustainability reporting mechanism for the private sector and other organizations. In line with his work with the private sector, Bertazzi was emphatic that private sector organizations will be critical to the success of future SDGs. Conversely, the SDGs will provide an opportunity for the private sector to engage more fully with the sustainable development agenda. To accomplish this, alignment is important between corporate reporting and national and international governmental reporting, ranging from technical to political to governmental. For example, in the political realm a target for increasing the proportion of companies conducting sustainability reporting could be implemented. On the governmental end, Paragraph 47 of the Rio+20 outcome document acknowledges the importance of sustainability reporting and a number of national governments have offered to establish secretariats to support such work. Pietro also suggested creating SDGs or targets that target specifically the needs and impacts of the private sector.

Questions and comments

Moving into commentary and questions from attendees, important points were made regarding challenges to data collection, international coordination, and alignment of stakeholder interests and inputs. It was noted that many countries exhibit resistance to international frameworks. Creating national level frameworks, which keep governments accountable to their citizens, is critical, and future SDGs need to be translated in national level development plans, interventions, and measurement systems. This could take the form of parliamentary inquiries or reviews. On the data front, some experts estimate that 80 percent of data necessary for tracking global development indicators is not measured or collected yet.

Further comments by audience members focused on the intersection of human rights and business, as well as how to create better reporting within the private sector around sustainability indicators and align better systems of reporting and review for private and public indicators. Given the current voluntary nature of corporate reporting and sustainability plans, it was asked whether and how a globally binding business and human rights initiative could be created, moving beyond the limitations of the Global Compact.

More info: www.measurewhatmatters.info