

Background note for consultations on the scope, methodology and frequency of the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)

Introduction and mandate

Paragraph 83 of “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development” mandated the president of ECOSOC to conduct a process of consultations on the scope, methodology and frequency of the Global Sustainable Development Report as well as its relation to the SDG Progress Report. As per this mandate, the outcome of these consultations should be reflected in the Ministerial Declaration of the HLPF session in 2016.

This note provides background elements on previous intergovernmental discussions on the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) and outlines the main elements of the consultation process.

Previous intergovernmental discussions on the GSDR

Rio+20 decided to establish the HLPF, which would, as one of its functions, “strengthen the science-policy interface through review of documentation bringing together dispersed information and assessments, including in the form of a global sustainable development report, building on existing assessments” (§85k).

General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/290 of 9 July 2013 confirmed the role of the GSDR and requested “...the forum to consider, in 2014, the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report, based on a proposal of the Secretary-General reflecting the views and recommendations of Member States, and relevant United Nations entities...”.

In response to resolution A/67/290, all Member States, political groups and all 53 UN organizations of ECESA-Plus were invited to make proposals on the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report. The views expressed were summarized in Secretary-General’s report E/2014/87 of June 2014. The report synthesized the positions of Member States and other stakeholders on the scope, methodology and frequency of the report.¹

The report also proposed three broad options for the GSDR going forward: option 1: Conventional UN flagship publication model; option 2: Multi-stakeholder, multi-level approach; option 3: Approach following that of the IPCC. Option 1 was the least resource intensive and option 3 the most costly.

A prototype GSDR, issued in June 2014, was prepared by the Secretariat. At the second meeting of the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC, the Prototype GSDR was presented to Member

¹ UNGA, 2014, Options for the scope and methodology for a global sustainable development report, Report of the Secretary-General, E/2014/87, June, E/2014/87. Accessible at: http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2014/87&Lang=E

States, and the scope and methodology of the GSDR were discussed. Preference was expressed for a multi-stakeholder, multi-level approach to preparing future reports.

A second edition of the report, published in June 2015, was prepared by the UN Secretariat.² Consistent with the expressed preference of Member States as summarized in the SG's Report, the approach adopted was a multi-stakeholder one, documenting and describing the landscape of information on specific issues, based on extensive inputs from the UN system, the scientific community, including scientists involved in key international assessments, government officials and stakeholders at all levels. The Secretariat is currently working on GSDR 2016, which will inform the 2016 HLPF.

The Summit outcome further clarified that the GSDR will inform the global reviews of the 2030 Agenda at the HLPF in paragraph 83 as stated above. The same paragraph also specifies the difference between the GSDR and the annual SDG Progress Report, which will be based on the global indicator framework and data produced by national statistical systems and information collected at the regional level.

Most recently, in their replies to the questionnaire on global reviews sent by UN/DESA, some Member States provided additional indications on their expectations for the GSDR.

Objective of the consultations

Following the mandate given by the Summit, the consultations will seek to identify a common position of Member States on the scope, methodology and frequency of the GSDR, as well as on the of the relation of the GSDR with the SDG Progress Report. The consensus will be reflected in an agreed text that will eventually be part of the HLPF Ministerial Declaration.

Scope of the consultations

The scope of the consultations indicated by the Summit mandate covers the four following elements: scope, methodology and frequency of the Report, as well as its relation to the SDG Progress. Under these headlines, the following questions cover the points that came up most prominently in positions stated by countries over the last two years. They could provide the initial frame for the consultation.

Frequency:

The main question to be addressed is whether, in addition to a comprehensive report every four years produced for the meetings of the HLPF under the auspices of the General Assembly, shorter and focused yearly reports should be produced to inform the HLPF when it meets under the auspices of ECOSOC.

Scope of the report:

² The GSDR 2015 is available at:
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1758GSDR%202015%20Advance%20Unedited%20Version.pdf>.

The scope of the report that was chosen for the prototype version was that of the SDGs, seen as an indivisible and integrated system. Member States may want to confirm this. In addition, the two following points could be clarified: (i) how the GSDR should link to the theme of the HLPF and to thematic reviews; and (ii) how the GSDR could support substantive discussions on the various agenda items of the work of the HLPF.

Methodology:

Questions needing clarification include the following: (i) what would be critical elements of the methodology in order to ensure sufficient scientific credibility of the report? (ii) what elements in relation to the methodology of the report could ensure maximal relevance of the report for its audience, in particular the HLPF? and (iii) what would be the most useful way in which the report could flag emerging issues for the attention of policy-makers?

Relationship with the SDG Progress Report:

The consultations could aim to further specify the complementarity of the two reports referenced in the 2030 Agenda, such as: (i) the GSDR is not expected to be a standard monitoring report based on indicators, but will complement the SDG Progress Report's anticipated goal-by-goal review of progress with a more integrated and cross-cutting assessment of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including successes, challenges, gaps, lessons learned and emerging trends; and (ii) the GSDR, following its mandate to strengthen the science-policy interface, will provide a strong, evidence-based instrument to support policymakers in promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development.

Process for the consultations

The negotiations will be facilitated by Ambassador Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations. The consultation process will consist of a series of informal consultations, starting with an initial meeting to collect the views of Member States. On this basis, consultations would continue, with the goal to agree on a text that will later be included "as is" in the HLPF Ministerial Declaration and will not be reopened during the negotiations on the latter. Informal meetings will be organized as needed for this purpose.

Timeline of the consultations

- End of January: appointment of the facilitator for the consultations.
- Early February: Letter from the President of ECOSOC to Member States on the consultations.
- Early March to 15 April: Facilitator to conduct a series of informal meetings and work on agreed text for inclusion in the HLPF ministerial declaration.