

Meeting of EC-ESA Plus Principals
Thursday, 4 July 2013
3:00 – 5:00 p.m.
Salle XVII at the Palais des Nations
Geneva

Background Note for Agenda Item I

I. Follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20)

a. **High Level Political Forum** A key outcome of the Rio+20 Conference was the decision to establish a universal high-level political forum “to follow-up on implementation of sustainable development, with the aim of convening the first forum at the beginning of the 68th session of the General Assembly”. The President of the Assembly appointed the Permanent Representatives of Italy and Brazil as co-facilitators to guide the negotiations on the format and organizational aspects of the forum. The negotiations are on-going.

Main issues on negotiations:

i. Institutional placement

The draft resolution proposes a so-called “hybrid model” involving:

- A meeting of Heads of State and Government (HOS/HOG) under the auspices of the GA, held every four years for up to two days;
- A ministerial meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC. This meeting would be held every year and comprise a three days ministerial segment preceded by a seven day preparatory segment.

The following issues are still pending to date in the negotiations on the forum:

ii. Participation

- Some delegations want all Member States of the UN and Member States of specialized agencies to participate in the forum (all-state-formula) whereas others want participation to be limited to UN member States.

iii. Decision-making and outcomes

- Regarding outcomes, many countries want the forum to have only negotiated outcomes. There is some agreement that a political declaration could be adopted at the level of heads of state/government – which would provide guidance to intergovernmental process and the UN system. But there is no agreement yet on whether meetings under the auspices of ECOSOC should have negotiated outcomes.

iv. Substantive issues

- There is broad agreement that the HLPF should discuss the post-2015 agenda. This however raises the question of how the forum would position itself vis-à-vis ECOSOC. Delegations have begun reflecting on whether the forum should replace the Annual Ministerial Review of ECOSOC after 2015.
- There is much interest in the global sustainable development report mandated in Rio. Member States would like to have a greater say in its substantive focus and see it as a system-wide exercise.

v. Architecture of the forum's meetings and provisional clauses

- There is broad agreement on having the forum meet at the level of Heads of State/Government under the auspices of the GA, every four years.
- There is likewise broad agreement that the forum would meet at ministerial level under the auspices of ECOSOC. There is however no agreement yet on whether these meetings should have an agreed outcome.
- There is also no agreement on whether to have a preparatory segment as part of the meetings under the auspices of ECOSOC.
- The first forum is expected to meet at the beginning of the general debate of the General Assembly at a date yet to be determined. There is also a proposal to hold exceptionally, a high-level meeting in the General Assembly in 2015. There is agreement that the first Ministerial meeting in ECOSOC should take place in 2014.

vi. Support to the high-level political forum

- The agreement is that DESA will support the work of the forum in close cooperation with “all relevant entities of the UN system, including funds and programmes, multilateral financial and trade institutions, the Rio Conventions and other relevant treaty bodies and international organizations within their respective mandates”.
- The negotiations on the forum are closely related to the ongoing negotiations on the strengthening of ECOSOC, under the leadership of the Ambassadors of Guyana and Belgium. Some decisions related to the strengthening of ECOSOC are left pending until there is agreement on related aspects in the context of the negotiations on the forum.

b. Mainstreaming sustainable development in the work of the UN system

The Rio+20 Conference called for “the further mainstreaming of the three dimensions of sustainable development throughout the UN system”. It asked the Secretary-General to report through ECOSOC to the GA on progress made in this regard.

The first Secretary-General's report on this topic¹ was produced in a close consultation with ECESA Plus members. It will be introduced to the ECOSOC on July 18th.

¹ A/68/79--E/2013/69; Available at:
<http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1799sgreport1.pdf>

The report serves as a preliminary stocktaking of how the UN system has integrated economic, social and environmental dimensions in its work – and thus as a baseline for future reporting. It identifies some lessons learned and makes a few recommendations for future work. Selected messages from the report are as follows:

- Sustainable development means that as policies and programmes are developed, policy makers should carefully consider the potential impacts of said policies on sustainable development. This is essential in order to avoid unintended impacts, conflicting policies or unsustainable outcomes. It also enables the UN system to identify opportunities to help countries to progress on all three dimensions at the same time.
- However, moving this concept into practice requires a fundamental rethinking of the way the UN conceives its analytical, policy and operational work.
- The new high-level political forum for sustainable development could become a central platform to spur mainstreaming of sustainable development throughout UN system intergovernmental bodies and organizations. It should receive future Secretary-General's reports on this issue.

c. Work of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals

The Open Working Group on SDGs has thus far held four sessions. Discussions during the sessions have demonstrated that delegations are aware of the need to shift gears to intensify the dialogue on concrete goals, targets and possible indicators that would capture the three dimensions of sustainable development. The next session of the group will be held on 25-27 November.

Initial views of the Member States show that most want to see a single UN development agenda beyond 2015 with sustainable development at its core. The following are among the key potential areas for the SDGs that have been identified by Member States: poverty eradication, food security and sustainable agriculture, water and sanitation, energy, education, health, employment, oceans, sustainable consumption and production, and means of implementation.

The special event of the President of the General Assembly, to be held on 25 September 2013, will be an important milestone in the process towards a post-2015 development agenda. The Co-chairs of the OWG will produce a short interim report for the event. The report will most likely have three parts: 1. Process; 2. Update on the side-events and different meetings around the OWG; 3. Substantive part that will include the Co-chairs' broader vision and highlights on each issue addressed by the OWG so far.