

E-discussion: *“Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals: What it will take”*

Summary report
Thematic Window IV: Monitoring and Review

The global e-discussion was coordinated and organized by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) is partnered with UNDP and DESA to coordinate one of the four thematic windows of the e-discussion on the issue of Monitoring and review.

I. Introduction

Theme IV of the electronic discussion on the 2015 ECOSOC theme *“Managing the transition from the Millennium Development Goals to the Sustainable Development Goals: What it will take”* was moderated by Patrick Paul Walsh, Senior Advisor at SDSN, New York and Chair of International Development Studies in University College Dublin, Ireland.

The thematic window IV was guided by the following two questions:

- What kind of monitoring and review in the multi-tiered and multi-stakeholder responsibility structure will be required for the SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda? What would be the key features of an effective monitoring and review framework?
- How will action on the different goals at the global, regional or national levels be better tracked, taking into consideration national and regional specificities? What incentives would be needed to ensure that a broad range of actors engage in monitoring and review of results?

The e-discussion provided a unique opportunity for the wider development community to formulate critical policy messages and recommendations for ECOSOC which we summarise in this report. Contributions came from academia, practitioners and policy-makers.

Contributions made by e-discussion participants will be summarized in this report and posted on the ECOSOC website. The contributions will also be channelled through the report of the Secretary-General on the ECOSOC theme in support of the Council’s deliberations on the theme during its high-level segment in July. The report of the Secretary-General will be a valuable input into the adoption of the Council’s 2015 Ministerial Declaration.

Opening Remarks

The proposed Sustainable Development Goals, when in place, will aim to mobilize governments, businesses, civil society organizations and academia to end extreme poverty in all its forms and achieve sustainable development as soon as possible.

The goals can be a management tool and a report card for all actors, but this will only be possible if sound indicators and monitoring systems are established. So far, the international community's attention has been focused on defining goals and targets. This focus must now be broadened to include the indicators and associated monitoring systems so that the world is ready to implement the SDGs.

The UN Secretary General, in his synthesis report – *The Road to Dignity by 2030* – suggests four levels of monitoring to ensure robust accountability for the SDGs: national, regional, global, and thematic. The report also calls for “*a culture of shared responsibility, one based on agreed universal norms, global commitments, shared rules and evidence, collective action and benchmarking for progress*”.

One issue is the comparable indicators and associated monitoring systems for 17 SDGs and 169 associated targets at the national, regional, global, and thematic levels. The technology to build micro data on harmonised digital platforms may exist, but the institutional structures, human capacity, legal requirements, financing issues and stakeholder will to standardize metrics on such a platform, may be hard to put in place. SDSN would argue the focus of harmonised global reporting on the SDGs should only be at the national level, where it can aggregate over heterogeneous national and local mechanisms and processes, with broad, multi-stakeholder participation. The number of indicators for global monitoring may not be so many. Some key indicators may be able to track a good few goals and several targets. Some key economic, social and environmental indicators could be developed to reflect a nation's position in achieving Sustainable Development. These key indicators may already exist or may need to be developed. Is it possible that we may only need as little as twenty indicators that transcend the 17 goals and 169 targets? For effective monitoring, flow data should be reported annually and stock data can be inferred annually and reported every few years. Statistically we would say that 20 indicators could work, but this may not work out politically. Agents of the UN system, governments, civil society and even academics will all want a particular indicator for a key, admit important, issue.

Regional monitoring and accountability will play a critical role in fostering regional collaboration and coherence in strategies to pursue the SDGs, while thematic reporting will play a critical role in mobilizing epistemic communities. National monitoring and accountability over these dimensions can be tailored and nation specific. There is no need for them to be comparable across nations, per se. Gathering robust and quality data will require capacity building and financial investments. To respond to this challenge, SDSN launched A Needs Assessment for SDG Monitoring and Statistical Capacity Development, in partnership with 15 other organizations. The report, entitled *Data For Development*, proposes a typology of development data that will be needed to track SDGs progress, identifies priority investments and provides an assessment of the level of resources required to build strong statistical systems in the world's poorest countries.

SDSN is working in partnership with UN agencies, civil society, national statistical offices and technical and scientific experts, to develop recommendations on the shape of these four monitoring levels, and to identify the investments and innovations that will be required to respond to the ambitious SDG agenda. .

The e-discussion also focused on the challenge of establishing a robust follow-up and review mechanism to support implementation. More specifically it considers the institutions that would be required to encourage mutual accountability of all UN member states, and the multiple stakeholders involved in the implementation of SDGs.

While taking stock of current agreements on the SDG follow-up and review processes, explaining the agreements reached on the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) and the utilization of evidence in the review process, the discussion is dedicated however to proposing a multi-level and multi-stakeholder framework for the SDG follow-up and review process that could be adopted and agreed on within the upcoming intergovernmental negotiations. Existing models and best practices informed the discussion. Follow-up and review can take place at three levels: national, regional and global. At the national level, reviews of progress should be supported by National Councils for Sustainable Development, working alongside the National Statistical Office who will generate the evidence. At the regional level, the Regional Economic Commissions should facilitate information exchange and peer review. The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) will be the key forum at the global level. The HLPF process should be grounded in the principles of mutual accountability and peer review. In this spirit, the HLPF will need to perform three key functions: providing a forum for countries to discuss their progress and collating global evidence reports; taking stock of the Global Partnership in support of implementation of the SDG agenda; and coordinating other, complementary parts of the UN system.

Key milestones in building a monitoring framework for the SDGs will include:

- Lead international agencies should work with NSOs and other stakeholders to prepare their information gathering systems in anticipation of the goals and indicators that will be adopted in September 2015.
- UN Statistical Commission in March 2016 needs to finalise the key data components of an SDG monitoring framework.
- The July 2015 Financing for Development Conference must mobilize the means for SDG monitoring and other components of the data revolution.
- The first SDG review (and accompanying report) can commence in the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) or other suitable fora in 2016.
- By 2018 at the latest, the international system, and notably the UN organizations and partner institutions (including the OECD, World Bank, World Trade Organization and others) should have in place an accurate and meaningful annual reporting system.

In our e-discussion we have witnessed outstanding expertise and tremendous enthusiasm for making the SDGs and their monitoring and review a success.

II. Discussion Points and Policy Recommendations

The discussion focused on the following four areas as important components of a successful monitoring and review process.

I Data

II Institutions

III Capacities

IV Enabling Implementation

I Data

What evidence will underpin this architecture and the monitoring of the SDGs? What is the role of indicators at global, regional and national levels?

Effective SDGs, targets, and their indicators will serve as a management tool to help countries develop implementation strategies and allocate resources accordingly. They will also serve as a report card to measure progress towards sustainable development and to help ensure the accountability of all stakeholders for achieving the SDGs. Indicators will be the backbone of monitoring progress towards the SDGs at local, national, regional, and global levels.

As underscored by the OWG, the focus of monitoring on the SDGs must be at the national level. Each country will choose the national SDG indicators that are best suited to track its own progress towards sustainable development.

Yet, the Goals also describe a global agenda, including some global public goods that cannot be implemented by any country on its own. Unless an effective global monitoring framework complements national efforts, the SDGs cannot be achieved in time. To ensure effective global monitoring, the Global Monitoring Indicators for the SDGs would be tracked in every country and reported periodically at the global level and by each country. In addition, regional monitoring and accountability will play a critical role in fostering the regional collaboration and coherence in strategies to pursue the SDGs. A fourth and critical level of monitoring occurs in each thematic or epistemic community. The e-discussion raised a number of issues that we list below

1. One should recognize the different capacities and capabilities of countries in producing indicators.
2. While national indicators don't need to be comparable across nations how is this consistent with global and thematic indicators that need to be collected in a harmonized way for international comparison?
3. What are the legal and security issues concerning monitoring data?

4. How can we utilize private sector platforms for effective monitoring and evaluation and leverage new technologies like cloud-computing?
5. Should we not be incorporating qualitative as well as quantitative targets? Sometimes the unmeasurable is the most important thing.
6. There is a call for a Global Sustainable Development Index that is a realistic alternative to GNI. A sustainability index, that incorporates economic, social and environment dimensions, a metric that has the power to drive political debates around issues of efficiency, equity and sustainability.
7. There is a call or nationally motivated gender based indicators around all targets. Data2x is doing great work here but are we seeing a mainstreaming of gender across the proposed indicators harmonized for global monitoring and used in strategic planning within countries?
8. There is a call for the use of integrated micro data. The problem at the moment is that micro data tends to be collected from Companies, Households and on the Environment separately, or not at all! Such data can be made interoperable with geo coding (see Aid Data project funded by US AID). There is no reason not to have company surveys include social and environmental disseminations and vice versa. The Central Statistics office will tell you that it's not an issue for them, but they play to the needs of independent departments of social welfare, environment and economic planning. The barriers to a data revolution are not really about technology and the building of bottom up meta data, but more about the need for a reform of government structures, people and agencies to enable and facilitate such.
9. We need to set good baselines for each of the indicators. Otherwise what is the counterfactual? Setting these within nations makes sense for national targets. This becomes more difficult for Global Monitoring. Baselines need careful consideration. Countries start from different initial conditions!

II Institutions

The Secretary General also notes that the SDGs present an opportunity to reform and further re-fit the UN development systems to ensure the UN is “fit for purpose,” a call which is appropriately ambitious, but UN reform process may be extremely difficult. The architecture for review could also play an important role in breathing new life into existing accountability mechanisms, with responsibilities for oversight delegated to appropriate UN bodies that play an existing accountability function. Such an approach could reduce the need for significant additional resources, as well as improve coordination on efforts to realise the SDGs. The global monitoring framework can make use of existing accountability mechanisms in at least two key ways. First, appropriate UN bodies could play a key role in collecting and reporting on the SDGs under the leadership of a central coordinating agency, likely the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA). Second, appropriate UN bodies could be used to facilitate reporting and dialogues on thematic areas covered by the SDGs.

Since most Member States opt for a voluntary and state-led Post-2015 review process, it is crucial to ensure multi-stakeholder participation and shared responsibility in a multi-tiered monitoring and review framework. The UN and its Member States must make sure that the monitoring and review process does not become solely a global level exercise; the global review needs to be based on a multi-level process.

While governments may have a problem accepting and practising the term “accountability” at the international level, they are accountable to their own citizens at the national level. In that context, national parliaments are important oversight bodies. They should have a role by holding regular hearings on the implementation of the national SD strategies and progress reports. In addition to this, civil society and other stakeholders, such as business or municipalities, should be involved in drafting and discussing national targets, commitments, and reports. To do so, they must have full access to information (i.e. monitoring data). Consultations and dialogues need to be informed, timely, and with agreed openings for meaningful input. The outcomes of participatory monitoring and accountability processes led by civil society organizations (“citizen reviews”) should be taken into consideration. National sustainable development councils or similar multi-stakeholder bodies, which all Member States should be urged to establish, could help coordinate national consultation and discussion processes on the national Post-2015 SD strategies, goals, targets, commitments, and progress reports.

At the international level, the UNGA resolution 67/290 that established the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) grants Major Groups and other stakeholders extensive rights of participation (different from the relatively restrictive ECOSOC rules). Major groups and relevant stakeholders have the right to “attend all official meetings”, “to submit documents and present written and oral contributions”, and “to make recommendations” (para. 15 a, d, e). As with the HRC’s UPR, their written reports and oral statements should be an integral component of the review process. To best handle the quantity of information, they should submit their reports to the secretariat serving the HLPF, which would then compile the relevant information into a synthesis report that would supplement the national progress report (following the model of the UPR). In addition, full reports could be put on the HLPF’s website. Consistent with resolution 67/290, non-governmental representatives will be allowed to speak during the debate of the reports in the HLPF’s plenary sessions. These discussions should give priority to comments from national-level, non-governmental civil society groups, national sustainable development councils, and other stakeholders. To achieve the greatest possible transparency and participation, the secretariat should open up an Internet-based discussion and broadcast review meetings by UN Web TV (as with the AMR and UPR). An ombudsperson could mediate in cases of complaints concerning problems of adequate participation rights at the national, regional, or international level of the Post-2015 review.

1. On a national level, and guided by countries unique contexts, establish or reinstate National Sustainable Development Councils. NSDCs should guarantee a broad multi-stakeholder membership and should inform national policy development, promote public understanding and engagement in implementation of sustainable development strategies, and, in partnership with National Statistical Offices, promote evidence-based development and monitoring of national strategies

2. On a regional level, facilitated by the UN Regional Commissions, the review process should take advantage of peer review mechanisms to promote mutual learning, knowledge exchange, transboundary cooperation, and identification of best practices that could be replicated in context-similar settings.
3. On a global level, HLPF should be the main forum for SDGs follow up and review process. It should enable mutual learning through providing a forum for cyclical country peer reviews and by generating evidence on global progress in the implementation of the post-2015 agenda.
4. HLPF should ensure independent global oversight of the follow up and review process. We propose that the UN Secretary General appoints an independent Expert Review Group to serve in that capacity, with thematically relevant UN agencies serving as the Group's technical secretariats.
5. On all levels of review, Member States and other agencies need to ensure full and formal participation of non-governmental actors to guarantee transparency, build national capacities, and promote ownership and implementation of post-2015 agenda.
6. Civil society and private sector actors should be subject to review processes to monitor their compliance with sustainable development practices.

III Capacities

What kinds of capacity investments are required to put in place a robust monitoring system? The SDGs require annual reporting of high-quality data from all countries. This in turn will require much greater investments in building independent, impartial national statistical capacities and strengthening quality and standards. NSOs must be actively involved in the development of global and national indicator frameworks, through a multi-stakeholder process that could be convened by the UN Statistical Commission. The SDGs will be goals for the world – applicable to all countries, as well as multiple, diverse actors. As such, the best input from business, science, academia, and civil society should be sought in their development, as well as in the development of the accompanying monitoring architecture. The e-discussion brought up a number of issues

1. The need to strengthen existing national structures of data collection, monitoring, and evaluation with greater investment in resources and technical assistance
2. The ability to deliver the SDGs will need extra finance and data, but also increased capacity in governments. In addition to the legal and technical requirements to collect data to monitor the SDGs, do countries have the necessary human resources and capacity? The Global Association of the Master's in Development Practice conducts training on sustainable development for civil servants but there is a lot to be done across all nations before September 2015. Many of the goals and targets need a medium to long term. Governments need top professionals with a public sector

vocation to achieve these SDGs or nothing will really happen. This is also true in the Private sector, NGOs and Academia.

3. There is a call for an enabling technical platform for global and national monitoring. As suggested it can be used not just for monitoring of output but to host research output from partnerships. Governments, and the UN, need to build a capacity to take leadership on these platforms. Our e-discussion here is a first step. Partnerships cannot work on digital platforms alone. Partnerships need to be present in governance structures and decision making as well. In terms of public policy development, some nation states are better than others when it comes to including Academics, Civil Society and the Private sector in planning. All stakeholders need to participate and reform to achieve the ambitious set of SDGs outlined in the OWG document. No doubt digital platforms for data, committee work, research coordination, work on implementation and monitoring can be a game changer for what is an ambitious SDG project.

IV Enabling Implementation

What kind of monitoring and review architecture is required to support implementation of the SDG agenda? The development of a comprehensive and coherent SDGs monitoring and review framework is essential to ensure progress towards sustainable development. Even the most robust set of goals, targets and indicators that are agreed upon by the international community will not guarantee in itself that the new development agenda is implemented universally, if it is not supported by a review mechanism that facilitates knowledge, best practice exchange and peer learning. The international consensus, stemming from various stakeholder consultations with respect to a monitoring and review framework, and further consolidated in the Secretary General's Synthesis Report, stressed the need for a multi-layered mechanism of national, regional and global levels. These three dimensions of the new monitoring framework should be complementary to each other and should avoid duplication with other parallel review mechanisms that are already in place as a result of previous international agreements and commitments.

1. Monitoring and evaluation must ensure multi-stakeholder participation and shared responsibility among international bodies, local governments, non-government organizations, civil society groups, business, and academia
2. We need to investigate the establishment of legally mandated structures of national accountability could help ensure commitments to delivering on the goals
3. We need to develop effective cooperation and communication mechanisms across countries and regions to share, evaluate, and compare findings
4. How can we really involve non-government actors like the private sector, civil society, and academia in the review and monitoring process? At the National level, one needs civil society to be involved in drafting and discussing national targets. One needs a participatory monitoring and accountability process. At the international level we need to ensure multi-stakeholder participation and shared responsibility - not an

executive, centralized process; stakeholders should have the right to attend meetings, submit documents and make recommendations

5. Discussions to give priority to national level NGOs and civil society groups, development councils and other stakeholders
7. Monitoring of implementation needs information sharing at local, national, regional and global level. However, it is not only the question of sharing official government data, but also establishing feedback channels to communicate with civil society and general public.
8. Role of participatory monitoring and shadow reporting could increase citizen engagement in the SDG implementation and review process. Civil society will play an important role in communicating perspectives of the marginalized communities, challenges and progress achieved and holding governments accountable.
9. Commit to regular review of SDGs progress to ensure timely identification of gaps in implementation and manage appropriate response.

Reference

Synthesis Report of the Secretary-General on the post-2015 Agenda (2014). para. 61 http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/reports/SG_Synthesis_Report_Road_to_Dignity_by_2030.pdf

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