



ECOSOC

United Nations Economic and Social Council

TAKING ACTION TO IMPROVE LIVES

E-Discussion on the 2016 ECOSOC Theme
***“Implementing the post-2015 development agenda:
moving from commitments to results”***

Summary

I. Introduction

Through their adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in September 2015, Heads of State and Government committed to eradicating poverty and advancing sustainable development, focusing on people and planet and pledging to leave no one behind. The 2030 Agenda is broad and ambitious, establishing a unified, universal and integrated development framework. The 2030 Agenda will therefore require enhanced capacities to coordinate and integrate policies at the national, regional and global levels with a view to fostering effective realization of the SDGs.

In response to the new Agenda, the theme for the 2016 Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) substantive session is *“Implementing the post-2015 development agenda: moving from commitments to results”*. The session will elaborate the policy, institutional and other requirements, as well as provide policy guidance and promote operational support for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

In support of the 2016 session, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) convened an e-Discussion on the 2016 ECOSOC theme from 29 February to 25 March 2016. The discussion focussed on:

- i) *The scope and implications of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, moderated by Ms. Diana Alarcón, Chief, Development Strategy and Policy Unit, Development Policy and Analysis Division/DESA;
- ii) *National implementation*, moderated by Mr. Pedro Conceicao, Director, Strategic Policy, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP; and
- iii) *Follow-up and review*, moderated by Mr. Neil Pierre, Chief, Policy Coordination Branch, Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination/DESA.

The e-Discussion was highly interactive and generated approximately 700 contributions from 177 countries. The Discussion engaged over 6,600 participants from civil society,

the private sector, academia and the UN system. Many provided concrete suggestions for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and for follow-up and review, especially at the national and local levels.

This summary provides an overview of the contributions by the e-Discussion participants. The views expressed do not represent the views of the moderators or their institutions.

II. Common messages and themes

Throughout all three of the thematic windows, the need to raise awareness about the SDGs and to be inclusive was stressed repeatedly. Concern was expressed about the limited awareness of the SDGs by relevant stakeholders within governments, the private sector, civil society, as well as among individuals.

The importance of promoting national ownership of the 2030 Agenda was also highlighted. Participants emphasized that national reviews should facilitate frequent consultations and provide mechanisms for participation of relevant groups from civil society, the private sector, academia and other sectors. Technology was identified as a key instrument for such consultations, as well as people's engagement and ownership of this process. In addition, it was noted that the international community must recognize the role of local leadership, including religious or community leaders, in promoting both awareness and ownership of the SDGs.

The need to strengthen and encourage multi-stakeholder engagement and partnerships in implementing the 2030 Agenda was also stressed in all of the thematic windows. Participants emphasized that it is crucial that such partnerships are inclusive and employ a systematic thinking approach in order to ensure sustainability.

Further common messages and themes include:

- **General awareness** of the SDGs and an understanding of the concept and principles of sustainable development are critical at this early stage of implementation. This will build strong follow-up and review processes in the future. This concerns everyone within societies, including government ministers, public servants and local communities. There is a need for raising of awareness about SDGs through dissemination of information and training, in order to ensure that no one is left behind.
- The SDGs need to be **localized** effectively (translated into results at the local level) in order for the 2030 Agenda to be successful. Localization would need to be coherent (in content and process) with efforts to raise awareness about and implement the Agenda at national and sub-nation levels.
- Countries should **mainstream and integrate SDGs into national development plans**, with the support of the UN development system, in order to ensure the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The use of lessons learned and best practices must also be disseminated to help countries save time and effort.
- **Leadership ranging from the community level to the highest branches of government** is essential to maximize the impact of policy interventions and their

compliance with key national priorities in an agreed collective approach that can meet the specific needs of each country.

- Role of the **UN as a catalyst for the 2030 Agenda**: The UN should facilitate awareness and policy advocacy, as well as encourage mutual accountability in implementation, while urging stakeholders to respect and encourage national ownership.
- **Gender empowerment** in education; job creation; skill building; quality, accessible and affordable childcare; and political and economic participation will result in positive development spill overs to the individual, family and society.
- Investing in **education** is pivotal for progress. There is a need to increase the educational attainment of girls, increase education investments in teaching national and local languages, and teach and use indigenous knowledge. Governments and stakeholders of the 2030 Agenda should also focus on providing free, quality education at primary, secondary, tertiary, college and vocational centers to build capacity, as well as on creating expertise and promoting innovation and research.
- **Inclusive partnerships** with the private sector, academia, research institutes, and technological corporations through their cooperative work towards a common goal, joint action in support of country-led plans to achieve sustainable development, continue to be important.
- **Multi-stakeholder engagement** is imperative to solving development challenges and achieving the 2030 Agenda, with many discussants calling for greater engagement of community leaders, women, youth and indigenous peoples.

III. Key messages and policy recommendations by thematic window

The 2016 ECOSOC theme on implementation is the next step in facilitating the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. It encourages reflection on the identification of concrete steps to implement the new agenda. The 2016 E-Discussion addressed the theme through three thematic windows.

A. *The scope and implications of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

Thematic Window I on “*The scope and implications of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*” focused on putting into practice “leaving no one behind”, ensuring policy coherence, identifying best practices and providing coordinated and integrated support for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

The window was moderated by Ms. Diana Alarcón, Chief, Development Strategy and Policy Unit, Development Policy and Analysis Division/DESA. There were 296 contributions from civil society, the private sector, academia and the UN system.

Participants identified a number of pre-requisites for creating an enabling environment for implementing the 2030 Agenda, including:

- access to safe drinking water and sanitation in rural areas;
- affordable housing and sufficient disposable income;
- the establishment of a sustainable economy;

- reduction in competition among government agencies;
- the resolution of conflicts and assistance to fragile states to strengthen good governance;
- embracing facts, science and new ideas; and
- addressing the issues of corruption, infrastructure deficits and poor education.

Participants discussed a wide range of issues related to how to implement the 2030 Agenda, including the need to establish a strong global monitoring framework. The main task would be to facilitate the embedding of the SDGs and the targets by national and local governments and use of the derived indicators into their own national policies, strategies and priorities. Key questions to be addressed would include: How can innovative pro-SDG policies on the ground be promoted and supported beyond merely monitoring and reporting? How can we show that these policies work? How can they be tested? There is an urgent need to identify agents of change at the grassroots level to monitor implementation.

Participants also discussed a number of roles for the UN in implementation. For all UN agencies, bodies, programmes and organizations, the SDGs and their targets should be the framework in which all (institutional) strategies need to be aligned. The SDGs and their targets provide a way to deliver on the ground. Therefore, each and every strategy and priority of the UN system agencies needs to converge into respective SDGs/targets, thus avoiding parallel processes that only create a bureaucratic burden in the UN and, moreover, to countries, such as requiring reporting for similar issues under the SDGs. In essence, the support from UN agencies must be streamlined.

Reporting by countries should also be simplified. The need for a template for measuring the baseline or monitoring of the SDGs in the rural communities was stressed. There is a need for a replicable policy template to ensure policy coherence in different development contexts (e.g. least developed countries, middle-income countries, high-income countries, fragile states etc.).

Governments should be transparent and accountable and promote the rights of women and girls, youth and indigenous peoples. The dangers of “remote-controlled” (top-down) development plans that do not take into consideration the impact of large-scale development projects on indigenous populations and the environment were highlighted. The importance of improving living standards and participation in decision-making for indigenous peoples, as well as promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, was stressed.

Global issues are still not given sufficient attention. Economic globalization is ongoing but there is little or no progress in the globalization of human rights or human care. There is a need to educate populations in all countries, developed and developing, countries to understand that world problems are also their problems, not only in the name of humanity, but also because globalization impacts all of us.

B. *National implementation*

Thematic Window II on “*National implementation*” focused on mainstreaming the SDGs into national policies, building national capacities for sustainable development and ensuring the exchange of information and experiences among stakeholders.

The window was moderated by Mr. Pedro Conceicao, Director, Strategic Policy, Bureau for Policy and Programme Support, UNDP. There were 366 contributions from civil society, the private sector, academia and the UN system.

The key messages and policy recommendations from the window include:

As national governments usually already have short to mid-term planning processes in place, mainstreaming the SDGs at the national level begins with assessing the degree of alignment of these existing national policies and programmes vis-à-vis the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda could also profit from the coordination of international assistance funding as recognized in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and also aligning global or multilateral trade and investment agreements with the SDGs.

Least Developed Countries should have a clear vision working towards inclusive economic, political and social transformation. This vision should be led and guided by a democratic political and good governance system.

In order to achieve SDG implementation, middle-income countries must work on improving job creation and sustainable sources of income, promote full scale IT utilization for technological advancement and achieve improved, resilient and diversified economic systems.

It is important to meaningfully engage youth in the implementation of the SDGs, partnering with youth as agents of change, encouraging and involving them in decision-making processes. Training/coaching could be offered in leadership, planning, implementing and evaluating SDG-centered projects, ethics, community outreach, coalition building and teamwork, entrepreneurship and creativity and social, technical and business innovation. Youth engagement is extremely important and relevant due to the size of this age group. Additionally, they have relevant, innovative ideas and are impacted first hand by the 2030 Agenda.

Improving access to technologies, including solar, wind, tidal, and combined wind/water condensation turbines in addressing climate change, is imperative for countries.

Job creation and rural sector development policies are necessary interventions for poverty reduction efforts. The private sector should take on a greater role in promoting the eradication of poverty and should avoid all unethical and inhumane activities with the UN advising on private sector engagement. Likewise, governments should implement precautionary and sustainable development measures, which would include systematically requiring corporations and businesses to submit environmental impact

assessments for licensing certifications and periodic reviews to ensure environmental protection.

Strengthening sustainable agriculture will protect the sector from seasonal fluctuations and climate shocks and improve food security at household levels, which is one of the most important elements for achieving the SDGs. Developing an agro-industrial economy can reduce food insecurity and boost nutrition quality. To tackle food insecurity challenges that will be brought by climate change, there is a need to invest in innovation and technology transfer that can bring both structural and non-structural rapid changes for the agriculture sector.

Natural resources governance, in particular inclusive land use and management policies, is important. Particular attention should be paid to avoiding marginalizing vulnerable groups in national land use strategy.

In Least Developed Countries, special attention should be given to improving health care facilities and building the capacity of health care workers to combat preventable diseases that continue to claim lives and negatively affect sustainable development efforts. For example, the spread of the Ebola virus emphasized the need for the international community to work together to improve health care facilities and build the capacity of health care workers.

Access to clean water, sanitation and energy is still a problem in both least developed and middle-income countries where the limited access to adequate services infringes on human safety and dignity, causes preventable deaths and even increases the risk of sexual violence. Access to these services in urban and rural areas is also key to reducing inequalities.

C. Follow-up and review

Thematic Window III on “*Follow-up and review*” focused on identifying the key components of a comprehensive national review process, using follow up and review as a tool to facilitate the achievement of the SDGs and identifying the steps needed to put in place the evidence base to track progress on the 2030 agenda.

The window was moderated by Mr. Neil Pierre, Chief, Policy Coordination Branch, Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination/DESA. There were 76 contributions from civil society, the private sector, academia and the UN system.

The key messages and policy recommendations from the window include:

Multi-stakeholder engagement was identified repeatedly as a key component of a comprehensive national and global review process. This is essential as the overwhelming emphasis of the SDGs has been on the need for collective efforts and strong partnerships among different development stakeholders. It also helps to promote transparency and accountability. There was strong agreement among contributors and

a useful exchange of examples on the importance of involving beneficiaries, service users and local communities to ensure transparency in follow-up and review.

It was noted that many review processes do not adequately measure the extent of implementation and the degree to which citizens have actually been helped by a given policy intervention. The involvement of local beneficiaries and their communities can also help to ensure that benchmarks are relevant to local contexts; this is something that will be important at the next stage of indicator development for the 2030 Agenda at the national level. Supplementary reporting and review from civil society organisations can lend an important perspective to these processes and ensure that best practices are followed for citizen participation.

There are other tools and mechanisms for integration and coherence that could be put in place to support comprehensive national review processes, such as integrated planning and budgeting frameworks, and the creation of an SDG coordinating function or office at the centre of Government.

The national review process should strengthen and build on existing capacities within countries. In many countries, there are a variety of policies and programmes already in place which could be used to elaborate a new system of follow-up and review of the Agenda. There are various examples of existing platforms or processes that review progress in different development sectors, including the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), the Universal Periodic Review and other human rights treaty bodies and rights mechanisms, as well as other initiatives such as the reporting framework developed for the 2001 Declaration of Commitments on HIV/AIDS, the Commission on Information and Accountability (CoIA), the Independent Expert Review Group (IERG) for women's and children's health. These should be looked at in the broader context of overall localisation and alignment of national development plans with the 2030 Agenda.

Much reporting on progress related to various aspects of the new Agenda is already being done and could be built on (e.g., the Global Education Monitoring, or GEM, Report). Global indicators could benefit from existing indicator frameworks for SDG-relevant measurements, such as the Global Monitoring Framework for Non-communicable diseases and the global monitoring framework for universal health coverage. Ensuring that these align will minimise the reporting burden of countries and capitalise on existing reporting mechanisms.

Efforts to align will need to be done on a regional basis as well. Within certain regions, such as Africa, there are fairly advanced sustainable development plans already in place, such as Agenda 2063, which need to be aligned coherently with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Good-quality baseline data is essential for measuring progress. Both qualitative and quantitative data, derived from "beneficiaries as well as technocrats" could help to inform review. To ensure that no one is left behind, there is a significant demand for increased availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income,

gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts. Such data will facilitate the identification of groups among which progress is not being made.

Global and regional sustainable development initiatives usually invest heavily in preparatory processes leading to the adoption of important commitments, projects and action plans. These need to be converted into simple, accessible forms that are non-technical and translated into local languages. The EA SusWatch Network was able to raise awareness among the general public and local policymakers about the East African Community Climate Change Policy (2011) by translating and disseminating information about the policy at the local level.

Global-level follow-up and review platforms and processes have a special responsibility to put the spotlight on countries facing special situations and their progress on the SDGs. This includes the LDCs, as well as conflict-affected states, LLDCs and SIDS, among others.

In addition to sharing lessons learned from successes, the proper conditions and incentives should be put in place, especially as part of the global High-level Political Forum, to encourage frank, transparent discussions among States and other stakeholders on overcoming setbacks and bottlenecks to SDG progress.