

ECOSOC Presidential Retreat
“Advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
through effective policy integration” - New York, 20-21 January 2017
Informal Summary

1. Introduction

The President of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), H.E. Mr Frederick Shava hosted a retreat on “Advancing implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through Effective Policy Integration,” at Glen Cove Mansion, New York. The objectives of the Retreat were to: (1) facilitate preparations for the 2017 high-level political forum (HLPF) and foster synergies with the FfD and STI forums; (2) engage in discussions aimed at ensuring a coherent review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level in light of its holistic and indivisible nature in the course of this first four year cycle; and (3) engage in a strategic debate on maximizing the role and contribution of the ECOSOC system to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, in keeping with existing mandates and responsibilities.

The meeting brought together approximately 80 participants, including members of the ECOSOC Bureau, Chairs of ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, representatives of regional and political groups of UN Member States, representatives of countries with engagement in the Voluntary National Reviews, senior officials of the UN Secretariat and the UN system, and selected representatives of major stakeholder groups.¹ Participants actively exchanged views on ways to promote strategic, coherent and integrated support for the 2030 Agenda during the current work programme cycle.

Key messages from the Retreat

1. Continuous strong leadership and national ownership will be critical in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, but implementation is “doable.” There was a sense of optimism that the Agenda could be achieved.
2. At the same time, many countries face capacity limitations and will need to prioritize their actions. Successful implementation requires extensive communication with all sectors of society, focusing especially on the most vulnerable.
3. Data collection and analysis are critical. This will better enable Governments to track progress in implementation and prioritize actions. Operational frameworks for review and evaluation will be necessary in order to regularly benefit from lessons learned in the process.
4. The ECOSOC system will need to accommodate differentiated country contexts in supporting implementation of the Agenda, which will remain country led. Governments and other stakeholders, including the private sector, will need to be “incentivized” to engage in the implementation of the Agenda and in comprehensive follow-up and review.
5. ECOSOC should forge important linkages with the issues of peace building, human rights and humanitarian affairs in the implementation of the Agenda.
6. The United Nations should support national efforts towards implementation of the Agenda in a seamless and context-specific manner.
7. Participants cited the need for adequate time to conduct the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the HLPF in order to ensure enough time for in depth discussions and exchange of experiences. They also underlined the need for support to developing countries in conducting rigorous and inclusive reviews at the national level in preparation for the HLPF ,
8. The FfD forum will need to strike a balance between addressing all action areas of the Addis Agenda and specific thematic areas. The forum must fulfil its mandate to promote the sharing of national and regional experiences in implementing the Addis Agenda. The modalities to do so need to be further refined.

¹ The retreat was jointly organized, on behalf of the President of the Council, by the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD), the Financing for Development Office (FfDO) and the Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA).

2. Opening Session

The opening session of the retreat featured remarks by the President of the Council, H.E. Ambassador Frederick Shava, as well as by the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, Mr. Wu Hongbo. In his opening remarks, the President noted that as the ECOSOC system is at the core of agenda implementation, 2017 will be a crucial year for the Council in its efforts to advance common goals. The President reminded participants that one of the objectives of the retreat was to facilitate preparations for the 2017 HLPF and the FfD forum. In this connection, he noted that the meeting would consider ways in which to ensure a coherent review of the 2030 Agenda at the global level, in the course of this cycle. The President provided an overview of the programme of the retreat and thanked the ECOSOC Bureau Members who would Chair each of the sessions.

Mr. Wu Hongbo delivered an opening statement as well as a message on behalf of the Secretary-General, who welcomed the initiative of the President in organizing the retreat. In his message, the Secretary-General reiterated the importance of linking United Nations approaches to peace and security, sustainable development and human rights in order to achieve the overarching priority of preventing conflicts. He emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach to global challenges, including rising inequality and global imbalances, terrorism and organized crime. He stressed that climate change, epidemics and other transnational threats demand a coordinated international response and called for bringing the humanitarian and development spheres closer together.

As part of his own opening statement, Mr. Wu Hongbo stated that the UN provides unique global multi-stakeholder platforms to engage in action-oriented and policy-relevant discussions on sustainable development. He emphasised the role of the Council in fostering a unified review and follow-up to the 2030 Agenda by the ECOSOC system and underlined the central role of the HLPF in the follow up and review, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda. He also stressed the importance of the ECOSOC forum on FfD follow-up in this regard.

3. Session 1: Framing session: Policy integration, follow-up and review and partnerships

The first session was chaired by the President of the Council, H.E. Ambassador Frederick Shava, and moderated by Mr. Navid Hanif, Director, Office for ECOSOC Support and Coordination, DESA. Discussions revolved around actions to: (1) foster policy integration, coherence and coordination at the global level; (2) encourage multi-stakeholder engagement at all levels of implementation; and (3) strengthen the role of the UN development system in supporting implementation at the global, regional and country levels. The session also discussed how partnerships could best support efforts in all countries to achieve the integrated 2030 Agenda.

The discussions noted that while many countries face capacity limitations and will need to prioritize their actions, successful implementation is a “doable” task. This will require extensive communication with all sectors of society, focusing on the most vulnerable. National ownership and leadership are key in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Solid data collection and analysis are also critical, as they enable Governments to track progress in implementation and prioritize actions. Operational frameworks for review and evaluation will be necessary in order to benefit from lessons learned in the process.

There were many suggestions on organizational and institutional issues. It was noted that the ECOSOC system will need to accommodate diverse country contexts in supporting implementation, which will first and foremost be achieved at the country level. Governments will need to be “incentivized” to engage in comprehensive implementation, follow-up and review, as well as various stakeholders, including the private sector. The UN should support these national efforts in a seamless manner and develop a business model to enhance coordination and engagement.

Least-developed countries (LDCs) run the highest risk of being left behind. They require prioritized attention, particularly during the first year of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Some cautioned that

multi-stakeholder partnerships should not be seen as substitutes for international cooperation, such as ODA, trade, FDI and technology transfer. Similarly, UN support should also be context-specific, targeted towards capacity building for countries in special situations in particular, and overcoming the middle-income trap in Middle-Income Countries (MICs).

The importance of maintaining the inclusiveness, universality, and indivisibility of the Agenda and leaving no one behind was reiterated. The UN plays a crucial role in fostering the review of best practices in implementation, including through feasibility studies and support for statistical capacity building. It was felt that this role could be further enhanced by strengthening cohesion while maintaining specialization across entities. On the intergovernmental side, it was felt that greater coherence is needed in the work of the various bodies, including ECOSOC and the GA main committees. The ECOSOC Integration Segment and other forums should contribute more directly to the work of the HLPF, including through aligning their cycles to that of the HLPF.

4. Dinner lecture

A guest lecture on “Linking Peace and Development in the Context of Agenda 2030: How Should ECOSOC Support that Effort?” was delivered by Mr. Ejeviome Eloho Otobo, Non-Resident Senior Expert for Peacebuilding and Global Economic Policy at the Global Governance Institute. In his lecture, he addressed the link between peace, security and sustainable development, providing a number of messages on ECOSOC’s role on this regard.

ECOSOC should be seen not as a body, but as a system with a comprehensive network of entities that could be utilized to address challenges in this area. ECOSOC should also play a strong role in promoting effective partnerships with other bodies working on peace, security and humanitarian issues. He suggested that the expertise of the ECOSOC system should be mobilized to provide technical advice and guidance on appropriate policy measures for countries in, or emerging from, conflict. ECOSOC should also assume a strong advocacy role to promote the mobilization of financial and other resources to respond to the needs of these countries.

While welcoming the thought provoking lecture, some participants were concerned that further engagement by the Council in this area as proposed by the speaker might unduly burden the ECOSOC’s already active work programme.

5. Session 2: Ensuring coherence in the follow-up and review – next steps with the thematic reviews and Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)

The second session of the retreat was chaired by the Vice-President of the Council, H.E. Ambassador Marie Chatardova and moderated by Under-Secretary-General Mr. Wu Hongbo. Discussions focused on how the 2017 HLPF could best reflect the indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs and how the voluntary national reviews can facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learnt. Discussions during the session highlighted the following points.

The indivisibility of the agenda should be maintained and the goals need to be reviewed with a strong focus on their interlinkages. Participants felt that the HLPF theme should be covered in a balanced and comprehensive manner and commended the UN intergovernmental bodies for aligning their agendas and programmes of work with the HLPF.

As the number of volunteers for VNRs at the 2017 HLPF has doubled compared to 2016, creative solutions were discussed on how to best accommodate them, including by allocating another day for the presentation of reviews. Ways to better engage other Member States and stakeholders, including from the private sector, were also discussed.

Several countries that had conducted VNRs in 2016 highlighted that key lessons were learned at the national level. The VNRs created a strong incentive for cooperation and collaboration among ministries. The process also mobilized contributions from all relevant stakeholders and the role and contribution of

the major groups and other stakeholders, including business as well as parliaments was also emphasised. A call was made to include stakeholders in all phases of VNR preparation.

The importance of regional level involvement was also highlighted. The UN should seek ways to strengthen its support to Member States in achieving comprehensive agenda implementation, utilizing existing regional platforms and mechanisms.

6. Session 3: ECOSOC forum on financing for development follow-up

This session was chaired by the Vice-President of the Council, H.E. Ambassador Cristian Barros Melet, and moderated by Mr. Alexander Trepelkov, Director, FfDO, DESA. It discussed how the four-day forum could comprehensively address the Addis Ababa Action Agenda in its entirety, including all its action areas and MoIs of the 2030 Agenda, while providing opportunity for focused thematic discussions. Discussions also revolved around how the FfD forum could mobilize greater participation of national policy makers from different sectors, as well as improve engagement with international financial and trade institutions, in particular BWIs, WTO and UNCTAD in the preparations for the FfD forum.

Participants reiterated that the forum's primary task is to address the implementation of the FfD outcomes and the means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In this context, it will need to strike a balance between addressing all action areas of the Addis Agenda and specific thematic areas, including illicit financial flows, taxation, financial inclusion and local finance, ODA, public private partnerships, systemic issues and countries in special situations. The IATF report will serve as the major substantive background for the forum.

There was convergence in the discussions on the need to bring national and regional experiences to the FfD forum, in order to promote solutions and facilitate policy-oriented exchanges among ministers of finance, central bank governors, IFI representatives, business sector and civil society. Various views were expressed on how this could be achieved. It was suggested that the ECOSOC Bureau further refine the modalities taking into consideration views expressed at the retreat. Speakers stressed the importance of concluding intergovernmental negotiations before the FfD forum, and urged early consultations with BWIs to allow for meaningful engagement with these institutions at the forum.

7. Session 4: Coherent follow-up on the MOI of the 2030 Agenda

This session was chaired by the Vice-President of the Council, H.E. Ambassador Juergen Schulz and moderated by the Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Mr. Elliot Harris. The session explored whether and how the programme of the 2017 FfD forum should take into account the set of goals (SDGs 1, 2, 3, 5, 9 and 14) to be reviewed and how the outcome of the FfD forum could inform the HLPF and its outcome. Discussions also focused on how the preparations of VNRs at the HLPF and the preparations for the FfD forum should be coordinated to ensure the coherence, complementarity and consistency of such reviews.

The session acknowledged that during the time horizon of the 2030 Agenda, global circumstances will continue to change, requiring policy adjustments along the way. Protectionist tendencies may impact economic realities and the multilateral system at all levels. Speakers highlighted that many of the shortcomings and imbalances inherent in the global economic system are addressed in the 2030 agenda.

The FfD forum is a valuable and impactful platform for the follow-up and review of FfD outcomes and the MoIs of the SDGs. It was emphasized that the success of the FfD forum depends on the active high-level participation in its entire programme. A format that is conducive to high-level participation and interaction would be welcome. In this regard, participants pointed out that much had happened at national level and can be shared at the FfD forum. There was also a call that the FfD forum should be informed by a balanced IATF report and should not become a preparatory event for the HLPF.

Speakers noted the need for national leadership and ownership in data collection and analysis, while stressing that gaps in capacity need to be comprehensively addressed. In this regard, a proposal was

made to demonstrate, through data, the contribution of each country's progress towards achieving the SDGs at global level. The adoption of national development plans that clearly define the necessary policies at the national level, as well as roles of the public and private sector, was emphasised as crucial for country-level implementation and review.

Discussions of the means of implementation should highlight fiscal policies that allocate resources based on SDG priorities. The importance of international support, especially from the World Bank, was also stressed. Developing countries, particularly in Africa, require assistance in order to bridge the gap with developed countries in the area of STI. Based on past experiences, measures should be taken to ensure that economic growth has a positive impact on poverty eradication and employment.

8. Session 5: Wrap-up session

The final session of the retreat was chaired by the Vice-President of the Council, H.E. Ambassador Nabeel Munir. The Vice-President provided a summary of the retreat. The session highlighted the following key messages from the retreat's discussions.

It was emphasized that Leadership and national ownership were very important for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The Agenda could be achieved, but there were capacity limitations, and it required extensive communication to all sectors of society, including the most vulnerable. The Agenda requires the breaking of silos, and the United Nations should provide support in a seamless manner. Incentives should be designed to attract the participation of all stakeholders, including the private sector. As the dinner lecture had demonstrated, ECOSOC had a role to promote peace, security and sustainable development by promoting partnerships. ECOSOC should be seen not as a body but as a system that can provide technical advice.

It was suggested that regional commissions should reinforce the work of the HLPF & FFD forums on a regular basis and that the scheduling of the Regional Sustainable Development Forums supported by the five regional commissions should be timed so to feed into the HLPF. It was recommended that channels need to be explored to integrate regional commissions' input into the work of the HLPF, in order to benefit from their engagement with a wide range of policy makers. The need to strengthen communication between Member States, and to foster the dialogue among political groups, was also highlighted.

9. Closing session

In his closing remarks the President of the Council highlighted that leadership and national ownership are central to implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He noted that limitations in capacity and resources must be addressed to ensure successful implementation in all countries. In particular, in order to curtail outflows of resources from Africa, national capacities for tax collection must be strengthened.

The President stressed that successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda will require collective action and systemic solutions. The Means of Implementation cannot be narrowly defined as financial aid, but must also include technology and knowledge transfer, a matter of priority for many developing countries. He emphasized that the private sector is expected to play a crucial role in implementation and cautioned that countries suffering from violent conflict will continue to face challenges in implementing the SDGs and require dedicated support. Countries with special needs such as LDC, SIDS and LLDCs will also continue to require special consideration.

The President noted that in the upcoming review of 68/1, options for better organizing the calendar of the Council and the contributions of its subsidiary bodies, in relation to the HLPF cycle need to be considered. The review could also explore how to strengthen integration among the various strands of work across the ECOSOC system.
