

Concept paper on the Group of Friends of voluntary national reviews, follow-up and review of the HLPF

Introduction

There is great interest in identifying ways to further improve the voluntary national reviews (VNRs) that are carried out at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) every year. So far, 102 countries have presented their VNRs and 47 will be presenting this year, therefore, by the end of July 102 countries would have presented and 15 would have done it twice. Many lessons have been learned on how to improve them within the realm of possibilities.

In addition to the VNRs, after four years of the first HLPF follow-up cycle, Member States have gathered knowledge and experience on the pros and cons of the current modalities of the Forum, including clustering, thematic reviews, themes, inputs from other intergovernmental processes, as well as on other aspects of the functioning of the HLPF.

The present note explores how the informal group of “**Friends of voluntary national reviews, follow-up and review of the HLPF**” will help in improving the 2019 VNR process, and in preparing the review of GA resolution 70/299 on the HLPF at the General Assembly’s 74th session, thus ensuring a coherent approach to the follow-up process beyond 2019, building on the lessons learned in this first cycle of four years.

Preparations of the VNRs

Countries that have presented their VNRs have been appreciative of the support they have received from the Secretariat in preparing for their reviews, including the material provided by the UN such as the SG voluntary common reporting guidelines, Handbook and Synthesis report. However, some Member States have expressed concerns over the time available for the official presentation and discussion of the VNRs at the HLPF. They feel more time should be allocated in order to properly present the outcome of comprehensive national preparation processes. Some also feel that there are too few comments and questions on individual presentations and that questions should be prepared in a more organized way while striving for interactivity.

Working with countries presenting VNRs in the run up to HLPF

Between now and July, the “friends” will study the main messages and reports of the countries presenting VNRs in order to share their relevant experience, relate the experience of the VNR country to relevant policy lessons and good practices, provide substantive comments and advice, and suggest constructive lines of questioning to be raised during the HLPF session.

The Group will organize its own work and steer away from the idea of peer reviews. It does not intend to conduct an assessment of the performance of VNR countries but rather working to ensure that the VNR countries benefit from their VNR supported by the experiences of other countries.

Preparations of the review of the resolutions on the modalities of the HLPF at the 74th session of the General Assembly

The modalities of the next cycle of the HLPF are pivotal in order to ensure an effective follow-up and review process. The next years are crucial to secure the best possible trajectories towards the achievement of the SDGs, its goals and targets.

Building on the lessons learned through its work on VNRs, the Group will set the ground for the review of the resolution on the modalities of the HLPF, with a particular focus on the thematic reviews of specific SDGs. It will look at options and formats for reviewing the SDGs; including reviewing the convenience of maintaining the current clustering scheme and finding innovative options such as focusing on specific cross-cutting themes, while ensuring an evidence-based approach.

The content of the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) will be an input that will be thoroughly examined. It will also aim to find an optimal way of including into the HLPF deliberation process the inputs coming from other entities, as well as the best available options for the presentation of VNRs.

The Group will discuss all the mentioned aspects and will bring written and/or verbal inputs to the negotiation process in order to enrich the debate and the decision-making process.