

Bringing Accountability Back Home

An open letter from the Together 2030 participants in the 2017 United Nations High Level Political Forum (HLPF)

As members of Together 2030, working in local, national, regional and global civil society organizations, networks, alliances, coalitions, social movements and research centers, from over 90 countries, both developing and developed, we welcome the organization of the HLPF, held from July 10-17 2017 in New York and its contribution to the ongoing mobilization of governments and stakeholders on the implementation and accountability of the SDGs.

We welcome efforts made to incorporate civil society inputs and recommendations in official documents, panel presentations and interactive sessions. We also commend the engagement of Member States, especially the 43 that presented their voluntary national reviews (VNRs) at the HLPF 2017.

It is clear that stakeholders are taking seriously the call to be part of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In this spirit, we share the following observations and recommendations in order to continue deepening and strengthening the HLPF as a process, and as a space, to review and guide the implementation of the SDGs, leading towards the fulfillment of its mandate.

Voluntary National Reviews

The Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are a core component of the follow up and review of the 2030 Agenda. Tracking the SDGs progress, encouraging and facilitating multi-stakeholders dialogue and strengthening commitment and implementation of the 2030 Agenda are major endeavors that the HLPF needs to continue undertaking leading up to 2030.

Whilst a high number of countries volunteered to present their reports, we were concerned to see that some governments presented reports only on a limited set of SDGs. Member States agreed, as part of the 2030 Agenda, that review of the SDGs should respect “their universal, integrated and interrelated nature and the three dimensions of sustainable development” (para 74). Accordingly, **VNRs should reflect on the implementation of all goals and their interlinkages**. The thematic reviews of a small set of SDGs, undertaken during the first segment of the HLPF, should not dictate or minimize the scope of the VNRs. We are very

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concerned that the experiences of limited reporting in 2017 could create an unjustified precedent for “cherry-picked” reporting in the following years. To support countries and provide proper guidance **we recommend a further review of the VNR guidelines prepared by UNDESA to reflect this concern.**

Stakeholder engagement in the VNR process should be encouraged before, during and after the HLPF. Voluntary National Reviews are not simple country snapshots, and definitely not a substitute for national processes. Instead, they should be viewed as opportunities to build national and sub-national dialogues and mechanisms on implementation in each country and offer a learning space among all stakeholders. Some specific recommendations for how embedding the VNRs can better support these wider processes for national implementation and review are:

In Advance of the HLPF:

- **Planning and timelines:** For volunteer countries to express their intention of presenting a VNR by December of the previous year, including a clear timeline and procedural details, to facilitate stakeholder engagement at the national, regional and global level;
- **Accessible and timely information:** For the ECOSOC President to strongly and consistently encourage countries presenting VNRs to share their final reports, in accessible formats, with national stakeholders, including national Parliaments, well in advance of the HLPF meeting and no later than mid-June;

At the HLPF:

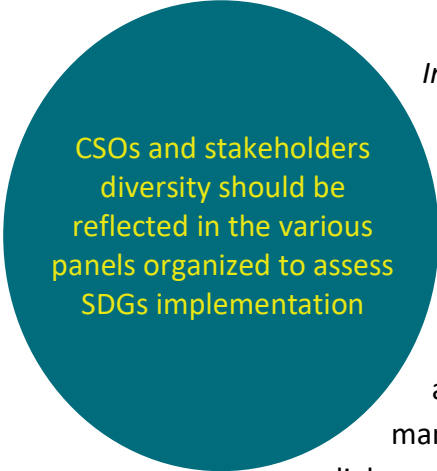
- **Stakeholders engagement at VNRs sessions:** We recognize the effort to coordinate the participation of major groups and other stakeholders in the VNR sessions and that several interventions were made during the HLPF. We strongly recommend the allocation of additional time for MGoS interventions, especially from national CSO platforms and alliances from reporting countries, to allow for more inclusive and participatory engagement, to better listen to the experience of the poorest, most marginalized and disadvantaged from VNR countries, and for engagement in more meaningful exchanges with Member States. We also recommend the introduction of a segment to the HLPF program where stakeholders are able to reflect and provide feedback on the VNRs presented by their countries and share their own contributions to the SDGs implementation;
- **Updating the format:** We recommend for VNRs to be presented in parallel sessions, in different meeting rooms, allowing more time for deeper analysis and discussions, including with civil society and stakeholders. In this sense, the United Nations must recognize the high demand and interest generated by the HLPF and book meeting

rooms at the UN HQ accordingly. VNRs should also be presented individually and not in panel discussions, so as to facilitate dialogues on national contexts and dynamics.

Civil Society and Stakeholder Participation at the HLPF

We recognize and welcome the improved environment for civil society participation at the official sessions of the HLPF, the spaces created for civil society participation, and the guidance and support provided by UNDESA. We consider that there is still a need for communications to be shared earlier in the process to facilitate coordination and preparation, especially for civil society colleagues based in developing countries.

Some additional recommendations to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society participation are:



CSOs and stakeholders diversity should be reflected in the various panels organized to assess SDGs implementation

In Advance of the HLPF

- **Side-Events selection:** The side event application and selection process needs to be revised, so as to offer clear deadlines, public access to all applications, and transparent and timely communication on decisions and rationale. Side events are a major avenue for stakeholder participation, sharing and learning on best practices of SDGs implementation, research and policy analysis and overall contributions to the HLPF mandate. Consequently, we recommend that UNDESA convenes a dialogue with stakeholders on the improvement of this process.
- **Information sharing:** Information notes produced by UNDESA are critical planning tools and should be translated into more languages. Initial versions of the information notes should be circulated at least one month in advance and updates shared broadly until the start of the Forum. This process allows for CSOs to build their capacity and maximize their time in New York and make their participation more effective.
- **Capacity building:** We further recommend that capacity-building opportunities be put into place way ahead of the HLPF, so that groups, constituencies and advocates can be better prepared to engage and participate at the HLPF.
- **Resources:** We call upon Member States and the United Nations to allocate more resources to support the participation of civil society and stakeholders at the HLPF, especially from developing countries and marginalized groups.

At the HLPF:

- **Embracing diversity:** CSOs and stakeholders diversity should be reflected in the various panels organized to assess SDGs implementation during official sessions at the experts

segment of HLPF. Such diversity can allow for different voices and perspectives from one year to the other. Further, greater efforts should be made to include children, adolescents and young people as agents of change recognized in the 2030 Agenda and the latest Ministerial Declaration.

- **Physical access:** The process of allocating seats and special tickets for major groups and other stakeholders should be revisited to avoid the real physical separation between Member States and CSOs, which reduced the opportunities for rich exchanges and dialogues.
- **Civil society reports and contributions:** We also recommend UN Member States and the President of ECOSOC to establish clear and meaningful mechanisms – beyond online platforms - to collect, publicize and analyze reports on the contribution of civil society and stakeholders on and to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at all levels.
- **Ministerial Declaration:** We welcome the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration as this provides the necessary political guidance expected from the HLPF. It is disappointing that it was not a consensus document and we recommend negotiations to start earlier in 2018 and for open plenary sessions to be held during the HLPF in case agreement is not reached before the Forum starts. We firmly believe that greater and more meaningful engagement of the major groups and other stakeholders in the intergovernmental negotiation process will lead to more ambitious and more broadly supported Ministerial Declarations in the future.

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We recognize the **urgent need to strengthen the HLPF process and structure** in order to capitalize on the energy, ideas and diversity currently mobilized at the global level. The forum should act as a space where governments prove that they have made the SDGs a political priority, are promoting a consistent ‘whole of government’ approach to the SDGs, and are encouraging inclusive partnerships across all national and subnational stakeholder groups in order to make the 2030 Agenda a reality.

A **stronger** HLPF produces more concrete guidance and richer exchange between all participants. A **more connected** HLPF ensures this global dialogue is meaningfully embedded in processes at all levels - especially the national and sub-national levels - and so brings accountability back home.

About Together 2030

Together 2030 (www.together2030.org) is a civil society initiative that promotes national implementation and track progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Initiative, set up in December 2015, aims at generating knowledge and project voices from different civil society and stakeholders around the world on the challenges and opportunities for the 2030 Agenda.

Together 2030 brings together actors to discuss the way to formulate and implement roadmaps at national level and hold governments to account at all levels.

About this paper:

This paper is issued on behalf of the Together 2030 members that attended the HLPF from July 10-19 2017, in New York and who signed up to the specific mailing list. A first round of inputs was opened from July 14 to 17 based on a set of questions proposed by a group of members. A first version was opened for comments and additional inputs from July 20 - 25 2017. A final round of comments was opened from July 26-27. The Together 2030 Core Group was also consulted in all phases of this process. Final text was revised by the International Secretariat.

Organizations engaged on the Together 2030 HLPF 2017 mailing list were invited to collaborate and provide inputs to this document. Final text reflects the summary and collection of those inputs but not necessarily, the agreement or endorsement of those organizations on all proposals presented.

Diversity of Opinion within civil society:

Members of Together 2030 express and prioritize different aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs and provide a broad range of views regarding its implementation and follow up. Members are united in the following objectives:

- *To strengthen partnerships between civil society and stakeholders to support the effective implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.*
- *To make the voices of people heard and have people holding governments accountable for the progress towards achieving Agenda 2030 and the SDGs at all levels.*

Name	Organization	Country
Rosemary Olive Mbone Enie	Abibimman Foundation/Salama Heritage Ecovillage (SHE) Tanzania	Tanzania/Cameroon
Christelle Huré	Action Against Hunger	Canada
Jared Akama Onyari	Africa Global wealth Creation	Kenya
Dr. Uzodinma Adirieje	Afrihealth Optonet Association [CSOs Network]/Society for Conservation and Sustainability of Energy and Environment in Nigeria (SOCSEEN)	Nigeria
Heather McPherson	Alberta Council for Global Cooperation	Canada

Aminata Alamir TOURE BARRY	Alliance contre la Pauvreté au Mali	Mali
Marc Herkenrath	Alliance Sud	Switzerland
Jyotsna Mohan	Asia Development Alliance	India
Mange Ram Adhana	Association for promotion sustainable development	India
Saba Ismail	Aware Girls	Pakistan
Deborah Glaser	BC Council for International Cooperation	Canada
Michael Bergöö	Biovision	Switzerland
Dr. Luise Steinwachcs	Bread for the World	Germany
Diego Martinez-Schutt	CAFOD	Global
Tola Winjobi	CAFSD-WRAG for Development/ Civil Society Coalition on Sustainable Development	Nigeria
Benson KIBITI	Caritas Kenya	Kenya
Edward Lansana Massaquoi	Caritas Sierra Leone /Sierra Leone Coalition 2030	Sierra Leone
Camilo Gamba	CEPEI	Colombia
Yamuremye Moïse	Chambre Transversale des Jeunes Entrepreneurs du Burundi	Burundi
Denison Jayasooria	CSO-SDG Alliance & RIPESS Asia	Malaysia
Silje Hagerup	Forum for Development and Environment	Norway
Alessandra Nilo	Gestos	Brazil
POUAGAM Joseph	Goodwill-Cameroun	Cameroon
Zahid Hossain Khan	Grameen Development society(GDS)	Bangladesh
Mekwuye Margaret Olabisi	Greenspring Development Initiative	Nigeria
Verity McGivern	HelpAge International	Global

Johannes Trimmel	IAPB	UK
Ricarda Motschilnig	ICAE	Austria
Alvin Leong	ICGC	USA
Petrina Teixeira Santos	Impact Hub	Brazil
Joanna Howard	Institute of Development Studies	UK
Willie Obiano	International Association of World Peace Advocates	Nigeria
Jean Patrice NGOYI KASONGO	JUstice, Development & Peace Commission (JDPC)Ijebu-Ode	Nigeria
Sena ALOUKA	JVE International	Togo
Anne	Kenya communities upgrading standards	Kenya
Stephen Cheboi	Kenya National Council of NGOs	Kenya
Timo Lappalainen	Kepa	Finland
Pauline Lambou	Leading Women of Africa	Cameroon
Ola Abu alghaib	Leonard Cheshire Disability	Global
Magdalena Kern	LIGHT FOR THE WORLD International	Austria
Daya Sagar Shrestha	NGO Federation of Nepal	Nepal
Jean-Claude Paul DEGBE	ONG PADJENA	Benin
Dr. Laurretta Will Sillah	People's Foundation for Humanity Development	Sierra Leone
Hilary F. Smith	PRAJAco	Jamaica
Tom Thomas	Praxis-Institute for Participatory Practices	India
Kristina Mayo	Shumei International	USA
Andrew Griffiths	Sightsavers	Global
Bette Levy	Soroptimist International	USA

Emmanuel Chidong'oi	Tanzania Organization for Agricultural Development (TOFAD)	Tanzania
Christine	The Danish 92 Group	Denmark
Markus Nilsen Rotevatn	The Norwegian Forum for Development and Environment	Norway
Ivonne Lobos Alva	TMG - Think Tank for Sustainability	Germany
Syed Saiful Haque	WARBE Development Foundation	Bangladesh
MAMATA DASH	WATERAID INDIA	India
Mojisola Florence Akinsanya	WOMEN FOR PEACE AND GENDER EQUALITY INITIATIVE	Nigeria
Arelys Bellorini	World Vision	Global
Ahmed ALLOUCH	Youth Without Borders - Tunisia	Tunisia