

36th INFORMAL WORKING BREAKFAST ON AGENDA 2030

Strengthening Accountability through Collaboration in National Voluntary Reviews: Partners for Review

Hosted by the Bahá'í International Community,
the International Movement ATD Fourth World, Regions Refocus, and the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations

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A diverse group of stakeholders¹ attended a working breakfast to discuss key issues related to connecting Agenda 2030 to national voluntary reviews. The following are highlights of the discussion:

- As shown with concrete examples, every country has very different challenges, and National Voluntary Reviews could serve as a space to address these challenges.
- With this dialogue today we would also like to convey the message that the 10 minute presentation of national voluntary reviews at the HLPF should be one more step in a process of participatory monitoring and review.
- We need to decide together how we can strengthen the review process and allow national presentations to be comprehensive and deep.
- The participation of traditionally excluded, impoverished and marginalized people in reviewing progress at national and local level is integral.
- Key challenge: how to include civil society in this process. Commitment to Agenda 2030 is strong -- challenge is in implementation. German government favors very inclusive approach but feels implementation cannot be left to governments alone.
- Serious tracking process and need to measure the progress made or not made -- in an honest review. This is high on German government's political agenda.
- 22 countries made national voluntary presentations last year. This year we have 43.
- Germany has launched the "Partners for Review Process" -- comprehensive platform for continued dialogue. One meeting took place in November. A second meeting will likely take place this spring.

Objectives of Partners for Review:

1. Global partnership
2. Platform to provide space to facilitate learning and exchange insights
3. Network to build up, mobilize, and share expertise on new and emerging issues
4. Practicable knowledge

Criteria for NGO participation:

- a. Active role in national SDG review process
 - b. Country that has reported or is aiming to report in 2016 or 2017
- The 2017 HLPF will be successful if we all (member states, academia, NGOs, civil society) work together.
 - The regional step between national and global is a gap that should be filled, including through the HLPF process. Since the Rio+20 preparatory process and post-2015 discussions, decline in inclusion of regional perspectives, role of UN Regional Commissions, etc. Regional participation also raises the bar for global goals, as in the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, more progressive on sexual and reproductive health and rights than the Sustainable Development Goals.

¹Permanent Missions & Government Agencies: Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Botswana, Brazil, Denmark, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Luxembourg, Mexico, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, Panama, Portugal, Romania, Samoa Representatives from UN: United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations Children's Fund, UN Women Non-governmental organizations: Bahá'í International Community, Care International, Center for Economic and Social Rights, Child Fund Alliance, CIVICUS, Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepard, Daughters of Charity, Ecoagriculture Partners, Global Action to Prevent War, Gray Panthers, International Movement ATD Fourth World, Regions Refocus, RESURJ, Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, School Sisters of Notre Dame, St. Vincent de Paul Society, UNANIMA

- Important to emphasize participation of autonomous organizations and networks working at the regional and national level, because grassroots organizations have a different perspective than national outlets of the big international non-governmental organizations.
- Given the need to squeeze now 43 national voluntary review presentations into three days at the HLPF, innovative approaches are required. Partners for Review is important because of the space it provides for dialogues -- peer learning, informal conversations, and small working groups is a good model that should be applied and taken into HLPF. (Though there is no mandate to change HLPF format until 2019, these lessons can still be applied in the meantime through informal discussions and events alongside the HLPF session).
- Real systematic structures for civil society participation are required at every step: national, regional, and global. Independent autonomous organizations working on the ground should have space at regional, national, and global level to share what they are already doing with governments and to highlight perspectives often not heard at the global level.
- Global level structures for civil society participation should be more transparent and open to organizations in the regions who probably have no idea how to follow these processes, how to get on lists, join meetings, etc. Difficult to engage even for those who do.
- National process - Strong system of involving civil society and NGOs in run-up to formulation of SDGs which was not typical for this country. In implementation phase, however, that same approach has not been employed and it is seen as the role of the government.
- Process of preparing for national voluntary review is 90% of the journey. Without including civil society, we move into shadow review. The process is the important part; report itself is just an outcome.
- How to turn ambitious agenda into concrete action in machinery in New York is a difficult process. While there may be shortcomings, it's important that HLPF is up and running. Importance of measurement - in this country very robust process in place via national statistics processes. Echoes significance of civil society involvement. NGOs can ask tough questions to the government about social policies.
- Role of ministerial declaration - last year, this was largely procedural in nature. We would like to see more comprehensive agenda for HLPF. Rio +20 outcome document - member states specified that other stakeholders should report – we would like to see space for this reporting to happen.
- Basic information about the opportunities is needed. Guidelines will shortly be published. Platforms like the Breakfast Dialogues and the Partners for Review are important spaces for engagement of civil society. Goal 16 is particularly significant for inclusion.
- National ownership is crucial. NVR presentations provide an opportunity to deepen national commitment. With it comes accountability and transparency. Ownership, engagement, and participatory approach are important to implementation of SDGs.
- Inclusion: How do national priorities -- voices of the peoples -- impact implementation? Inclusivity matters.
 - a. Other development actors, like the corporate sector, need to be involved.
 - b. Important constituencies, such as indigenous and migrant groups, should also be included in process. When wanting to consult civil society, how do we consult groups who are not usually represented; how are they allowed to be part of the process?
 - c. Inclusiveness - in one country, civil society is actually leading the process. Civil society organized a conference to bring different stakeholders together to exchange learning and set goals.

Learning: Intersection of geography and thematic focus of SDGs.

- a. Civil society is also learning a lot in trying to manage the complexity of SDG processes.
 - b. Importance of spaces like this which provide opportunities for exchanges of learning ahead of the HLPF. *Continuous learning* is key.
- International Cooperation – implementation of some SDGs demand international cooperation or can never be implemented at national level. For example, one country will highlight what kind of international support they've received as part of their national voluntary review presentation.
 - How do we address growing inequalities? It takes political will to address this. How can NGOs support governments to implement the best practices on behalf of all, not some, of the people.

- How does mother of child who died of bronchitis know that an SDG is going to be implemented? How does she communicate with a nation's office about the SDGs?
- Challenge regarding how to organize ourselves. Too many countries squeezed in (same amount of time as last year, double the countries). Challenge at subnational level for very large countries. Goals and targets of SDGs are implemented at the municipal level, somewhat at state level, with supervision of the federal government. How can sub-national units be involved? Civil society is fundamental to this. "Network of multipliers" – representatives of civil society who act in the various states.
- Positive aspect of SDGs – competitive nature built in to system. It can serve as an incentive – for instance, if these other countries can achieve these goals, why not ours? Role of civil society is also to help national representatives learn from mistakes and triumphs of others.
- Participation of NGOs: In one country the New Development Plan incorporates lessons learned – draft placed online so that public and others can comment on it before it is finalized. NGOs can either be with government or hold different views. There should be a platform for NGOs to offer reviews of what the government is doing.
- Regions: Regional groups were part and parcel of negotiation process. Are you asking that regions make presentations at HLPF? EU has not discussed yet whether it wants to do regional presentations. Member states may also hide behind regional presentations.
- Shadow Reporting: German government does actually welcome it. Issue of involved NGOs in HLPF report is important, but not as a means of avoiding criticism of report. There is value to this – there are points governments can't make that NGOs can.
- Challenges: Time – especially when trying to include many actors. Indicators – Germany has 231 indicators but doesn't have time and methodology to do all of these so used 60.
- Partners for Review is an exchange platform. Challenge: coordinating with other preparatory processes.
- Rising above logistics: Hopes we won't get bogged down in logistical frustrations. This era is about the zeitgeist – how we view this world and what we want to leave behind. Encouraging that more countries want to participate in National Voluntary Review process. Goal is for all member states to participate.
- Importance of Regional Groups: The United Nations defines regions according to the 5 regional commissions. Regions Refocus works at sub-regional level to acknowledge specificity. The Caribbean, for example, is grouped with Latin America in terms of the regional commissions but has its own regional specificity. It is important to spotlight the real challenges of regions and sub-regions, as well as the genuine contributions from the regional level e.g. ECLAC's work on fiscal space and redistributive macroeconomic policy. As ESCWA (Arab States regional commission) is not planning to have a regional preparatory forum ahead of this year's HLPF, where is the space at HLPF to hear from Arab regional groups looking at existing processes, including through other regional institutions like the League of Arab States? How can the very real constraints and challenges of this region be highlighted at the global level, and not swept under the rug?
- Integrity of the process: Have to ensure that there are resources for genuine citizenship engagement and governments have real political autonomy in terms of reporting. When we talk of civil society, who are we talking about? The corporate sector is changing the landscape of civil society. Compared with the Human Rights Commission, ECOSOC is devoting significantly less time and resources for implementation to the HLPF, so there is a need to support with resources, time, and Secretariat capacity. "The Future We Want; the United Nations We Need" report of the Independent Team of Advisors (ITA) is very clear about the need to strengthen implementation at the regional level.