

39th Informal Working Breakfast on Agenda 2030

HLPF 2017 in retrospect: Furthering prospects for a successful HLPF 2018

Hosted by the Bahá'í International Community and Regions Refocus

28 September 2017

A diverse group of stakeholders¹ attended a working breakfast to discuss key issues related to this year's High-Level Political Forum, engaging in a robust dialogue regarding the lessons learned and how they may be implemented into next year's VNRs. The following are highlights of the discussion:

Lessons from Voluntary National Review (VNR) process 2017:

- SDGs have structural targets integrated in them. Strategies include 3 pillars of development and achieving a green, resilient economy is a key goal, to reduce climate change.
- VNR process highlights experiences and learnings. Presents opportunity to align SDGs with national development planning cycle - and vice versa - and current development strategy.
- Opportunity to localize participatory process. Conduct participatory consultation at all levels amongst different sectors, to get input on SDGs. Ownership is key; it helps to accelerate implementation, creates a network.
- National efforts are important but we cannot achieve the SDGs without global partnerships. We need to mobilize the private sector. We need to mobilize those resources into SDG allied efforts.
- Governments have shown commitment to further strengthen the VNR process (increasing numbers of volunteers to present, some countries already volunteering to present a second time).
- More important than the report is the process itself.
- Institutional arrangements for SDG implementation are important in indicating state commitment, involvement of relevant sectors.
- Lessons have been accrued from other countries and presented to capital. These are experiences we have gained from each other.

Policy coherence/alignment with budget

- SDGs are going to be implemented at national and local level. We have to make sure they are integrated into national, regional, and local development plans, including budgets, to see results.
- Challenges of policy coherence (multiplicity of national development plans) and aligning the budget. Requires changes in priorities of the government. Needs to be dealt with at national level before arriving in New York for HLPF, as process of creating the baseline to work for the future.

Civil society participation

- The UN was not expecting the number of applicants to host side events, which was frustrating for civil society. There was the impression that the desire to participate in the HLPF took the UN by surprise, meaning the UN needs to prepare better moving forward.

¹ Permanent Missions & Government Agencies: Arab Republic of Egypt, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Ireland, Jamaica, Mexico, Portugal. Representatives from UN: United Nations Development Programme, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Non-governmental organizations: Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, Delegation of the Government of Catalonia to the US, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Gestos, Global Action to Prevent War, Milano School of International Affairs, Management and Urban Policy (The New School for Public Affairs), Soroptimist International, Regions Refocus, UNANIMA International.

- More than once, civil society questions were not addressed during the VNR presentations, and there were times where civil society was cut altogether.
- Decision-making bodies within UN systems are not yet including CSOs in the governance process. We need to be stronger in making sure than the UN itself will be more inclusive.
- We need to improve our capacity for communication and dialogue, and to make sure that the entire benefit of this process will be for those who need it most.
- All national delegations should include civil society.
- When civil society produces its own spotlight reports, we should have a formal space to present, as well as a space for follow through.
- The purpose is not to fight with governments; but is to have sincere and open dialogues so that we may move forward, and that the implementation of SDGs can move forward.

VNRs moving forward

- Example of Universal Periodic Reviews (UPR) in the UN Human Rights Council, involvement of civil society - how can ambition be ratcheted up for the VNRs especially in advance of the 2019 potential amendment of modalities? Appetite needs to be created. This will depend on the focus we create at the country level. What can we do now to convince government from country level to New York to make review of SDGs stronger via accountability mechanisms?
- Is there a national process now developing which could generate an annual VNR, or do countries prefer to wait 5 years?
- VNR is perhaps not necessary to be done every year but every few years.

Methodology/Guidance

- A stronger orientation is needed so that countries will actually follow the guidelines. For example: there is a huge difference in reports of different Latin American and Caribbean countries.
- There are concerns about the methodology of having only some of the goals considered each year. Guidelines should protect the indivisibility of the 2030 Agenda, as the interlinkages are very important.

Intergovernmental negotiations

- Disagreement on whether the process of negotiations for the Ministerial Declaration should conclude prior to the HLPF. Some participants thought that it's best to involve ministers from capital in the negotiation, and some preferred that the negotiations be finished to enable the ministers attending the HLPF to pay attention to the VNRs and other discussions.
- One participant reminded those present of the existence of the President's Summary as the other outcome of each year's HLPF, as a way of capturing the details of the discussion in a way that the Ministerial Declaration cannot, having been completed before the HLPF begins.