

Summary and Policy Brief

July 2018



HLPF Side-Event: Stakeholder Engagement in the High Level Political Forum and its Review in 2019

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Summary

To ensure the full implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs - the world's blueprint for social, economic and environmental development through to 2030) <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals> , the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) meets at UN Headquarters each year to analyze progress and challenges in implementing the SDGs. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2018> As mandated by the Member States themselves, the voice of the people - as expressed through non-profit and other civil society organizations - is crucial. Yet, the space for civil society voices and effectiveness is being challenged globally and in many countries. Consequently, in the face of this shrinking space, civil society organizations, including Gray Panthers, is doing its best to fight back. Frances Zainoeddin, our foremost representative at the UN, has been a leading voice to ensure that civil society's voice remains strong at the HLPF. She sits on one of the committees dedicated to HLPF reform. She ensures that the voice of the constituency of older persons is not ignored.

At the HLPF, an important event on the critical need for HLPF reform/ stakeholder engagement was held. <http://sdg.iisd.org/news/stakeholders-share-views-on-hlpf-effectiveness-ahead-of-2019-review>

Stakeholder engagement in the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) and the preparatory processes are key challenges that must be addressed for a more effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Some of the main issues considered include: the lacking of a human-rights approach at the HLPF, the lack of inclusion of civil society, lack of analytical data, as well as issues in inclusive and transparent consultation. Additionally, the concept of "leaving no one behind" was discussed, considering the ways to effectively give a voice to historically marginalized groups.

Key messages

- *The recognition of civil society and stakeholder groups by the United Nations is a key issue; we need to see that the coalition is supported, recognized, and involved as part of the review process of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*
- *In civil society, there needs to be more attention given to historically marginalized groups of people.*
- *A Human-Rights approach is needed in the implementation of SDGs.*

Session Highlights

The first segment of this side event discussed Major Groups and other Stakeholder Groups (MGoS) participation in the HLPF, encouraging the input of all members of society. These major groups include women, children and youth, indigenous peoples, older persons, and NGOs-- to name a few.

1. As Mr. Stefano Prato--from the Society for International Development-- discussed, there is a need to avoid bureaucratic issues to facilitate successful progress. He mentioned the need to improve regional outreach and participation. Prato asserted that there exists various systemic obstacles in the way that the UN operates. There needs to be a clear decision -making process created within the HLPF structure to provide a voice for struggling groups to become active participants in their own affairs.

2. Mohammed Ali Loutfy from Disabled People's International agreed that there are fewer opportunities for non-governmental voices at the HLPF, and questioned ways to fix this issue. Loutfy mentioned the critical need to recognize civil society and stakeholders. These entities must have greater presence in the planning and policy decisions made by governmental groups. Loutfy maintains that mechanisms must ensure participation at the local level as well as at the global one. The 2030 Agenda calls to: "leave no one behind." This is a key point so that the UN fulfills its mission to affect positive change for the people of the world. Non-governmental organizations must be able to participate and be drivers of change at more than a token level.

"We need to make this a decision-making space." Mr. Stefano Prato

"The space for engagement by civil society is shrinking."

3. Segment two of this side event highlighted the need to work with and analyze data more critically. Ms. Marianne Beisheim from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs stated that thematic reviews should provide a solid analysis of the state of implementation of each of the SDGs. This must address specific consideration of the 2030 Agenda *principles* of being: transformative, integrated, inclusive, and "leaving no one behind."

Among the problems at the HLPF that need to be addressed are: that thematic reviews include the lack of reporting standards; lack of collaboration between the panels; background notes for each SDG are of limited value; limited time for the panels to discuss in depth; and insufficient attention to what constitutes actionable results. For the future, roadmaps on preparation and follow-ups of reports and presentations should be established, and panels should produce policy recommendations.

4. Additionally, Ms. Rebecca Malay from the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, from the NGO named GCAP, highlighted the need for more coherent policies, and criticized the severe lack of MGoS participation in the implementation process of SDGs. She also stressed that national economic and development authorities come up with more solid plans to develop the SDGs.

Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are country-led and country-driven reviews of SDG implementation progress at the national and sub-national levels. They aim to provide a culmination of a national level implementation process. Ms. Beisheim criticized that the VNRs are voluntary guidelines which vary in quality, lack self-reflective analysis, provide limited time to discuss in-depth, interactive debates are not

well-prepared, and there is limited room for critical questions from MGoS. Ms. Malay also commented that although VNRs are showcases of best practices, they generally do not show policy coherence or the realization of human rights, which is an extremely important aspect to include. Interventions from the floor also addressed that guidelines should be strengthened.

5. Theo Morrissey from the International Trade Union Federation highlighted three components to be improved upon, namely:
- a. Transparency (Limitations to access to information)
 - b. Consultation (Only a few countries had adequate consultation processes with civil society, and there is a lack of structure)
 - c. Social Dialogue (There is a lack of relevance in the private sector, and social partners are often consulted as a side approach with little effort to bridge perspectives)

6. A representative from the Major Group for Children also suggested three recommendations on ways to improve VNRs:

- a. Each member state must present their progress on each indicator instead of a summary
- b. Each member should provide written recommendations rather than solely recognizing what other have done
- c. The implementation of more parallel discussions that allow for more in-depth reviews and dialogues

7. Similarly, a representative from Plan International highlighted the fallbacks of the current VNR process, and suggested the need for more substantial VNRs.

Ultimately, there is still more work to be done to secure actionable results and support for the thematic reviews and VNRs. Guidelines need to be better developed,

more analytical reviews have to be implemented, accountability and ambition should be strongly adhered to, and action towards “leaving no one behind” should be upheld and actually achieved.

The third segment, a review of the General Assembly (GA) Resolution 67/290, discussed the interlinkages, coherence, accountability, and lessons learned from the first cycle of the HLPF.

8. The panelist, Ms. Sachini Perera, from the International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia/RESURJ, elaborated on the issue of representation at the forum. She argued that the civil society needs to be centered on historically marginalized groups of people, and that we need to redesign the HLPF to ground it in human rights.

9. Mr. Jan-Gustave Strandenaes from the Stakeholder Forum asked the room to consider whether or not agenda setting is really taking place. He argued that in order to effectively engage in the review process, we must internalize the 67/290 guidelines.

10. Statements and questions from civil society representatives on the floor highlighted this issue of inclusion, with a representative from Together 2030 noting that the voices of those who have been left behind, especially the voices of the poor, need to be heard. It is not enough to say we will leave no one behind; we need to actively work to do so.

11. A representative from Canada critiqued the 2030 agenda, saying that it leaves many behind with the lack of training for the HLPF and the lack of transportation to it. Struggling groups need to make an enormous effort to arrive at the HLPF, and we not only need to help them in their journeys, but also need to ensure their voices are sufficiently heard at the forum when they get there.

The Bottom Line

There exists a need for more non-governmental engagement at the HLPF.

Recommendations:

Voluntary National Reviews should be shared at least 6 months before HLPF

The United Nations needs to open up even more for the participation of civil society and stakeholder representatives

Incorporate a human rights approach to the implementation of the SDGs

Guidelines need to be better developed

More analytical reviews must be implemented