



Follow-up and Review of the SDGs: fulfilling our commitments

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Working paper

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The SDG framework commits all UN member states to the achievement of 17 goals and 169 targets, spanning the three dimensions of economic, social and environmental development. Under this framework, each national government – as well as other stakeholders, including local governments, business and civil society – is expected to identify, implement and report on specific actions that lead to their achievement.

This paper considers the challenge of establishing a robust follow-up and review mechanism to support such implementation. The paper underscores the importance of the follow-up and review process taking place at three levels: national, regional, and global. We propose that the HLPF process be based on mutual accountability and peer review. To ensure the impartiality of the HLPF process, we recommend the creation of an Independent Expert Advisory Group, comprised of leading experts from outside of government. We also recommend an active, formalized role for civil society, academia and business, both in the submission of evidence and in the HLPF discussions.

This paper is part of the SDSN's extensive work on framing, implementing, and monitoring the SDG agenda. Other relevant SDSN publications include [Indicators and a Monitoring Framework for the SDGs](#), [Data For Development](#), [Principles for Framing Goals, Targets and Indicators](#), and our reports on global partnerships and financing for development.¹

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APRM – African Peer Review Mechanism

AU – African Union

CSD – Commission on Sustainable Development

CSOs – Civil society organizations

CDP – UN Committee for Development Policy

ECOSOC – UN Economic and Social Council

ECLAC – Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

EPR – Environmental Performance Review

ESCAP – Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

ESCWA – Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

GA – UN General Assembly

GMI – Global Monitoring Indicators

GRI – Global Reporting Initiative

HLPF – High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

HRC – Human Rights Council

IAEG – Interagency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators

IEAG – Independent Expert Advisory Group on the Data Revolution

iERG – independent Expert Review Group

IGN – Intergovernmental Negotiations on Post-2015

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators

LDCs – Least Developed Countries

MDGs – Millennium Development Goals

NCSD – National council for sustainable development

NGOs – Non-governmental organizations

NPoA – National Plan of Action

NSDS – National sustainable development strategy

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

OECD-DAC – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee

RNE – Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung (German Council for Sustainable Development)

SD – Sustainable Development

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

SDSN – Sustainable Development Solutions Network

SuR – State under Review

TI – Transparency International

UNCSD – United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

UN DESA – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UN DSD – United Nations Division for Sustainable Development

UNECE – United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme

UNGC – United Nations Global Compact

UPR – Universal Periodic Review

WBCSD – World Business Council for Sustainable Development

WHA – World Health Assembly

WHO – World Health Organization

Introduction

Following the progress made under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which guided global development efforts in the years 2000-2015, the world's governments recently endorsed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the period 2016-2030 at the UN General Assembly (GA). The SDGs will continue the fight against extreme poverty, but will add the challenges of ensuring more equitable development and environmental sustainability. The new agenda is universal and it will require participation of all UN member states.

The SDG framework was agreed upon by all UN member states on 25 September 2015 and is also expected to commit other stakeholders, including business and civil society, to the achievement of 17 goals and 169 targets spanning the three dimensions of economic, social and environmental development. This paper considers the challenge of establishing a robust follow-up and review mechanism to support implementation. More specifically it considers the political process that will be required to encourage the sharing of evidence, lesson-learning and mutual accountability of all UN member states, and the multiple stakeholders involved in the implementation of SDGs commitments. To the extent possible, our proposals build on existing UN architecture and multilateral monitoring systems, recognizing that any new review process must not pose a heavy burden on countries. Nevertheless, reforms will be required to ensure the full participation of non-government actors, to guarantee transparency within the process and to build the willingness and capacity of all Member States to engage.

This paper considers the concepts of follow-up, review and accountability and how they might be interpreted within the multilateral negotiations on Post-2015. It then takes stock of current agreements on the SDG follow-up and review processes, including the role of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and the utilization of evidence in the review process. The majority of the paper is dedicated to proposing a multi-level and multi-stakeholder follow-up and review process for the SDGs to feed into ongoing deliberations on the implementation of the new 2030 Agenda. Existing models and best practices, highlighted in case study boxes throughout, inform our suggestions.

The paper proposes that follow-up and review take place at three levels: national, regional and global. National review processes will be particularly crucial to drive progress and can build on "existing national and local mechanisms and processes, with broad, multi-stakeholder participation."² National Councils for Sustainable Development may be one appropriate model for countries to consider. At the regional level, the Regional Economic Commissions will have an important role to play facilitating information exchange and peer review. The High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) will be the key forum for follow-up and review at the global level. We propose that the HLPF process be grounded in the principle of mutual accountability and utilize the mechanism of peer review. In this spirit, the HLPF will need to perform five key functions: (1) fostering high-level buy-in, political and public support for the SDGs; (2) providing a forum to discuss progress and challenges of both countries and other key stakeholders; (3) encouraging an evidence-based discussion; (4) providing a

forum to take stock of progress on the Global Partnership; and (5) encouraging UN coordination and alignment. To ensure the impartiality of the HLPF process, we recommend the creation of an Independent Expert Advisory Group, comprised of leading experts from outside of government. We also recommend an active, formalized role for civil society, academia and business, both in the submission of evidence and in the HLPF discussions.

1. Follow-up and Review: A global process to shepherd us forward, together

“Operating at the national, regional and global levels, it [the follow-up and review framework] will promote accountability to our citizens, support effective international cooperation in achieving this Agenda and foster exchanges of best practices and mutual learning.”³

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were adopted in September 2015 put forth a global agenda to eradicate poverty, transform economies, promote greater equality, and protect the planet. The focus of action and accountability will be at the national and sub-national levels, but an important motivation for the SDGs all along has been to tackle challenges that require international cooperation and solidarity. These include the fight against extreme poverty, reducing inequalities, addressing environmental degradation, maintaining a stable climate, and other global public goods.⁴ Achieving the SDGs will therefore also require a robust follow-up and review process at the global and regional level.

Achieving the new, shared vision set out in the SDGs will not be easy. All countries will have to undertake profound transformations in the way they pursue economic growth, provide social services, protect the environment and plan for the future. Businesses will have to adapt their operating principles to support sustainable development and commit to driving innovation, particularly in low-carbon technology. Science and academia will have to provide timely evidence on progress, challenges and opportunities. Civil society organizations (CSOs) should work to bring about a wider public understanding of sustainable development and to affect a shift in individual behaviors, whilst concurrently working to hold their governments to account.

To achieve this change, all stakeholders need to work together and pull in the same direction. High-level processes for follow-up and review that recognize the role and contribution of all stakeholders, and provide space for the sharing of experiences and lesson-learning will be crucial to achieve this change. Furthermore, a polycentric approach (as described in the box⁵) to the review process, which recognizes the roles of the private sector, private philanthropy, civil society and academia alongside governments, will create a network of actors collectively responsible for driving forward development.⁶ The active engagement of all stakeholders will ensure that the global review process builds upon the inclusive, open and transparent nature in which the SDG negotiations have been undertaken.

“Under a system of polycentrism, if one level of government, industry, or civil society fails or defaults on a problem, other layers remain available to address the task. This creates a “safety net” that can ensure social problems are addressed.”

Timely and regular reviews will also play an important role in improving coordination and coherence, delineating mutual roles and responsibilities. At the national level, review processes will help to increase governments’ legitimacy, transparency, answerability, responsibility, decision-making and inclusion.⁷

Guiding review processes at the regional and global level should be the principle of mutual accountability. All too often, accountability is narrowly understood as a system of obligations coupled with sanctions.⁸ In the context of the SDGs, accountability should be understood as mutual accountability, as defined in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, and later refined and expanded in the Busan Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation⁹. Mutual accountability refers to a set of commitments voluntarily made by two or more implementing partners. “It relies on trust and partnership around shared agendas, and on encouraging changes in the policies and actions needed to meet commitments rather than on any sanction for non-compliance.”¹⁰

2. Current Consensus on an SDG Follow-up and Review Process

Several aspects of the SDG monitoring and review architecture have already been discussed and agreed upon by the international community, for example the 2012 Rio+20 summit agreed upon the creation of a High Level Political Forum (HLPF) to oversee monitoring and follow-up on international commitments. Meanwhile Member States participating in the Open Working Group (OWG) and Intergovernmental Negotiations on Post-2015 (IGN) emphasized the importance of differentiated levels of review and an evidence-based process.

THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM

As stipulated in the Rio+20 Outcome Document *The Future We Want*,¹¹ a High-level Political Forum (HLPF) will succeed the Commission on Sustainable Development, with a mandate to oversee implementation of sustainable development efforts and coordination within a broader UN system, avoid duplication with other existing mechanisms and ensure cost-effectiveness (vertical accountability).¹² In 2013, the General Assembly (GA)¹³ further specified HLPF’s political mandate and goals. It established that the Forum should meet annually under the auspices of ECOSOC (for eight days, including a three-day ministerial segment) and every four years under the auspices of the General Assembly, at the Heads of State or Government level. Despite being primarily an inter-governmental forum, the resolution envisions HLPF to be a platform involving other actors engaged in the implementation of sustainable development – major groups and other stakeholders (horizontal accountability). An additional role that HLPF was tasked with is to serve as a hub strengthening the “science-policy interface”¹⁴. To this end, it will collate available data and produce an annual Global Sustainable Development Report.

MULTIPLE LEVELS OF REVIEW, UNDERPINNED BY ROBUST, TIMELY EVIDENCE

As recognized by Member States in the Intergovernmental Negotiations on Post-2015 and in the UN Statistical Commission, a post-2015 monitoring and review architecture should reflect the multiple levels of engagement of the international community. In particular monitoring and review should take place at national, regional and global levels.

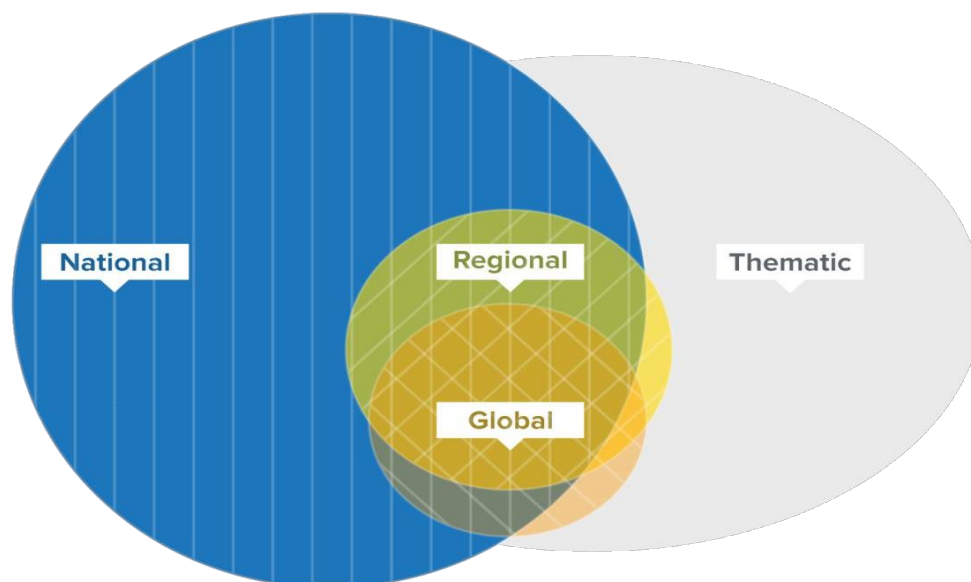
Informing each level of review should be evidence. In its report on *Indicators and a Monitoring Framework for the SDGs* SDSN proposes that this evidence be produced through national processes of data collection (usually coordinated by a National Statistical Office), as well as harmonized sets of indicators at the global and regional levels. Thematic monitoring, by expert communities, may also be used as important complementary evidence to official monitoring and review at national, regional and global levels (see Figure 1).

Global Monitoring Indicators would be collated at the national level, complementing more extensive national indicator sets. These indicators would be harmonized across countries, requiring common methodologies and approaches, to ensure comparability and to support global SDG monitoring. These indicators would be reported to the HLPF, via the UN Statistical Commission, on an annual basis, whilst national and regional review times and processes would be set according to local needs and pre-existing processes.

Through extensive consultation with academics, experts and civil society, SDSN has identified ten key principles for selecting robust Global Monitoring Indicators. These qualities will be essential to ensure that the review process generates results that can inform policy-making, as well as facilitates adequate and timely responses to remedy problems. Indicators need to be:

1. Limited in number and globally harmonized (for global monitoring indicators),
2. Simple, i.e. single-variable indicators with straightforward policy implications,
3. High-frequency, allowing regular monitoring, preferably on an annual basis,
4. Consensus-based, in line with international standards and system-based information,
5. Constructed from well-established data sources,
6. Disaggregated to the greatest extent possible,
7. Universal,
8. Mainly outcome-focused,
9. Science-based and forward-looking,
10. A good proxy for broader issues or conditions.¹⁵

Figure 1: Generating evidence to inform global, regional and national reviews: setting and compiling key indicators



National monitoring is the prerogative of each national government. Each country decides on number and nature of national indicators, which follow national standards and may not all be internationally comparable. A limited set of Global Monitoring Indicators will also be integrated into national monitoring efforts. Although likely to be drawn from official data sources, countries may also decide to include non-official data among their national indicators.

Global monitoring is based on a set of Global Monitoring Indicators that are harmonized to common global standards and would form basis for review at the High Level Political Forum. GMI would be predominantly drawn from official data. GMIs are generally applicable to all countries, but some may only cover a subset (e.g. malaria does not apply to countries in temperate zones and landlocked countries do not report on oceans).

Regional monitoring provides a platform to foster knowledge-sharing, peer review, and reciprocal learning across regions. Regional indicators comprise Global Monitoring Indicators, Complementary National Indicators, and possibly a small number of indicators targeting specific regional priorities. Regional monitoring mechanisms should build on existing regional mechanisms.

Thematic monitoring comprises specialist indicators reported on by epistemic communities. They can include input and process metrics as helpful complements to official indicators. Many communities may also use other sources of unofficial data and experiment with creative and novel ways of collecting, analyzing, and presenting data.

Source: SDSN (2015) *Indicators and a Monitoring Framework for the SDGs*, Paris, France & New York, USA: SDSN.

Even though some of the basic foundations of monitoring and review of the SDG agenda have been laid, there are multiple gaps remaining with regards to how such mechanisms should function in practice. These include the way in which all three layers could be coordinated, and the mechanics of the review process.¹⁶ The following sections of this working paper tease out lessons from existing multilateral, national and regional review processes, to inform policy-makers' decisions about possible ways forward.

3. A Multi-level Review Process for the SDGs

The development of a comprehensive and coherent SDGs monitoring and review framework is essential to ensure progress towards sustainable development. Even the most robust set of indicators will fail to ensure implementation if they are not used to inform a review process that takes stock of progress, encourages best practice exchange and peer learning.

Global stakeholder consultations, as well as the Secretary General's Report – *The Road to Dignity by 2030*, stressed the need for a multi-layered review mechanism.¹⁷ The many levels of the review mechanism should complement each other and avoid duplication with parallel review mechanisms that are already in place as a result of existing international agreements and commitments. The importance of coherence and coordination is stressed in the HLPF resolution, which identifies ECOSOC as the “principal organ in the integrated and coordinated follow-up of the outcomes of all major conferences and summits in the economic, social, environmental and related fields”.¹⁸

This section makes preliminary recommendations on all three layers of a potential SDG review mechanism, drawing on the lessons learnt from existing review processes. It further proposes that the thematic aspect of SDG monitoring be integrated into all three layers of the review mechanism.

A. NATIONAL REVIEW

National governments hold the primary responsibility for ensuring their countries' development. National-level review processes will therefore be decided by each State, based on pre-existing mechanisms (such as Parliamentary review¹⁹) and best practice. Whatever their shape or form, common to all national review processes should be three essential functions:

1. **Coordination:** National review processes should help to coordinate and focus the attention of government actors from across a wide range of government departments. Through a clear annual review cycle, governments can better prioritize actions, direct political attention and financial resources.
2. **Multi-stakeholder engagement:** National review processes should seek to engage a wide range of stakeholders, ensuring that their activities are complementary to national priorities and that all stakeholder activities are pulling in a common direction. Moreover, multi-stakeholder engagement can provide a broader range of evidence with which to review progress, and can help to instill public confidence and legitimacy in the national process.
3. **Timely, evidence-based review:** National review processes should be informed by timely evidence collated by the National Statistical Office and relevant Ministries during the preceding year. When data is two or more years out of date its ability to inform political decision-making and to drive allocations of resources is severely hampered.²⁰ For this reason, efforts to collect data on the SDGs

should start immediately, from January 1, 2016. Although key indicators will need to be collated and reviewed annually, a comprehensive national sustainable development report may be prepared less often, to coincide with country reports to the HLPF (see below).

National Sustainable Development Councils,²¹ first recommended in *Agenda 21*, and currently implemented in multiple countries around the world, may serve as a model of a mechanism that can support implementation and monitoring of national commitments (see Box 1). In particular, NSDCs can play an important role by ensuring coordination among various stakeholders, including local governments, civil society, academia, and the business sector, and by supporting the development of national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs). In order to be truly effective bodies, NSDCs' should complement and seek to streamline existing national sustainable development efforts in countries, coordinating among other commitments that countries have made under previous international and regional agreements. By identifying synergies between SDGs and the existing national goals and strategies, NSDCs can help avoid duplications of effort and reduce the burden on countries seeking to develop a new NSDS. Furthermore, the councils can serve as important links between the governments and civil society by helping raise awareness of the SDGs and their importance in local contexts, therefore driving citizens' ownership and empowering people to interact with governments with regards to the local agendas implementation.

BOX 1: GERMANY – SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ARCHITECTURE²²

Overview of the mechanism: Sustainable development efforts in Germany are coordinated by several agencies: German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE, appointed by the federal government in 2001); Committee for Sustainable Development (under the Federal State Secretaries); Federal Statistical Office (which publishes a biannual Indicator Report that informs the government's progress reports); German Bundestag (Parliament, in particular the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development); and German Federal Press Office (which hosts online dialogues on SD).

RNE is comprised of 15 experts representing multiple stakeholders (from academia, think tanks, NGOs, trade unions, business, local government) and its primary role is to provide advice to the government on sustainable development policy, proposing targets and indicators and facilitating the implementation of the Sustainability Strategy. Furthermore, the council's mandate is to mobilize stakeholders to contribute to sustainable development. In this regard, the council engages with the general public and representatives of major groups to raise awareness of sustainable development, drive engagement and communicate governmental policies to the public.^{23 24} The development of the National Sustainability Strategy (since 2002) is the mandate of the Committee for Sustainable Development.

Who is subject to the review: Commissioned by the Federal Chancellery, and facilitated by RNE, the German sustainability policy is subject to an international peer review process by an eight-member group of international experts.²⁵

Frequency: Every four years. To date, two rounds of review have been conducted – in 2009 and 2013.²⁶

Follow-up: Recommendations from the review are presented to the Committee for Sustainable Development. Outcome reports comment on the progress in implementation of the Peer Group recommendations from the previous round of review. The peer review outcomes are also discussed by the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development.²⁷

Lessons learnt for post-2015:

- The important advisory role of the German Council for Sustainable Development, and the fact that it is comprised of a broad representative membership, drives national ownership of the sustainability agenda.²⁸
- The independent nature of the Committee for Sustainable Development allows for more flexibility to offer a

critical overview of the implementation of government strategies, which increases its legitimacy among the sectors and the general public.²⁹

- The independent peer review process, conducted at the national level, helps to inform progress and drive improvements of national strategies³⁰

There are various membership models for NSDCs: government representative membership (government officials only), mixed stakeholder membership and non-governmental membership. All involve trade-offs in terms of policy influence, representation, participation, effectiveness and partiality.³¹ The choice of model should be at the discretion of member states, based on the local context and breadth of non-state actors to be involved. This can range from non-governmental actors being involved as observers, to having them included as council members with equal rights, such as in the German RNE.³² However, regardless of the membership composition, multi-stakeholder engagement in NSDCs programming should be encouraged. By convening state and non-state actors, NSDCs can help in raising awareness of the sustainable development agenda among the general public, and increase legitimacy and ownership.³³

Table 1 provides an overview of the core functions of an NSDC. Although the emphasis may vary, common to all NSDCs are the fundamental principles of coordination, multi-stakeholder engagement and monitoring and review. As implementation-oriented entities, NSDCs can also play a crucial role: supporting policy development, drawing on timely evidence and lessons learned.³⁴

Table 1. Functions and activities of NSDCs

FUNCTIONS AND ACTIVITIES OF NSDCS	DESCRIPTION
Strategy creation and advice	<p>Reviewing, drafting or providing recommendations for National Sustainable Development Strategies.</p> <p><i>Added value:</i> greater objectivity and facilitation among various government departments' priorities.</p>
Policy and implementation	<p>Advising, providing feedback, reviewing or drafting governmental policies. The advisory function may include working with various sectoral committees to inform their policy-making in terms of all aspects of sustainable development.</p> <p><i>Added value:</i> as above.</p>
Monitoring and review	<p>Assisting in the analysis of national indicators for sustainable development and communicating outcomes of monitoring processes. Providing formal inputs to NSDCs' review processes and informing decision-making on the follow-up.</p> <p><i>Added value:</i> Because NSDCs are (for the most part) multi-stakeholder entities, they are well-placed to provide objective feedback on the progress in implementation of national strategies.</p>
Stakeholder	<p>Outreach to stakeholders to inform NSDCs' thinking and recommendations, public education about</p>

engagement and capacity building	sustainable development. <i>Added value:</i> promoting broad, national ownership of national strategies.
International outreach	Promoting national best practice in regional and global forums (e.g. the UN CSD or regional peer review mechanisms). <i>Added value:</i> Peer learning, collaboration on transboundary issues.

Source: Adapted from Osborn, D. et al. (2014)

Table 2. Examples of National Sustainable Development Councils

COUNTRY	NAME	MEMBERSHIP	OBJECTIVES
Colombia	Comisión Interinstitucional de Alto Nivel para el alistamiento y la efectiva implementación de la Agenda de Desarrollo Post 2015 y sus Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (2015)	Governmental: Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Finance/Internal Revenue, Environment and Sustainable Development as well as the DGs of Presidency, National Statistics, Prosperity and Planning The Commission is also entitled to establish technical and working groups of mixed membership (academia, civil society, private sector, government).	Develop SDGs implementation strategy and action plan (also at sub-national levels), coordinate with stakeholders, establish monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, mobilize academia and promote peer learning and capacity building. ³⁵
Philippines	Philippine Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) (1992)	Mixed: government, business and civil society.	PCSD advises government on NSDS, scrutinizes government implementation and facilitates stakeholder engagement. ³⁶
Czech Republic	The Government Council for Sustainable Development (2003) ³⁷	Mixed: government, civil society, academia and business.	Development, implementation and revision of NSDS. ³⁸
United Kingdom	Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) (closed 2011) ³⁹	Independent: civil society, academia, business.	Watchdog function on monitoring implementation of NSDS, regularly reporting to the Prime Minister. ⁴⁰

Source: Authors' own

B. REGIONAL REVIEW

Regional reviews are a complementary process that can foster mutual learning and encourage the exchange of best practice and transboundary cooperation because of

the shared challenges of countries within a given region.⁴¹

Regional reviews can be forums for mutual learning and information exchange, as well as peer review, where individual or groups of countries engage in the process of mutual assessment and peer learning. Peer reviews are soft governance instruments by which the public policy performance and practice of states is periodically assessed by other states ('peers'), and sometimes the secretariats of international organizations. This procedure builds on regular collection of information around commonly agreed standards or goals. Different mechanisms are involved, such as on-site visits, peer discussions and recommendations to the reviewed state. The institutional design of existing peer review mechanisms varies significantly and so do their functions and functionality, for instance as regards to the degree to which they enable peer learning, lead to peer persuasion or public attention or pressure.⁴²

Two excellent examples of peer review mechanisms amongst countries with common characteristics are the OECD Environmental Performance Review⁴³ and the African Peer Review Mechanism (see Boxes 2 & 3).⁴⁴ The European Commission has also sought to actively encourage the use of peer reviews in support of Sustainable Development strategies (see Box 4). Though the effort is nascent it offers some useful recommendations for follow-up and review of the SDG agenda.

BOX 2: OECD ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW (EPR)

Overview of the mechanism: Established in 1992, EPR has conducted 70 country reviews, with the majority in OECD countries, although a growing number of partner countries are participating. The current review cycle examines key environmental trends within any given country, the national policy framework, environmental governance systems, recognition of environmental policies in economic strategy, including through taxation or pricing mechanisms. In addition, a country under review is asked to choose two topics of particular importance and local relevance to be comprehensively reviewed.⁴⁵ Data collection is done by the EPR Secretariat and uses OECD and external data sources, including environmental statistics provided by OECD Working Party on Environmental Information (WPEI). After the collection of data, a review team visits the reviewed country and engages in meetings with various state and non-state actors. OECD interactive peer review discussions are organized in the framework of the WPEI based on the findings from the data collection and country visits. As a general rule, high-level government officials (minister or head of state) lead the reviewed countries' delegations. In addition to providing country-specific recommendations, the peer review discussions highlight lessons learnt from other participating countries that could lead to wider policy adoptions. Final reports are publicly launched at high-profile events and their findings are broadly disseminated among policy makers, civil society organizations and the general public.

Who is subject to the review: OECD member states and selected partner countries. In addition, UNECE sought OECD help in designing an environmental review mechanism for UNECE member countries that are not part of the OECD membership.

Frequency: Cyclical. The third cycle of reviews is currently underway. Each country is reviewed once every 7-8 years.⁴⁶

Follow-up: Progress reports are prepared on a voluntary basis by the reviewed countries. Each country that is subject to a subsequent review is also assessed in terms of implementation of recommendations from the previous review.

Lessons learnt for post-2015:

- The process has inspired domestic policy reform (e.g. green tax reforms in Denmark and France or the creation of an Environmental Agency in New Zealand and the Ministry of Environment in Chile);

- The mechanism can promote intersectoral collaboration and motivate policy alignment, especially in countries with nascent environmental administration.⁴⁷
- Peer reviews can empower parties under review through informing, learning and policy development, and by increasing the legitimacy of policies.⁴⁸ Indeed, the OECD states that “[t]he recommendations resulting from such a review can also help governments win support at home for difficult measures.”⁴⁹
- Well-functioning peer review mechanisms can be replicated and adapted by other organizations to inform their review processes.⁵⁰
- Alongside peer persuasion, value sharing, shared commitment, mutual trust and credibility of the peer review process are the factors that help drive change and motivate policy improvement.⁵¹
- Low frequency of reviews (7-10 year cycle, or even longer since the inclusion of more partner countries to the review) may hamper the learning process. It might also lower incentives for policymakers to seriously engage in follow-up on review recommendations.⁵² Voluntary mid-term reviews could help in this regard, although this tool has hardly been used so far. Reflections about how to incentivize the production of such progress reports in order to keep momentum and track process on a regular basis is needed.⁵³
- The longstanding experience and reputation of the OECD as the pioneer of peer reviewing helps in getting political and public attention and acceptance. The OECD EPR (and other OECD peer reviews) can serve as example for other regional reviews. The OECD could organize sessions for peer learning on the mechanism as such, for instance at/around the HLPF.

BOX 3: AFRICAN PEER REVIEW MECHANISM (APRM)

Overview of the mechanism: APRM serves as a monitoring mechanism to evaluate national action plans in the areas of democracy and political governance, economic governance and management, corporate governance, and socio-economic development. It was established in 2003 by the African Union under the umbrella of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). National review reports are produced by the APRM Secretariat based on country visits and consultations with a range of stakeholders: national and local governments, civil society organizations, academia, trade unions, external experts and the private sector. The outcome of the review is a National Program of Action. Country reports are subject to mandatory public release not later than six months after the internal discussion.

Who is subject to the review: The APRM is voluntary. All AU member states are eligible to become members.

Follow-up: A National Plan of Action that stipulates short, medium and long-term goals for a country under review. Progress in meeting those objectives is monitored on a six-monthly basis, with Progress and Annual Reports prepared for the APR Forum. A member state under review can request a follow up review after three years.

Lessons learnt for post-2015:

- The voluntary nature of the mechanism means it has patchy coverage of the African continent and a number of members have yet to engage in a review process.⁵⁴
- Stakeholder participation in the review process varies between countries.⁵⁵ Participation of civil society should be institutionalized in the review mechanism process to raise public awareness of APRM and drive ownership.⁵⁶
- Capacity building is an essential component to ensure quality. UN entities and member states have provided assistance to the Secretariat and countries under review in the past.⁵⁷
- It is possible to engage political leaders in the review process (Heads of State Forum). Despite the assumption that high-level engagement would translate to country-level reforms, APRM has been only partially effective in that respect.⁵⁸
- Drafting of the National Plan of Action (NPOA) should engage multiple stakeholders and entail commitment of the government. It should focus on addressing key gaps in implementation and specify costs and time frames.
- For the follow-up and review process to be effective responsibilities for implementation should be identified.

- NPOs need to be integral parts of national sustainable development strategies.⁵⁹

BOX 4: PEER REVIEWS OF NATIONAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT POLICIES WITHIN THE EU

Overview of the mechanism: The suggestion to make use of peer reviews in the field of sustainable development was formally introduced by the European Commission in 2006 in its 'Renewed EU Sustainable Development Strategy' and substantiated with the publication of guidelines for organizing and implemented such reviews by the Directorate General for Environment.⁶⁰ Member countries were encouraged to review their NSDS or sustainable development policies by organizing a peer review at the national level. Countries themselves can select and invite peers to conduct the review and provide a secretariat to facilitate the review. The guidelines suggest several principles for the review, such as broad participation of the public and different stakeholder groups in the review and the focus on peer learning.⁶¹ The organization of a peer review was incentivized by the European Commission with the offer to co-finance the review (however, only The Netherlands made use of this).

Who is subject to the review: EU member states that decide to undertake a peer review of their NSDS on a voluntary basis. So far, only three countries made use of the instrument: France (pilot, 2005), the Netherlands (2006/7) and Germany (2009 and 2013).

Frequency: Up to the respective EU member state to decide, although the guidelines of the European Commission propose that they should not be conducted as a one-off review.⁶²

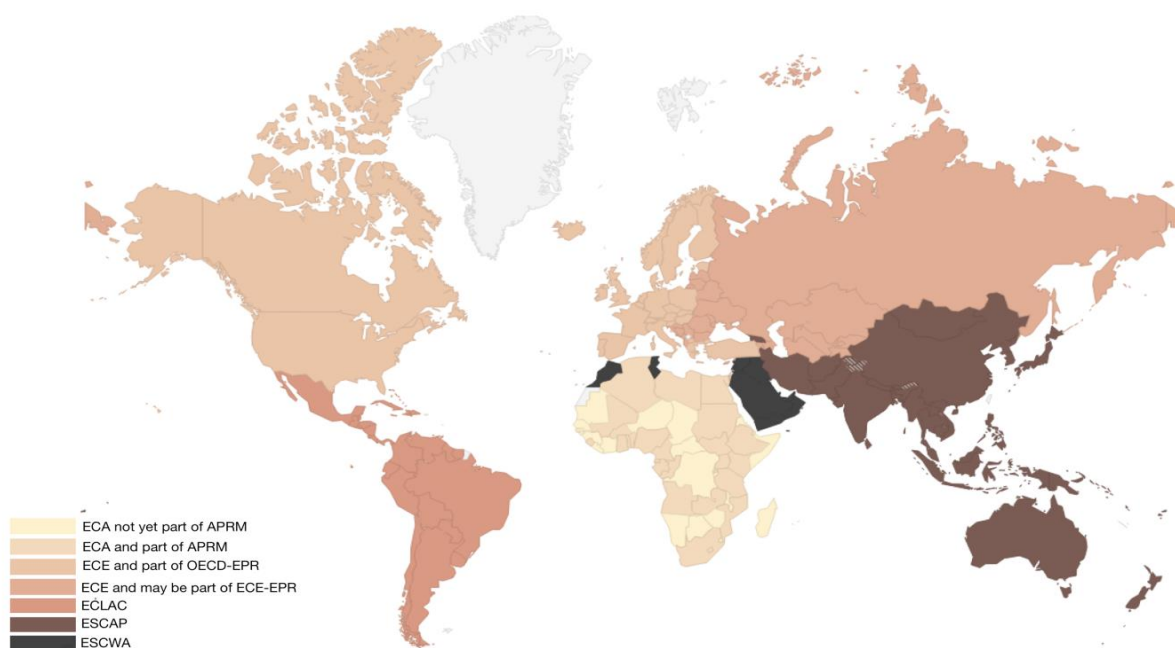
Follow-up: While the guidelines by the European Commission suggest regular progress reports, countries can decide themselves if and how to organize a follow-up up of the review.⁶³ Only Germany has engaged in a full follow-up process, thus far, in the form of organizing a second peer review four years later.

Lessons learnt for post-2015:

- The fact that very few countries have thus far decided to conduct a peer review (despite the offer of co-funding by the European Commission) points to the need to better promote the idea and demonstrate the added value of the peer review among countries.
- Guidelines provided by the European Commission were voluntary creating the freedom for member states to design the peer reviews according to national preferences and needs. For instance, while the Dutch review was framed as a "civil society review" with a strong focus on stakeholder participation and the creation of public debate, the German reviews were more geared towards seeking input from political and academic elite and thus was designed as an "expert peer review".⁶⁴
- Political leadership and guidance is crucial for an effective review. For the German reviews, the high level commitment by the Chancellor and the location of responsibility for sustainable development (and the review thereof) at the Committee for Sustainable Development (directly in the Chancellery) was important driver.⁶⁵
- Timing of the peer review (and particular the launch of its report) is important. Peer recommendations are more likely to be followed up if they feed into a 'window of opportunity' (e.g. new government, political/public interest in a specific issue, such as the "Energiewende" (energy transition) in Germany).
- Effective communication strategies are important to attract media and public attention, for instance in form of a public launch of the review report.
- A one-off review is less effective than a peer review that has a certain periodicity, as follow-up reviews require to go back to the peer recommendations and assess progress made, as well as to look into further actions to be taken.⁶⁶

As exemplified by the African Peer Review Mechanism, it is important that regional review mechanisms build on existing, effective regional mechanisms (see Figure 2 and Table 3), thereby increasing participation in the review process and minimizing the burden on participating countries.

Figure 2: Regional Commissions and existing regional review mechanisms.



Source: Authors' own. Please note that this map does not present countries according to scale.

Table 3. Regional organizations and existing peer review processes.

ORGANIZATION	EXISTING MECHANISMS THAT COULD BE UTILIZED FOR SDG MONITORING AND REVIEW
UNECA ⁶⁷ and African Union	APRM – need to broaden the thematic scope.
UNECE and OECD	OECD-DAC, OECD EPR, ECE EPR need to broaden the scope to encompass all SDGs.
ECLAC	IG meetings, ad hoc expert group meetings, technical assistance. Exact mechanism to be decided. ⁶⁸
ESCWA	Arab Forum for Sustainable Development. Peer review mechanism to be decided.
ESCAP	Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development. Peer review mechanism to be decided.

Source: Authors' analysis

Regional reviews should be seen as complementary to the global and national review processes, not as part of a linear monitoring process. Some stakeholders have proposed that evidence be collated at the national level, then discussed in the regional forum and only then presented in a global forum, but if countries follow a linear review path then there will necessarily be a time-lag and the HLPF will be unable to provide timely, policy-relevant advice and support. Nor will it be able to direct resources and international cooperation most effectively. Instead, regional review processes should operate in parallel, providing a forum to discuss specific regional challenges and to share experience. Given the wide range of issues covered by the SDG agenda, regional reviews may be structured around a set of rotating or alternating themes. These may either align with the focus areas of a given HLPF session (see below) or may respond to context specific, shared challenges.

C. A GLOBAL FOLLOW-UP AND REVIEW PROCESS

The outcomes of national and regional review processes will feed into the global review of SDG progress in the High Level Political Forum, under the auspices of ECOSOC.⁶⁹ The role of the HLPF should be to take stock of progress across all of the goal areas and within each region, and to highlight challenges or set-backs, thereby helping to direct global assistance to those countries and goal areas making least progress. Furthermore, the HLPF should collate and synthesize information gathered from national and regional review processes, as well as complementary thematic and expert reports.⁷⁰

To encourage maximum cooperation and exchange between countries, the HLPF, like the regional review mechanisms, should consider a model based on peer review. Within the context of a peer-reviewed process of mutual accountability, the HLPF should serve 5 key functions: (1) fostering high-level buy-in and public support for the SDGs; (2) providing a forum to discuss progress and challenges of both countries and other key stakeholders; (3) encouraging an evidence-based discussion; (4) providing a forum to take stock of progress on the Global Partnership; and (5) encouraging UN coordination and alignment.

- **FOSTERING HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL BUY-IN AND PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE SDGS**

The annual meeting of the HLPF, as well as the four-yearly meeting under the General Assembly, must be an action-forcing moment, which drives global progress. High-level political participation will be crucial, as is a conducive and open environment for international media, civil society participation and public mobilization. Broad engagement will give additional legitimacy to the HLPF, and will uphold the cross-cutting principle of the SDGs that we ‘leave no one behind.’ Furthermore, broad engagement will help to educate the public about the sustainable development agenda and will empower people to be active in holding their governments to account.

The Sustainable Development 2015 (SD2015) program is an example of how to mobilize external stakeholders to provide input to the intergovernmental processes that will shape the global sustainable development agenda. The SD2015 program – a

collaboration between CIVICUS, Stakeholder Forum, UNDESA, and the European Union – has been carrying out consultations, sharing resources, and providing “engagement tools” in order “to help stakeholders participate and influence the Post-2015 and Post-Rio+20 sustainable development processes.”⁷¹ For example, its website has a section devoted to media that contains a directory of expert commentators and informational webinars, guides, and videos.⁷² Moving forward, initiatives that encourage public support and provide educational resources (such as SD2015) should become critical input to the implementation and follow-up processes of the 2030 Agenda. (See section 4 for more information).

An important prerequisite for a high-level forum, that attracts political attention and commitment, is that it deals with a topic, set of topics or theme that is suitable for agenda setting at the specific moment in time. Simply progressing chronologically from goal 1 to goal 17 will not create enough interest, nor will it align with entry points in ongoing international and national processes. Topics for discussion should attempt to link to live debates in other multilateral forums, across the UN but also within the Group of Seven (G7) and The Group of Twenty (G20). Topics should relate to cross-cutting themes that can also help to ingrain the concept of sustainable development as an interconnected and indivisible issue that touches on many aspects of our lives, concurrently. One example could be to align the focus of next year’s HLPF with the theme of the UN HABITAT III Conference on “sustainable cities” in Quito in October 2016.⁷³ Sustainable Cities, besides being a stand-alone goal (SDG11), is across-cutting issue relating to localization of the whole agenda at different territorial scales. Such a theme would enable discussion of the breadth of the agenda whilst providing a specific entry point that is politically timely.

- **A FORUM TO DISCUSS PROGRESS AND MUTUAL CHALLENGES**

The key function of the HLPF is to provide a forum for countries to showcase progress and challenges and to encourage peer learning. When meeting each year at the Ministerial level and every 4 years at the Heads of State and Government Level, countries should have the opportunity to provide progress reports. These might be provided as written submissions, and/or as brief presentations, made by each Member State on a rotating basis. There are 193 Members of the General Assembly, so it may be practical to consider presentations from up to 40 countries each year, on a 5-year cycle.

The HLPF resolution also recognizes the critical role of non-governmental actors and major groups within the formal review process,⁷⁴ as an independent check and balance on government reporting but also as stakeholders in the SDG process, equally bound to report on their commitments, progress and challenges. The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of the Human Rights Council has been given special attention as a mechanism that could serve as a model for a multi-stakeholder SDG review process (see Box 5).⁷⁵

BOX 5: UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR)

Overview of the mechanism: The main aim of UPR is to improve the human rights situation of all UN member states. Each year 42 countries are subject to review during one of the three sessions (January/February, May/June, October/November). Upon the completion of the review, the State under review (SuR) is presented with a list of recommendations to be implemented prior to the subsequent review.

The review is conducted in several stages. Firstly, SuR prepares a national report that should take into account civil society contributions. Afterwards, UN entities, coordinated by the office of OHCHR, supplement the report with relevant comments and recommendations regarding SuR's implementation of human rights treaties. In parallel, NGOs submit inputs to the official process that are compiled into a "Summary of stakeholders' information" document made public and presented to the HRC. However, NGOs are not allowed to take the floor during the public presentation by the SuR or the interactive dialogue that is streamed live for general public access. An outcome report with recommendations is compiled by a troika of countries representing different regional groups and selected by drawing lots.⁷⁶

Who is subject to the review: All UN member states.

Frequency: Each member state is reviewed every 4.5 years.

Follow-up: At the subsequent review, member states report on the implementation of recommendations (that need to be previously accepted by the SuR) and human rights situation in the country since the previous review. In addition, and on a voluntary basis, states can provide mid-term updates to HRC.

Lessons learnt for post-2015:

- It is important to ensure a platform for formal and meaningful participation of NGOs and other stakeholders.
- The mechanism has been successful in encouraging dialogues between SuRs, recommending states and international institutions.⁷⁷
- Even though the acceptance rate of recommendations remains high throughout the subsequent review rounds, the more politically charged issues suffer from low acceptance.⁷⁸
- One of the successes of the UPR is its ability to ensure high-level political participation in the process.⁷⁹ However, despite some positive progress,⁸⁰ there is limited evidence that the reviews have driven change in countries that were subject to review.⁸¹
- The process of country reporting on the recommendations stemming from the review needs to be formalized and strengthened.⁸²

One lesson from the UPR process is the value of encouraging NGO contributions as part of the formal information-gathering exercise. Given the value of these contributions (and noting the valuable contributions provided by NGOs during the SDG deliberations) member states' should create space for NGOs to actively participate in the formal HLPF sessions.⁸³

As active participants in the implementation of the SDGs and in respect of the principle of mutual accountability, non-state actors should also be subject to a review process, which ensures their activities are supportive of achieving the SDGs.⁸⁴ For civil society the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness⁸⁵ is a platform that could be utilized to advance the concept of self-regulatory frameworks for civil society involvement in sustainable development efforts. Or a more formal mechanism may be considered,

such as National Councils for Sustainable Development conducting routine assessments of CSO performance, in line with the SDGs.

The business sector is expected to become an important partner in ensuring implementation and progress of the SDGs. First, business will be crucial to encourage innovation and to identify solutions to some of the most intractable development challenges, such as rapid decarbonisation and global monitoring and the SDG agenda. Second, business will need to adapt corporate behaviors to ensure that they are aligned with the pursuit of the SDGs. Third, a system of national and global reporting on the sustainable practices of private companies, similar to CSOs monitoring, can be an important component. The recently launched SDG Compass⁸⁶ comprises an international monitoring mechanism that could be utilized in this context. Developed by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), and the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), the SDG Compass aims to identify Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that can help track business' contributions to the SDGs. This mechanism can be seen as an example of voluntary contributions of the private sector towards the exchange of knowledge on sustainable development practices. *The Post-2015 Business Engagement Architecture*⁸⁷ proposed by the UN Global Compact laid out a proposal for such a mechanism that would ensure public transparency through the tracking of companies' commitments to sustainable development, common reporting standards and certification schemes.⁸⁸ Aligning companies' reporting criteria and policies could contribute to a more "level playing field"⁸⁹ and improved corporate legitimacy.

- **AN EVIDENCE-BASED DIALOGUE**

As agreed at Rio+20, it will be important that evidence informs discussions on the HLPF. In particular Rio+20 recommends the compilation of an annual **Global Sustainable Development Report** to inform the HLPF's discussions.⁹⁰ This report should seek to "*strengthen the science-policy interface through review of documentation bringing together dispersed information and assessments.*" To be more than just a review of recent evidence, it should consider the world's development trajectory and whether countries are collectively on track to meet SDG commitments. To make the report timely and to ensure it reflects upon countries' current realities it should include a distinct section or Annex on SDG progress and attainment. This section might show progress on each of the 17 Goals and 169 targets, against a very concise set of global indicators. The Statistical Commission, with the support of the UN Statistics Division under UNDESA, should oversee the compilation of this evidence. With regards to timing, this section of the report could be prepared and presented to the UN Statistical Commission each year at their annual meetings in March, and then fed into the Global Sustainable Development Report for publication and release in July, at the HLPF.

The Global Sustainable Development Report is compiled by UNDESA in partnership with a broad range of academic and scientific advisers from all countries. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network—established by the UN Secretary General as a network of academic and expert advisers—is a logical partner in this endeavor.

- **AN OPPORTUNITY TO TAKE STOCK OF THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP**

Having reviewed country and regional progress, and discussed challenges, the HLPF should encourage a dialogue on how best to support implementation of the SDGs. In particular, the HLPF should consider whether the targets relating to the Means of Implementation and the new Global Partnership are being fulfilled. To this end, the HLPF should also consider the commitments made at the third Financing for Development Conference in Addis Ababa in July 2015. A two-way mirror mechanism, which evaluates performance towards meeting mutual commitments, may help to facilitate this process. Lessons may be learned from two existing models; the Mutual Review of Development Effectiveness in Africa (MDRE), a joint effort between the UN Economic Commission for Africa and OECD, under a mandate from NEPAD Heads of State and Government, and the World Bank's Global Monitoring Report.⁹¹

- **COORDINATION AND ALIGNMENT**

By placing HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC, the Council has been given a central role in the process. As such, the ECOSOC's functional commissions and subsidiary bodies should play a complementary role, providing forums for countries to showcase progress and discuss challenges on the wide range of cross-cutting issues covered by the SDGs. For example, the Commission on Social Development could be actively involved in the issues related to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 (the eradication of extreme poverty and the fulfillment of basic rights) whilst the Commission on the Status of Women could take stock of progress on gender equality and other gender-related aspect of the agenda.⁹² To ensure that these discussions do not become too sector specific and do not undermine the integrated nature of the new development agenda, it may be helpful to orient these discussions around cross-cutting themes as opposed to specific goal areas, such as inequality, human rights, disaster risk reduction, science, technology and innovation, sustainable land use and terrestrial ecosystems, wellbeing and global partnership.⁹³

4. Ensuring an Impartial, Evidence-Based Review

One of the main challenges facing existing follow-up and review mechanisms is impartiality. For example, critics of existing mechanisms point to the problem of countries providing only selective data that may impair the ability of assessment teams to get a full understanding of the case.⁹⁴ One of the ways to overcome this obstacle is by engaging a group of independent experts, who can provide impartial reviews of progress. Examples include the Independent Reporting Mechanism that enables stakeholders to track progress towards the Open Government Partnership and the Independent Expert Review Group that was established as a part of the Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health (see Box 6).

BOX 6: INDEPENDENT EXPERT REVIEW GROUP (BY THE COMMISSION ON INFORMATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY)

Overview of the mechanism: In an effort to facilitate progress on the Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health, the UN Secretary General requested WHO to establish the UN Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health. In its final report⁹⁵, the Commission came up with a proposal for an accountability framework and laid out a set of ten recommendations. The accountability proposal was based on three principles: monitor (data collection), review (data analysis), and react (recognizing successes and recommending remedial actions).⁹⁶ The last recommendation of the Commission was devoted to the issue of global reporting on progress, and the Commissioners proposed that a time-bound independent Expert Review Group (iERG) be established.

The group was envisaged to be the primary review group for the Global Strategy, reporting to the UN Secretary General, through WHO's Director General. It is a fully independent body, albeit hosted by WHO that also performing a secretariat function. The scope of responsibilities of the group spanned from tracking the implementation of country commitments (financial and programmatic), reviewing whether the recommendations of the Commission were implemented, assessing transparency in financial resources flows, identifying challenges in implementation of the Global Strategy and Commission's recommendations, and identifying best practice.⁹⁷ In an effort to collect reliable evidence, the iERG conducted site visits (only in the last year of its operations), issued calls open to all stakeholders on best practice examples and existing obstacles. Country scorecards and detailed assessments were published in annual reports.

Who is subject to the review: 75 countries with 98% of the world's maternal and child mortality.

Frequency: Reviews were conducted on an annual basis between 2012-2015.

Follow-up: iERG tracked both the implementation of the recommendations of the Commission on Information and Accountability, and the commitments of countries in the light of the Global Strategy.

Lessons learnt for post-2015:

- The political support in the establishment of the expert group strengthened its credibility among multiple stakeholders and secured a channel of communication⁹⁸.
- Independence of the expert group helps to ensure honest and accurate assessment of the countries and themes under review.⁹⁹
- Country engagement is essential for meaningful review process.
- Review process needs to be conducted on a regular basis, using robust, timely and reliable data.
- The review mechanism should be in itself subject to review that would assess whether it serves its purpose in terms of advancing international commitments and serving the populations.¹⁰⁰

Building on the model of the independent Expert Review Group for the Commission on Information and Accountability, we propose that the UN Secretary General considers appointing a similar body to oversee review processes for SDGs. Some Member States have suggested that such an Independent Expert Group might be based upon a strengthened Committee for Development Policy (CDP), albeit with increased resources and greater visibility.¹⁰¹ This interdisciplinary expert group could function alongside the member state-led HLPF but have broad representation of stakeholders. It could comprise members of UN agencies, academia, civil society, and business with expertise on various aspects of the sustainable development agenda.

The body would have thematic subgroups that could engage with the HLPF on alternate years, according to the official ECOSOC rota of key themes. Thematically relevant UN agencies and/or leading scientific institutions could be appointed as technical secretariats to the expert group and sub-groups.¹⁰² They would be responsible for collating thematic information coming from regional peer review processes, national reporting, relevant ECOSOC subsidiary bodies, and other expert NGO or academic agencies that may be involved in data collection and analysis of SDGs indicators.¹⁰³

From their position both inside and outside of the formal process, civil society and other stakeholders will also play a crucial role in ensuring an independent, evidence-based process, by raising awareness of sustainable development efforts among the general public, holding governments to account for their commitments, and providing independent reviews outside of official processes (shadow reporting).¹⁰⁴

Shadow reviews are usually undertaken by civil society organizations, think-tanks or research institutions that function outside of the formal accountability processes, which however seek to inform intergovernmental debates. These types of reviews provide alternative sources of information and data that can contribute to the assessment of governments' performance in meeting international commitments. Shadow reviews (sometime referred to as "spotlights") may have two functions. Firstly, they are often advocacy driven, focused on influencing donors or partners with the use of media, awareness campaigns or by generating public debates. Secondly, they may be oriented towards gathering and analyzing information and data that can be used by them or other partner organizations to assess performance.¹⁰⁵

The evidence generated by CSOs, think-tanks and academic institutions has received good visibility during the OWG and IGN negotiations on post-2015. The multi-stakeholder nature of the discussions and the wide array of evidence considered has been widely praised and should be reflected in the format of the HLPF moving forward, through the creation of a platform or dedicated space for non-governmental stakeholders to present their independent, complementary assessments of progress (see for example Table 5, Day 4).

BOX 7: TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL (TI) – GLOBAL CORRUPTION REPORT¹⁰⁶

Overview of the mechanism: TI's Global Corruption report aims to provide an overview of the state of corruption around the world. It commenced in 2001 and has focused each issue on levels of governance (regional), or sectoral / thematic issues such as education, climate change, political corruption or judicial system. In addition, the publication reported on the status of implementation of the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials in International Business Transactions and compliance to other international agreements. The report is intended to serve as a source of data and information for various stakeholders – policy makers, civil society, private sector, and academia.

Who is subject to the review: Depending on the given issue, the reports focus on geographic regions or thematic and sectoral issues.

Frequency: The report is published annually.

Follow-up: The main purpose of the report is to raise public awareness of the issue of corruption and mobilize bottom-up

civil society efforts to counter the phenomena and hold governments accountable.

Lessons learnt for post-2015:

- CSOs can play an important role in building the critical mass of public pressure to advance key issues.¹⁰⁷
- Public education through civil society advocacy is necessary to influence and improve policy making.¹⁰⁸
- CSOs can provide sophisticated alternative measures of progress e.g. the Corruption Perception Index, featured in the GCR.
- Governments' acceptance of accuracy of data published by CSOs remains a challenge, especially in the case of less favorable outcomes.¹⁰⁹ Upon verification of the validity of methodology used by CSOs to gather data, international and national review processes should establish formal ways for civil society inputs.

Table 4. Proposed levels of review

LEVEL OF REVIEW	WHO?	HOW?	THEMATIC FOCUS	OUTPUT	PARTNERS	UN SYSTEM	INCENTIVES TO PARTICIPATE	MODEL/ EXAMPLE MECHANISMS
NATIONAL	National Councils for Sustainable Development Working with National Statistical Offices	National Sustainable Development Strategies Global and national indicators	Yes, for country-specific priority areas.	National SD report	NSOs, CSOs, business, academia, trade unions, local governments.	UN country teams or other UN organizations	Political capital. Accountability to citizens.	Various models of NCSDs.
REGIONAL	UN Regional Economic Commissions Regional organizations	Peer reviews	Yes, for regionally important focus areas as identified by NCSDs.	Annual meeting. Scorecard and report with actionable recommendations.	Depending on peer review mechanism in place – CSOs, business, academia, other.	UN Regional Commissions	Peer learning; reputational Saving time and resources.	APRM, OECD EPR, peer reviews of NSDS within the EU.
GLOBAL	HLPF and the Independent Expert Group. UN Statistical Commission with the support of the UN Statistics Division. Broad range of stakeholders to provide inputs to all processes.	Peer reviews Independent expert review group.	Covering all areas but with a rotating thematic focus.	Country progress reports. Report from the Independent Expert Group Global SD report, including a section on SDG monitoring.	CSOs and major groups, including business sector.	ECOSOC/ GA	Peer learning, reputational Technical and financial assistance.	UPR, EPR, APRM, Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health.
THEMATIC	Major thematic communities, such as health or education.	Independent thematic reviews, possibly supported by the functional commissions of ECOSOC and other intergovernmental bodies.	Yes, e.g. in line with yearly HLPF theme.	Thematic reports	Epistemic communities, including CSOs and universities.	HLPF	Peer learning	Various examples, e.g. the Global Burden of Disease study.

SHADOW	CSOs and other stakeholders.	National and international reporting, advocacy campaigns.	Yes, according to areas of expertise.	Theme or region-based reports.	Potentially coalitions of NGOs, academia, think-tanks, business sector.	N/A	Hold governments to account.	TI Global Corruption Report
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Source: Authors' own

Table 5: Arranging the various inputs into a practical HLPF schedule (excludes the High-Level Ministerial Segment)

HLPF PROGRAM	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
Participants and Presentations	Member State Progress Reports	Member State Progress Reports	Report on the Independent Expert Review Group Dialogue on Global Partnership and Means of Implementation	Reports and presentations from other stakeholders, including: 1. Shadow reports on MS performance 2. Reporting on non-governmental stakeholder performance (e.g. business reporting)	Thematic Spotlight (based on annual ECOSOC/ HLPF theme)

Source: Authors' own

5. Creating a Dynamic HLPF – Attracting Interest and Maintaining Momentum

The HLPF is poised to become the “lead political champion”¹¹⁰ to advance sustainable development at the global level. HLPF 2016, which will take place under the auspices of ECOSOC, will be a crucial point to assess its capacities, especially in terms of its ability to attract high-level participants and to provide strong action-oriented guidance.

When compared to its predecessor, the UN’s Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), the structure of the HLPF shows several signs of improvement: it is a “universal, intergovernmental, high-level political forum”¹¹¹ that builds on both the strengths and

shortcomings of the CSD. In its first three sessions since its inauguration in September 2013, the HLPF has started to build a vast action platform that attempts to help it achieve its complex and encompassing agenda. With support from its “substantive secretariat”¹¹² (the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) of UN DESA), it makes use of the Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform to manage communications and outreach to major stakeholders, as well as to perform knowledge management. During the HLPF 2015, numerous official events, side events, and training courses (“SD-Learning”) took place in support of its third session.

However, in order to effectively perform its immense task of making “a vital contribution to implementation and [...] help[ing] countries to maximize and track progress in implementing this Agenda in order to ensure that no one is left behind”¹¹³, the HLPF needs to become a platform that has the capacity to live up to its “high-level” name and mandate, in particular by attracting top decision makers from countries and international organizations. This will require a thorough understanding of how to spur a successful forum that effectively focuses attention and mobilizes resources and action to galvanize sustainable development. Learning lessons from existing structures and mechanisms that worked well in the past needs to go hand in hand with thinking outside of the current “UN toolbox”. Ahead of the next meeting of the HLPF in July 2016, it is crucial to explore possible avenues to turn this week-long meeting followed by three days of ministerial sessions into an international platform that attracts diverse stakeholders, including high-level decision-makers, planners and achievers from many countries, policy areas and sectors of society. What will attract such individuals to come to the UN Headquarters and expend their time and resources? And how can we prevent the HLPF from being perceived to be “yet another talk-shop without substantive outputs and visibility”?

This section outlines several innovative ideas on how to make the HLPF a dynamic action-forcing forum, which has impact beyond the boundaries of a UN conference room. It does not aim to offer ready-made and fully developed solutions, but rather to stimulate discussion and further reflection on this important and timely issue.

- **Inspiring innovation**

To make the HLPF a dynamic forum it may be advisable to use it as a springboard to “kick start” new initiatives that respond to areas of slow progress. Focusing on this function could be particularly helpful in the early years of the HLPF, as it will realistically take at least two to three years for countries to be able to substantially review the implementation of the SDGs. Thus, developing the HLPF as a forum that goes beyond follow-up and review, for instance by establishing it as an “idea lab” and “knowledge hub” for sustainable development solutions could be useful to drive engagement.

However, this exercise should not take place at the expense of getting the global follow-up and review process up and running. The review process should start as soon as possible, in order to gain experience with monitoring, build capacity and address challenges in a timely manner. Thus, reviews need to develop over time, and become more in-depth once data on SDG implementation becomes more readily available.

- **Reaching beyond the conference room**

Substantive discussions on countries' progress and challenges can and should take place during the formal sessions of the HLPF, but they should also be encouraged and facilitated through additional formats. Organizing some form of "Sustainability Fair" or "Market of sustainable opportunities" could facilitate such discussions in a less formal setting, with broader participation, whilst also encouraging more dynamic explanations of SDG implementation and progress. "Partnership Fairs" (similar to those organized under the CSD), a "World Fair"- or "International Expo"-style presentation of best practices and new innovations (for instance on green technologies), or inclusive "People's Summits" (like the one organized during Rio+20) should be considered as examples of interactive events that attract not only international policy-makers, but also the global public. If successful, such events could be staged in a series of international venues. Formats can be kept flexible and reviewed/adapted each (other) year depending on the interest, resources and needs of the different HLPF rounds. Such complementary forums could lead to specific outputs such as new partnerships, regional/national initiatives, or education and communications collaborations. They provide an opportunity to showcase the commitment and action of civil society, the business sector, and to ensure representation of marginalized groups.

Another way to foster broad participation is through a series of "TED Talks"¹¹⁴, where stakeholders from different societal groups present innovative solutions in an attractive, inspiring format. Such "Sustainable Development (SD) Talks" could take place during the HLPF, at different venues in New York and be open to the general public. Access to such events could be "awarded" based on individual action, combined with a lottery, as per the approach used by the Global Citizen Festival each September.¹¹⁵ For instance, access could be dependent upon completing a task, such as sharing the actions you have personally taken to support the SDGs, or writing a vision of how your village, city or country could become more sustainable. This format could easily be expanded to other geographies and contexts, to reach broader and diverse audiences.

Another strategy for ensuring inclusiveness could be to continue the successful practice of broad online consultation, as in the "My World" Survey¹¹⁶, in which individuals around the world were asked to "vote" for their priorities for the sustainable development agenda. Enabling global citizens to vote or submit their own evidence and opinions

could increase the feeling of active individual involvement, thereby encouraging ownership of the 2030 Agenda. Online consultations could be organized on a series of topics, including the themes of that particular HLPF, speakers for the suggested “SD Talks”, or even nomination of individuals with outstanding contributions to advancing the global sustainability agenda, as part of a competitive prize or award process (see below).

- **Attracting broad media and public attention.**

The HLPF provides an annual, high-level moment to attract popular attention to the sustainable development challenge. Effective public communication will therefore be crucial to the HLPF’s success. Sustainable development is not a common theme for front-page news, particularly when competing with imminent threats like war and economic decline, it may therefore be advisable to consider incentives for journalists to report on the SDGs – to explain their pertinence to people’s everyday lives, to show progress, explain challenges and encourage active citizen engagement in support of implementation. Grant schemes such as the one run by the European Journalism Centre can help to encourage high-level journalistic work.¹¹⁷

Another means by which to attract popular attention and media interest is to encourage and support the creation of an “awards” process, which could be announced each year at/around the HLPF by a foundation or think-tank (possibly with support of the UN)¹¹⁸. Some kind of “Sustainable Development Leader” award could be given to an actor- from any given sector of field- who has offered an outstanding contribution to the advancement of the SDGs. For instance, one year it could be given to a political figure, another to an entrepreneur and in the third year to a NGO, UN staff member or active citizen, and so on. Engaging the public in the nomination and/or voting for the award winner could increase interest in such a prize, as people can participate and be inspired by the actions of the prize winners. In principle, anyone could be nominated, so it can also function as an incentive to obtain recognition for one’s work. Both news and entertainment media could present the nominees in advance of the award ceremony, creating inspiring portraits of those who are driving sustainability. Next to the reputational value, prizes could also consist of financial support to encouraging more actors to participate and put themselves forward for nomination.

- **Living up to its name: Maintaining ‘High-Level’ attention and engagement**

While having participants with decision-making power attend the HLPF is of course critical, the focus should not only be on the formal rank of politicians and other stakeholders. One important challenge is how to achieve the necessary “buy-in” from actors who have not been directly engaged or affected by the HLPF process. These include not only national governments’ ministers of Planning, Commerce, Trade, and

Finance, but also local government officials, business leaders, religious and cultural representatives and other stakeholders with potential substantive impact on achieving the SDGs. Besides the obvious practical value, such inclusion is important in order to give equal weight to the different (sub-)dimensions of sustainable development and avoid “siloed” thinking and action.

Other international forums can provide some inspiration in this regard. While the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos cannot be fully compared in mandate or scope to the HLPF, its success has to a large extent been based on the breadth and diversity of participants, including governments, business and civil society representatives. Also, the mix of both experienced, powerful leaders, as well as young, inspirational “new comers” has created active discussions in a “collaborative and collegial Spirit of Davos”.¹¹⁹ Another example of a multi-sectoral and high-level forum worthy of exploration is The Skoll World Forum, which seeks to showcase “innovative solutions to the world’s most pressing social issues.”¹²⁰ For a decade, the forum has attracted around 1,000 participants per year from all over the world. This invitation-only event is organized by the Skoll Foundation and is co-produced with the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at the Saïd Business School, Oxford University.¹²¹

In addition to the activities suggested above (fair, talks, award, media presence etc.), another motivator for high-level, diverse participation is social networking. Finance ministers might be more willing to come to New York for the HLPF if they can meet with other “primus inter pares”. Putting the Global Partnership and means of implementation (the focus of SDG 17) on the HLPF’s agenda each year could be one way to encourage attendance. Also, trying to schedule meetings in Washington around the time of the HLPF might enhance the opportunity for ministers with portfolios other than development and environment to join their country’s delegations. Forums such as Davos have shown that the presence of business actors also increases the participation of the political elite. Thus, organizing partnership fairs or other opportunities for businesses to showcase their innovations and partnerships, and seek new public-private cooperation will be important.

Conclusion

The paper proposes that follow-up and review take place at three levels: national, regional and global. National review processes will be particularly crucial to drive progress and should build on “existing national and local mechanisms and processes, with broad, multi-stakeholder participation”.¹²² National Councils for Sustainable Development may be one appropriate model for countries to consider. Core, common functions for national review mechanisms should include coordination, multi-stakeholder engagement and evidence-based reviews.

At the regional level, the Regional Economic Commissions and (where applicable) their associated regional review mechanisms, will have an important role to play facilitating information exchange and peer review amongst countries sharing similar contextual challenges. Regional review processes will be complementary to national and global processes and should not be seen as part of a linear monitoring process, whereby evidence is collated at the national level, passed on to the regional level and only then considered in a global forum.

The HLPF will be the key forum for follow-up and review at the global level. We propose that the HLPF process be grounded in the principle of mutual accountability and utilise peer review. In this spirit, the HLPF will need to perform 5 key functions: (1) fostering high-level buy-in and public support for the SDGs; (2) providing a forum to discuss progress and challenges of both countries and other key stakeholders; (3) encouraging an evidence-based discussion; (4) providing a forum to take stock of progress on the Global Partnership; and (5) encouraging UN coordination and alignment. To ensure the impartiality of the HLPF process, we recommend the creation of an Independent Expert Advisory Group, comprised of leading experts from outside of government and the active participation of non-governmental stakeholders.

We have also outlined several practical steps through which the HLPF could become a dynamic, interactive forum. These include creating parallel spaces in and around the forum for multi-stakeholder participation, attracting media and public attention including through the use of prizes and awards, and encouraging social networking opportunities.

Reflecting the ambition of the SDGs and the ‘leave no one behind’ principle, the HLPF should become an important meeting for the world, engaging high-level political, private, and civil society leaders. It is critical that the HLPF becomes a platform that enriches national and regional follow-up and review processes, engages with the broad public to communicate the concept of sustainable development, and drives progress in the adoption and implementation of the SDG agenda.

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