



Asia Pacific Regional CSO Engagement Mechanism

Key messages and comments on the element paper of the reviews of ECOSOC and the HLPF

We thank the co-facilitators for their work on the element paper. Firstly, we are grateful for the opportunity and once again reaffirm the key role that civil societies and major groups and other stakeholders could play in the ECOSOC cycle. For both HLPF and ECOSOC we believe that **stronger, action-oriented outcomes** are crucial. They both have to provide political leadership for various constituents, intergovernmental bodies and organizations throughout the UN system.

Chapeau: Overview and Context

Under the UN Charter, ECOSOC is responsible for promoting higher standards of living, full employment, and economic and social progress; identifying solutions to international economic, social and health problems; facilitating international cultural and educational cooperation; and encouraging universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Both ECOSOC and HLPF should ensure Policy Coherence, reckoning article 103 of the UN Charter stating that if there is a conflict between the provisions of the charter and any other treaty, it is the charter that prevails. The HLPF should restore the primacy of UN treaties and ensure all agreements and processes, including multilateral and bilateral trade and investment treaties and the work of international financial and trade institutions, does not undermine the UN Charter.

ECOSOC and HLPF should support and advance the establishment of institutions required to support sustainable development and incorporate review of those mechanisms including those relating to international tax cooperation, sovereign debt restructuring, macroeconomic governance reforms, private sector accountability, and Financing for Development while respecting their separate but complementary processes. Moreover, the emerging processes such as Summit of the Future must build on the work achieved through ECOSOC-HLPF and not erode it.

- The elements paper emphasizes that the current review should prioritize how ECOSOC and the HLPF can follow-up and build upon the provisions of the 2023 SDG Summit Political Declaration. However, the Declaration turned out to be a testament to the naivety of multilateralism, in the name of broadest possible consensus, despite the need for a bold,

responsive and transformative declaration in the darkest hour of humanity amid COVID 19 recovery, lackluster SDGs and emergent peace & security challenges.

The Declaration's emphasis on private financing for developing countries, instead of the 0.7% of GNI commitments fulfillment, was a glaring trade-off for corporate capture of resources and governance in the Global South. Similarly, debt swaps for SDGs instead of sustainable broader debt treatment prevailed the business-as-usual model in the times of acute debt distress across developing countries.

Review of the Economic and Social Council

On the section identify gaps in implementation:

- We agree that the Council needs to be more effective and responsive in addressing contemporary and emerging global challenges. The council must strengthen the analysis of systemic barriers to sustainable development, especially those related to global inequalities of wealth, power and resources, international economic, trade, monetary and financial frameworks, militarism & conflict, and authoritarian governance. .
- **On integration of gender-perspective** across the ECOSOC cycle and the HLPF, a gender-responsive and gender-transformative focus is critical to ensure that inequalities are addressed, reckoning specific needs, experiences and contexts, while the programming also ensures the redress of root causes.
- **On engagement**, ECOSOC and its segments, forums and subsidiary bodies need to prioritize democratization over corporatization; focusing on meaningful engagement of the right holders. The increasing corporate capture of the UN, under the current stakeholderism model, might severely damage the credibility of the UN having failed at ensuring corporate accountability over a history of exploitation of labor and environmental standards, tax evasion, carbon emissions, land grabbing, monopolization, as well as abuse of state policy space throughout the world. The Charter requires the UN to advance and safeguard legal and normative considerations compliant with human dignity, rights and development, and international law as opposed to repackage violators as 'stakeholders' in the process.
- **On alignment**, ECOSOC must pronounce its role in building on the reforms ambition forwarded by the Pact of the Future involving international trade & financial architecture with a specific focus on IFIs and WTO's compliance with policy coherence for sustainable development unlike current policies and practices.

Review of the High Level Political Forum

In terms of participation at the HLPF, we agree to encourage ministerial-level participation at the HLPF and by principals of UN system entities, as well as high-level participation by other stakeholders, particularly meaningful engagement of right holders.

To encourage high level participation of UN system entities, HLPF should include active participation of relevant Special Procedures, as well as human rights Treaty Bodies and UN Specialised Agencies, whose inputs should be discussed in the ECOSOC Integration Segment and reflected in the HLPF deliberations. This could also include Special Rapporteurs to assess policy coherence, and compatibility impact assessment on progress, identification of systemic and structural barriers, violations and obstacles, and actionable recommendations for resolve.

On Themes, SDGs under in-depth review as well as HLPF Programme,

- We appreciate that the element paper highlighted the need to **increase attention to the systemic barriers to achieving the SDGs and leave no one behind as well as address the unique challenges of vulnerable and marginalized groups.** Identifying and tackling systemic drivers of inequality must be central to the annual ECOSOC/HLPF Theme to ensure the agenda is truly transformative. HLPF should clearly underline progress and implementation gaps at national, regional and global levels in order to allow for corrective actions and change of policies, programmes and institutions. HLPF needs to ensure an adequate analysis of the root causes and systemic determinants of slow progress in all areas. This requires special attention to situations of developing countries, global economic, trade, tax, monetary and financial frameworks; as well as militarism and social and cultural norms such as patriarchy, fundamentalism, racism, casteism, etc.
- We would like to reiterate the need to have a **more systematic annual comprehensive review of the SDGs.** The current goals under review approach is incoherent and does not sufficiently capture the change on the ground while also overlooking the interlinkages across goals. A comprehensive review requires greater attention to an integration of wider inputs including by diverse civil society organizations, members of affected communities, human rights defenders, academia, treaty body reports, and reports by Special Rapporteurs and Independent Experts. A comprehensive approach enables HLPF to provide interlinkages and integration across the SDGs and sustainable development frameworks as well as opportunities for assessing synergies and tradeoffs.
- The emphasis on integration of the regional processes, Sustainable Development fora, and their outcomes to inform the deliberations at the HLPF, is much appreciated, reckoning

the regional progress in Asia and the Pacific at merely 17%, with the rest of the regions more or less same, in the absence of coherent, consistent and holistic coordination mechanisms connecting the national-regional-global dynamic and back.

Regional processes are a critical space for identifying regional priority issues and current systemic challenges to propose very specific solutions and actions at a regional level that are more difficult to achieve at global levels.

Besides, the Regional process should be further shaped to contribute to specific needs of marginalised and grassroot constituencies, especially in the global south, to support their efforts to break out of marginality and achieve sustainable development.

Therefore, more HLPF sessions should be dedicated to systematically integrate regional forum perspectives to inform global processes. To further enhance the process, a continuous feedback loop should be created to flow back from HLPF into regional, sub-regional and national levels to efficiently track the implementation of recommended actions.

- We also appreciate the commitment to fully implement provisions of previous GA resolutions on strengthening the contribution of major groups and other stakeholders (MGoS) and NGOs. We emphasise the following:
 - To **Adhere and apply the principle of non-regression** so that all rules and practices expand regarding participation and transparency do not regress with respect to either current formal and informal practices of internationally agreed principles and rights, such as the human rights to participate in decision-making and access to information; and
 - **Support communication, outreach, capacity building and funding to ensure communities**, particularly the most marginalized are aware of the sustainable development goals and can fully participate in their implementation and review.
 - To ensure effective civil society and MGoS engagement at the global and regional level processes can be guided by following parameters:
 - The diversity of civil society and social movements and the diverse means for outreach to their respective constituencies should be respected, as they represent significant capacity necessary to connect agenda setting with implementation.

- Full access to all official documents and information within a reasonable time period prior to official meetings should be provided, ideally with translation to different languages widely used in the region in order to reach out to broader constituencies.
- Transparent, inclusive and meaningful opportunities for civil society interactions with Member States in defining the agenda and optimizing civil society inputs in intergovernmental discussions such as through the establishment of joint working groups that include civil society representatives (such as the one adopted for the Disabilities discussion in the annex of ESCAP Resolution 69/13), and the right of civil society to intervene and make recommendations at official intergovernmental meetings should be ensured.
- Civil society speaking spots in all panels should be assured and organized through civil society selection processes;
- CSO's autonomy and capacity to organize through collectively agreed mechanisms at the regional level should be recognized by the UN system at the regional and global levels.
- Meaningful policy dialogue and engagement at the national level between government and civil society should be encouraged, to ensure coherence and effective national implementation of the resolutions and decisions adopted by UN bodies.
- The UN at regional and international levels should enable CSOs to prepare for substantive and theme-based engagement in intergovernmental processes and facilitate their participation in regional and sub-regional civil society preparatory meetings prior to Commission meetings and sustainable development processes;
- Major groups and organized stakeholder structures are able to organize official side events and round tables in collaboration with UN agencies during all national, regional and international intergovernmental meetings.

On Voluntary National Review,

- HLPF should institutionalize the follow up on the recommendations received during previous reviews, with a special focus on civil society/shadow reports.
- The recommendations should also be directed at the national and regional level UN systems (including Resident Coordinators, specialized agencies and country missions), for complementarity in follow up and review process.

- Given there is limited time, **a better link between regional and global reviews could be set up.** *“The regional sustainable development forums convened by the UN Regional Commissions were considered as an opportunity to exchange more in-depth on individual VNRs. It was suggested that countries could submit their interim VNRs to the regional forums, receive comments and subsequently submit the final reports to the HLPF.*
- Besides, countries reporting for the second or third time should report on the progress of the recommendations received during the last review for a holistic and systematic review of progress.
- **Global bodies responsible for the macroeconomic structure should be brought to the table, including multilateral entities, IFIs and other affiliate agencies to share reviews of their contributions to the Agenda 2030; at the regional and global levels depending on the mandate of such organizations.**
- **Due to limited time for review at global levels, regional processes remain very important. Some examples of where regional processes have been further strengthened can be drawn from the Latin America and the Caribbean region where the first binding regional agreement** - The Escazú agreement to protect the access to information, public participation and access to environmental justice has been set up. Also the Montevideo Strategies that developed concrete action points for women’s human right and gender equality in the context of SDGs by 2030. These mechanisms have clear accountability frameworks and similar bodies can be operationalized through member state, UN system and civil society coordination.

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