



# THE 2016 HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

under the auspices of ECOSOC

## Retreat of the President of ECOSOC

### Introduction

The ambitious, universal and transformative 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted in September 2015<sup>1</sup> needs to be matched by an equally innovative, visionary and action oriented follow-up and review architecture. Therefore, it will be crucial for the 2016 meeting of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) to demonstrate that the forum can deliver on its central role in overseeing follow-up and review at the global level and will be able to serve as a novel, creative, science and evidence based and action oriented platform to promote implementation of sustainable development commitments.

This meeting, to be convened under the auspices of ECOSOC from 11 to 20 July 2016, will be the first

meeting of the forum, now that the 2030 Agenda has been adopted. The President of ECOSOC is mandated to convene the HLPF and prepare its activities. He aims to consult broadly to ensure that the meeting is owned by all and meets the high expectations of the HLPF. He is organizing the retreat to launch a reflection and an exchange of ideas on how best to prepare and shape the 2016 meeting of the HLPF.

Such broad consultations will also help the President to ensure that his vision and organization of the 2016 session are consistent with the views of Member States on the future of the global follow-up and review architecture which will be discussed in the General Assembly in the coming months as decided by the 2030 Agenda (paragraph 90).

### Background

The creation of the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) was a central piece of the reform of the institutional framework on sustainable development launched at Rio+20. Rio+20 and the General Assembly: in a 2013 resolution on the format and organizational aspects of the HLPF<sup>2</sup>, gave a range of important functions to the forum. Those relate broadly to providing political leadership, guidance and recommendations to promote the implementation of sustainable development commitments, including those on means of implementation, and reviewing progress. The forum is also to increase the science-policy interface, address new and emerging issues, promote policy coherence and integration, discuss the sustainable development challenges faced by countries in special situation, build on regional preparations, address sustainable consumption and production and engage major groups and other stakeholders.

In September 2015, the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development established the central role of the HLPF in follow-up and review of the Agenda at the global level. It decided that the HLPF will “oversee a

network of follow-up and review processes at global level working coherently with the General Assembly, ECOSOC and other relevant organs and forums, in accordance with existing mandates.”

The Agenda also specified that the HLPF “will facilitate sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned, and provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations for follow-up”. It should “ensure that the Agenda remains relevant and ambitious and should focus on the assessment of progress, achievements and challenges faced by developed and developing countries as well as new and emerging issues. Effective linkages will be made with the follow-up and review arrangements of all relevant UN Conferences and processes, including on LDCs, SIDS and LLDCs”<sup>3</sup>.

The 2030 Agenda provides further guidance and principles on how the HLPF and the broader UN system architecture, should review progress. It establishes that the HLPF will be informed by the outcomes of two new forums created at the Addis Ababa Conference on Financing for Development

namely (i) the ECOSOC forum for financing for development and on (ii) the multistakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation<sup>4</sup>.

The HLPF meets every four years for a period of two days at the level of Heads of State and Government under the auspices of the General Assembly, and every year for eight days under the auspices of ECOSOC. When the HLPF meets under the auspices of ECOSOC, its three day ministerial segment is included in the high-level segment of the Council. The HLPF meetings “shall result in a concise negotiated political declaration to be submitted for the consideration of the Assembly”.

The HLPF, when meeting under the auspices of ECOSOC, conducts regular voluntary reviews of implementation (“national reviews”) which will “include developed and developing countries as well as relevant UN entities and other stakeholders including civil society and the private sector”<sup>5</sup>. The 2030 Agenda also decided that “thematic reviews of progress on the SDGs, including cross-cutting issues,

will also take place at the HLPF”. They will be supported by ECOSOC functional commissions and other intergovernmental bodies and forums. The work of the HLPF is supported by an annual Secretary-General progress report on the SDGs and a Global Sustainable Development Report.

All HLPF reviews are expected to respect the principles laid down in paragraph 70 of the 2030 Agenda, meaning that they will, among others, be country-led, voluntary, track progress in implementing the universal goals and targets in an integrated manner, including their means of implementation, be open and inclusive, and build on existing mechanisms where these exist.

The General Assembly defined ambitious modalities for the engagement of major groups and other stakeholders in the work of the HLPF. Those actors can, for example, intervene in official meetings, “have access to all official information and documents and make recommendations”<sup>6</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

<sup>2</sup> A/RES/67/290

<sup>3</sup> Agenda 2030, paragraph 82

<sup>4</sup> “Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development”, para 86 and 70

<sup>5</sup> 67/290 para 8 and Agenda 2030 para 84

<sup>6</sup> GA resolution 67/290 para 14 and 15



## Retreat of the President of ECOSOC

### Living up to the ambition of Agenda 2030: What would an ideal 2016 HLPF look like?

This session will form the backdrop for the discussions during the rest of the retreat. Participants will outline what they would consider to be an “ideal” 2016 HLPF. A number of criteria will determine whether, in a year’s time, the international community considers that the 2016 HLPF responded to its expectations. These criteria will relate to whether the 2016 HLPF delivered on its various mandates. Success may also be evaluated based on more immediate aspects such as the kind of outcome the HLPF

produces and whether it reflects the level of ambition and characteristics of the Agenda, the significance of the theme(s); the “take aways” from the meeting (e.g. emergence of new issues, learning of good practices, launch of new partnerships, etc.); the quality of the discussions and interventions and the kind of participants who attended.

---

### Questions for discussion

1. **What, in your view, would be the building blocks for a successful 2016 HLPF and how can we achieve them?**
2. **How should the success of HLPF be measured?**



## Retreat of the President of ECOSOC

### Theme: Substantive focus of the 2016 HLPF session

The mandate regarding the theme of the HLPF comes from GA resolution 67/290. It states in paragraph 7 that: “the meetings of the forum under the auspices of ECOSOC... (c) Shall have a thematic focus reflecting the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development, in line with the thematic focus of the activities of the Council and consistent with the post-2015 development agenda”. In 2015-16, the annual theme of ECOSOC is “Implementing the post-2015 development agenda: moving from commitments to results”. This leaves ample space to find a theme for the 2016 HLPF.

Regarding the process, General Assembly Resolution 67/290 and the 2030 Agenda do not provide specific guidance on how the theme of the HLPF should be decided as they focus only on the coordination the President must conduct in preparing the activities of the HLPF with the bureaux of the second and third GA committees and the Bureau of ECOSOC. In 2014, the theme of the HLPF was decided by ECOSOC. For 2015, the HLPF itself chose its theme.

The 2030 Agenda, in paragraph 85, states that “Thematic reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including cross-cutting issues, will also take place at the HLPF...”.

In 2016, it would be very important for the HLPF to address a substantive theme rather than focus only on organizational and process aspects. The mandates do not determine whether the theme of the HLPF session should be the same as the focus of thematic review(s).

Criteria that can guide the choice of a theme for the 2016 HLPF could include the following:

- The theme should allow the HLPF to start to deliver on its mandate to provide assessment of the situation and political leadership with the aim of addressing the overall Agenda by its 2019 meeting under the auspices of the GA.
- It should be broad enough to show that the HLPF is faithful to the integrated nature of the

2030 Agenda and will address the whole set of goals in future years without privileging any dimension of sustainable development.

- It should be central to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and reflect an important priority of the international community.
- It should be clear and understandable to everyone.
- It should be in line with the thematic focus of the activities of ECOSOC.

Based on these criteria, one of the possible options could include a broad theme like “Leave no one behind”. Another possibility could be to have a theme that would relate to sustained, sustainable and inclusive growth and building productive capacities. A topical theme could also be chosen, for example in relation to major upcoming UN conferences and events ( e.g. UNFCCC COP 21 in Paris, Habitat III, UNCTAD XIV or the mid-term review of Istanbul Programme of Action for LDCs), e.g. “*inclusive and productive cities for sustainable development*”.

Two options may be considered:

**One option** would be to have one overarching theme for the 2016 HLPF, which would also be the focus of the thematic review. The theme could be for example built around a cross cutting issue or one SDG area which would be looked at in connection with all SDGs.

**Another option** would be to have one overarching theme for the 2016 HLPF, and, in addition, conduct a thematic review of a few selected SDGs and their means of implementation as well as SDG17. Such a group of SDGs could be either:

Option 2A - a cluster of 3-5 inter-related SDGs, which would be closely related to the overarching theme, including their means of implementation or

Option 2B - a group of four SDGs taken in a sequential manner, e.g. SDG 1 through 4 and SDG 17.

Table 1 below provides illustrations of possible themes and thematic reviews for 2016.

It is of utmost urgency to decide on the theme for 2016 HLPF and it should be done as soon as possible after the retreat.

### Questions for discussion

1. What would be in your view important criteria to select a theme for 2016 HLPF?
2. What could be the next steps to promptly determine the theme of the 2016 HLPF?

### Thematic Reviews at the 2016 HLPF

This session will deepen and build on the conversation of the previous session. The mandate for thematic reviews comes from paragraph 85 of the 2030 Agenda, which states that “Thematic reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including cross-cutting issues, will also take place at the HLPF(...)-supported by reviews by the ECOSOC functional commissions and other inter-governmental bodies and forums which should reflect the integrated nature of the goals as well as the interlinkages between them, and, where possible, feed into, and be aligned with, the cycle of the HLPF”.

As mentioned in the background for the theme, the 2016 thematic review may focus on (i) option 1: a cross cutting theme or on a particular SDG area in

relation to other SDGs, which would also be the overarching theme of the HLPF session, or (ii) option 2: on a subset of SDGs – be it a cluster of interrelated SDGs (Option 2a) or a group of SDGs taken sequentially, i.e. the first four SDGs (option 2b) – along with their means of implementation. Regardless of which approach the HLPF takes, the review would need to address the interlinkages with other SDGs, in accordance with the spirit of the 2030 Agenda.

Taking the above into consideration, the options below for the 2016 theme and thematic review are provided for illustrative purposes. SDG17 would be reviewed under each option.

These are possible themes and thematic reviews that could be chosen for 2016 HLPF:

Theme of the HLPF	Thematic reviews
<b>Option 1 (Possible examples from which one would be chosen)</b>	
1. Leave no One behind	“Leave no one behind” Across all SDGs
2. Giving children and youth a chance to transform our world	Giving children and youth a chance to transform our world ( across all SDGs)
3. Education	Education ( across all SDGs)
<b>Option 2a (Possible examples from which one would be chosen)</b>	
1. Mobilizing sustainable and inclusive growth and productive capacities for realizing the SDGs	SDGs on Economic growth; infrastructure; inequalities and education
2. Inclusive, smart and healthy cities	SDGs on inequalities, cities, health and education
3. Building resilience and addressing vulnerability	SDGs on inequality, infrastructure, employment and climate
4. Multidimensional poverty	SDGs on poverty, food, education and health
<b>Option 2b(Possible examples from which one would be chosen)</b>	
1. Beyond the MDGs: Poverty, food, health and education	SDGs 1 to 4
2. Mobilizing sustainable and inclusive growth and productive capacities for realizing the SDGs	SDGs 1 to 4

Regarding the process, ways will need to be found to ensure that all relevant intergovernmental bodies and forums contribute effectively to the thematic review of the HLPF, especially given that the theme and focus of the thematic reviews will probably not be decided

before the end of 2015<sup>1</sup>. It will also be important to bring together and analyze the outcome of those other processes in a form that will support the strategic guidance of the HLPF.

---

### Questions for discussion

1. **What would be the best combination of theme and thematic review(s) for the HLPF in 2016?**
2. **How could the UN system, including functional and regional commissions of ECOSOC and other intergovernmental forums, best contribute to the HLPF thematic reviews in 2016 within their areas of expertise? How should these various inputs be presented to the HLPF to facilitate its political guidance and recommendations?**

---

<sup>1</sup>The ECOSOC President will convene a retreat on the ECOSOC system and the 2030 Agenda on 11 and 12 December



## Retreat of the President of ECOSOC

### National reviews at the 2016 HLPF

Implementation, follow-up and review take place first and foremost at the country level, taking into account domestic specificities and development models. The 2030 Agenda encourages governments to “develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this agenda” (Paragraph 78). Member States are also called on to “conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels which are country-led and country-driven” (Paragraph 79). The outcome/reports from such national-level processes will “be the foundation for reviews at the regional and global levels” (Paragraph 74 a). Those various levels of reviews will “inform recommendations for follow-up” at various levels (Paragraph 77).

The 2030 Agenda confirms that the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC will carry out regular voluntary reviews of implementation. Those will “include developed and developing countries as well as relevant UN entities and other stakeholders including civil society and the private sector”. They will be State-led and “provide a platform for partnerships, including through the participation of major groups and other stakeholders”(paragraph 84). Based on the overall message from the 2030 Agenda, notably on the principles it defines (paragraph 74), the HLPF 2016 national reviews will be constructive and “identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices”. They will track progress in implementing “the universal goals and targets and their means of implementation”. They will be inclusive, participatory, and people centred. They will draw on reporting to existing mechanisms and avoid overburdening governments

During the 2015 HLPF, several Member States said that Governments volunteering for the first reviews

at the 2016 HLPF could present ways in which they are preparing for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and what steps they have undertaken to foster integrative sustainable development policies. In this regard, the President of ECOSOC has sent a letter to all Permanent Missions to invite Member States to volunteer for the first round of reviews at the 2016 HLPF. The HLPF’s consideration of these reviews should allow for real dialogue, mutual learning, as well as the launching of new assistance and partnerships. To do so, countries could make their presentations at a retreat prior to the HLPF which would allow the reviews in 2016 HLPF itself to focus more on (i) areas of success, flagship initiatives, best practices; (ii) pressing issues, challenges and areas where support and advice on best practices is needed and (iii) desired partnerships. In addition, workshops could be organized at the HLPF where countries could present the outcome of their reviews in more detail. This would allow for a more interactive format of the HLPF session and enhance knowledge sharing and peer learning as wished for by many Member States.

The 2030 Agenda stresses that “inclusive regional (follow-up and review) processes will draw on national-level reviews and contribute to follow-up and review at the global level, including at the HLPF” (Paragraph 80). It encourages “Member States to identify the most suitable regional forum in which to engage” (Paragraph 81). In 2016, regional forums on sustainable development will be convened by regional commissions in preparation for the HLPF.

In addition to national and thematic reviews, the 2016 HLPF will review a pilot version of the progress report on SDGs and the GSDR. Major groups and other stakeholders are called upon to “report on their contribution to the implementation of the Agenda” (2030 Agenda, Paragraph 89).

### Questions for discussion

1. How can the 2016 national implementation reviews of the HLPF be best prepared? What could be possible innovative and ambitious formats for these reviews? How can we ensure that the dialogue on national reviews at the 2016 HLPF is meaningful and leads to identifying important challenges and policy lessons, mobilizing partnerships and support as well as identifying recommendations for follow-up at various levels?
2. How can countries be encouraged to participate in the reviews?
3. How can major groups and other stakeholders participate fully in the 2016 HLPF national and other reviews?



## Retreat of the President of ECOSOC

### Building on the new forums on Financing for Development and Science, Technology and Innovation

To follow-up on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), Member States decided to establish an annual ECOSOC Forum on Financing for Development that will review implementation of the provisions of the AAAA. It will be launched in 2016 and consist of up to five days (Paragraph 132). “The Forum will consist of up to 5 days, one of which will be the special high-level meeting with the Bretton Woods institutions (BWIs), WTO and UNCTAD, as well as additional institutional and other stakeholders depending on the priorities and scope of the meeting, and up to four days dedicated to discuss the follow-up and review of the Financing for Development outcomes and the means of implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. Its intergovernmentally agreed conclusions and recommendations will be fed into the overall follow-up and review of the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda in the HLPF” (AAAA, Paragraph 132; 2030 Agenda). The first Forum is expected to take place in April 2016.

With regard to the technology facilitation mechanism (TFM), an identical paragraph on the TFM is included in both the 2030 Agenda (2030 Agenda, Paragraph 70 and the AAAA, Paragraph

123). The mechanism was launched at the UN Summit on 25 September 2015 in order to support the SDGs. It will comprise: (a) a UN Inter-Agency Task Team on science, technology and innovation for the SDGs (IATT) as a gateway for information on existing STI initiatives, mechanisms and programs within and beyond the UN, an annual Multi-stakeholder Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) for the SDGs; and (b) an online platform. With regard to the STI Forum, it will discuss cooperation in the area of STI around the thematic areas related to the implementation of the SDGs. The meetings of the forum will be convened by the President of ECOSOC before the meeting of the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC or, alternatively, in conjunction with other forums or conferences, as appropriate, taking into account the theme to be considered and on the basis of a collaboration with the organizers of the other forums or conferences. The summary of discussions elaborated by the two co-Chairs of the STI Forum will be an input to the meetings of the HLPF, in the context of the follow-up and review of the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. (2030 Agenda, Paragraph 70 and AAAA Paragraph 123).

### Questions for discussion

1. How could the 2016 HLPF best address the outcome of the 2016 Multi-Stakeholder Forum on STI and the Financing for Development Forum both during its meeting and in its outcome and how can it add value to those outcomes?
2. Could there be additional activities on the margin of the HLPF to launch partnerships and mobilize support on specific aspects of Agenda 2030?



## Retreat of the President of ECOSOC

### Ensuring a science- and evidence based policy discussion

The Rio+20 outcome document and General Assembly Resolution 67/290 mandated the HLPF to “(...) strengthen the science-policy interface (...), including in the form of a global sustainable development report” (Paragraph 20).

The 2030 Agenda delineated a role for the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) to support the HLPF follow-up and review. Specifically, the GSDR should “strengthen the science-policy interface and provide a strong evidence-based instrument for policy makers” (Paragraph 83). Two editions of the GSDR have been published so far: a prototype which was discussed at the 2014 HLPF, and a second edition which fed into the 2015 HLPF. The 2016 version of the GSDR is being elaborated. The ECOSOC President is tasked to hold consultations on the scope, methodology and frequency of the report so that a decision can be made at the HLPF in 2016.

By offering a platform for dialogue between scientists and global policy-makers, the HLPF can enhance science inputs to the policy discussions around the implementation of the new Agenda, as well as to its follow up and review. Chapter 1 of the 2015 GSDR makes specific suggestions in this regard, including options for assessing sustainable development trends and exploring

interlinkages among sectors. This in turn will support agenda setting by the forum, identifying areas where further action is needed and prioritizing emerging issues.

During the 2015 HLPF, three official sessions on science were held, as well as a number of side-events. Scientists contributed important ideas to the HLPF discussions. The ECOSOC President’s summary reaffirms the potential of the HLPF as a platform for science-policy interface that can support the agenda-setting function of the forum.

The challenge is how to organize the contribution of science to the 2016 HLPF in order to maximize the benefits of scientists’ inputs for the forum as a whole. In particular, it has to be determined how inputs from science can benefit substantive discussions in various sessions at the 2016 HLPF, as well as after the HLPF. Given the typical time frames of scientists, if meaningful contributions are to be provided by science to the 2016 HLPF, their involvement should start early on and go beyond participation of selected scientists in a few sessions of the forum. Rather, a continuous process of engagement with scientific communities should be envisioned before and after the forum.

---

### Questions for discussion

- 1. How should science-policy interface sessions be organized at the 2016 HLPF?**
- 2. How should the interaction between the science community and the preparation process for the 2016 HLPF be organized in order to secure substantive, specific contributions of science to the discussions?**
- 3. What kind of additional guidance is needed from Member States on the Global Sustainable Development Report in order to enable it to support discussions at the HLPF?**



## Retreat of the President of ECOSOC

### Outcome, broad lines of HLPF 2016 programme and possible format for the sessions

General Assembly Resolution 67/290 provides guidance on the agenda of the HLPF. It calls for an agenda that is “focused, dynamic and action-oriented” and allows for the consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges (Paragraph 2). The agenda must allow adequate space for discussions on means of implementation and the outcomes of the FFD forum and multistakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation (2030 Agenda, Paragraphs 70 and 86). In addition, it must provide time for considering national reporting of countries, the outcome of the regional sustainable development forums as well as thematic reviews and discussions on the science-policy interface. It should be also considered how the 2016 HLPF will address the SDG progress report mandated in the 2030 Agenda and reflect on global progress in light of the early stage of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The HLPF should also reflect the particular sustainable development challenges of SIDS, LDCs, LLDCs and African countries (Paragraph 11) and deliver other mandates including on sustainable consumption and production. Furthermore, possible inputs from major groups and other stakeholders will

have to be considered. This presents a challenge since HLPF has been mandated to meet for only 8 days out of which 3 are at the ministerial level. Ways would need to be found to maximize this time, possibly through a robust preparatory process.

A ministerial declaration is the only mandated outcome document of the HLPF. This year’s declaration needs to build on the variety of inputs submitted to the HLPF by the different processes mentioned above. It should include references to the 2030 Agenda and its implementation, political guidance from HLPF reviews, and possibly, the outcomes of the consultations of the General Assembly deliberations on follow-up and review taking place in early 2016, recommendations in relation to the theme of the 2017 HLPF and of the multi-stakeholder forum on science, technology and innovation. It would also need to cover other mandates of the HLPF, such as the follow-up to the SAMOA Pathway and the situation of other countries in special situations, sustainable consumption and production, mainstreaming sustainable development into the UN system as well as emerging issues.

### Questions for discussion

1. **What should be the main substantive blocks of the 2016 HLPF programme? How should the thematic review be incorporated in the programme? How can there be maximum participation of major groups and other stakeholders?**
2. **How can the 2016 programme allow for sufficient space to discuss the specific needs of countries in special situations, in particular SIDS, as well as the outcomes of regional sustainable development forums?**
3. **How can it be ensured that the ministerial declaration of the 2016 HLPF is strategic and helps advance the transformation the 2030 Agenda entails? How could the lessons and conclusions emanating from the various reviews at the HLPF be covered in greater detail?**



## Retreat of the President of ECOSOC

### Next steps: Getting on with preparations of the 2016 HLPF

The HLPF is prepared notably through dedicated regional forums on sustainable development, as mandated by GA resolution 67/290, and through the meetings of intergovernmental bodies and forums which will contribute to its thematic review. ECOSOC's work is also intrinsically linked to the HLPF.

The President of ECOSOC aims to conduct the preparations of the Forum in a transparent and inclusive manner, allowing for the involvement of Member States and major groups and other stakeholders. There are various ways this can be achieved, beyond conducting the mandated

consultation with the bureaux of the relevant GA committees and ECOSOC. This might include convening regular small group meetings, constituting informal "groups of friends on the 2016 HLPF" overall or on specific aspects of its work, conducting open briefings, consultations of major groups and other stakeholders and various on-line consultations and information. Ad hoc informal preparatory meetings may also be considered, for example to enable major groups and other stakeholders, including business, to discuss their contribution to the HLPF theme or to prepare the conduct of HLPF national or thematic reviews.

---

### Questions for discussion

1. How can the President of ECOSOC ensure that Member States and other stakeholders are fully engaged in preparing the HLPF and shaping its outcome?
2. How can it be ensured that the functional commissions and other inter-governmental forums and bodies contribute to the preparations of the HLPF, and what kind of dedicated informal preparatory meeting would be useful?