

Contributions to the High-Level Political Forum Review Debates

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**OBJETIVOS
DE DESARROLLO
SOSTENIBLE**

 **أهداف
التنمية
المستدامة**

**可持续发展
目标**

 **OBJECTIFS
DE DÉVELOPPEMENT
DURABLE**

ЦЕЛИ
 **В ОБЛАСТИ
УСТОЙЧИВОГО
РАЗВИТИЯ**

**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT
GOALS**

1. Introduction

This work seeks to present Cepei's inputs to the High-Level Political Forum Review process ongoing debates.

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the main body for the 2030 Agenda follow-up at the global level. The 2012 meeting of the UN Sustainable Development Summit (Rio+20) resolved in [The Future We Want](#) document to replace the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development with the HLPF. The General Assembly (UNGA) established the Forum in its [resolution 67/290](#), adopted in July 2013, defining its format and organizational aspects based on the Rio+20 outcomes.

However, the UNGA modified the Summit's original mandate from the ten main tasks assigned in Rio to three, erasing seven of the original mandates, keeping two of them, and adapting one to strengthen the HLPF role in the 2030 Agenda follow-up.

As a result, the HLPF primary missions are:

1. To provide leadership, guidance, and recommendations for sustainable development, follow up, and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments.
2. To enhance the integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic and cross-sectoral manner at all levels.
3. To work under a focused, dynamic, and action-oriented agenda, ensuring the appropriate consideration of new and emerging sustainable development challenges.

Although the first HLPF meeting took place in September 2013 under the theme *Building the future we want: from Rio+20 to the post-2015 development agenda*, its relevance only increased since 2016, when reviewing the SDGs progress at the global level for the first time. Since then, the HLPF has played a key role in the 2030 Agenda follow up, becoming the "SDGs Global House."

The HLPF is a "hybrid institution" which meets annually at a ministerial-level under the ECOSOC's auspices and once every four years as a Summit under the UNGA auspices. [The first review cycle](#) (2016-2019) ended with the first SDGs Summit. HLPF modalities of work went into a review to be adapted considering the experience gained during the four first years of SDGs reviewing.

2. The High-Level Political Forum Review Process Is On

As part of the meetings seeking to provide inputs to the 74th UNGA debates, the European Commission and the Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) gathered an expert group meeting on lessons learned from the HLPF SDGs first cycle follow-up. This group published its [conclusions](#) in May 2019 and a document named [The Way Forward – Strengthening ECOSOC and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#) was released in December 2019.

Stakeholders also contributed by giving input in debates. Among a myriad publications, we highlight Marianne Beisheim's policy paper [UN Reforms for the 2030 Agenda. Are the HLPF's Working Methods and Practices "Fit for Purpose"?](#), Dreide de Burca Blog [Where To for HLPF Review Process?](#) published in October 2019, and the [Principles paper for HLPF review](#) document jointly produced by a group of major global civil society networks including Forus, Action for Sustainable Development, Together 2030 and TAP network early in 2019.

Finally, the official HLPF review process was launched during the COVID-19

pandemic framework^[1] by the UNGA [resolution 74/298](#) of August 12, 2020, in which UN member countries decided “to conduct, in conjunction, the reviews of the Economic and Social Council, aimed to strengthen it, and the review on the format and organizational aspects of the HLPF. Alexander Marschik, Permanent Representative of Austria, and Cheikh Niang, Permanent Representative of Senegal, were designated by the Secretary-General as co-facilitators for the intergovernmental negotiations review process.

The HLPF review process suffered delays and faced diplomatic challenges in times of COVID. Its first (virtual) informal consultation meeting was held on January 25, 2021, and the debates are rolling out. The aim is to have a consensus that could be formally adopted by the 76th UNGA period of sessions.

“The intergovernmental review of the HLPF now underway at the UN is an opportunity to enable it to lead an evidence-based, coherent, and action-oriented agenda. The current political climate will not make that easy.” Marianne Beisheim (2020) said. Even though the success of the ongoing process is essential to keep the 2030 Agenda's original level of ambition, we share her vision.

1. See the [“COVID-19 | The importance of the UN HLPF meeting in times of the pandemic”](#) blog.

3. Cepei's Answers To Some Questions Raised By The Cofacilitators

In a communication shared in January 2021, the President of the UN General Assembly transmitted a letter written by the cofacilitators Marschik and Niang announcing that a second virtual informal meeting on the review process will occur on February 5, 2021. The cofacilitators included in its letter a list of questions in which they are working, calling for contributions. Seeking to support the ongoing work, we share Cepei's main inputs to the HLPF Review debates.

3.1. What should the rest of the HLPF cycle look like until 2023 (themes, SDGs/interrelations/cross-cutting themes in 2022 and 2023)? Is there a way to combine a review of subsets of SDGs and a review of the interrelations among the SDGs/cross-cutting themes?

Considering a four year cycle does not fit in the 15 years established to reach the SDGs and the unusual situation of the 2020 HLPF, the cycle could be rearranged, extending the current one until 2024. As a result, six years will still separate us from 2030, providing enough time to execute two final three years cycles 2025-2027, and 2028-2030.

Given that the 2021 HLPF theme is "Sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic that promotes the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development: building an inclusive and effective path

for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in the context of the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development", we can consider the following options:

- **HLPF 2022:** Linking the SDGs by promoting the sustainable development economic dimension.
- **HLPF 2023:** Linking the SDGs by promoting the sustainable development environmental dimension.
- **HLPF 2024:** Linking the SDGs by promoting the sustainable development social dimension.

Doing so would allow us to change the approach from an SDGs subset analysis towards a 2030 integrated consideration, including possible impacts of the 17 SDGs over each dimension.

3.2. How can we further improve the VNRs, and in which areas are new mandates required? How can the VNRs result in the launching of new partnerships and the provision of advice and support to VNR countries?

The Secretary-General Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) at the HLPF for sustainable development could be the cornerstone of the HLPF review. We can expect each VNR

to produce information, feeding each report chapter suggested in those Guidelines.

If that is the case, no new mandates are needed. The real problem is how to ensure governments will apply the existing mandates.

The countries' Group of Friends of VNRs could play a critical role. To do so, it still needs to institutionalize a permanent space to work with non-state actors, to facilitate the creation of synergies and promote multi stakeholder engagement in VNR processes at the national level.

Regional Sustainable Development Forums may also play a key role. Countries that volunteer to submit VNR Reports to the HLPF could be summoned to share their VNR strategies and progress, while also receiving input to improve it. Voluntary countries could take note of the suggestions and reach directly those actors that made them, opening to the voluntary government an opportunity to partner with them to gain a deep understanding of the experiences that it considers useful to its own purposes.

3.3. How can the HLPF build better on the regional forums?

The main problem here is related to schedules and timing. The most transparent and robust way to support the process would be to hold regional presentations of VNR reports draft versions. Every year submitting countries rarely have enough level of progress in their reporting exercises to do so. Member Countries could explore a change in the deadlines, and maybe the HLPF should be moved from July to August.

The presentation of the VNR Reports Drafts at the regional level could be considered a

necessary step to submit the final reports to the HLPF. Moreover, those drafts could replace the "Main Messages" document, becoming a more factual information on the ideas and messages that each voluntary country will present at the global level.

On the other hand, UN Regional Commissions should have a more important role at the HLPF. The Executive Secretaries could present regional situations instead of the country's representatives holding the temporary presidency of the regional group.

3.4. How can the review process of the HLPF and ECOSOC take into account the targets with a deadline of 2020?

This is a tricky question. The targets with a deadline in 2020 represent 12% of the total targets. Little progress could be shown (stagnation and reversion in trends are part of the final picture that includes indicators without available data). Should we spread a message of the 2030 Agenda failure when we're not even halfway through? Would it make the commitments for the next ten years stronger or weaker?

Something should be done and said. To stay silent is the worst option. The best option is to transform weaknesses into strengths. The failure in reaching the 2020 targets should not be presented negatively (even when being a negative result) and instead show what the world has lost in the economic, social, and environmental fields due to the failures of reaching the targets. Only then we can ask: do we want to keep losing chances this way? Can countries face the post COVID-19 recovery needs, allowing themselves to waste opportunities to achieve a balanced economic, social and environmental growth, leaving no one behind?

3.5. What measures should be taken to strengthen the HLPF under the auspices of the General Assembly (SDG Summit)?

The SDG Summit would be considered a twofold: a cycle closure and a curtain-raiser for the next.

World leaders could be called to present national commitments to actions towards sustainable development to be taken before the next SDG Summit, in the same way countries present their Nationally Determined Contributions in the framework of the Paris Agreement but SDGs oriented. In doing so, the implementation approach will gather two synergic directions.

1. **Top-down:** Goals are decided by the international community to be implemented globally.
2. **Down to top:** national specific commitments to reach the global goals are set by each state.

This “double approach” is a lesson learned from the “failure” of the UNFCCC (Top-down approach) and the steps taken trying to find a more accurate system to be applied to the Paris Agreement (Down to top approach). In short, “SDGs National Determined Contributions” documents could be implemented, and its submissions aligned to SDGs summits.

4. Conclusions

Many other questions are seeking an answer. No actor can find responses thinking and working siloed. The HLPF Review should be as open as the 2030 Agenda negotiations were in 2015.

A first agreement seems to exist: the HLPF design should be adapted to the existing global framework, available tools and to make it an engine that helps bring to reality the Decade of Action and Delivery while building back better.

In this work, Cepei’s inputs to the HLPF Review avoided duplicating other proposals. We aim

to complement them, moving the dialogue forward. Each one of the proposed answers is incomplete and needs to be cross-fertilized with other perspectives.

There is much more than bureaucracy improvement at stake. We are debating about efficiency, effectiveness, levels of ambition, leadership, and above all, peace, prosperity, partnerships, people, and planet.

What we are confronting is not solely a good governance management issue: it is about fulfilling promises to the most vulnerable people and generations to come.

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