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**Reviewing the HLPF's "format and organizational aspects" – what's being discussed?****Assessing current proposals under debate**

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## Content

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>The Review of the High-Level Political Forum in 2020</b>                 | 3  |
| <b>The HLPF's Architecture and its Outcomes (AO)</b>                        | 4  |
| Ministerial Declaration   | 5  |
| Time and Timing of the HLPF   | 6  |
| SDG Summit: Political Declaration and Global Sustainable Development Report | 8  |
| <b>Thematic and SDG Reviews (TSR)</b>                                       | 9  |
| Improving the Thematic and SDG Reviews                                      | 10 |
| <b>Voluntary National Reviews at the HLPF (VNR)</b>                         | 15 |
| Preparatory process for countries presenting a VNR                          | 15 |
| Presentations and interactive debate of VNRs                                | 16 |
| Follow-up of VNRs   | 18 |
| <b>The Way forward</b>  | 19 |

This working paper identifies and discusses *proposals* currently under debate for reviewing the “format and organizational aspects” of the HLPF, in particular (1) the HLPF’s architecture and outcome (AO PROPOSALS), (2) the Thematic and SDG Reviews (TSR PROPOSALS), and (3) the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs PROPOSALS).

In the interest of brevity, this paper will focus on proposals for those elements of the HLPF that are under control of UN member states (i. e. processes at UN level) and on those proposals that have gained at least some prominence in the debate. While the paper examines the arguments behind the proposals, it does not endorse any particular proposal. Some of the proposals are mutually exclusive (these will be abc-numbered in the text), others may complement each other; if nothing is changed, the status-quo is the alternative.

Multiple sources form the empirical basis for this paper: participant observations at various UN-organized or UN-related meetings, background discussions and personal communication, evaluations of documents (like resolutions, meeting protocols, surveys, or informal papers).

The two charts reflect the results of an informal SWP expert workshop in December 2019 – thanks go to the participants of this workshop.

As, so far, most discussions happened in informal settings, this assessment may not be comprehensive. And, as the discussion and the official process have just started, positions and proposals may change quickly.

The working paper builds on and uses parts of a 2018 SWP research paper: Marianne Beisheim: *UN Reforms for the 2030 Agenda. Are the HLPF's Working Methods and Practices “Fit for Purpose”?* SWP Research Paper 2018/RP 09.

## The Review of the High-Level Political Forum in 2020

The *High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development* (HLPF) is at the heart of the UN's (United Nations) sustainable development architecture. Both the UN General Assembly resolution on the HLPF adopted in 2013 and the 2030 Agenda adopted in 2015 attribute to the HLPF "a central role in overseeing a network of follow-up and review processes".<sup>1</sup> Since 2013, the HLPF has brought together delegations from all UN member states in New York. They meet annually in July for eight days under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as every four years for another two days in September at the level of heads of state and government under the auspices of the General Assembly. The mandate of the HLPF was very broadly formulated in 2013, which now determines - and burdens - the annual programme planning. Among other things, various reports are expected to be addressed, such as the Secretary-General's (UNSG) annual Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) progress report and other reports from the UN system, the regional commissions, reports on the various thematic areas, the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), and the results from the Forum on Financing for Development (FfD) and on Science, Technology and Innovation for the SDGs (STI). The HLPF is supposed to also pay particular attention to regional developments as well as the special needs and concerns of different country groups.<sup>2</sup> This wealth of input and tasks means that reports are usually only taken note of, but that their results are not evaluated or discussed, and no decisions based on them are made. At the same time, political and societal interest in the HLPF is high and growing, as are expectations. The HLPF is thus in danger of falling victim to its own success if it cannot fulfil the high demands while relying upon current processes and resources.

Shortly after the 2016 HLPF, member states agreed upon a resolution to clarify the HLPF's modalities.<sup>3</sup> In that resolution, they also decided to review the "format and organizational aspects" of the HLPF at the 74<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly, "in order to benefit from lessons learned in the first cycle of the forum".<sup>4</sup> In the meantime, the lessons learned from the first cycle of HLPF have been discussed during the 2019 HLPF, in several Expert Group Meetings (EGMs), and in the literature.<sup>5</sup> In September 2019, Member States confirmed in the *Political Declaration* of the SDG Summit their "determination to implement the 2030 Agenda and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals" and therefore "to do more and faster". "To this end", member states committed, among other things, to:

**"Strengthening the high-level political forum;** we pledge to carry out an ambitious and effective review of the format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum and follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level during the seventy-fourth session of the General

<sup>1</sup> United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1) (New York: UN, 21 October 2015), para. 82.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the small island developing states (SIDS), the least developed countries, land-locked developing countries, and middle-income countries.

<sup>3</sup> UNGA, *Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the Global Level* (A/RES/70/299) (New York: UN, 29 July 2016).

<sup>4</sup> UNGA, *Follow-up and Review* [see note 3], para. 21.

<sup>5</sup> See for example 2019 HLPF Panel on "Lessons learned from the first cycle of HLPF and Messages for 2019 HLPF Summit: What should Heads of State and Government know and how can we improve the HLPF?", especially the background note and also the author's own input (based on SWP Research Paper 9/2018), and the Summary of the Expert Group Meetings in [May](#) and [December](#) 2019.

Assembly with a view to better addressing gaps in implementation and linking identified challenges with appropriate responses, including on financing, to further strengthen the effective and participatory character of this intergovernmental forum and encourage the peer-learning character of the voluntary national reviews.”<sup>6</sup>

The HLPF is a success and a “go-to” forum, it attracts a lot of attention and attendance is good, but – as this is its core mandate – it needs to deliver more substantial “political leadership, guidance and recommendations”<sup>7</sup> for the future implementation of the SDGs, especially now for the “decade of action and delivery” (see the title of the 2019 Political Declaration of the SDG summit). The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs’ (UNDESA) 2019 survey shows that a majority of the respondents expects more in this regard.<sup>8</sup> The HLPF can only gain more political significance if its mandate to deliver political leadership and guidance includes also taking relevant decisions to that effect. This is also important to keep high-ranking politicians interested in the forum. To achieve such relevance, however, the budget for the HLPF would need to be consolidated. As many member states want to avoid any program budget implications (PBI), a reallocation of resources might be the only way.<sup>9</sup>

It is up to UN member states to decide on all this. In January 2020, the President of the General Assembly has appointed H.E. Mr. Jean-Claude de Rego, Permanent Representative of Benin, and H.E. Mr. Kaha Imnadze, Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations to co-facilitate the intergovernmental negotiations on the ECOSOC and HLPF Review. They are expected to publish a roadmap for these negotiations in early February.

## **The HLPF’s Architecture and its Outcomes (AO)**

In 2013, the HLPF was established to be a forum rather than an intergovernmental body. Some ask whether this decision needs to be revisited and the HLPF should be upgraded to a “decision-making body” (PROPOSAL AO1). Some suggest to upgrade the HLPF by giving it its own Bureau and a better equipped secretariat (PROPOSAL AO2). Some want to fully move the HLPF under the General Assembly and give it “a status similar to the Human Rights Council so that it has the capacity to set norms and overcome governance weakness at a global level.”<sup>10</sup> Barbara Adams (Global Policy Forum) has suggested that the General Assembly should establish a “Sustainable Development Council” (PROPOSAL AO3) – similar to the Human Rights Council and the Peacebuilding Commission. As part of broader UN reform efforts “these councils could refresh (and replace) much of the work of the General Assembly Second and Third Committees, which includes economic and social development, gender equality and human rights.” She argues that while the 2030 Agenda

<sup>6</sup> UNGA, *Political declaration of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the General Assembly* (A/RES/74/4) (New York: UN, 15 October 2019), para. 27j.

<sup>7</sup> UNGA, *Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development* (A/RES/67/290) (New York: UN, 23 August 2013), para. 2.

<sup>8</sup> UNDESA, *Comprehensive HLPF Survey Results. Evaluation of the HLPF after 4 Years* (New York, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> For this it would be interesting to have a disaggregated overview of the budget for ECOSOC and the HLPF.

<sup>10</sup> Elena Marmo, *People’s Assembly Debates UN Reform and HLPF Review*, UN Monitor #07 (Global Policy Watch, 1 October 2019).

promotes to “break out of the siloes of thinking and programming, this has not been matched at the governance level”.<sup>11</sup>

### *Ministerial Declaration*

The HLPF’s outcome documents – the annual Ministerial Declaration or every four years the Political Declaration – are supposed to deliver on the “political leadership and guidance” for the future implementation of the SDGs. The HLPF’s mandate speaks about an “action-oriented agenda”.<sup>12</sup> Many complain, however, that the declarations do not deliver actionable recommendations, nor a clear mandate for follow-up. According to UNDESA’s 2019 survey, more than 80% of the respondents want to see more political guidance and recommendations in the Ministerial Declaration.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the declaration is negotiated *before* the annual HLPF, which implies that it cannot draw on results from most reports and the reviews or debates during the HLPF.

As a consequence, some see no value-added and also too much duplication with the work of the Second Committee (Economic and Financial Committee of the General Assembly) and would therefore prefer to no longer have a Ministerial Declaration (PROPOSAL AO4a). Others argue that it is more likely that Ministers will attend the HLPF when there is a Ministerial Declaration – they might want to have that “footprint” – and therefore opt for keeping it (PROPOSAL AO4b, status quo).

In that second group, many focus on the question of how to keep the declarations but make them more meaningful by giving them more of an added value in terms of “political leadership and guidance”. For producing that kind of guidance, it would be a basic requirement that the HLPF is enabled to better help us learn from past experiences of implementing the SDGs, to understand the “why” and “how” of national and global SDG successes and failures. To facilitate effective peer learning – in the views of many member states the main task of the HLPF – the forum needs to build on more in-depth analysis and evaluation of the plethora of reports and reviews that are being delivered before and during the HLPF in July. During the HLPF, the ultimate goal of the panels for “follow-up and review” should be to discuss concrete policy guidance with special consideration of the central principles of the 2030 Agenda: recommendations for transformative, integrated, inclusive action steps towards sustainable development that leave no one behind (LNOB). To negotiate such actionable recommendations, member states need sufficient time to coordinate their reaction to reports and recommendations with capitals. For that, one could think about changing the work-flow and preparatory processes that lead up to the HLPF meeting in July and provide for a *better and earlier evidence base* for the negotiations of the Ministerial Declaration in June (see section on timing below). Of course it would be politically naïve to think that better information alone would automatically lead to a better outcome document. But it at least could provide a better basis for the co-facilitators (they would have to be nominated early) and member states to then discuss action points. For this to happen, many think it would be relevant to negotiate recommendations not only within the New York “bubble” – as the dynamics there are not necessarily action oriented but deeply entrenched in group dynamics – but to *involve capitals earlier and more substantively*, asking them, for example, for their input on good practices or their inclination to be part of an action coalition of the willing (PROPOSAL AO5a).

<sup>11</sup> Barbara Adams (Global Policy Forum), *Democratic global governance: if it doesn't challenge power it isn't democratic*, in *Spotlight on Sustainable Development 2019*, p. 35f.

<sup>12</sup> UNGA, *Format and organizational aspects* [see note 7], para. 2.

<sup>13</sup> UNDESA, *Comprehensive HLPF Survey Results aspects* [see note 8].

Some member states are discussing to adapt/amend the pre-negotiated Declaration *during* the HLPF (PROPOSAL A05b). But most agree that this is not feasible simply because there is not enough time and capacity, especially for smaller missions, and negotiations would prevent delegates from attending the HLPF meetings. Some suggest to draft the Ministerial Declaration only *after* the HLPF (PROPOSAL A05c). Yet another suggestion is to move the ECOSOC High-Level Segment (HLS) to the beginning, adopt the Ministerial Declaration and discuss its implications afterwards during the HLPF (PROPOSAL A05d).

#### *Time and Timing of the HLPF*

From the outset, there was a consensus that the HLPF should not duplicate existing multilateral processes on the topics of individual SDGs. Instead, the forum should build on them, foregrounding the principles of the 2030 Agenda. To achieve this, effective *preparatory and follow-up processes* should continue throughout the year.

Moreover, many argue that eight days are not enough for all the tasks originating from the HLPF's mandate. Others express reservations to an expansion of time because of budgetary considerations (both at UN and national level).<sup>14</sup> In fact, in its latest resolution on ECOSOC Strengthening, the General Assembly decided, as of 2019, to hold the one-day Integration Segment directly before the HLPF.<sup>15</sup> Its new task is to process all the input from ECOSOC's subsidiary bodies and the UN system on the annual theme of ECOSOC and HLPF; discuss and consolidate all the inputs of member states, including case studies and lessons learned, and other relevant stakeholders; on this basis, develop action-oriented recommendations for follow-up and feed them into the ensuing HLPF. In 2019, the ECOSOC Vice-President reported on the results from the Integration Segment at the opening of the HLPF (on the following day) – but this summary did not encompass clear action points.<sup>16</sup> Given the complexity of the task, it is impossible to achieve all the necessary work within the framework of a single day, moreover immediately before the HLPF. Reviews should not just be reports on raw data or projects; good quality reviews require analysis and evaluation and this work needs time and perhaps a reallocation of the necessary resources.

Many want the HLPF to be a culmination point of all year long preparatory processes. For this, it is helpful that the HLPF Review is supposed to be in conjunction with the ECOSOC Review. Most agree that both entities have the potential to strengthen each other in their work, enhancing the effectiveness of the entire ECOSOC cycle. In the latest resolution on the ECOSOC Review, member states have called on the UN Secretariat to consider the need to adjust the calendar of meetings of subsidiary bodies of the ECOSOC and/or make adjustments to their reporting arrangements.<sup>17</sup> Already, the ECOSOC-HLS is being held the day after the HLPF and, since 2019, focuses on future trends and scenarios related to the Council theme, which corresponds to the annual HLPF theme. Following that resolution, more could be done to improve the quality of the work streams.

In a non-paper that has been discussed in the “Group of Friends of VNRs and HLPF”, Mexico has proposed to *transfer ECOSOC days* to the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC, one each from ECOSOC's Integration, Management, and High-level Segment (PROPOSAL

<sup>14</sup> Meeting Summary of the Group of Friends of VNRs and follow-up of Agenda 2030, Permanent Mission of Mexico, 16 January 2020, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> UNGA, *Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/1 on the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council* (A/Res/72/305) (New York: UN, 25 July 2018), para. 11.

<sup>16</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), *ECOSOC Integration Segment – Empowering People and Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality. ECOSOC Vice-President's Summary*, (New York, 8 July 2019).

<sup>17</sup> UNGA, *Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 68/1* [see note 15], para. 31.

AO6).<sup>18</sup> With those additional three days, the HLPF could convene six days of Thematic Reviews and five days of VNRs at ministerial level. As the Mexican proposal explains, the number of ECOSOC days in total would not change, hence they assume that there would be no PBI. Moreover, the non-paper suggests switching to a five-year cycle (PROPOSAL A07).

Data, trends, and policy evaluations must be analyzed and discussed sufficiently in advance of the July HLPF.<sup>19</sup> To have more time for processing the reports and reviews feeding into the HLPF, member states could decide to hold a preparatory *HLPF Spring Meeting* (PROPOSAL A08a) in April or May (see also chart 2 below). Within the existing time framework, one could combine (1) four days of HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC with one day of ECOSOC Integration Segment for one preparatory week in spring, and (2) the other four days of HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC with one day of ECOSOC High-level Segment for a second week in July, encompassing the current 3-day high-level ministerial segment. Furthermore, to avoid PBI and save on travel costs for delegations, a Spring Meeting could happen back to back with another meeting that is related to the HLPF's work (for example FfD-Forum in mid-April or STI-Forum in mid-May). Others have proposed a more informal preparatory meeting, with a few days at expert level in spring to evaluate reports, i.e. a pre-meeting that is not an official part of the HLPF (PROPOSAL A08b). However, the meeting would profit from having input from capitals. Both, proposal A08a and A08b, aim at better informing the negotiations of the Ministerial Declaration in June and boosting the preparatory work for more meaningful HLPF panels in July.

In advance of any such preparatory meeting, it would be useful to know the main messages of the Secretary-General's SDG Progress Report, of the reports feeding into the FfD and STI Forum, of any other reports and inputs from the UN system (Regional Commissions, ECOSOC Functional Commissions, Custodian Agencies) and stakeholders, and to have the background notes from EGMs and the so-called VNR "main messages" (see below) available. On this basis, such an HLPF Spring Meeting could then hold the Thematic and SDG Reviews. The sessions would identify entry points for achieving transformative change, clarify who should do what, and how to install the right incentives for those actors. A summary of results and recommendations could be shared in a briefing with or a written summary by the ECOSOC President. This would provide a basis for UN missions – sufficiently early in the process – to discuss with decision-makers in capitals what policy recommendations, good practices, or commitments they would want to bring to the HLPF in July. The results of such a HLPF Spring Meeting could also feed into the negotiations of the Ministerial Declaration in June, which on this basis could and should contain more substantial recommendations (incl. on who should do what and how to get the right incentives for those actors in place). During the (one-week) July HLPF and ECOSOC-HLS, these recommendations and their follow-up could then be discussed at ministerial level.

For the *follow-up* after the July HLPF, member states could think about ways to encourage participants to implement recommendations and foster the identified good practices, as well as about making further commitments and joining innovative action/policy coalitions or partnerships. Member states could also think about how to install effective feedback loops between the HLPF meetings. As regards the UN development system, the link between the HLPF and the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) could be more explicit, for example with a quadrennial panel on this in the HLPF's program

<sup>18</sup> Mexico, informal non-paper for the Group of Friends (New York, 2019).

<sup>19</sup> There is a huge debate on the need for good-quality data. See, for example, Pietro Gennari and Dorian Kalamvrezos Navarro, "Are We Serious about Achieving the SDGs? A Statistician's Perspective", *International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)* (online), 14 January 2020; Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, *Data for Now: Inception Workshop Summary Report*, December 2019.



([PROPOSAL A09](#)). In general, some member states feel that the link to the UN development system should be improved.

#### *SDG Summit: Political Declaration and Global Sustainable Development Report*

In the last year of the cycle, the HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC in July could also have one day for preparing the quadrennial SDG Summit in September of that same year (i.e. the HLPF under the auspices of the General Assembly) ([PROPOSAL A10](#)). This session could serve to consolidate results in advance of the Summit.

During the SDG Summit in September 2019, member states adopted the *Political Declaration* with the title “Gearing up for a Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development”.<sup>20</sup> In that declaration, member states committed to a ten-point action plan. However, to put this action plan into practice, not only means of implementation need to be outlined, but also concrete and integrated policy guidance is required. Member States also called on the UNSG to “organize an “annual moment” to highlight inspiring SDG action, in the context of the General Debate of the General Assembly”.<sup>21</sup> Beyond that, there is no clear mechanism or guidance as to whether and how member states will work on these ten action points in the next HLPF cycle. Member states could think about a better follow-up of the Summit and institutionalized ways to work with the negotiated outcome document ([PROPOSAL A011](#)).

Every four years, the Independent Group of Scientists (IGS) presents the *Global Sustainable Development Report* (GSDR) at the HLPF under the auspices of the General Assembly. The GSDR 2019 was officially presented at the SDG Summit in September 2019.<sup>22</sup> The report’s “Call to Action” identifies 20 points where interventions may create transformative and accelerated progress towards multiple goals and targets in the coming decade. These actions are organized around six “entry points”<sup>23</sup> for six “transformative pathways”, plus four “levers” as powerful agents of change to impact the goals through the identified entry points. The GSDR claims that a transformation across the dimensions of sustainable development is only possible, if novel and context-dependent combinations of levers as well as novel collaborations of the respective actors are actively being pursued.<sup>24</sup> This assessment of the GSDR is based on recent scientific literature that analyzes deeper systemic interconnections between individual goals and targets, including trade-offs and co-benefits, and that advocates for transformative pathways towards sustainable development.<sup>25</sup> Again, it is unclear how the member states will work with the GSDR’s results. It has been suggested that these findings of the GSDR could inform the future

<sup>20</sup> UNGA, *Political declaration* [see note 6].

<sup>21</sup> UNGA, *Political declaration* [see note 6], para. 26.

<sup>22</sup> Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019: The Future is Now – Science for Achieving Sustainable Development* (New York: UN, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> (1) Human well-being and capabilities, (2) Sustainable and just economies, (3) Food systems and nutrition patterns, (4) Energy decarbonisation and universal access, (5) Urban and peri-urban development and (6) Global environmental commons.

<sup>24</sup> The four levers – (1) governance, (2) economy and finance, (3) individual and collective action, (4) science and technology – are related to the means of implementation, “but are also different, in that they accommodate the multiple, complementary roles that individual actors and entities play in bringing about change” (IGS, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019* [see note 22], p. xxi).

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, International Council for Science (ICSU), *A Guide to SDG Interactions: from Science to Implementation*, (Paris 2017); TWI2050 - The World in 2050, *Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, (Laxenburg, International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, 2018); Jeffrey D. Sachs, Guido Schmidt-Traub, Mariana Mazzucato, Dirk Messner, Nebojsa Nakicenovic and Johan Rockström, *Six Transformations to Achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, *Nature Sustainability*, no. 2 (September 2019): p. 805-814.



Thematic and SDG Reviews (see TSR proposals below). In terms of an efficient preparation, for example, it would be helpful to (a) identify key trade-offs and conflicts that need urgent resolution, and (b) try to find the key ‘virtuous circles’ that seem promising to make (not linear but) exponential progress.

As a matter of fact, the theme of the 2020 HLPF – “Accelerated action and transformative pathways: realizing the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development” – makes a reference to both, the 2019 Political Declaration and the GSDR. As the ECOSOC President has explained, the HLPF 2020 theme allows to advance the cross-cutting issues identified in the Political Declaration and to make best use of the entry points as identified in the GSDR.<sup>26</sup> The program for the HLPF 2020 is yet to be decided. Some member states have been discussing whether the ECOSOC President and Bureau could “test run” a few innovative elements already in July 2020.

## Thematic and SDG Reviews (TSR)

As agreed in 2013, the annual High-level Political Forum (HLPF) shall have a “thematic focus”.<sup>27</sup> The 2030 Agenda mandates the HLPF to hold “thematic reviews of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, including cross-cutting issues”.<sup>28</sup> It also suggests a sensible use of existing review procedures (including their reports, data, and analyses). Thematic Reviews shall be supported “by reviews by the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums which should reflect the integrated nature of the Goals as well as the interlinkages between them”.<sup>29</sup> In 2016, member states agreed in a resolution to discuss each year at the HLPF an overarching theme (*Thematic Reviews*) and to discuss selected SDGs “in depth” (*SDG Reviews*) in 2017-2019, taking into account their „integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature“.<sup>30</sup>

The latter resonates with the GSDR’s recommendations and it is precisely where the added value of these reviews at the HLPF should lie: a solid analysis of the state of implementation with special attention to the principles of the 2030 Agenda, on the basis of which politically relevant recommendations for further implementation could then be generated. For this, Thematic and SDG Reviews must not only present data on the agreed indicators, but also need to analyze it. As the GSDR points out, this analysis should focus on relevant *interlinkages* between goals, trade-offs and co-benefits. As we are in the decade of action and delivery, *integrated* assessments should identify entry points for transformative and coherent action in *all* relevant policy areas. Representatives from all those policy communities could then discuss recommendations for appropriate measures.

Opinions differ as to whether the Thematic and SDG Reviews produced such results in the past. In view of the time pressures during the HLPF sessions, good preparatory (and follow-up) processes are essential. The *preparatory processes* for the different Thematic and SDG Reviews during the HLPF 2017-2019 varied quite a bit.<sup>31</sup> Over time, they have

<sup>26</sup> ECOSOC, *Joint Briefing by PGA and President of ECOSOC. Remarks by the President of ECOSOC, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Ms. Mona Juul, Norway* (New York, 28 January 2020)

<sup>27</sup> UNGA, *Format and organizational aspects* [see note 7], para. 7c; UNGA, *Follow-up and Review* [see note 3], para. 2 and 6.

<sup>28</sup> UNGA, *Transforming Our World* [see note 1], para. 85.

<sup>29</sup> UNGA, *Transforming Our World* [see note 1], para. 85.

<sup>30</sup> UNGA, *Follow-up and Review* [see note 3], para. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Marianne Beisheim, *UN Reforms for the 2030 Agenda. Are the HLPF’s Working Methods and Practices “Fit for Purpose”?* SWP Research Paper 9/2018 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik), p. 17ff.

been organized more effectively, also being more and more connected with existing processes and reporting cycles. Until 2018, working groups of the extended Executive Committee for Economic and Social Affairs (ECESA Plus, a coordination platform originally used to prepare for the Rio+20 conference) evaluated the material from the UN system on the SDGs being reviewed in that year. In 2019, not only for the July HLPF but especially for the run up to the SDG Summit in September, a HLPF task force was co-chaired by UNDESA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). For 2019, member states also sought to use a more effective ECOSOC Integration Segment, as discussed above, with the goal to consolidate all inputs from the UN system and others. In the past two years, the results from preparatory processes were consolidated through EGMs (one on each SDG under review and one on the annual Theme) and then put in background notes for the HLPF's panel sessions. Moreover, in 2019, UNDESA synthesized 62 submissions received from intergovernmental bodies and forums responding to the 2019 theme and set of SDGs, including lessons learned, gaps and challenges, emerging issues, and recommendations developed by these entities.<sup>32</sup> But, so far, it seems as if not many would work with these documents. In the early years, even experts were unaware of these processes and well-structured background materials, also including references to interlinkages and recommendations. Accordingly, speakers on the HLPF panels hardly ever based their presentations on these reports and materials. In 2019, the external communication on the preparatory processes was improved, with a more visible extra section on the HLPF webpage. Still, there is no real incentive to read and work with these materials: speakers who often participate on a self-financed basis come mainly to present the work of their own organisation; this is, however, not necessarily what is most needed.<sup>33</sup>

There is widespread agreement that discussions should be more focused and results-oriented. For this, reports to the HLPF must be available much earlier. Only then can solid analyses be carried out and relevant national, regional and international actors coordinate and plan their input. Responsibilities should be clear, without creating “silos” or giving priority to securing resources and mandates. Integrated analysis and safeguarding of results continue to need improvement – all this with the goal of making the HLPF's output more relevant for the local-level implementation and achievement of the 2030 Agenda.

#### *Improving the Thematic and SDG Reviews*

For the next HLPF cycle, member states have to decide how they want to work with the Thematic and SDG Reviews within the HLPF framework. They must also decide whether and/or how to review the individual SDGs and how to best link these reviews to the annual HLPF theme. Some want to continue with the SDG Reviews and terminate the Thematic Reviews, others want to do the opposite. Some want to keep the Thematic Reviews but not in the form of a single panel during the HLPF but as an analysis of a cross-cutting theme that runs through all discussions.

In terms of the *content* of the reviews, most member states agree that Thematic and SDG Reviews should focus more on the *interlinkages* between goals. While the discussion is still very open and fluid, they seem to disagree on whether to give up the individual SDG Reviews altogether. Mexico criticizes the model of “clustering” individual SDG Reviews

<sup>32</sup> UNDESA, *Synthesis of voluntary submissions by functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council and other intergovernmental bodies and forums. Note by the Secretariat* (E/HLPF/2019/4) (New York: UN, 10 May 2019).

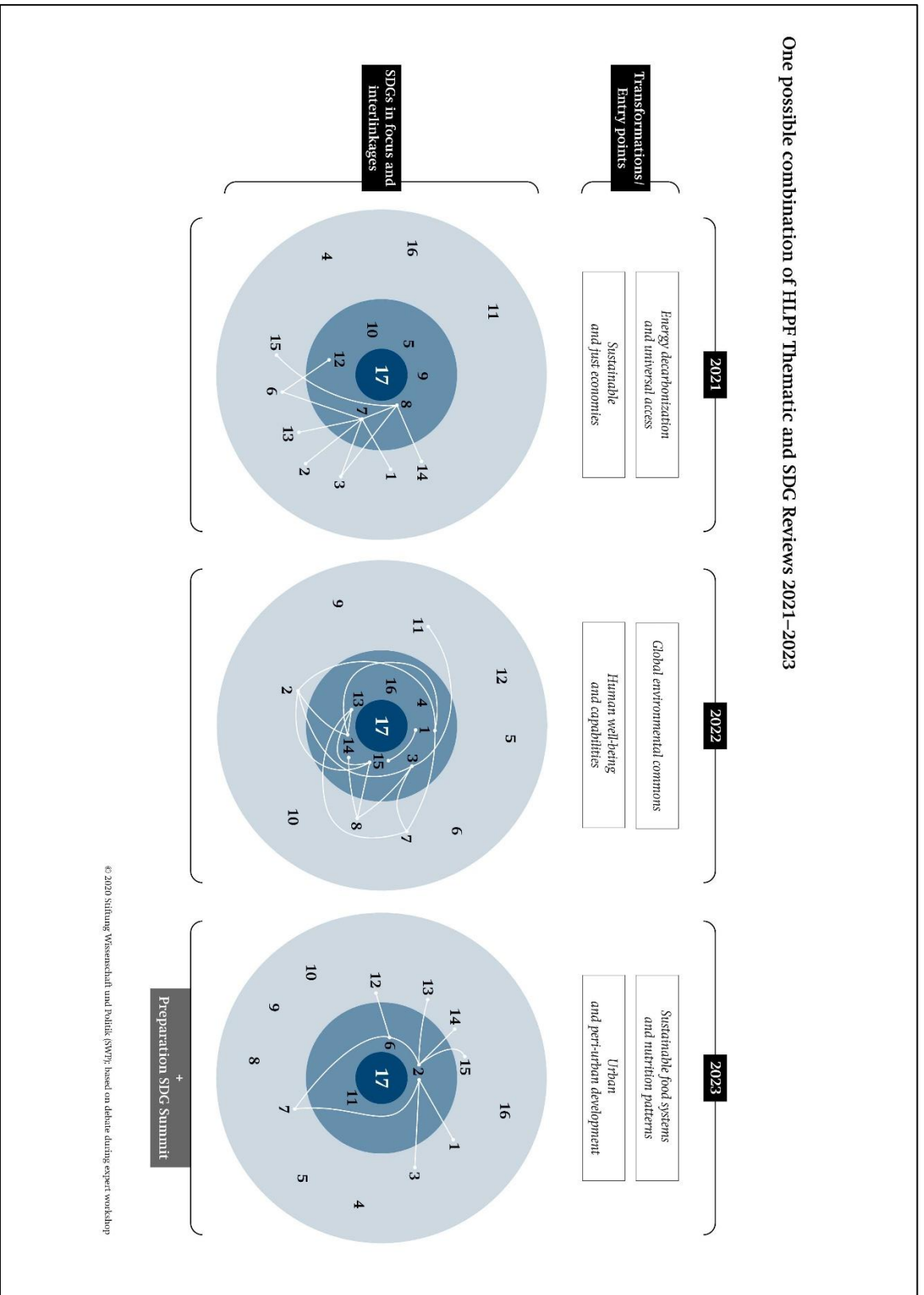
<sup>33</sup> While, in 2013, member states decided to pay travel expenses for one representative from each LDC from the regular budget, funding for panelists is all extra-budgetary (UNGA, *Format and organizational aspects* [see note 7], para. 25).

each year as too silo-ish. In the context of the “Informal Group of Friends of the VNRs, Follow-up and Review of the HLPF”, Mexico tabled a proposal that suggests to use six days of the annual HLPF for Thematic Reviews on *all* “entry points” outlined in the GSDR (each with the four “levers”, 2 levers in the morning and 2 in the afternoon, i.e. 1.5 hours for each intervention point) (PROPOSAL TSR1a). With this, Mexico hopes to mobilize national-level agencies across the board for policy planning and budgeting. Others fear, however, that having only cross-cutting Thematic Reviews at the HLPF would neither produce in-depth assessments of SDG progress nor very concrete recommendations. They feel reminded of the 2016 HLPF that suffered from that problem.

The EU, China and others, as of now, would like to keep the reviews of individual SDGs. One option would be to simply continue with the existing model of clustering SDGs into years (PROPOSAL TSR1b). This would give member states certainty to determine the composition of their delegations in a given year. Many agree, that the mobilizing power of the individual SDG Reviews needs to be preserved, bringing relevant decision makers from beyond the more narrow sustainable development community to attend the HLPF. Nevertheless, most member states want to see a strengthened focus on the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the SDGs, on synergies and trade-offs, spillovers and challenges, and overarching principles like LNOB. Hence, there is appetite for a renewed model that nevertheless preserves the benefits of the old one. One option would be to discuss each year only *two* of the six entry points for the transformative pathways outlined in the 2019 GSDR (PROPOSAL TSR1c). Based on the selected combinations of entry points, the most relevant SDGs could be identified and reviewed in-depth in that year, emphasizing their interlinkages to *all* SDGs. As in the previous HLPF-cycle, SDG 17 could be discussed annually (see chart 1, combining SDGs in three concentric circles each year), with a particular focus on FfD, STI, and countries in special situations. Criteria for the combinations of entry-points in each year could be: 1) those entry points with the highest distance to targets could be considered early in the HLPF-cycle, 2) an alignment with relevant international processes and major upcoming events should be considered, 3) all three dimensions of sustainable development should be covered each year, 4) relevant interlinkages should be in the focus of the overarching theme. The GSDR offers a box on the interactions among SDGs that could help to identify the most relevant interlinkages, and also a table on the “projected distance from reaching selected targets by 2030”.<sup>34</sup> For illustration purposes, the chart below presents one possible combination of two entry points and SDGs in a year. Each year there could be an overarching thematic thread that points to the relevant interactions (in this example something like: 2021 just transition, 2022 people and planet, 2023 rural-urban linkages). Other combinations are possible and could be checked against the criteria named above – plus other considerations that may be relevant. This could establish a more coherent *systems approach*, covering all SDGs and their interlinkages each year, while also mobilizing the respective communities of practice in a particular year. This is relevant because, as many point out, it would be most pertinent to forge and showcase progressive good practice coalitions for the six transformative pathways. In 2023, member states could choose to review fewer SDGs in-depth, to allow for more preparatory time for the SDG Summit in September 2023.

<sup>34</sup> See IGS, *Global Sustainable Development Report 2019* [see note 22], box on page 6 (every interaction in Box 1-2, for example, with a total strength above 50, could be depicted) and table on page 10.

Chart 1:GSDR-informed systemic approach to Reviewing Themes and SDGs with a focus on transformations and relevant interlinkages



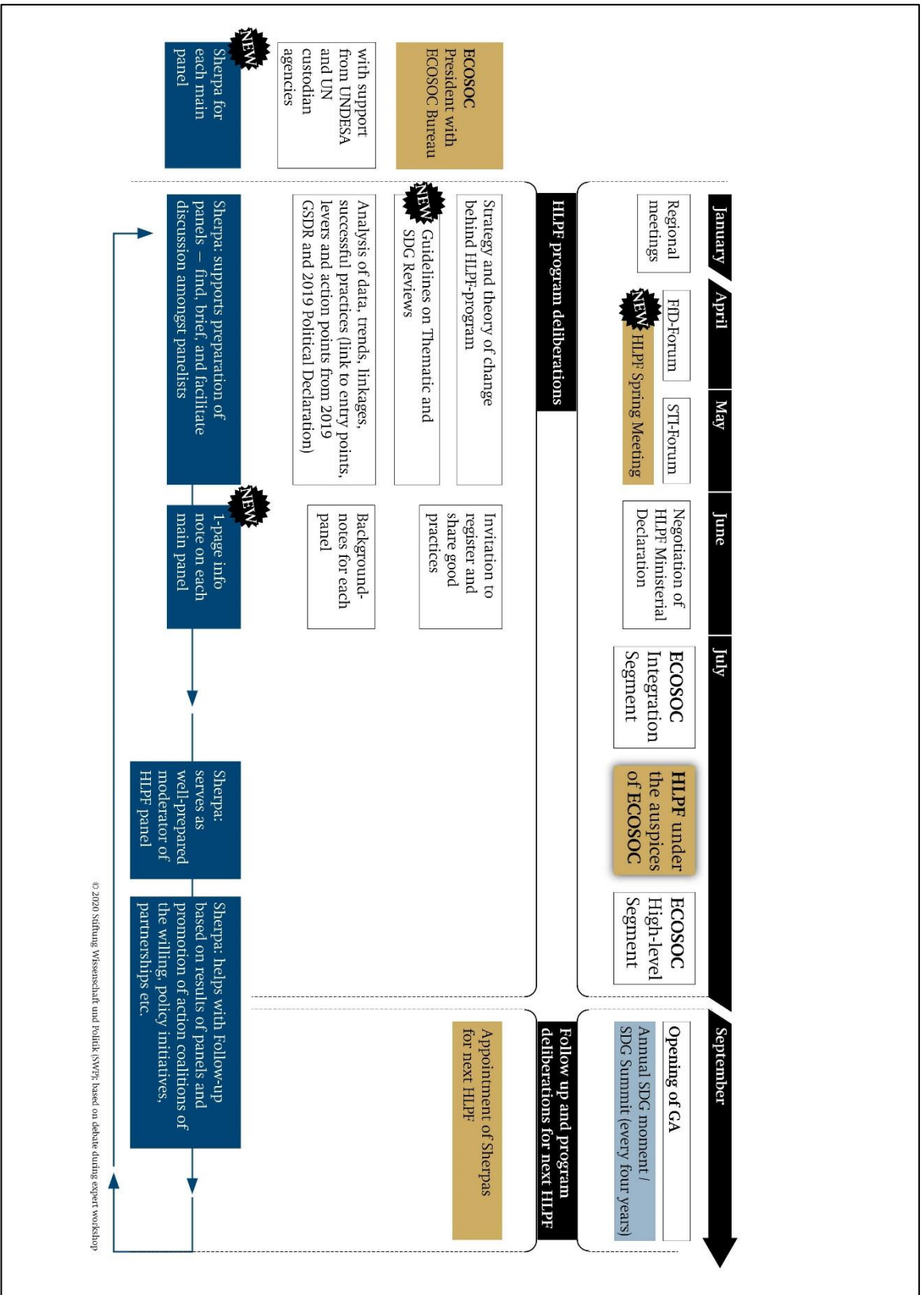
Whatever decision will be taken, UNDESA could be mandated to develop good practice *guidelines* for the Thematic and SDG Reviews (PROPOSAL, TSR2) that are sufficiently flexible and yet establish and further develop minimum standards. For example, the guidelines could ask custodian agencies to urge their task teams to publish a roadmap for a preparatory and follow-up process early so that member states, UN agencies and stakeholders can prepare their input in good time. Reports from the UN system could also follow a common template. As we are in the “decade of action and delivery”, the guidelines could ask all involved in the preparatory process and in the HLPF panels to discuss concrete steps, taking into account both, necessary means of implementation as well as the role of various, complementary individual actors and entities. To this end the guidelines could call, as the GSDR suggests, for deploying the four *levers* in an integrated and intentional manner, attributing concrete tasks and responsibilities to the change agents needed across sectors, as well as to take up and specify the action points that the GSDR outlines for each entry point, as well as the ten action points of the 2019 Political Declaration. In this context, it is imperative to enhance UNDESA’s capacities, for example to work with these guidelines, to produce and disseminate synthesis papers, to find-fund-brief panelists, and broker follow-up.

The first five days of the HLPF Thematic and SDG Reviews are organized in *panels*. These panels need to produce policy-relevant information. To help with the all-year preparatory process for these reviews and the corresponding HLPF panels, member states could decide to ask the ECOSOC Presidency to install a “*Sherpa*” (PROPOSAL, TSR3, see chart 2) for each main panel (incl. maybe also for related official side events).<sup>35</sup> The Sherpa could be a renowned scientist (e.g. from the GSDR Independent Group of Scientists) or a former diplomat with a high level of expertise and standing in the field (like Ambassador Peter Thomson of Fiji for the 2017 review of SDG 14). He or she could support the process by taking up the results of the UN System’s preparatory work and, on that basis, curate the further process, for example by helping to identify and brief suitable panelists. Later, the Sherpa could serve as a well-prepared moderator of the panel and also work to ensure an action-oriented follow-up after the HLPF. In the interest of the “decade of action and delivery”, the Sherpa should insist that invited panelists take note of all relevant reports to the HLPF and, based on them, discuss policy-relevant recommendations (rather than to merely represent their own topics and interests). Moreover, the Sherpa could also help produce a “digestible” one-page note for each main panel to help UN missions to consult with their capitals, thereby getting meaningful guidance from them for negotiating the Ministerial Declaration in June and preparing fit-for-purpose inputs for the HLPF’s interactive debates in July. On this basis, member states and stakeholders could also be invited to share good practices (also through UNDESA’s database) and make suitable commitments. For all this, Sherpas would have to be appointed sufficiently in advance. If they wish, member states could also combine these Sherpas (and possibly others)<sup>36</sup> in an “Advisory Program Committee” to support the ECOSOC President and Bureau in their decision-making on the HLPF’s program. Its members could also discuss whether there are any new and emerging issues that should be dealt with by the next HLPF.

<sup>35</sup> In general, it would have to be decided according to which substantive logic the main panels would be organized: around SDGs, interlinkages, cross-cutting themes, transformative pathways/entry points, levers, country groups or other.

<sup>36</sup> Resolution [A/Res/67/290](#)[see note 7], in para. 22, requests the PGA and the ECOSOC President to also benefit from the inputs and advice of the major grounds and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.

Chart 2: Sherpa and all-year process around annual HLPF under the auspices of ECOSOC





## Voluntary National Reviews at the HLPF (VNR)

In contrast to the Thematic and SDG Reviews, the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) are *national* reviews, reflecting the national and local-level implementation of the SDGs. Thus, they are supposed to address *all* 17 SDGs, analysing also *why* there is progress or lack thereof. For this, the VNR-presentations at the annual HLPF should be seen as the culmination of a previous national-level review process, which includes a solid analysis of the state of implementation at national level with special consideration of the 2030 Agenda principles.

Since, so far, the VNR reports have often come in late, it has been a challenge for other member states, UNDESA, and stakeholders to work with them to effectively prepare for the HLPF sessions, identifying, for example, proven good practices or systemic challenges that would require multi-lateral action. During the HLPF itself, many lament the limited time for in-depth discussions during the so-called “interactive debate” after the presentations (speaking time is very limited with 10-15 min. overall and 2 min. for each speaker). Moreover, the debate could be more inspiring, both for the presenting and for other countries. To keep the process relevant, actionable recommendations, results and support should be secured. Accordingly, member states are discussing ways to best evaluate and disseminate the VNRs’ results.

As for possible reforms of the VNRs, there is a multitude of suggestions under debate. Some of them refer to the processes around the VNRs during the HLPF, others rather to the (very relevant) national-level preparatory work.<sup>37</sup> The focus here is on the former, discussing those proposals that could be implemented through a decision by UN member states.

### *Preparatory process for countries presenting a VNR*

By now, UNDESA makes available very good materials to support member states in preparing their VNRs: the Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines, the Handbook for the Preparation of VNRs, a Q&A section on the website, and also a whole array of supporting materials. The guidelines, for example, have been updated twice to integrate lessons learned from previous VNRs – a very valuable exercise for a learning system of follow-up and review. The annual VNR Synthesis Report highlights good practices from last year’s VNRs and could serve to inspire good quality VNRs in the next round. UNDESA works with these materials in webinars and three preparatory workshops for VNR countries. However, UNDESA always struggles to find resources for the necessary update of the materials and the workshops. At the same time, member states keep saying they want more and better support. So far, the preparatory process is financed on the basis of ad-hoc voluntary contributions. It could be an option to ask countries presenting a VNR in a given year for a contribution to the HLPF’s voluntary Trust Fund (with a waiver for the LDCs). The Trust Fund could be used to ensure an intensified preparatory work of countries both at national and at global level (PROPOSAL VNR1).<sup>38</sup>

There is also some debate around an enhanced role for *regional organizations* in the preparatory process, especially for the UN Regional Economic Commissions (PROPOSAL

<sup>37</sup> Many advocacy papers of CSOs develop recommendations for this. National-level stakeholders, for example, have asked their governments to present and discuss the (draft) VNR reports at national level *before* going to present at the HLPF in New York. See, for example: Forus, *Position Paper on HLPF. The Review of the HLPF as an Opportunity to Strengthen Multi-stakeholder Participation & Improve SDG Implementation* (Paris, 2019).

<sup>38</sup> For the HLPF Trust Fund see UNGA, *Format and organizational aspects* [see note 7], para. 24.



VNR2).<sup>39</sup> Yet, from early on, many member states have been insisting on flexibility when it comes to the regional level – that might not have changed. Some also think that UN Country teams “could have a role in jointly sharing experiences or providing statistical data”.<sup>40</sup>

UNDESA asks VNR countries to hand in the “*main messages*” of the VNRs by the end of April. To learn early about country-level experiences, these main messages could be the basis for identifying and discussing (maybe during a HLPF Spring Meeting) selected good practices and solutions that contribute to SDG successes or common obstacles that countries struggle with. This information could then be used to inform the negotiations of the Ministerial Declaration in June. In that context, UNDESA could also better advertise and use its database on Best Practices.<sup>41</sup> For all this, the “*compilation of main messages*” for the VNRs could profit from having an official mandate that gives clear guidance both in terms of structure and content as well as timing of those inputs (PROPOSAL VNR3).

### *Presentations and interactive debate of VNRs*

Some member states and many CSOs would like to allocate *more time* to the VNRs (PROPOSAL VNR4). Time could be added in a flexible way, for example, depending on the number of VNRs in a given year. Some suggest to generate more time for individual VNRs by allowing only *one* VNR per country in a cycle (PROPOSAL VNR5). Combining this, Mexico suggests in their non-paper for the Group of Friends a so-called “VNR System”: To allow space for all member states, they opt for changing to a five-year cycle, with a maximum of 40 VNR countries per year, five ministerial days for VNRs each year, eight VNR countries per day, with 45 minutes per country (PROPOSAL VNR6).<sup>42</sup> Some member states want to give more time especially to *high*-ranking officials from capitals for presenting the reports (PROPOSAL VNR7).

Most member states, however, would like to allocate more time to the *interactive debate* of the VNR results (rather than more time for presentations). For this, one option is to start the July-HLPF with the ministerial days and have a “ministerial moment” with the VNR presentations, and, afterwards, during the five working-level days, create space for discussing the findings of the VNRs more in-depth (PROPOSAL VNR8). Others want to grant VNR countries the opportunity to have one guaranteed national side event to discuss their VNR more in-depth (PROPOSAL VNR9). In that context, many praise UNDESA’s *VNR labs* as a meaningful innovation that could be given more of an official status in the HLPF program (PROPOSAL VNR10). Those labs were created to offer an informal opportunity to exchange experiences. In 2018, UNDESA facilitated eight labs, in 2019 already 17 labs took place. So far, the majority of the VNR labs identified common challenges and offer anecdotal good practices. Labs could complement the individual VNR presentations with a more detailed debate of potential solutions that emerge from VNRs in that year. For this, the lab character of these meetings could be enhanced by employing more innovative formats. In labs, participants typically develop and discuss tangible ‘prototype’ solutions, with space for experimentation. Instead of duplicating the moderated panel-discussions which are typical for the HLPF’s official panels, the labs could follow more co-creative processes, drawing on the knowledge of external experts and diverse stakeholders that are capable

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Cepei, *A Sustainable Regional UN* (Bogota: Cepei, 2019).

<sup>40</sup> Meeting Summary of the Group of Friends of VNRs and follow-up of Agenda 2030, Permanent Mission of Mexico, 16 January 2020, p. 3.

<sup>41</sup> UNDESA, *SDG Good Practices* (online).

<sup>42</sup> Mexico’s informal non-paper for the Group of Friends (New York, 2019).

of giving feedback from the viewpoint of potential users and beneficiaries of the identified solutions.

For more time-efficient VNRs, clearer guidance as to the *content* of the presentations could also help. Given the limited time and the high level of interest in peer learning, member states could ask UNDESA to adjust the voluntary guidelines ([PROPOSAL VNR11](#)) and ask VNR countries to exclusively focus their *oral presentations* during the HLPF on (1) sharing lessons learned and good practices that have transformative potential and could benefit other member states' implementation efforts and (2) sharing challenges and identifying areas where support is needed and should be mobilized afterwards.

These short and focused oral presentations could be complemented by more comprehensive *written reports*. For the reports to become more analytical reviews, many recommend a new focus in the second round of reviews on *how and why* countries face success or failure in their efforts to achieve the SDGs ([PROPOSAL VNR12](#)). In that context, VNR countries could be encouraged to reflect the GSDR's results and discuss the potential of, for example, levers and co-benefits, or the corresponding action points in the GSDR's "Call to Action".

To enrich the debate, member states have been discussing *complementary reports*. Mexico suggested a second report for the VNR sessions "containing statistics with input of the UN system" ([PROPOSAL VNR13](#)).<sup>43</sup> Others suggest having a complementary report from civil society that could be referenced in the interactive debate ([PROPOSAL VNR14](#)), possibly including citizen-generated data; yet others think about additional input from business, science, regional commissions, country teams or national sustainable development councils. So far, only a few papers of non-state actors have been uploaded to the stakeholder section of the UN's SDG Knowledge Platform. For 2020, the revised voluntary common reporting guidelines ask member states to send, if they so wish, other reports to UNDESA "for posting on their national page in the VNR database, including complementary reports by stakeholders".<sup>44</sup>

Many seem to favor "a greater degree of interaction, peer learning and widespread engagement" during the VNR *interactive debate*.<sup>45</sup> In previous years, because of the severe time restrictions, all Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) were asked to coordinate one, maybe two, 2-minute statements for the interactive debate on a VNR. Given the breadth of the MGoS' constituencies (from indigenous groups to cities, from unions to businesses, from youth to older persons) and their respective interests, the resulting statements – often the lowest common denominator – could not be the best possible contributions. If member states should decide to allocate more time to the debate, they could give MGoS a greater number of slots, which would allow for more meaningful input from these constituencies ([PROPOSAL VNR15](#)). In that context, some also call for opportunities to engage online, which would be most relevant for those unable to travel to New York ([PROPOSAL VNR16](#)). There is also debate around having a set of "discussants", for example from the UN system/country teams, different stakeholders, expert commentators (as in 2016 and 2017), or well-prepared peer-countries comments ([PROPOSAL VNR17](#)). Some want to bring more local and regional governments into the VNR

<sup>43</sup> Mexico's informal non-paper for the Group of Friends (New York, 2019).

<sup>44</sup> UNDESA, *Voluntary common reporting guidelines for voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum for sustainable development (HLPF)*, (New York, 2020).

<sup>45</sup> Meeting Summary of the Group of Friends of VNRs and follow-up of Agenda 2030, Permanent Mission of Mexico, 16 January 2020, p. 3.

process, hoping that “the most visible impacts of the SDGs” at the local level “will create stronger political motivation for leadership at different levels to propose and deliver ambitious SDG outcomes” (PROPOSAL VNR18).<sup>46</sup> If available, these actors could also report on their voluntary local reviews (VLRs). Beyond that, non-state actors developed many more ideas for their meaningful participation at the local, national, regional, and global level.<sup>47</sup> Finally some also opt for shared review panels, with countries twinning for a mutual peer review and exchanging lessons learned and good practices before, during, and after the VNR presentations (PROPOSAL VNR19).<sup>48</sup> Such efforts could also assess cross-border effects of SDG implementation.

#### *Follow-up of VNRs*

Given the enormous efforts that countries invest into their VNRs, it would be a waste not to work with this data. Modest additional investments in the follow-up of VNRs could immensely increase the effectiveness and – in terms of output-input ratio – also efficiency of the HLPF.

In previous years, UNDESA produced an annual “VNR Synthesis Report” that in a very cautious way “reflects the wealth of national experiences in implementing the SDGs”.<sup>49</sup> So far, there is no mandate for an official report on good practices (PROPOSAL VNR20a) or a comprehensive policy document with actionable recommendations (PROPOSAL VNR20b) – member states could change that. Recommendations could be country specific and countries reporting for the second time could be encouraged to follow-up lessons learned and recommendations from their previous VNR. Recommendations could also be directed at the UN system (including Resident Coordinators and country teams), and, where appropriate, also address other follow-up processes. Based on the VNR analysis, UNDESA, the UN development system and others could also be more explicitly mandated and better equipped to broker support and “match make” multi-stakeholder partnerships in areas where countries say they need assistance (PROPOSAL VNR21).<sup>50</sup> Custodian Agencies could be asked to evaluate the VNRs for relevant information (especially regarding good practices and challenges) that could then also be used in the Thematic and SDG Reviews (PROPOSAL VNR22). Next to the GSDR (with its focus on scientific assessments), an expert panel (possibly consisting of members of existing bodies like, for example, the Committee for Development Policy or the Committee of Experts on Public Administration) could review all the VNRs in a cycle for best practices, systemic problems that need more multilateral attention, and also emerging issues. Their quadrennial report could produce recommendations that inform the negotiations on the Political Declaration (PROPOSAL VNR23). Others propose to dedicate one panel during the HLPF to discuss the combined lessons from all the VNRs each year (PROPOSAL VNR24).

<sup>46</sup> Nobue Amanuma, Hiroataka Koike, Eric Zusman, Matthew Hengesbaugh, Junichi Fujjino and David D. Sussman, “Assessing the HLPF Four Years On: Enhancing Integration, Linking Processes, and Strengthening Political Leadership”, *IISD* (online), 24 September 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Action for Sustainable Development, forus, Together 2030, TAP Network, *Principles paper for HLPF Review* (New York 2019); see also papers cited in note 10 and 37.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Vanuatu, Australia, Papua New Guinea and Samoa collaborated in 2019, in 2020 Uzbekistan and Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia are doing a twinning.

<sup>49</sup> UNDESA, *2019 Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report* (New York: UN, 2019), p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> See the already impressive work being done at Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, *Multi-stakeholder Partnerships and Voluntary Commitments*; see also Marianne Beisheim and Anne Ellersiek, *Partnerships for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Transformative, Inclusive and Accountable?*, SWP Research Paper 14/2017 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik [SWP], December 2017).

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## The Way forward

The official process for the ECOSOC and HLPF Review starts on February 10, 2020, with the first informal meeting of the co-facilitators for the intergovernmental negotiations with member states. It is likely that the two co-facilitators will attempt to have a consensus document ready before the 2020 HLPF and ECOSOC High-level Segment in July.

There is a real danger to lose momentum and the support of many, especially in civil society but also in national administrations, should the process fail and business-as-usual simply continue. But, so far, discussions have been mostly encouraging. It may be surprising in these difficult days for multilateralism, but it seems as if many member states would like to keep the HLPF 'fresh' and relevant and make it even more so – it has been a vibrant forum already during the first cycle and many would like to preserve that quality. Member states should ensure that the HLPF continues to be a learning institution that enables countries to do better in implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs – a „spark“, as someone described it during a retreat, to set off action, investment (given the new dynamics around sustainable finance), and other measures to move forward. For this to happen, member states should discuss innovative formats for the HLPF and results-oriented processes, especially in the three areas that this paper discusses: the overall architecture, including the process around and content of the outcome documents, the evaluative preparatory work throughout the year for effective and useful reviews during the HLPF, and an action oriented follow-up of the HLPF's results afterwards.

The 2030 Agenda is a "golden nugget" for multilateralism, as an Ambassador has put it during an expert group meeting on the HLPF Review, proving that the UN is capable of making the world a better place. When celebrating the UN's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2020, member states could reward this achievement by strengthening the HLPF, as the UN's "home of the SDGs", ensuring the forum is fit for purpose to support them in their efforts to master the decade of action and delivery.