

Synthesis Report

Towards an effective monitoring and accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda: perspectives from the regions.

In response to the emphasis and strong recognition by Member States of the role and valuable contribution of the regional dimension during the interactive dialogue organized by the President of the General Assembly on 1 May 2014 on “Elements for a Monitoring and Accountability Framework for the post-2015 Development Agenda,” the Secretary-General requested the UN Regional Commissions (ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA) to organize regional meetings to solicit views on accountability and explore options based on existing mechanisms and possible new approaches.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the consultations were held in Bangkok, Thailand on 5-6 August 2014. The African regional consultations took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 21-23 August. The consultations in the Latin American and Caribbean region took place in Santiago, Chile on 28-29 August. The consultations in the ECE region took place in Geneva, Switzerland on 15-16 September. The consultations in the Arab region took place in Tunis, Tunisia on 15 -16 September 2014. The discussions and deliberations of the regional consultations were reflected in the form of a Chair’s summary produced by each UN Regional Commission. The Chairs’ summaries and other relevant documents and information can be accessed through this link: <http://www.regionalcommissions.org/?p=915>.

The following is a synthesis of the main reflections and messages from the regional consultations on monitoring and accountability that have taken place in the five regions.

1. **The monitoring and accountability framework should be an integral part of the Post-2015 development agenda and not an “after-thought.”** The framework should ensure appropriate linkages between various levels (local, national, sub-regional, regional, global), actors (state and non-state) and sectors. However, **there is a need to distinguish the meaning of accountability at different levels.** The meaning of accountability at the national level is clear because national governments are accountable to their people; but the meaning of accountability at the global level is not as clear – who is accountable to whom? Under the principle of universality, accountability should apply equally to developed and developing nations and to all stakeholders, including nongovernmental actors. As such, accountability should be understood as a participatory and inclusive process, which envisages cooperation and an interactive dialogue between multiple stakeholders. It should also apply to all goals and targets, including those related to MDG 8 and the proposed SDG 17 (or its final version). Indeed, the fulfilment of ODA, technology transfers, access to markets and financing for development commitments should be a central part of the accountability framework.
2. **The backbone of an accountability framework should be at the national level.** It is at this level that all accounts of implementation actions converge to show a pattern and create a picture of performance. The national level is also the most relevant in view of the fact that the majority of commitments are either those of the state or those of development actors established under national laws and regulations. Hence, **the focus should be to strengthen capacity for implementation, monitoring and evaluation at**

the national level, including through greater involvement and engagement of civil society and the private sector from the planning to the monitoring phases of the SDGs. **Review tools and mechanisms for accountability should be state-led, and based on official statistics**, although the potential relevance of other sources of information should also be acknowledged.

- a. It was highlighted that it was time to view the **private sector** not just as a resource provider but also as a contributor to strengthening accountability frameworks by creating institutional systems and appropriate incentive mechanisms to review and encourage sustainable production and resource efficiency. At the national level, legislative frameworks could stimulate corporate social responsibility, and corporate business compliance with allocation of funding for sustainable development.
 - b. With respect to **civil society**, there should be more systematic and institutionalized mechanisms to involve them, from the planning to the monitoring and evaluation phases of this process. The Aarhus Convention with its focus on access to information, participation and access to justice is a good example of such a participatory process. These mechanisms should ensure that particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups including youth, indigenous peoples and people with disabilities, were reached and involved.
 - c. The need to **strengthen countries' capabilities at the national level** for the generation, processing, analysis and dissemination of information in a transparent and enabling manner was highlighted. The integrity of any accountability system ultimately depends the quality if the information available. The necessary capacities needed for accountability and associated costs are also very important. Accountability requires considerable national capacity in terms of data management and monitoring as well as human and financial resources. Some countries will require support from the international community through financial and technical assistance to strengthen their capabilities for monitoring and accountability purposes.
 - d. Enhancing capabilities for **collection of disaggregated data at the national and sub-national levels** was emphasized, particularly with regard to vulnerable and marginalized populations which are often difficult to reach and reflect in statistics. Indeed, while national averages mask disparities, disaggregated data identifies structural gaps at the sub national levels, and allows identifying which populations are not benefiting from public policies and services. This information is necessary to track progress and adopt the necessary initiatives in support of a truly inclusive development agenda.
3. The **SDGs** are not legally binding commitments and, as such, should **maintain their positive, inspirational and aspirational nature. National ownership and creating and promoting a collaborative environment towards SDG achievement and implementation are critical to their success. SDGs should be used as incentives for people and countries to come together and make a joint effort towards their achievement.** In a voluntary system participants need to perceive that their involvement adds value for them. The existence of suitable incentives for countries and other stakeholders to participate in a monitoring and accountability framework is

a basic requirement. This is important for a strong buy-in from all countries, segments and sectors. In line with this, the SDG accountability framework should not be used to impose certain development models on countries or to “certify” or impose other conditionalities on them for their behaviour, particularly with regards to ODA and other means of implementation.

4. **The regional dimension could play a critical role since countries within regions share common experiences and challenges.** A regional monitoring and accountability framework could support countries’ efforts to deliver on development commitments. This framework is likely to lessen the burden of global-level requirements and can enhance coordination among regional organizations and actors to strengthen the link between global commitments and national efforts. The need for a collaborative spirit instead of a competitive one to infuse the achievement of the SDGs was stressed and the regional dimension could build trust among countries by **encouraging countries to share information, knowledge and experiences, strengthen their respective capabilities and define coherent regional policies and approaches.** Indeed, **collaborative transparency to assess and evaluate performance** may be a better way of framing accountability at the regional and international levels. Voluntary evaluation helps to identify whether the right policies and actions are being pursued and, if not, points to the alternative directions to follow. . The regional level is also the natural platform to address regional or transboundary challenges, which have an important role in sustainable development. This level can also help countries to translate global goals into policies, guidelines, recommendations and standards that can be implemented at the national level, as well as mobilize partnerships and South-South cooperation.

5. The option to establish adequate platforms for a multi-layered system of accountability for the post-2015 development agenda at all levels, national, sub-regional, regional and international should take into consideration the different roles and mandates of regional institutions and entities. In this context, the **UN Regional Commissions were called upon to support the development of effective regional monitoring frameworks while linking national and global efforts, as well as to provide a platform for collective multi-stakeholder review of regional progress on the post-2015 development agenda, based on national assessments of progress.** The Regional Forums on Sustainable Development, convened by the Regional Commissions with regional and other partners, were largely recognized as inclusive evolving regional platforms for monitoring and accountability, while complementing national efforts and supporting regular assessment at the global level.

6. For the purposes of follow-up and accountability, the regional consultations affirmed that it is **important to build on existing mechanisms and successful experiences.** The intergovernmental architecture available in each region was acknowledged as a means to own and support the implementation of the post- 2015 agenda and its review mechanism. For example:
 - i) In the Asia-Pacific region there was broad agreement that regional level monitoring could offer a peer review mechanism

for assessment and cross-fertilization. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) has the potential to evolve into a platform for monitoring and accountability while complementing national and sub-regional efforts and supporting regular assessment. It was also recommended that the partnership among existing regional and sub-regional mechanisms such as the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, ASEAN and its Corporate Social Responsibility Network, Inter-State Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD), Pacific Island Forum (PIF), ESCAP Statistics Committee, the Asian Development Bank and other institutions, as well as the conduct of sub-regional consultations could be strengthened to provide coherent platforms for countries to adopt agreed standards and make concerted efforts for improvements.

- ii) In the Africa region, it is suggested that consideration be given to adapting the African Peer Review Mechanisms' (APRM) Eminent Persons' Group, which receives reports from peer-reviewed countries for vetting, analysis and onward transmittal to the APRM Heads of State and Government Committee and through this Committee to the AU. It is at this level that all national and sub-regional reports are collated, processed and analysed to derive a regional pattern in order to arrive at a realistic and informed assessment of the overall performance of the continent in fulfilling the commitments made by stakeholders. ECA has been actively providing technical support to this mechanism.
- iii) In the Latin American and Caribbean region, the intergovernmental architecture available in the region – such as the subsidiary bodies of ECLAC and other intergovernmental fora – were acknowledged as a means to support the implementation of the agenda and as an appropriate review mechanisms. The region also acknowledged that accountability should hold all stakeholders responsible for effectively and efficiently achieving development outcomes and delivering on commitments. In this context, a more systematic involvement of civil society and the private sector from the planning to the monitoring stages of the post-2015 development agenda was highlighted.
- iv) The Arab region welcomed the Arab Forum on Sustainable Development (AFSD) as a main and critical regional platform for supporting the implementation and monitoring of the post-2015 development agenda. The potential of the Arab Sustainable Development Report as a key informative, analytical and policy tool was recognized in this regard. Lessons learned from the implementation of the MDGs should be taken into account in preparing such report. The region stressed that, for any accountability mechanism to be relevant and deliver effectively, the Arab regional development context needs to be taken into account as the region currently faces many challenges and

impediments to development, such as conflict, occupation, political transition and deficits in social justice.

- v) In the ECE region, a solid set of institutions and mechanisms exists, with mandates and data capacity to review and monitor socio-economic and environmental developments as well as democratic governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights. The aim should be to integrate these existing mechanisms rather than create new structures. There are well-established reporting and accountability frameworks for UNECE legal instruments and reviews of national performance in different policy areas relevant for SDGs. Experience with the Environmental Performance Reviews shows that regular monitoring of recommendations to improve performance in different policy areas can lead to strong results. UNECE plays a key role in the measurement of sustainability, both concerning the development of methodologies and international standards and strengthening of national statistical capacities for monitoring. This work is performed in cooperation with partners like the regional UN system, other regional organizations and civil society.

7. Since national mechanisms should constitute the foundation of the overall accountability framework, a review of national sustainable development strategies and their implementation should be a key element of the national accountability framework. The sustainable development goals should be nationally owned, adapted and mainstreamed into national development planning for effective accountability. **The role of UN country teams and specialized agencies in assisting member states in their reviews was underscored.** Support should be varied and could include the preparation of reports and analysis within the framework of national sustainable development plans and strategies, help with the identification of barriers to the implementation of the SDGs and the preparation and organization of review meetings at the national and sub-national levels.
8. The regional and global levels should support national processes, while facilitating the exchange of best practices. The regional level can collate and aggregate national information so that it can be integrated in the discussions at the global level. **The ECOSOC and the High-Level Political Forum, with inputs from the Regional Forums on Sustainable Development, are called upon to play an important role in ensuring the coherence of the overall accountability framework** and bringing together the main findings and messages on the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda.

In conclusion, the monitoring and accountability framework should be multi-layered but anchored in national and sub-national efforts and be infused by a collaborative spirit. The regional dimension is an effective means to build trust and promote this spirit, thus providing a critical link between the global and national levels.