Towards an Accountability Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda:

Perspectives from the UNECE region

Questionnaire

Please complete

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Please return the completed questionnaire by FRIDAY, 8 AUGUST 2014 to:

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Development Policies and Cross-Sectoral Coordination Unit
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The electronic version of the questionnaire is available at:

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I. Objective

This questionnaire is meant to collect regional perspectives from a wide spectrum of stakeholders in the UNECE region, including member States, civil society, private sector, and other regional organizations on elements for an accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda and the potential for a regional framework for accountability anchored at the national level and feeding into the global level.

The UNECE Secretariat will compile and synthesize the responses received. The synthesis report will be submitted as an input from the region to inform the Stocktaking Event of the President of the General Assembly (New York, 11-12 September 2014) on the elements for a monitoring and accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda. The synthesis report will also serve as a background document for the Regional Ministerial Consultation on “Monitoring and Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda – The
Accountability for a universal agenda can be understood as the joint commitment of the global community to monitor, evaluate, share and discuss progress towards the implementation of the agreed goals. An accountability framework could allow each Government and development actor to contribute to and benefit from a better global understanding of challenges and effective strategies. The concept of accountability extends beyond Government, and applies to all stakeholders being held accountable for their role in implementing a universal development agenda, within their respective governance frameworks and scope of responsibility.

Source: Background note for the interactive dialogue on elements for a monitoring and accountability framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, convened by the President of the General Assembly on 1 May 2014

II. Background

In July 2013, the General Assembly decided on the format and organizational aspects of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in its resolution 67/290. Paragraph 8 of 67/290 “Decides that the forum, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, shall conduct regular reviews, starting in 2016, on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives, including those related to the means of implementation, within the context of the post-2015 development agenda.” The reviews shall be voluntary, state-led and provide a platform for partnerships.

Recognizing that a transformative, people-centred and universal post-2015 agenda requires an accountability framework at all levels, the President of the General Assembly convened an interactive dialogue on 1 May 2014, to address the “Elements for a monitoring and accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda.” The dialogue reaffirmed the importance of an accountability framework at the regional level as countries in the same region shared similar challenges and were likely to make greater progress by collectively addressing them. The background note prepared to that event
elaborated on a number of experiences with accountability mechanisms, including through peer reviews at the regional level.

The main messages that emerged from the dialogue were:

(a) a universal and transformative agenda would require a strengthened accountability framework that is inclusive, participatory and engages people at all levels; (b) a decentralized system of accountability would ensure that all stakeholders take ownership and are incentivized to share, evaluate and adjust their policies; (c) national and regional accountability frameworks need to be anchored in a global accountability framework that is simple, focused and provide clarity on the roles of different actors; and (d) a multi-layered approach could work with parliaments at the national level, peer review mechanisms at the regional level, and with HLPF and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at the global level.

III. Questionnaire on Elements for an Accountability Framework at the Regional Level

A) Overall accountability mechanism

As noted above, there is an emerging view that the accountability mechanism for the post-2015 development agenda should be multi-layered.

Question 1: In general terms, what should an overall accountability mechanism involving the national, regional and global level look like and what could be the role of the regional level in this mechanism?

The post-2015 development agenda and the accountability mechanism regarding the SDGs should be multi-layered. But like Climate issues, the SDGs process (e.g. means of implementation, targets' achievements) could be settled at the European level as a form of regional commitment, before being guided onto the National level. There is a lack of structured governance regarding the Sustainable Development agenda, which unease the Accountability Mechanisms. It could yet rely on existing institutions. For instance, the National level could then rely on the National Strategy on Sustainable Development (NSSD) each country should have since Johannesburg 2002. The European level reinforces the coherence for the achievement of the common goal in compliance with the respective national responsibilities and MOI.

Although one shall not forget one of Europe's most important levels: local territories. There is a need to mobilise multi-partnership and international initiatives like SPIRAL, the “Societal Progress Indicators for the Responsibility of All” launched by the Council of Europe. It takes into account the local level in terms of accountability, and enables foreign territories with common local issues to get together to tackle them.
For instance, the “Territory of Coresponsibility” on wikispiral.org is presented as a territory (a municipality, a group of cities, a neighbourhood, ...) in which a Local Multi-Actor Platform is created, willing to develop new forms of coresponsibility of the collective actors (public or private) and of the citizens and inhabitants, in order to make steps for improving the well-being for all - including future generations - on the basis of inclusion and equity. The Local Multiactors Platform is defined as a “coordination group” in which all stakeholders are invited to participate, in a spirit of openness and representativity. A proper monitoring relies on the appropriate data and indicators, which both can arise from the local organisations, the closest to people targeted by the SDGs.

The main focus to keep regarding the different accountability mechanisms and processes are coherence, standardisation, transparency, a comprehensive approach (relevant to all stakeholders).

In the past, review of progress on sustainable development was carried out under the auspices of the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD). In the area of development, monitoring and accountability under the MDG framework has been carried out through various mechanism and procedures.

**Question 2:** What are the major lessons from CSD progress reviews and MDG accountability that can inform and help improve the post-2015 accountability framework? Have CSD progress reviews and MDG accountability been adequate and if not how should this be different for the SDGs?

The lesson of the review of the MDGs, especially in the light of the work undertaken by local authorities / actors / territories on the co-creation of progress' indicators, shows that what needs to be measured has to be connected to everyone's well-being, now and for tomorrow. The process of involving citizens establishes a relational and informative environment that enables them to overcome preconceptions about the complexity of indicators and produce their own expertise in defining the content of the indicators, their implementation and monitoring. National and international interlocutors are experts in national accounting: the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies for the French national dimension (INSEE), UN bodies at the international dimension (e.g. UN Statistical Commission in the ECOSOC). Their discussions are political and technical, but local territories / actors have yet another logic that must be developed. It is a collaborative approach to open a space for the expression of civil society. The construction of indicators of well-being shows the importance given to situations experienced in positive or negative developments. The bottom-up approach should be affirmed and rely on a system that characterizes indicators, they emanate from citizens or international negotiations. Governance from
local to global, but also cross between different types of institutions and/or communities, should be organized to make up the contributions of actors in capacity measure.

Many of these local actors are NGOs, which have been present all along during the OWG negotiations, and will play a role in the implementation of the SDGs. They have to play a role in the accountability process.

After a CSD progress review “too voluntary”, the upcoming SDG accountability and monitoring process will need to be based on data and concrete facts to review concrete goals and targets every 5 years.

B) Nature of possible review at the regional level

Scope of the review

In terms of the substantive scope of the review, there are a number of options. For instance, the progress towards all SDGs could be reviewed in one review cycle. Alternatively, the review could be limited to certain selected SDGs or themes. It might also involve other existing commitments that are not directly part of, but nevertheless relevant to the SDGs. There are also different possibilities in terms of the country coverage. For instance, all member States could be reviewed over a multi-year cycle. Alternatively, only governments volunteering to be reviewed could be included. In addition, the reviews could also cover other stakeholders that have responsibilities for achieving the SDGs (e.g., private sector).

**Question 3: What should be reviewed and who should be reviewed?**

- About action against poverty, should be reviewed: access to social services and to work, respect of fundamental rights, respect of social justice, the empowerment of people, their wages
- About action against inequalities, should be reviewed: the splits between wages, the differences of access to social services, gender inequalities, the vulnerability of people
- About the ecological balance, should be reviewed: pollutions (polluters), the quality of natural resources, the consumption of these resources, biodiversity, the ratio between preserved natural zones and number of inhabitants
- About the responsibility of economical actors, should be reviewed: the impacts of their activities, their financial transparency, the respect of the norms
- About access to fundamental rights, should be reviewed: access to services and goods, the possibility to enforce its rights, the respect of international conventions
- About the quality and efficiency of governance, should be reviewed: representativeness of decision-makers, citizen participation to politic, the transparency of institution, the fight against corruption

*The review process should address all the SDGs and agreed target, as well as all the countries.*
The independent and transparent reviews should also focus on recommendations to States and various stakeholders (including private sector) in order to improve their strategy.

Review process

Accountability can take different forms and modalities, ranging from more basic monitoring to more comprehensive reviews and, accordingly, with a different capacity to assist, support and advise governments and other stakeholders in achieving the SDGs:

- Monitoring of data on SDG performance which highlights where progress is and is not on track.
- Analytical reports on SDG implementation in the region which would provide an analysis of best practices and make policy recommendations where progress has been poor.
- Discussions and exchange of experiences and best practices at regional meetings, for instance Regional Forums on Sustainable Development convened by UNECE.
- Review of progress of members States by other member States (peer reviews).

Monitoring of data and tracking progress against the agreed goals will be the basis of any further analysis or review process. Different information and inputs will be needed for the various types of reviews, e.g. quantitative data or qualitative assessments and policy analysis. Different parts of the UN system (Regional Commission, the inter-agency Regional Coordination Mechanism and the regional UNG, specialized agencies on specific SDGs) could play a role in the various reviews. While the review process will be state-led, it will also benefit from the contributions of other stakeholders (civil society, the private sector, academia).

**Question 4: What type(s) of review should be conducted and what kind of information should it be based on? What should be the role of the UN system and other stakeholders in the process?**

**Types of reviews that should be conducted:**

- About action against poverty: multidimensional measure of poverty that contains school attendance, familial incomes, poverty threshold, etc...
- About action against inequalities: reviews should not focus only on financial indicators, but be mixed with access to social services, etc...
- About the ecological balance: renewal capacity of ecosystems, studies about waste management...
- About the responsibility of economical actors: qualitative studies should be led (respect of norms, accountability mechanisms...)
- About access to fundamental rights: cross-studies on the quality of services, the hidden costs, the possibility to make an appeal....
- About the quality and efficiency of governance: quality of governance should be studied, knowing that there could be different criterion depending on the country
Regarding the nature of the goals and targets reviewed (and their coherence), their monitoring can be conducted through statistical quantitative and qualitative data (which could be based on stakeholder consultations). The UN system plays a role to hold States accountable for their commitments. Other existing mechanisms can review their accomplishments in lights of their commitments (e.g. the Human Rights Monitoring, the HRC peer review mechanisms, reports on MEA, etc.)

The UN also plays an important role in terms of homogeneity of the indicators selected, and regarding a possible standardisation of national data gathering (to ease the comparison), even if States will be in charge of the implementation of the SDGs and of the accountability of stakeholders on their territory (e.g. regulations towards the private sector).

Peer review mechanisms are considered to be an effective instrument to strengthen accountability in a multilateral context with strong ownership by participating governments. Some examples are the Universal Periodic Review conducted under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, the OECD Peer Reviews, ECOSOC’s Annual Ministerial Review, the WTO Trade Policy Review Mechanism and the UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews.

**Question 5: If you favour peer reviews, what could such reviews at the regional level look like and what existing models do you consider relevant?**

Peer reviews should keep in mind the broad scope of the SDGs and associated targets and indicators. Other forms of monitoring exist, like the SPIRAL method developed by the Council of Europe, which may appear a lot more independent and objective.

**Linkage with global and national reviews and other mechanisms**

A regional accountability mechanism needs to be part of a multi-layered structure with a strong national and global dimension. This requires regional reviews to be anchored at the national level and to feed into the global level. Reviews at the global level will be carried out by the High-level Political Forum. For example, the regional level could therefore provide a regional synthesis to the global deliberations and align its theme with the global review. It could also go beyond merely complementing the HLPF and be more systematic and ongoing, taking into account the regional priorities and particularly transboundary issues. A key pillar of the overall system will be national accountability. National SDG reports, prepared by governments and supported by the UN Country Teams and the UNDG agencies as appropriate, could play a key role in the review process and provide important inputs into the regional review. National parliaments could also be involved. In addition, it will be critical to build on and integrate existing accountability mechanisms in the post-
2015 follow-up process, for example those under relevant existing legal instruments or programme activities or carried out in other fora.

**Question 6:** How should the reviews at national, regional and global level be linked? And how can existing accountability mechanisms be integrated?

Local, national, regional and global levels are interconnected: the existing accountability mechanisms, adapted to the SDGs review, shall complete one another and avoid overlap or incoherence.

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