



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:

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)
Development Policies and Cross-Sectoral Coordination Unit

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The electronic version of the questionnaire is available at:

www.unece.org/post-2015/regionalministerialconsultation2014.html

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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, 8-9 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 Regional Dimension*”, to be held on 15 and 16 (a.m.) September 2014 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva that will be convened upon the request of the Secretary-General.

*“**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 preliminary views of Finland are:

The accountability mechanism should be multi-layered and multi-stakeholder.

The first layer would be the HLPF taking the role of the global focal point for integrated sustainable development, that regularly reviews progress in the implementation of the post-2015 commitments holistically on the basis of national reviews, as well as a global level analysis of the status so far on the basis of global level science, regional analysis and other accountability mechanisms, multi-stakeholder dialogue etc. in the form of "an assessment of assessments". Lessons learnt from existing global level review mechanisms should be made use of when building the HLPF review mechanism.

The other key layer in the accountability mechanism would be the national level, with Parliaments, national audit agencies as well as major group representatives in key roles, together with and lead by the Government. The national level could be a clear progress review, based on nationally defined indicators and identification of responsibilities, but could also include elements of analysis of various actions and actors, including non-state actors. As the implementation of the commitments in concrete terms takes place at the national level, the inclusion of all stakeholders in the review, as well, begins at this level. Existing national monitoring and review mechanisms should be made use of and further developed. We emphasize the role of National Councils of Sustainable development or other relevant multi-actor national platforms, where they exist, in the review process. The UN could provide support guidance as to how and what to monitor, though leaving space for national systems of monitoring.

A third layer, the regional level, would be a supplementary bridging layer, and focus on shared learning and peer pressure. It could include a voluntary peer review at regular intervals and a forum of dialogue for discussions on best practice and lessons learned. This system would also be multi-stakeholder, and enable all major groups also to participate and share learning.

All in all, for the prospective review mechanisms at various levels to be useful and effective, they would need to have built-in elements of encouragement and incentives for participation and avoid finger-pointing.

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 MDG accountability mechanism has been limited to monitoring of progress and has left limited room for national, regional or international dialogue on lessons learned or mutual learning on policies and actions that would accelerate progress. As stated earlier, the future SDG review mechanism should be inclusive of all stakeholders in a dynamic and forward-looking manner and in the spirit of partnership. The national and global colour-based overview of each goal in the MDG accountability mechanism has been very helpful in communicating the status of the MDG achievement in the run up to the deadline year.

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?

A regular mandatory review on the whole post-2015 agenda for all countries and stakeholders would be preferable. This would require more accurate and disaggregated data than what may currently be available in many countries. It is crucial that the reviews would not stay only at a general level, but would provide insights into the situation of different groups and regions. This should not exclude the possibility of thematic or methodological reviews at regional or global level in addition, for deeper analysis and dialogue.

The prospective Global Sustainable Development Report should be an integral part of the review process and be used of as a powerful communications tool in this respect.

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 UNDG, 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?

- National level: progress reports on the basis of disaggregated national data laying the foundation for an inclusive and dynamic multi-stakeholder approach.

- Regional level: peer reviews with analysis and dialogue on lessons learned, best practice and mutual learning. Analytical reports or dialogue on certain themes or methodologies on the basis of peer reviews.

- Global level: progress reports on the basis national reporting as well as analysis of the global overview on the basis of national and regional accountability, other sources of information, including science as well as accountability mechanisms of other commitments, if considered useful.

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?

A regional forum to discuss the findings of the peer reviews, including major group representatives, would seem very interesting an opportunity to facilitate mutual learning across countries. The review per country could be based on a report of team of peer reviewers, that would include major group representatives, as well as on the national accountability reports. The forum could focus on a collective discussion on lessons learned, as well as possibly formulating recommendations from the forum to the country in question. The subsequent review would follow-up on the implementation of recommendations from previous reviews. The regional level could synthesise thematic or methodological lessons learned to an analysis from various peer reviews together, in order to further discussion at national, regional or global level on certain issue.

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?

Regional and global level accountability could utilise national progress reports, global level and national level could utilise the regional level peer reviews and thematic analyses. Global level could take into account also information from other accountability mechanisms.
