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 Regional Dimension”, to be held on
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?

Plan believes that all accountability mechanisms from local to global must be independent, rigorous, and appropriate with meaningful participation for all men, women, girls, and boys, particularly the most marginalised. **Independent** in the sense that interested parties are not able to tamper with, or ‘enhance’ the data and information on which assessments are based, that such data and information have been collected by a reliable agency and that the reports monitoring progress may be independently verified; **rigorous** in the sense that rules are applied, many sources of information are used and thorough research is conducted by unbiased parties; **appropriate** in the sense that no one size fits all: a number of different accountability mechanisms will be needed at local, national and regional levels to assess progress (or lack thereof) depending on the issue at stake or the actor being monitored. Lastly, it is critical that **all people, including the young people, the poor and marginalised, are able to feed in and participate** in the accountability mechanisms. By this, Plan infers all concerned populations, not just organised civil society. This has a number of significant implications relating to governance.

For accountability mechanisms to operate effectively, transparency of processes and of decision-making is paramount, with people being able to input from the outset through a number of different means. Similarly, freedom of information, of the media, of association and speech must be guaranteed. For people to comment and contribute effectively, appropriate civic awareness programmes must be established for adults and children alike. Putting in place such an enabling environment and the requisite processes and mechanisms will require adequate human and financial resources being dedicated to the task.

**As regards the nature of the mechanisms:**

At the international level, a mechanism housed in the UN system will be needed in order to hold all states accountable for the commitments they have made in the post-2015 framework. Where the framework addresses issues with respect to which international standards or norms already exist, the focus should be on strengthening existing accountability mechanisms (such as Human Rights Monitoring and Reporting, the HRC Peer Review Mechanism, reports on the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements) or following best-practice examples (e.g. national/regional human rights commissions/courts). Where the framework covers issues for which there is a gap in effective mandatory accountability mechanisms, such as in the area of corporate transparency and accountability, new mechanisms will need to be put in place.
While we recognise that rendering accountability mandatory is not popular, voluntary participation in mechanisms will not have the weight or the results needed for addressing the global challenges we face. Accountability mechanisms, as the very name suggests, aim to hold states to account for their responsibilities and their obligations. It should therefore be possible to bring pressure to bear to ensure that all states are held to account for their commitments. Without this, an international mechanism risks functioning solely as a monitoring and reporting tool rather than one that inspires and requires action in response to findings.

The Regional Level
While fully supporting the notion of regional mechanisms, Plan does not believe that these will be the most important aspects of overall accountability for the post-2015 commitments. The most important levels are local and national where people, particularly young people and the most marginalised, are able to directly share findings with duty bearers and to demand action and change. Regional and global (UN) mechanisms can only be as strong as these national processes on which they are built. They can however help to demand results and sharing learning on key issues, such as verifying that progress is being made for the poorest and most marginalised in each country, reviewing the framework to see whether adjustments are needed, and determining where to dedicate greater financial or non-financial resources.

The regional level is interesting from the perspective of bringing peer pressure to bear for a number of issues that are of cross-border significance such as those pertaining to the environment (eg. management of water resources such as rivers, pollution etc), regional trade, political instability, and so on. The regional level may also permit states to come together to draw up regional agreements to work together on certain parts of the framework where there is a joint interest. We are not convinced, however, that making regional comparisons – for example – is of particular merit given the very different starting points and contexts of many countries within any one region.

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 lack of accountability and transparency has been recognised as one of the deficiencies of the **MDG framework**. Monitoring mechanisms were set up late and although progress could be measured, it was in an overly narrow manner and excluded any qualitative measures of progress. It also focused largely on monitoring, rather than accountability, meaning that progress made or not made was recognised but no responsive action was then required.
A further lesson learnt was that the statistical methodology and data needed as a basis for analysis and policy development must be significantly improved, with data being disaggregated by a greater number of criteria. We propose that data be disaggregated by age, gender, disability, geographic location, minority status, social status and income quintile, at a minimum.

Lastly, the emphasis on aggregate measurements, while simple to understand, masked the fact that countries could prioritise ‘easier-to-reach’ parts of the population and appear ‘on track’ to meet a particular goal even though huge inequalities might still exist and those most in need of change would still be left behind.

A considerable increase in inequality has been noted over the last 10-15 years, with the marginalised and disadvantaged falling still further behind and the gaps between the rich few and the poorer masses widening dramatically – a phenomenon which has not been reserved to any one income group of countries. This is partly inherent in the way the goals and targets were framed.

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?

Every goal and target in the future framework should be reviewed and reported on, on a regular basis. As mentioned earlier, different mechanisms may be needed for the various goals. These should come together in one global overview report, which may be produced with a lower frequency than the progress reports at national level. They should be reviewed according to indicators which are determined at a national level and based on consultations with the population, adults and children alike, in order to ensure that each country is able to focus on the issues of most concern to it within every goal and target area. The voices, views, and realities of those directly affected, including young people and the most marginalised, should be a key input into all reports.

States are the primary duty-bearers and will be the signatories to the framework – they are therefore the key actors to be held accountable. They are also the entities which sign up to all the international agreements and conventions which the post-2015 framework must reflect and respect in order to make progress on their provisions.
However, other actors, such as the **private sector** will be important players both in terms of realising the goals and targets through their direct contribution to sustainable development and in terms of their potentially being the subject of some of the targets or indicators, such as tighter regulation on corporate activities, or requiring greater compliance with human rights and environmental standards.

Similarly, both states and other actors such as the private sector and civil society organisations must be held accountable for their responsibility to contribute to the **financial and non-financial** means of implementation (MoI). One area of great importance in the realm of financial MoI will be reforms and strengthening of the tax systems in countries and corporate compliance with tougher controls to enable countries to raise sufficient domestic resources.

One example of a non-financial means of implementation which will be critical to the realisation of the goals and targets – and for which states and other actors must be held accountable – is **Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development**. Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development (PCD) refers to the requirement for all actors to ensure that their policies (and therefore their actions) in any area do not negatively impact on people’s prospects for progress or on the realisation of their rights and preferably support those objectives. Ensuring policy coherence across key sectors to support sustainable development goals will avoid generating further costs, or undoing investments through the negative effects of incompatible and harmful policies. Important policy areas include: climate change; trade, investment and finance (including crisis prevention, ending tax avoidance and evasion and eliminating speculation on essential goods and services); agriculture; energy; food security; health; migration; and conflict, fragility and security policies.

**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?**

A multiplicity of types of review will be needed in order to hold different actors accountable for the various parts of the future framework and to reach out to and facilitate consultations with all people affected. Some of these will need to be context-specific. Plan would like to focus on those mechanisms, or types of review, that are particularly important for engaging young people, including children. Clearly the methodologies we will describe benefit from there being a fully up-to-date database (census) of the population so that sophisticated methods for choosing those who should participate can be employed and to reach out to more marginalised groups. A robust and functioning civil registration and vital statistics system is crucial in this.

1. **Score cards**
   A score card is a participatory tool which provides feedback on how various services are perceived by the community. Score cards are versatile and can be employed individually or collectively (such as community or school score cards) and could be adapted to other situations than service provision.

2. **Social Audits**
   Social audits are participatory exercises which examine how devolved government funds are used by public agencies to deliver services that are relevant to and benefit young people.

3. **Opinion polls**
   This is a methodology which permits one to garner qualitative information and data. There are some disadvantages linked to their largely being household-based, with households being considered to be adult-headed in many instances.

4. **Use of ICT and mobile phone technology in particular**
   Mobile phone technology offers simple, accessible and innovative ways of supporting people in monitoring government services. It could be extended to monitor environmental degradation, or abuses of power, such as corruption.

5. **Participatory budget analysis and expenditure**
   This type of monitoring involves a population in understanding and shaping national and sub-national budget plans and in monitoring whether expenditures correspond with plans – and commitments – made. These could prove to be a very useful tool in the context of holding governments to account to dedicate the necessary resources to achieving the goals and targets of the post-2015 framework.

**Information**

A wide range of information sources should be used to analyse progress towards the future goals. Clearly, civil society reports will be key to ensuring a balanced and comprehensive view of the situation affecting people, especially some parts of the population such as women, children and the most marginalised and disadvantaged. Equally, reports by think tanks, foundations and academics should be used.
However, what will be particularly important in order to enable all segments of society to feed into consultations and accountability processes such as surveys, consultations etc, is the availability of timely, reliable information in an accessible format. That means that information must be disability-friendly, written in all the languages spoken in the country and must be age-appropriate.

Lastly, the rights to freedom of information, of the media, of association and speech must be guaranteed.

**Role of the UN and Stakeholders**

Implementing the post-2015 framework requires an institutional framework that can serve to address the complexities and inter-linkages between its different goals, targets, indicators and means of implementation. A sufficiently resourced institutional framework wherein mandates are clearly defined for supervision of implementation and to ensure accountability is therefore essential. The framework must also serve to safeguard the principles on which it is built.

The UN must be central to the accountability mechanisms set up, particularly at an international, or global, level. The UN, being made up of a series of bodies with the power both to initiate international law and agreements and to monitor their implementation, should be the entity which draws up and disseminates global reports on the progress made towards meeting the post-2015 goals as well as proposing the means to improve implementation.

The UN should consider what tools it has at its disposal to encourage states to comply with their reporting obligations. Indeed, such reporting should be an obligation.

Lastly, the UN must ensure that:

1. If the High Level Political Forum is to take on the role of overseeing the implementation of the framework, it must be set up in such as way as to work closely with all other UN entities and specialised agencies and it must enjoy the same level of mandate and representation as the UN Human Rights Council.

2. International environmental governance - building on the outcomes of Rio+20 - be fully integrated with social and economic global governance to ensure a holistic understanding of current global challenges and sustainable solutions from all three dimensions of sustainable development. In this context, ongoing discussions regarding the United National Environmental Programme (UNEP) should lead to its becoming a specialised agency of the UN with civil society being represented in its governance and fully integrated into its structure.

3. ECOSOC be reformed and strengthened so that it can adequately exercise its international economic and social governance functions.

4. A clear mandate be given to the UN to enforce coherence in the policies and programmes of bodies such as the International Financial Institutions and the World Trade Organisation.

5. Participation of civil society, including children and youth, as laid out in Principle 10 of the Rio 1992 declaration, be ensured. Three dimensions of participation should be guaranteed: access to accreditation and to key information and documents; participation in negotiations; a clear mandate and space for civil society in UN mechanisms to enforce accountability for the framework.
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?

As mentioned previously, peer reviews mechanisms may be an effective instrument but do not suffice in terms of holding states accountable for the provisions that will be incorporated in the future framework. They could be of interest in instances of transnational concern, such as issues concerning the environment, trade etc.

**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. An option for formal, recognised alternative reports by civil society will be crucial at the national level. 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?

The most logical process would be to organise regular (annual) monitoring and evaluation at a national level which would feed into less frequent processes at regional and global levels. Thus the regional and global accountability frameworks would be anchored in a national accountability framework and maintain a continuum of accountability that recognises that responsiveness and accessibility are key principles of any accountability mechanism and that these are strongest at local and national levels.

Global reports must be based on a wide variety of sources of information, including the states’ annual reports and alternative reporting from civil society. The model of phased reporting might facilitate global monitoring, along the lines of that used by the Human Rights Committees which review the reports of a large number of countries every year. It is also possible that the phasing might be determined according to a grouping of goals which are most closely linked.
Reports from existing accountability mechanisms, such as the recommendations from the Human Rights Council, should be a key input into all SDG monitoring. Thus these accountability mechanisms can reinforce one another and re-emphasise the foundation of the SDG framework on human rights.