



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:
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, 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 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?

Together with the national accountability mechanism which is of key importance, due to the fact that country ownership and responsibility for implementation is crucial for the achievement of the SDGs, the regional dimension of sustainability is an important added factor, especially taking into account that there are significant similarities in the way neighboring countries address and encounter challenges connected to sustainable development. Only a regional approach and a joint concerted effort to tackle development goals will deliver the best results. The regional aspect is particularly important in addressing SDGs related to climate change, sustainable environment, transport and development of infrastructure. It is particularly crucial with regard to peaceful societies and inclusiveness, as well as rule of law and fight against corruption and criminal activities.

Besides the decision to establish an Open Working Group to elaborate on SDGs, Rio+20 agreed to establish a High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), eventually replacing the CSD, to follow up on sustainable development commitments made since the first Rio conference. We believe that both of these processes are contributing to broad UN consultations towards framing the post-2015 development agenda.

It is of crucial importance to take immediate actions in order to strengthen institutional framework for sustainable development at all levels of governance (national, regional and international), which responds coherently and effectively to current and future challenges of sustainability agenda. This institutional framework must be inclusive, transparent and effective. The General Assembly should remain global authority that helps to integrate sustainability as a cross sectoral issue and a key element of the overarching framework for United Nations activities. At the same time, the ECOSOC has its role, as defined by the "Rio + 20" outcome document, as a central mechanism for the coordination of the United Nations system. It must contribute to strengthening system-wide coherence and coordination of sustainable development agenda, among other issues. This also includes coordination of the outcomes of major UN conferences and integration of the three dimensions of sustainable development concept.

HLPF must build on the strengths, experiences, resources and inclusive participation modalities of the Commission on Sustainable Development. This universal body is tasked to follow up on the implementation of sustainable development by giving political leadership, recommendations and guidance. Being a dynamic platform for regular dialogue, this high-level, inclusive body should be main accountability body with the role to review and assess implementation of the SD policy. This is also a forum for elaboration of the future SDGs and their implementation.

On the other hand, regional commissions, such as UNECE, and UN agencies has significant role to play in assisting countries to participate in future development and implementation as well as reporting on post-2015 development agenda. This is particularly important due to the fact that post-2015 development agenda must be built on existing processes related to sustainable development, including its environmental, social and economic aspects, that are being coordinated by UNECE, UNEP, UNDP etc. Accountability must be placed in the context of implementation and reporting on processes such as Environment for Europe, Environment and Health, Education for Sustainable Development, Transport Health and Environment, but also on concepts such as Green Economy, Low Carbon Development, Strengthening Resilience etc.

In order to be able to follow up on implementation of SDGs at subregional level, the establishment of an intergovernmental coordination/steering group/committee should be considered. This body should be also correlated with the mandate and functions of HLPF.

This body could be based on the mechanisms and principles of UNECE Committee for Environmental Policy.

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 principal benefit of the *MOGs* has been their measurability and the fact that targets were quantified, which made it relatively easy to deduce whether the goals have been achieved or not. It is important that the measurability of the *SDGs* be more precise and comprehensive. Serbia was not a member of the CSD and has little experience of its practice, but it is evident that the process of implementation of the *SDGs* should be thorough, comprehensive and detailed. The *SDGs* will be a key barometer of development in its three dimensions - economic, social and environmental in the next fifteen years.

CSD has been providing political leadership, and guidance to the countries in implementing sustainability policies. In the previous period, progress reviews were more based on monitoring countries performance based on reports that did not integrate to significant level other national and regional counterparts. There was no tangible mechanism that could motivate countries to regularly report on implementation of their sustainability policies. This process was largely based on reporting on implementation of national sustainable development strategies, while there was no sufficient link with MDGs reporting.

In post-2015 development agenda, both of the accountability processes should be integrated in SDGs monitoring, reporting and review. This must be done in an overarching and integrated manner,

taking into account good practices on reporting on implementation of MDGs, as well as other positive examples, such as reporting under the European Environmental Agency on sustainable development indicators.

With an increasing complexity of global environmental problems and in the context of development of appropriate supportive structures for adequate implementation of SDGs, there is a need to further strengthen international environmental governance within the context of the institutional framework for sustainable development.

Accountability for Post-2015 development agenda must be inclusive. This particularly refers to the need of involving all relevant national stakeholders in the implementation, reporting and monitoring processes.

There must be some form of national coordination structures that can support inclusive accountability, such as the role of national sustainable development councils. This is why the role of national SD councils must be reiterated under the post-2015 development agenda, reflecting multi dimensional nature of SDGs.

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?

All the *SDGs* should be monitored and evaluated in a continuous, systematic and detailed manner for all member states of the UN. The international community has invested a substantial effort in formulating the global sustainable development goals. Their implementation can only be successfully achieved through a process of vigilant and thorough monitoring.

Taking into account the fact that purpose of the review processes is to provide comparable information, there is a need to establish coherent and transparent SDGs review process at all levels (national, regional and international).

Universal methodology should be developed with concrete indicators and comparable chapters with regard to all elements of SDGs. Review process should include each of the SDGs, while also taking into account the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders at national level (government, CSOs, business, industry, academia etc.). Review process should reflect impacts of SDGs on sectorial policies, as well as on overall development agenda (including impacts on achieving green economy). The role and impacts of SDGs on initiating and developing new policies should also be considered.

Since SDGs are product of negotiations based on outcomes of international processes and documents, such as Rio + 20 and "The Future We Want", reflection should be made to implementation of the outcomes, while taking into account commitments taken at Rio 1992 and Johannesburg 2002 SD conferences.

Review process can be conducted at subregional levels, through functional regional UN commissions, based on the lessons learned under some of the ongoing review processes, such as UNECE Environmental Performance Review.

It is very important that set of indicators is provided to monitor implementation in a measurable and quantifying manner.

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 comprehensive and detailed review of all adopted global sustainable development goals is vital. The UN country team and UN specialised agencies have also had a significant role and task in this process. UN specialised agencies are well placed to assist member states in the implementation and evaluation of SDGs, as well as in identifying of barriers and impediments to their realisation. Reviews should be comprehensive and detailed, taking into account all available data and material. In order to be able to monitor implementation and compare data, there is a need to set quantifiable and measurable indicators. This also indicates the need to develop analytical reports on SDG implementation at national level and for the region as well, which would provide an analysis of best practices and make policy recommendations where progress has been poor. Review process should

be done initially by the countries themselves with the assistance and support of UN subregional commissions and UN agencies (similarly to the EPR process conducted by UNECE). In order to achieve coherence, discuss progress, common concerns and financing needs, consultative process must be established at subregional level. These consultations can take the form of Regional Forums on Sustainable Development. Peer reviews also remain an option and can be conducted for the less developed countries that express the need for this kind of assistance.

Review process should also incorporate analyses of existing and needed institutional structures and decision making procedures with regard to SDGs. Besides national coordination bodies, such as councils for sustainable development, the role of national parliament, local self governments, business associations and CSOs in implementation, monitoring and reporting on SDGs should be integrated in the review reports. Reports should provide solid basis for the countries to develop applicable MRV (monitoring, reporting and verification) systems on SDGs.

Review process should be mandatory for all countries, at least at subregional level.

Reporting process as well as regional consultations can be led by regional commissions but should be conducted with the involvement of all relevant UN agencies that have experience in supporting countries to meet their development agendas (in particular UNDP and UNEP). Coherence of involvement of UN agencies can be ensured through the involvement of UN Development Group.

Eventually, compilation and analyses of national and subregional analytical reports should be presented at global level as well in the form similar to the UNDP reports on MDGs or UNEP's Global Environmental Outlook.

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?

Voluntary country presentations, as conducted in the framework of the ECOSOC annual ministerial review, have proven to be useful, interactive, probing and dynamic. Regional reviews on the implementation of the SDGs could be organised within the framework of the regional economic commissions. This could be done on the basis of the presentation of the country's performance in conjunctions with UN country team assessment and evaluations of UN specialised agencies.

Republic of Serbia has conducted three Environmental Performance Reviews under UNECE. This has been very positive process and experience in terms of information obtained and lessons learned. This mechanism ensures comprehensive independent expert review of the current state and progress in implementing international commitments into national legislative and strategic framework. It assist countries in improving performance by indicating weaknesses and strengths in administrative capacities as well as in institutional arrangements. Peer review process should be based on country expert missions arranged by regional commission (UNECE) and previously agreed

by the participating governments. Likewise in EPR process, UNECE should be used as a intergovernmental forum for preparation of the peer review, as well as for discussing findings and recommendations. This forum can take form of the conference or meeting which would include representatives of the governments, but also other stakeholders as well in the form of observers. Due to crosssectorial nature of SDGs, organizer of the intergovernmental forum should secure participation of representatives from economy, environment and social dimension. This can significantly contribute to building cohesion and consistency in sustainability policy implementation across the subregion. However, taking into account multidimensional structure of SDGs, it would be important to have better involvement of all relevant UN agencies in peer review process in order to maximise utilization of available expertise.

Eventually, this should be process driven by participating governments and supported by regional commissions (UNECE) and UNDG.

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?

It is vital that reviews of the SDGs at national level be collated, analyzed and integrated at the regional level, where it would be possible to compare performance between countries and regions. All regional assessments should be collected and incorporated into a global assessment that should be meticulously analyzed by the Department of economic and social affairs of the UN Secretariat, leading to a global evaluation of the implementation of the SDGs. Indicators for measuring progress on SDGs implementation at country level represent basic element for conducting valid and comprehensive review process. Countries should have measurable and verifiable set of indicators of progress in order to be able to monitor performance and report. Regional commissions (UNECE) should provide guidance to the countries in terms of downscaling SDGs to regional and local levels (especially taking into account transboundary cooperation). As already indicated, the role of UNDG is also crucial in terms of assisting countries with collection of

information and strengthening synergies between SDGs and other multilateral agreements and international processes. Final outcome of this cooperation would be to provide a regional synthesis to the global deliberations. It is of crucial importance that SDG implementation do not post additional burden to the countries but to provide them with the assistance to improve their performance in implementing commitments already undertaken under different multilateral, bilateral agreements and processes (including countries obligations related to reporting under multilateral agreements). The role of subregional commissions (UNECE) and UNDG is also to ensure synergies of SDG reporting and review process with existing processes, such as UNECE EPR, the PEP, Environment and Health etc. Besides that, subregional review process should be used to discuss and plan programmes and projects at national and regional level to support implementation of SDGs. Clear link should be made to reporting obligations under the 10 YFP on SCP led by UNEP in terms of avoiding overlaps and strengthening exchange of information and good practices. Particular attention in the review process should be paid to financing opportunities to support implementation of SDGs. Countries with economies in transition would significantly improve performance if additional bilateral or multilateral assistance (in the form of special SDG support fund) would become available.
