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
E-Mail: dpccu@unece.org

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, 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?

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<th>General characteristics of an overall accountability mechanism:</th>
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<td>- <strong>Build on existing mechanisms:</strong> A review mechanism should aim to advance integration, implementation and coherence. It should take into account information and results from existing monitoring and accountability mechanisms at all levels (national, regional, global). National mechanisms including reporting should be the key pillar / foundation of an overall accountability “system” and the respective review processes at the global level under the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and, as appropriate, at the regional level.</td>
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<td>- <strong>Advance integration and coherence:</strong> An overall accountability mechanism should ensure linkages between levels (national, regional, global), actors (state and non-state actors) and sectoral mechanisms. The different processes/mechanisms should not be isolated but reinforce each other. Avoid heavy reporting burden by aiming for national reports which can also be used at the regional and global level. Moreover, information from existing sectorial monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be used at all levels.</td>
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<td>- <strong>Participatory, inclusive and transparent:</strong> It should be based on an interactive dialogue with the full involvement of the country concerned, civil society, the private sector, statisticians and other relevant stakeholders and provide for adequate levels of information and transparency.</td>
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<td>- <strong>Multi-level bottom-up approach:</strong> National level should be a starting point. Regional level preparatory process could complement and prepare for the global part of review. In our view further analysis and discussion are needed with regards to what role an functions should be assumed best at each level: national, regional, global.</td>
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<td>- <strong>Incentive based:</strong> The focus should lie on cooperative support between countries with an emphasis on learning. The mechanism should give guidance and recommendations for the implementation of sustainable development commitments of the reviewed state by promoting the exchange of best practices and experiences in the implementation of sustainable development, identify gaps in implementation, as well as necessary means and measures to address them.</td>
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<td>- <strong>Country Ownership:</strong> Reviews should be state-driven, involving ministerial and other relevant high-level participants.</td>
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<td>- <strong>Central role for UN:</strong> The UN should play a key role to ensure legitimacy and coherence. Particularly, the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development should have an important role in the overall accountability framework and fostering coherence. It should bring together findings and messages on sustainable development implementation aspects of the post-2015 development agenda.</td>
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- **Result oriented:** The mechanism should provide a platform for partnerships to spur implementation (including public and private actors) and for a follow-up of the sustainable development commitments.

- **Quality and disaggregated data:** Good coverage and quality of data is essential for any effective global monitoring and accountability (data quality, accessibility). It has to be ensured that data is timely, reliable and sufficiently disaggregated. Country data capacity for data collection and analysis needs to be strengthened. Capitalizing on technological innovation to make data collection more efficient, widely accessible, and usable will be important.

**Role of regional level:**
- In our view further analysis and discussion are needed with regards to the different possible roles at the regional level, also taking into account that institutions at the regional level are functioning differently in each region, with different levels of capacity, resources and linkages with other regional actors (UN System, regional development banks, non-state actors and regional multi-stakeholder platforms).
- The regional level could have a role in preparation and providing support for the national level processes, particularly with a view to the global level theme- and/or country-specific reviews.
- The regional level could focus on data collection capacity-building, collating and aggregating national information/data and reports at the regional level into regional reports and analysis for discussion at regional preparatory meetings in view of global meetings at the HLPF, but also supporting countries in preparing for sharing their lessons learned at the global level with regards to their national commitments and their respective implementation for achieving the post-2015 goals/targets.

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?

Major lessons learned from CSD progress reviews and MDG accountability are that they were not adequate (too weak) and need to be strengthened (see for example the UN SG Report on lessons learned from the CSD 2013; UN Task Team Report on a renewed global partnership 2013; UN OHCHR Report Who will be accountable? 2013; DESA, ECOSOC AMR Expert Workshop Report 2013). Any design of a future monitoring & accountability framework for the SDGs should take these lessons learned into account.
A. Lessons learned from CSD Progress Reviews:

**General comment:** The CSD has not been effective in reviewing progress towards sustainable development.

**National Level:** Experience with voluntary reporting by governments to the CSD has shown that they are used very little in the review processes of the CSD. Guidelines for national voluntary reporting have been rather loose and therefore reporting was uneven. There was not enough capacity-building for undertaking such reporting in developing countries. CSD – at the global level – has never dedicated time to a systematic review of national implementation efforts, e.g. the national sustainable development strategies developed in many countries through multi-stakeholder dialogues.

**Regional Level:** The impact of the regional preparatory review meetings of the UN Regional Commissions was relatively small at the global level (CSD). Regional perspectives were presented at the CSD global session focusing on region-specific barriers, constraints and lessons learned related to specific thematic clusters. Because they were held in parallel to CSD Plenary meetings they had little influence in general.

**Global Level:** The CSD had not sufficient space to reflect on gaps in implementation and barriers to progress at the global level. However, CSD had strong capacity to enable the sharing of best practices and lessons learned which is important in helping countries and other stakeholders to exercise policy choices and adopt sustainable development paths. Another major challenge was the weak link between the CSD and operational entities of the UN system.

B. Lessons learned from MDG Accountability:

**National level:** MDG-reporting conducted in the past did not sufficiently take into account the extent to which MDGs were incorporated into national strategies and policies. The monitoring process was technocratic and lacked legitimacy: parliamentarians, civil societies, the private sector, relevant national institutions and platforms, minorities, marginalized communities have not been actively involved. In addition, national reports mainly reflected donor and multilateral agencies demands. Another key challenges was data quality and adequacy.

**Regional and global level:** The different instruments are generally perceived as weak (UN Regional Commissions issued regional MDG reports; at the global level MDG Gap Task Force Reports were published since 2008; since 2007 MDG reviews in the context of ECOSOC AMR). A key reason for this was that focus is solely on monitoring and reporting (no real participatory review and absence of recommendations that can be monitored and followed up combined with an adequate system of incentives and means to address gaps in implementation).

It is generally acknowledged that the Voluntary National Presentations (NVPs) at the ECOSOC AMR need to be strengthened. Only a few countries have presented since 2007. Central reasons for this are: lack of time for presentation, interactivity, incentives, feedback; absence of recommendations and follow-up; limited scope for participation of other actors; unproductive reviews not resulting in concrete actions; no adequate framework for holding countries to account with regard to commitments to the global partnership for development.
C. Way Forward – implication for SDGs review mechanism

General elements:
- Accountability of SDGs must be based on an inclusive process generating ownership from the bottom to create greater legitimacy.
- Sufficient time should be allocated to preparing the high-level review meetings (at the global level).
- Review mechanisms should be incentive based (e.g. promoting / encouraging creation of platforms for sharing experiences and lessons learned among governmental and non-governmental stakeholder including multi-stakeholder partnerships and the UN entities present on the ground), sharing of lessons learned between member states and other actors (not only government-to-government peer review), all member states.

National Level:
- National statistical capacity has to be strengthened at the national level, where necessary, to be supported by UN System or other relevant actors.
- Clear rules on the collection of data will need to be applied (SDGs should be monitored as part of the national policy monitoring process at national levels, which will feed into global and sectorial monitoring).
- Interaction between national and international (regional and global) level, will be key in a future framework.

Regional Level: also see answer provided in question 1.
- The regional level would need to link up more closely with the national and global level processes.
- Inter-regional dialogues could be promoted at the global level (at the HLPF where the different regional discussions will be brought together).

Global Level:
- Inputs from national and regional levels need to be given due consideration.
- Attraction of high-level participants from all three dimensions of sustainable development (economic, social, environment).
- Sharing of best practices and lessons learned among countries as well as capacity building, also at the global level, will be key.
- The link with the UN system (operational entities) should be strong.
- Linkage with sometimes highly advanced sector-specific accountability mechanisms should be ensured.

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?**

**What should be reviewed:**

OWG Outcome Document: “Sustainable Development Goals are accompanied by targets and will be further elaborated through indicators focused on measurable outcomes. They are action oriented, global in nature and universally applicable. (...) Targets are defined as aspirational global targets, with each government setting its own national targets guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances.” This implies that the SDGs must be reviewed on two levels:

- **Achievement of global objectives:** Implementation – and progress in implementation - of all SDGs and targets, as well as other sustainable development commitments including those related to means of implementation (as indicated in Rio+20 Outcome Document §§76 (i), 85(e) and specified in A/RES/67/290). In order to address the challenge of lack of focus faced by the Commission on Sustainable Development the post-2015 agenda/SDGs should be at the centre of the reviews.

- **Achievement of national commitment:** review of member state’s contribution to achievement of SDGs. A process of “commit and review” could be considered. In a first cycle, member states would make commitments on the level of national contribution to the global targets e.g. in a national sustainable development strategy, national development plans etc.. In the following cycles, implementation of these commitments will be reviewed. This process would create ownership and legitimacy.

**Who should be reviewed:**

- All member states (according to national commitments and contribution to global ambition)
- UN entities
- In addition, innovative incentives are needed to tap into experiences and lessons learned of private sector and civil society (the reviews should give the opportunity to launch partnerships for implementation). The monitoring and accountability tools will need to reflect a more complex field of action and actors.

The reviews would need to take place in a determined cycle.

**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?

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<th>Types of review</th>
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<td><strong>1. Every 4 years review by HLPF (high level)</strong></td>
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<td>- milestone events getting global momentum and visibility.</td>
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<td>- review of global achievements of all SDGs, collecting data and lessons learned from national and regional reviews, sectorial reviews etc. in a synthesized high-level manner (feeding into the Global Sustainable Report) and providing input to the UN System, highlighting where progress is and is not in track.</td>
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| **2. Yearly global review (HLPF at ECOSOC level) consisting of a (1) thematic and (2) country reviews:** |
| - (1) country review at global level (contribution of a country to global goals) could include peer review elements: consider joint groups of countries (cross-regional), in a determined cycle, and non-state actors (civil society and private sector), also providing a platform for implementation partnerships which could be launched at the HLPF meeting. Incentive-oriented approach: identifying gaps and challenges and addressing them with the support of the UN system and other actors (incl. development banks) by making policy recommendations where gaps are wide. |
| - (2) global thematic reviews at global level(state of global implementation of one or more SDGs) global thematic reviews should provide space for non-state actors to present their contribution and promote multi-stakeholder partnerships. |
| - Analyses of and identification of best practices and recommendations. |
| - To ensure visibility, high-level government participation in a global forum is key. |

| **3. Regional level:** see also answer provided in question 1: |
| - should be complementary to global level and could have a role in preparing and providing support for the relevant national and global level processes. |
Information the reviews at the global (and where applicable regional) level should be based on:

national and international information, including information from civil society and other stakeholders

1. National information: national reporting by countries and national stakeholders on progress on SDG implementation incl. national sustainable development strategies, development plans etc. (countries with assistance needs can be supported by the UN system – UN Country teams and UN agencies in collaboration with other development actors);

2. International information: consolidated reporting from intergovernmental entities (this is likely the role of the enlarged UNDG interagency report as successor of the MDG reporting); sectorial in-depth reporting (as done by the specialized agencies and others, e.g. FAO, UNEP, WHO, ILO, etc.). At the regional level relevant UN entities will have a role in providing respective information and inputs.

Role of the UN system

The UN system should have an important role in:

1. Providing support to national reviews (e.g. UN Country teams).
2. Providing information and inputs to reviews: See above. In order to keep the way of integrating existing reviews and reports manageable, UN could appoint task managers / coordinators (TST) as it was the case for the OWG on SDGs.
3. Taking into account lessons learned of national reviews: based on lessons learned in the past the link between the reviews and the UN operational system should be strengthened.
4. UN System reviews rsp. review of UN entities themselves as foreseen in HLPF Res. 67/290 (OP 8): whether organizations are providing integrated support to member states in a given area and whether individual organizations are mainstreaming sustainable development (economic, environmental and social dimensions) in their work.

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?

There is no “one-size fits all solution” in the sense that one model can be replicated as such for the post-2015 development agenda. Different models and their lessons learned need to be taken into consideration.

In our view, it is important to first look at lessons learned from existing mechanisms in order to identify building blocks for an appropriate peer review mechanism at the regional and/or global level.
The existing ECOSOC AMR (global accountability for MDGs) might be a starting point. However, it needs to be seriously overhauled and its many shortcomings must be addressed (see question 2), in order to promote the implementation of the post-2015 agenda and its impact on the ground. A more ambitious model based on the lessons learned of relevant other examples is to be developed.

Lessons learned from the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review (UPR) should be taken into account. The UPR, the post-2015 development agenda and the HLPF have in common the principle of universality. Furthermore, as stipulated for the HLPF, the UPR is also a state-led process. One key aspect of the UPR is the approach of having a high-level overall review without duplicating the sectorial treaty-body monitoring mechanism, and the UPR’s participatory nature. In addition, UPR includes the participation of non-state actors.

When it comes to incentives and capacity-building the WTO TPRM also provides relevant insights. Lessons learned from OECD Peer Reviews and relevant regional reviews, such as the UNECE Environmental Performance Reviews, also need to be taken into account. Moreover, lessons learned from innovative approaches, such as experiences from sectorial multi-stakeholder mechanisms should also be considered (e.g. the Committee on World Food Security which is currently working towards the establishment of a framework in the area of food security and nutrition).

*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?*

Three key elements to ensure linkage and keep reporting burden low:
- **alignment in time**: national and regional reviews must be timed such that it can feed in the global review process by HLPF.
- **alignment in substance**: data and format of data collected on all levels should be coherent. To avoid duplication, existing information and reports should be integrated.
- **window for high-level country reviews at global level** (as outlined in question 4).
- **window for regional inputs at global level** (eg. presentation of reports, regional synthesis to the global deliberations). Based on lessons learned of the CSD, a truly inter-regional dialogue will be key.

- **Integration of existing sectorial accountability mechanisms**: Based on lessons learned of the UPR of the Human Rights Council which also provides for a high-level overall policy review and does not aim at duplicating the detailed work undertaken by the different issue-specific treaty-monitoring bodies, information from those existing sectorial accountability mechanisms should flow into the SDG reviews (linkage and cross-referencing), without having the SDG review mechanism duplicating the existing sectorial reviews. In order to keep the way of integrating existing reviews and reports manageable task managers as coordinators (TST) as it was the case for the OWG could be appointed.

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