



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, 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?

This mechanism should be inter-governmental, universal, and voluntary. It should be a technical platform to help governments accelerate national transitions to sustainable development trajectories. It should focus on promoting national policies and programming that integrate the economic, social, and environmental components of sustainable development, with a particular emphasis on the transfer of the knowledge and experience (good practices, lessons learned), resources, and technology needed to effect these transitions.

This mechanism should be national in focus, with reviews conducted in appropriate regional and global fora, similar to the logic of the universal period review mechanism for human rights. Regional UN and civil society bodies could provide technical support.

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?

CSD progress reviews suffered from: (1) the absence of an MDG-like monitoring framework for sustainable development, with quantified goals, targets, and indicators, all set relative to a single baseline, and enjoying a measure of approbation from member states; and (2) links to national policy discourses, with the participation of ministries other than those responsible for environmental protection and foreign affairs.

*Efforts to enforce accountability for MDG progress suffered from: (3) the perception by some member states that the MDGs were imposed on them by the UN system, without due process and adequate consultation; (4) the absence of well defined, standardized, codified (*inter alia* in national legislation) review and accountability mechanisms, with specified *ex ante* roles for governments, the UN system, and civil society; and (5) data and other technical/design weaknesses in the design of the MDGs (both individually and collectively), which can make it difficult to: (a) compare MDG progress across countries (e.g., due to the “nationalization” of MDG targets and indicators); (b) determine whether a country is, in fact, meeting a given MDG (e.g., due to differences between performance as measured against global as opposed to nationalized targets and indicators, or to conflicting trends among different indicators or targets for a given MDG); and (c) capture the absence of development progress at the sub-national level, or along socio-economic cleavages.*

In terms of lessons learned for the SDGs:

** The presence of an MDG-like monitoring framework for sustainable development, with quantified goals, targets, and indicators, all set relative to a single baseline, will go a long way towards addressing weaknesses (1).*

** Weakness (2) can be addressed by efforts to ensure that: (a) reviews of national progress towards sustainable development do not happen only in HQ locations, and (b) other ministries besides environment and foreign affairs are co-responsible for the reviews' outcomes.*

** Weakness (3) can be addressed by the: (a) extensive national, regional, and global post-2015 consultations supported by the UN system and other actors; and (b) transparent, participatory process by which the SDGs are being designed—particularly in terms of the role of the Open Working Group on the SDGs, as well as the Secretary General's High Level Panel on the SDGs.*

** It remains unclear whether the SDGs will be able to avoid weaknesses (4) and (especially) (5).*

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?

The need to differentiate between reviews of versus accountability for progress towards sustainable development should be emphasized here. Such reviews can be performed by any number of actors. But in order to have an impact, they need to be linked (ideally statutorily) to the accountability mechanism.

Experience from the UPR and the other frameworks mentioned below shows that, in order to be effective, the process and outputs of these reviews must: (i) enjoy the support of the member states undergoing review; (ii) contain concrete, feasible, primarily technical recommendations for improvement, which must be approved by the member states undergoing review; (iii) be costed; and (iv) be accompanied by a commitment from the international community to provide the knowledge and experience (good practices, lessons learned), resources, and technology needed to support the implementation of the accepted recommendations.

It is progress towards meeting the SDGs that should be reviewed, within the framework of the accountability mechanism.

Definitive judgements about the nature and frequency of these reviews would at this stage be premature, as key aspects of the SDGs—their number, structure, ambition, and means of implementation—are not yet known. However, if member state participation in the accountability framework were to be voluntary or less than universal, this would argue against attempting to cover all member states. Likewise, if the breadth of current structure of the SDGs (as proposed by the Open Working Group—with 17 goals and 169 targets) remains, such a framework cannot, realistically, be monitored (under such an accountability mechanism as is under discussion here) on an annual basis for all member states.

It is the behaviour of governments, rather than of the private sector or other development actors, that should be reviewed, within the framework of the accountability mechanism. It is governments that:

- * undertake legally binding development commitments;*
- * possess the statutory power to pass laws and introduce policies and programmes that can influence the behaviour of the private sector and other development actors; and*
- * are ultimately accountable to their societies (electorates) on the whole, rather than to segments therein, for their performance on sustainable development.*

Experience from the UPR and other such mechanisms shows that, in order to be effective, reviews conducted under an inter-state accountability framework must be voluntary in nature. Other reviews conducted by other actors (e.g., civil society) need not be so constrained.

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?

The four bullet points mentioned above are spot on. To these could be added:

- * Support by UN Country Teams for efforts to more closely link the SDGs to national development/poverty reduction strategies/fiscal frameworks/sectoral programming, particularly at the indicator level; and*
- * Greater efforts by member states represented on the executive boards of the Bretton Woods Institutions to ensure that BWI programming and policy advising recognize the primacy of the SDGs (rather than treating them as an afterthought—as has often been the case with the MDGs).*

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?

The UPR seems to be the most effective of the above-mentioned mechanisms, in terms of: (i) having a universal character; (ii) generating actionable recommendations that are taken on board and addressed in a multi-sectoral fashion by member states; (iii) without having to be based on a more detailed body of international and especially national law (as is the case with the WTO TPRM). The UPR therefore seems to be a good model to pursue.

This exercise should be linked to/aligned with the analysis in/publication of the UNDESA <<Global Sustainable Development Report>>.

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?

All of the above ideas are good, and should be encouraged/supported.

Additional key challenges include: (i) adopting a model/mechanism that is acceptable to member states; and (ii) in designing the SDGs, minimizing the technical weaknesses apparent in the MDGs as a monitoring framework.
