
**Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Seventieth session**

Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on: Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda
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DRAFT

Background Note *

* This document has been prepared without formal editing, and will be revised to reflect the outcomes of the consultation.

Executive Summary

1. Although the Millennium Declaration affirmed the “shared responsibility” of all relevant parties, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not establish a complete framework of inter-related institutional commitments, functions, standards and processes that would hold key actors accountable for the achievement of the goals.
2. Given the global dialogue on accountability for the post-2015 development agenda, there is hope that an effective framework that can meet the challenges of an integrated, comprehensive and ambitious development framework, as proposed by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development. The outcome of the work of the OWG to date indicates that:
 - a. 17 SDGs will be further elaborated through targets and indicators focused on measurable outcomes recognizing the economic, social and environmental interlinkages;
 - b. Although SDGs are global in nature and universally applicable, there is recognition that they will need to take into account national realities, capacities and levels of development and respect for different national policies and priorities;
 - c. The sustainable development agenda will need to fully implement a range of the international programs and commitments;
 - d. There is need for a robust mechanism of implementation review for a sustainable development agenda and to monitor the implementation of the SDGs it will be important to improve the availability of, and access to, data and statistics; and
 - e. The global partnership for sustainable development will be critical for the implementation of SDGs and will involve active engagement of governments as well as civil society, private sectors and the UN system.
3. This background is critical to keep in perspective while deliberating accountability and review mechanisms for the post-2015 development agenda. There is need to develop a shared understanding of the critical commitments of different players and stakeholders, and set in place an integrated framework of accountability and monitoring that is grounded in strong buy-in and ownership of the member states at the national, regional and global platforms. Each of these layers should also effectively support and reinforce each other.
4. A global accountability framework that focuses on areas of development cooperation will reinforce the means of implementation and will need to go beyond the MDG8 commitments that could not be realized, the shortcomings in which have impacted the MDG outcomes and results.
5. There is a range of options for a monitoring and accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda. A few guiding principles will help ensure that the design of the architecture of the framework is functional, open and transparent. They include:
 - a. The need for strengthened mechanisms to ensure they are more comprehensive and outcome-driven, and recognize the depth and breadth of the new development agenda, while respecting national and regional realities; at the same time, these mechanisms should be simple and workable.
 - b. The need for strong leadership and ownership of the SDG agenda, with implementation mechanisms backed by strong political commitment, effectively-resourced institutional frameworks and better interagency coordination;
 - c. Increased investment in relevant, measurable, accurate, complete, timely and internationally-comparable data and statistics, accompanied by the strengthening of national and

regional statistical systems, for independent and credible tracking of SDG progress. This is the data revolution we need – incorporating technological advances and disaggregated indicators to make sure that nobody is left behind;

d. Monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be open and transparent, backed by effective communication strategies and involve states, civil society, the private sector, women, youth and other key stakeholders, as well as the international development community at large;

e. Mainstreaming and integrating monitoring and accountability frameworks within the regional Sustainable Development Forums, to ensure consistency and coherence. At the inaugural session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), feeding into the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), participants also highlighted the importance of such frameworks for the region; and

f. Defining the central role of the United Nations regional commissions in coordinating and collating progress on meeting national commitments, based on the reviews conducted jointly by the UN agencies with sectoral and thematic mandates, and also effectively including regional commissions within the Global Partnerships institutional framework which defines and monitors development cooperation, but thus far does not have representation of the regional commissions.

6. In line with the United Nations' system-wide effort to take stock of existing accountability and monitoring platforms, UN ESCAP has convened its first *Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda* from 5-6 August 2014 to solicit views of the meeting on an effective accountability framework which will be submitted to the UN for its incorporation in the Secretary General's Report on the matter.

7. This background note underlines the need for an accountability framework that identifies inter-linked mechanisms for monitoring, review and remedy at the national, regional and global levels, to ensure the successful implementation of a post-2015 development agenda.

8. With the establishment of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), and the specific attention that has been paid to regional commissions, it particularly focusses on the regional dimension of accountability for the post-2015 development agenda and proposes several considerations for shaping an accountability framework with the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development playing an important role, in particular through strengthened peer review mechanisms.

I. Introduction

“Shortfalls have occurred not because the goals are unreachable, or because time is too short. We are off course because of unmet commitments, inadequate resources and a lack of focus and accountability.”

(United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon)

1. While the Millennium Declaration¹ affirmed the “shared responsibility” of all the relevant parties, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not fully articulate the responsibilities to fulfill commitments, or establish a complete framework of inter-related institutional commitments, functions, standards and processes that would hold key actors accountable for the achievement of the goals.

2. An effective accountability framework that encompasses the global, regional and national levels will be critical for the successful implementation of a post-2015 development agenda. Emerging views and proposals have been shared among member states at the global level.² Following this dialogue, the UN Secretary General requested regional commissions of the United Nations to convene a series of consultations on accountability in each region of the world. *The Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on Accountability for the Post 2015 agenda* is being organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on 5-6 August 2014.

3. The regional consultation provides the opportunity for further examination of the key requirements for an effective accountability framework. While such a framework will encompass all intergovernmental tiers at the global, regional and national levels, and involve key stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society and others, there must be clarity on how such a framework will work to support implementation at the national level.

4. The role of strengthened regional level accountability has received significant attention in this regard. The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), under the auspices of ECOSOC, shall conduct regular reviews, starting in 2016, on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives, as indicated in the Ministerial Declaration of the 2014 high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council and the HLPF convened under the auspices of the Council. In line with the UN General Assembly Resolution 67/290 on the *Format and organization of the high-level political forum on sustainable development*, the Declaration also highlights the importance of the regional dimension for sustainable development, and invites the United Nations regional commissions to “contribute to the work of the Economic and Social Council and the high-level political forum, including through annual regional meetings, with the involvement of other relevant regional entities, major groups and other relevant stakeholders, as appropriate.”

5. The first annual Asia-Pacific preparatory meeting for the HLPF, the *Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development* took place on 19-21 May 2014. There, participants highlighted that the sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda should be backed by effective accountability and monitoring frameworks,³ and outlined recommendations for the future shape of this forum.

6. At the global level, the dialogue has focused on strengthening development cooperation to reinforce the means of implementation agreed in the framework of the SDGs, and go beyond the commitments expressed in MDG 8, the shortcomings in which have negatively impacted MDG outcomes. The Mexico Communiqué⁴ underlines a commitment to inclusion and solidarity and “a paradigm shift from aid effectiveness to effective development cooperation” with ODA as “the main source of international development assistance to better support the long-term and broad developmental impact of a strengthened mobilization of domestic resources and the convergence of efforts of all public and private development stakeholders at all levels.” The Communiqué goes on to recommit to financing for inclusive and sustainable development, “particularly those agreed in the Monterrey Consensus and its follow up and at the United Nations Conferences on the Least

Developed Countries and at Rio + 20, including ODA targets” and to generating “tangible results and opportunities for all, advancing socio- economic transformations and securing a sustainable future that leaves no one behind.”

7. Further dialogue to shape an effective accountability framework must keep in focus the scope of commitments and scale of this challenge. On 19 July 2014, the Proposals of the Open Working Group (OWG) for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were released. The Outcome document of the OWG has offered a comprehensive agenda and emphasized the overarching objectives of sustainable development which are poverty eradication, sustainable patterns of consumption and production, and protecting and managing the natural resource base of economic and social development. The OWG offers the following guidance on some key elements of the implementation framework of this development agenda:

- o 17 SDGs will be further elaborated through targets and indicators focused on measurable outcomes recognizing the economic, social and environmental interlinkages;
- o Although SDGs are global in nature and universally applicable there is recognition that it will take into national realities, capacities and levels of development and respect for different national policies and priorities;
- o The sustainable development agenda will need to fully implement a range of the international programs and commitments;
- o There is need for robust mechanism of implementation review for sustainable development agenda and to monitor the implementation of the SDGs it will be important to improve the availability of, and access to, data and statistics; and
- o The global partnership for sustainable development will be critical for the implementation of SDGs and will involve active engagement of governments as well as civil society, private sectors and the UN system.

8. While re-thinking, and where appropriate, strengthening, existing frameworks, the changing international environment since the signing of the Millennium Declaration in 2000 should be recognized – the economic and financial crisis of 2008, the emergence of a multi-polar economy, and increasing global inequalities all play a hand in framing the effective delivery of international commitments. Stakeholders have underlined that “traditional forms of accountability are unfit for the new challenges of development.”⁵

9. The evolution of the accountability landscape must also be considered, noting that there is a “groundswell of accountability innovation, with collaboration at the core.”⁶ Accountability mechanisms now incorporate more inclusive representation of development actors and increasingly engage civil society organizations, parliamentarians and other national level accountability actors for a broader coverage of stakeholders and mutuality.⁷

10. Drawing on the lessons of the MDG experience, there is need to develop a shared understanding of a concept of an accountability framework, to secure key commitments of different stakeholders, to consolidate the buy in and ownership of members states at the national, regional and global platforms, and to ensure that each of these layers effectively supports and reinforces each other to impact national-level delivery. A few guiding principles will help ensure that the design of the architecture of the framework is functional, open and transparent. They include:

- o The need for strengthened mechanisms to ensure they are more comprehensive, outcome-driven, and recognize the depth and breadth of the new development agenda, while respecting national and regional realities. At the same time, these mechanisms should be simple and workable.

- o The need for strong leadership and ownership of the SDG agenda, with implementation mechanisms backed by strong political commitment, effectively-resourced institutional frameworks and better interagency coordination;
- o Increased investment in relevant, measurable, accurate, complete, timely and internationally-comparable data and statistics, accompanied by the strengthening of national and regional statistical systems, for independent and credible tracking of SDG progress. This is the data revolution we need – incorporating technological advances and disaggregated indicators to make sure that nobody is left behind;
- o Monitoring and accountability mechanisms should be open and transparent, backed by effective communication strategies and involve states, civil society, the private sector, women, youth and other key stakeholders, as well as the international development community at large;
- o Mainstreaming and integrating monitoring and accountability frameworks within the regional Sustainable Development Forums, to ensure consistency and coherence. At the inaugural session of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), feeding into the High-level Political Forum (HLPF), participants also highlighted the importance of such frameworks for the region; and
- o Defining the central role of the United Nations regional commissions in coordinating and collating progress on meeting national commitments, based on the reviews conducted jointly by the UN agencies with sectoral and thematic mandates, and also effectively including regional commissions within the Global Partnerships institutional framework which defines and monitors development cooperation, but thus far does not have representation of the regional commissions.

II. Challenges and potential - an effective accountability framework

“Global accountability for development cooperation is about providing incentives to meet voluntary commitments, with the promise of sustainable development results as the most powerful motivators.”⁸

11. An accountability framework in relation to the post-2015 development agenda refers to the set of institutions, procedures and forums that together would ensure that each sovereign state meets its commitments to shared development goals. Such a framework would allow for measuring the progress of procedures, policies and their performance in comparison to the initially set goals, and for facilitating corrective action by addressing shortcomings in performance and lessons learned.

12. The global dialogue has emphasized the importance of lessons learned in moving forward on the post-2015 development agenda. Effective accountability frameworks have increased state or institutional responsiveness, lowered corruption, built new democratic spaces for citizen engagement, empowered local voices and facilitated better budget utilization and delivery of services.⁹ In the context of development cooperation, effective mutual accountability mechanisms in which all partners are held accountable for the roles they play, have been important for instilling trust among developing country actors and promoting change in behaviour.¹⁰

13. The experiences of these frameworks point to the need to increase equitable participation of development actors, to strengthen science and data-based monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and to rectify the imbalance of power between development actors to ensure impact at all levels.¹¹

14. These lessons learned are complemented and reinforced by an examination of key gaps in the existing accountability frameworks. In terms of the overall architecture and concept, existing frameworks have often been based on a “bottom to top” orientation that accumulates power and disperses responsibility.¹² Overlaps among frameworks related to different commitments and a lack of international community and UN system coherence have, in the past, reduced the effectiveness of

accountability frameworks. A focus on compliance has reduced interest in participation, innovation and partnership, and at the global level, created an aversion to the discussion on accountability in some instances. Although mutual accountability is often promoted, such approaches can provide incentives for participants to alleviate pressure on themselves by being less rigorous in assessment of others.

15. Participation and inclusion remains a concern, with a large body of less-than satisfactory experience in the development cooperation context. Monitoring mechanisms have often lacked expert and stakeholder input, while at the global level, “relatively few mechanisms give partner countries an equal voice or base targets and methodologies on their perspectives.”¹³

16. Shortcomings in the formulation of targets have hindered progress, where targets have often been difficult to measure and sensitive to changes in policy and practice, and inadequately supported by agreed standards and principles.¹⁴

17. Monitoring and reporting mechanisms are in evidence across the governance landscape. In addition to an evolving monitoring framework for the MDGs that may be adapted to the SDGs,¹⁵ there are also several initiatives to monitor MDG achievement at the national level (see Annex 3 for examples from South Asia). However, there is notable absence of, or relatively weak, “remedy” mechanisms that ensure that action is taken when these monitoring and review initiatives reveal shortfalls in achievement. This is a major gap to be closed.

18. The post-2015 development agenda demands, at the national level, fully-elaborated mechanisms, while at the regional level, national experiences and conclusions with respect to monitoring, review and remedy should be collated and analyzed. At the global level, a comprehensive and strengthened accountability framework should be established. A shared understanding of the concept of an accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda may be shaped by the assumption that monitoring, review and remedy¹⁶ are needed at each level of accountability - national, regional and global.

19. An effective accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda must focus on strengthening and linking global, regional and national dialogue both horizontally and vertically - across all sectors and dimensions of the framework. Synergies are important to maximize the benefits of an effective accountability framework on development progress. It has been underlined that currently the “landscape is delivering less than the sum of its parts.”¹⁷

20. Given the diversity of platforms and frameworks for accountability – for example within the social sector and in the environment and development field (see Annex 2), the post-2015 development agenda presents a particular challenge to integrate all three dimensions of sustainable development and harmonize these commitments and platforms under a unified agenda and accountability framework.

21. Mechanisms should be both horizontally and vertically linked. Vertical linkages should ensure that monitoring of progress at the global level would build on monitoring mechanisms and efforts at national and regional levels, while reviews of the results of monitoring efforts should likewise reflect the views of stakeholders at the national and regional levels. Global agreements on the responses to a shared understanding of levels of achievement, underlying issues and investments needed, should be based on credible processes at the national, regional levels. Global dialogue should further inform national responses.

22. Horizontal linkages between monitoring, review and remedy mechanisms at the national, regional and global levels would ensure that national dialogue is constructive and focussed, integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development, and should strongly engage civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders

23. Within such a framework a diversity of accountability mechanisms may be deployed, taking various forms, including ‘spotlights’ or independent non-official assessments of performance; ‘mirrors’ such as peer review programmes, or even ‘two-way mirrors’ as a mechanism for mutual accountability. **Monitoring mechanisms** should be independent (but participatory), provide a

credible baseline analysis and regular and transparent reporting of progress towards goals, and also be participatory and benefit from technological advances and the data revolution.¹⁸ They would include monitoring of international development cooperation¹⁹ on the post-2015 development agenda, continued focus on aid effectiveness, and also monitoring of partnerships. They will also require investment in a data revolution (see box 1). **Review mechanisms** would be based on “mutual accountability.” Review mechanisms at the global, regional, and national levels, would be deployed to enable a shared understanding of progress and priorities, and would allow for the active participation of all stakeholders to strengthen rigor of review. **Remedy mechanisms** would ensure that the results of monitoring and review impact further implementation and allocation of resources at the global, regional, and national levels. Remedies for shortcomings in progress/performance (for example reallocation of resources, new partnerships and changes in work programmes and development strategies) can be defined collaboratively among stakeholders.

24. Table 1. illustrates the kinds of mechanisms that can be put in place at each level of a comprehensive and effective accountability framework for a post-2015 development agenda in which the HLPF and the regional sustainable development forums play a central role at the global and regional levels. A regional accountability platform in the form of the Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development and related mechanisms for accountability assumes critical importance. A credible synthesis of the results of monitoring, review and remedy mechanisms/efforts at the national level that may be shared at the global level is needed to inform prioritization of investments, shared understandings of global progress and potential solutions.

Table 1. Platforms and mechanisms for an effective accountability framework for the post-2015 Development Agenda

Platforms	Potential (*) and existing mechanisms/tools		
	Monitoring	Review	Remedy
Global ECOSOC, UNGA, HLPF, DCF & financing for development processes	Self-reporting on national progress Global sustainable development report (independent) SDG monitoring* (independent, multi-agency, inclusive, taking advantage of the data revolution)	Global independent expert review group(s)* Standards and principles* (e.g. decent work, sustainable infrastructure, financial regulation, etc).	Specific political sessions/events for defining new directions for investment and resource allocation at the global level, in response to monitoring and review* Multi-stakeholder mechanisms for collaborative design of solutions by stakeholders and experts (by individual goal?) – with recommendations to political body*
Regional			

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