

REPORT OF HLPF STRATEGY GROUP MEETING UN Headquarters, New York, April 3-6, 2018

WFEO attended the HLPF Strategy Group meeting representing the Scientific and Technological Major Group (STC MG).

1. Objectives

The meeting main objectives were:

- To outline an action plan in preparation for the HLPF (High Level Political Forum) 2018, including activities, responsibilities, political leadership, and strategy to mobilize the Coordination Mechanism (CM).
- To discuss and set up initial elements for a strategy regarding the MGoS (Major Groups and other Stakeholders) mobilization towards the HLPF structure review and the HLPF under the auspices of the General Assembly (GA) 2019.
- To review the organization of the work, membership, accountability and other pending organizational matters.
- To explore strategies to strengthen the MGoS system, including its role as a space to promote partnership and exchange, cooperation, advocacy and communication.

2. Meeting with ECOSOC President, Ms. Marie Chatardova

ECOSOC President stressed the will to strengthen the Civil Society stakeholder engagement for the implementation of SDGs through ECOSOC.

Due to Member States (MS) concerns of overlap between the work done by UN DESA division and ECOSOC, regarding support and coordination of HLPF activities, implementation of structural reform is under way. The reform elements approved by the Secretary General include the transfer of HLPF servicing responsibilities from DESA to the ECOSOC office for support and coordination (Office of Intergovernmental Support and Coordination for Sustainable Development). The new appointed director is Ms. Marion Barthelemy. This office will provide services for the GA and ECOSOC, thus eliminating future duplication.

DESA will not be servicing for HLPF, but will be working in the manner of a SDG hub. The Division for Sustainable Development will be renamed "Division for SDGs". It is expected to be an anchor for the SDGs thematically. There will be stronger emphasis on capacity building and partnerships. They expect to keep promoting thematic experts' meetings for some SDGs. The process of transition will occur in the next months and, in the meantime, there will be parallel work of both these bodies, while the fully functioning modality in the new way is expected to occur in 2019.

The STC MG took this opportunity to state ICSU's concerns regarding meetings procedures: "we need further guidance from the UN secretariat to structure our work, anticipate requests and identify early opportunities for engagement. This calls for the UN to clarify how they see the role of MGoS and to point out, in the upcoming 6 months to one year, what are the opportunities for engagement. In this way, we will be able to do some forward planning, rather than reacting to invitations that come often at the last minute. Self-govern is important but without this strong partnership with the relevant divisions of the UN secretariat, it is hard to engage effectively".

3. Main actions

The following are critical points discussed at the Strategic Group meeting:

- The CM shall become the body for accountability of the sustainable development agenda. Such a function will strengthen the HLPF role for the implementation of SDGs.
- How to have a safe space where MGoS members can speak, without being threatened or silenced by government authorities? How to make sure that the safety

and integrity of those asking the questions is ensured? The implications of submitting questions to Member States' delegations three days in advance, so that they have access to them prior to the Voluntary National Review (VNR) session, gives time to identify authors of questions. To avoid this, the HLPF Strategy Group will promote using an autonomous website to post questions and to account for which ones were answered and which ones were not. A separate and autonomous web page that the CM would manage on its own, besides DESA's web page, should be established.

- There have been individual interests of constituencies to get slots to intervene disregarding the MGoS collective standing. This caused a conflicting environment for the Steering Group (SG) and the CM and challenged the HLPF space to expand the messages of all constituencies. The Coordination Mechanism (CM) should allow the Steering Group to take action to avoid such situations.
- The opportunity for an independent secretariat and the impact of this decision in terms of SG structure, financing and fundraising, including potential legal and political implications, should be considered in the short term.

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