



ASIA CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERSHIP FOR
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT (APSD)

Asia Civil Society Partnership for Sustainable Development (APSD)

Need for reforming the HLPF and the VNR processes

Proposal put forward by APSD

a. Background:

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) was held in New York this year from July 9 – 18, 2018. HLPF is a central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The member nations present their voluntary national review of the SDGs in the HLPF every year. This time 46 nations presented their VNR.

Despite the SDGs being in place for three years, the World continues to face serious challenges. The world is becoming more unequal; the challenges around climate change, conflicts and migrant issues are huge.

As Civil Society it's our responsibility to see that adequate steps are taken by the national governments towards fulfilling the goals by 2030. It's necessary that HLPF as the forum for monitoring Agenda 2030 proves itself to be an effective body. This is time to discuss the functioning of the HLPF.

Asia Civil Society Partnership for Sustainable Development (APSD), a civil society partnership in Asia level on SDGs initiated the process of discussion on the HLPF reforms through webinar.

This paper is based on the discussion held in the webinar on HLPF reforms on September 7, 2018 where CSO members from national, regional to global levels participated and shared their views on SDGs, Voluntary National Review (VNR) and the High Level Political Forum (HLPF).

b. VNR and role of HLPF:

In the first United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 - known as the Rio Earth Summit, the association of the civil society was formalized and they were called the Major Groups. Initially there were 9 major groups and eventually it was increased in 2012 (Rio+20). The Major Groups are as follows:



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- Women
- Children and Youth
- Indigenous Peoples
- Non-Governmental Organizations
- Local Authorities
- Workers and Trade Unions
- Business and Industry
- Scientific and Technological Community
- Farmers
- Local communities
- Volunteer groups and foundations
- Migrants and families,
- Older persons
- And persons with disabilities,

VNR process: There is a process of voluntary national review (VNR) of the Agenda 2030 and SDGs by the member nations. It's voluntary. UNSC sets a guideline for reporting for the country-wise review of the implementation of SDGs. It is necessary that the national processes should include relevant stakeholders including the civil society. The basis of the HLPF is the VNRs.

VNR include all SDGs. But in the first half of HLPF some thematic reviews are done. The Secretary General progress report on SDGs is also released and discussed in first part of the HLPF. It includes course of implementing SDGs, crosscutting goals, reports from regions, LDCs, LNOB etc

As the Major Group we highlight our contribution and engage in the process at the Un level.

c. HLPF 2019:

We have already had three HLPFs in 2016, 2017 and 2018. The 2019 HLPF will be significant, as it will do a first cycle (four-year) review of the Agenda 2003. There will be two HLPFs in 2019. One is the regular one in the July – the ministerial one and the other in in September by the heads of the States which will be convened by the UN Security Council (UNSC). The holistic review of the processes will be done in the September one and the declaration is likely to come in the September itself.



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d. Observations from VNRs and HLPFs:

- HLPF processes are weak. The whole mechanism of accountability and monitoring of SDGs need to be reformed to make them robust.
- Many of the national processes are relatively limited in consulting the civil society and other stakeholders. It should be built through inclusive processes and decentralised meetings needed to be done to get inputs.
- In India for example, there was no opportunities for shadow reports done the CSOs to reach official delegations and deliberations. Neither they were they part of the official report.
- There is lack of awareness in the part of the national governments on the process of VNR.
- Even CSOs are also not fully conversant with the processes of Agenda 2030.
- In Nepal, the CSOs held consultation and submitted the recommendations to the governments. The CSOs are however not happy with the process.
- In Singapore, the CSOs interacted with the government but they did not involve them in the VNR process
- In Sri Lanka though CSOs were consulted, the process was not adequate.
- There is no space for the Shadow report in UN website
- In some cases there was no time for the CSOs to raise questions to the official reports after they are presented in the HLPF.
- No space for meaningful dialogue among government and CSOs in HLPF. The VNR lab is meant for that but it has its own limitations.
- We do not hear much of transformation. No meaningful discussion is coming from VNR and the HLPF process.
- Verification needed in the global indicator framework
- There are so many target and indicators, which makes very hard to track. In last years government have chosen to pick to the one they are suitable fir them to report on.
- Data gap is a major issue. Where CSO can play any role.
- The official indicators at the global level have been adopted by national governments in most cases. Technical aspects are involved there. Indicators adopted by the governments need a lot of validation, but it does not have resources or expertise to do it.



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e. Role of the CSOs (What CSOs have done and should do plan ahead):

- The CSOs have been in the forefront in raising awareness, doing shadow reports and engaging in the VNR processes, so also in the other UN processes at the national regional and global levels. The CSOs in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Laos, Philippines, Japan, Thailand, Bangladesh etc prepared shadow report or civil society reports.
- CSOs have done capacity building of its members
- It has taken public awareness campaigns like the Global Day of Action by GCAP, Action4SD etc to generate awareness, seek accountability and create impact.
- Action4SD is developing a global handbook on Voluntary People's Review (VPR)
- Role of CSOs to identify the gaps in implementation of the SDGs.
- We need to tell the government and UN that whole implementation of SDGs and the VNR are not technocratic exercises and they should not be reduced to some data. It should not miss the needed the dynamism.
- In some countries, we can do independent sessions on key goals and targets
- We can work together in area of evidence as we move forward to start developing some solid plan for the across Asia.

f. Proposal for HLPF reforms:

- The national processes should be built through inclusive processes and decentralised meetings ought to be held to feed into the document. We need to have whole society approach, not just a narrow government approaching.
- The regional forums should provide space for CSOs. The APFSD (Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development) is very strong in inclusiveness of CSO
- It has to be an exercise and processes in entire year running to HLPF. Just not the last two months.
- Bring all stakeholders to a platforms – not just CSOs
- The UN systems must ensure accountability and transparent process and the national governments should be held accountable in the UN system. Need of accountability at HLPF.
- So much of private investment will come in the garb of implementing SDGs. The private players should be transparent in their investments.



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- The VNR process must report the nature of such investments and ensure that they do not violate human rights and damage environment.
- There should be a 3-tier process. Pre-HLPF, HLPF and the post-HLPF. Before HLPF the consultations ought to be held at decentralised level and with various stakeholder. In the HLPF itself there should be meaningful exchanges between the government and the other stakeholders. And after HLPF, back in the country the governments should inform the outcome and commitments made to the Parliament/Legislature and to the general public.

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