
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific Seventieth session

Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on: Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda
Bangkok, 5 August 2014

Draft Chair's summary of the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Overview

1. The Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda was organized by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) in Bangkok Thailand, from 5 to 6 August 2014.
2. The Consultation was chaired by H.E. Ms. Oyun Sanjaasuren, Minister of Environment and Green Development (Mongolia), and attended by around 150 participants, including experts and representatives of Governments, major groups and other stakeholder organizations and entities within the United Nations system.
3. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following ESCAP members and associate members :Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Fiji, France, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Japan, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Marshall Islands, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Viet Nam, Cook Islands and Macao, China.
4. In the four sessions held during the meeting, the following issues were discussed: (i) National Leadership on Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda; (ii) Regional Platforms for Accountability - Role and Functions for Asia and the Pacific; (iii) Accountability and a Renewed Global Partnership; and (iv) Innovations and partnerships for the future we want - The role of the private sector.
5. Participants agreed that the Chair's Summary be brought to the attention of the Secretary-General to inform his Synthesis Report that would launch the intergovernmental negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda.

National Leadership on Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

6. Clear threads of consensus emerged from the discussion including on the necessity of a strengthened and transformative accountability agenda to support the post-2015 development agenda, anchored in human rights, with a focus on equality, sustainability and non-discrimination and that integrates local, national (including parliamentarians) and global actors and processes actively, inclusively and equitably in the design and implementation of decentralized accountability frameworks including tools for monitoring and evaluation. Building an effective accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda was understood to be a transitional and long term undertaking, with democratic ownership and shared leadership for its delivery reaching all the way through local, regional and global levels.

7. Positive experiences with mechanisms such as bottom-up participatory and gender budgeting, civil society led parallel monitoring and assessment processes and nationally integrated social and gender-responsive accountability mechanisms were shared, as well as innovative mechanisms to reinterpret and leverage existing monitoring and accountability tools – such as a proposal to revise the Human Development Index to include select sustainability dimensions put forward in the post-2015 agenda, such as per capita CO₂ emission and measures of income inequality. Inclusive dialogue and effective communications on the global development agenda at the national level in order to raise the profile and pertinence of the global agenda for local level stakeholders, including by working with traditional and new media sectors, was stressed.

8. Among the key challenges highlighted during the session were a lack of capacity for effective national accountability and governance, financial and human resources, public engagement and awareness, and appropriate incentives. The panel underscored the need for statistical capacity strengthening by highlighting lack of data (including sex, disability and other socio-economically disaggregated data) in key policy areas such as disaster risk reduction and management; the critical importance of measurable targets and appropriate indicators to generate action, and, national ownership of data sources.

9. Recommendations included that an effective accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda should go beyond vertical relationships to encompass a multi-sectoral framework that avoids duplication and leverages existing effective accountability mechanisms to streamline, harmonize and reduce the burden of accountability for the post-2015 development agenda and existing treaty bodies. Efforts should be made to link existing mechanisms and ensure systematic communication/exchange of information among them. Multiple mechanisms in similar fields should draw on each other more systematically to ensure synergies, reduce duplication and ease the reporting burden of countries. To ensure sustainability, accountability for the international goals should be mainstreamed into national development, planning, monitoring and reporting.

10. Strong and long term commitment to strengthening capacity to engage and implement accountability mechanisms for the post-2015 development agenda at the local level in support of government functions

was cited as critical to national accountability. Here, several speakers highlighted the opportunities for regional and subregional organizations in supporting nationally-defined processes and mechanisms.

11. It was recommended that national governments with support by the international community take a lead role in the Data Revolution to realize the transformative changes that are required for both developing and developed countries to produce and disseminate high quality disaggregated sustainability statistics. It was highlighted that for such efforts to succeed, basic building blocks in the form of robust national statistics offices and strong civil registration and vital statistics systems must be in place and appropriately resourced. An opportunity exists for all accountability actors to embrace new technologies and make use of new data sources to close the digital divide - including through passive data collection by mobile devices, satellite technology and business intelligence - to improve data literacy, collection and sharing for accountability, particularly for those with limited access to information and communication technology (ICT). Here also capacity building targeted to respond to national needs would be critical for such opportunities to be seized.

Regional Platforms for Accountability - Role and Functions for Asia and the Pacific

12. It was highlighted that subregional monitoring and accountability frameworks play an important role in developing joint strategies for regional accountability frameworks. The achievements of subregional frameworks for monitoring and reporting, peer-review, engagement of civil society, as well as data standardization established under the Inter-State Commission on Sustainable Development ICSD, Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS), CSR ASEAN Network and ESCAP Statistics Committee, as well as of the Asian Development Bank itself were described by the panellists.

13. The issue of ensuring comparability and timely availability of data for reporting on SDGs implementation was discussed and the importance of standardization to ensure quality and comparability of official statistics was stressed. Bearing in mind the present variability in the quality of official national statistics, the need to enhance national statistics capacity to support effective monitoring also at the regional level was highlighted. In reference to the data revolution, participants cautioned that while digitization of information has pushed further the frontier of statistics, it must be recognized that population groups without access to information technology are left out in data collection exercises that rely on new data sources such as social media.

14. The discussion highlighted the need for stronger stakeholder engagement. Formalization of engagement of CSO and private sector as well as parliamentarians in regional monitoring and accountability mechanisms was highlighted.

15. The discussion highlighted that defining the layers of accountability and the processes would ensure effectiveness of the accountability frameworks, at the regional and subregional levels. “If everyone is accountable, no one is accountable” was quoted.

16. It was highlighted that it was time to view the private sector not just as a resource provider but as a contributor to strengthening accountability frameworks by creating institutional systems to review and reward good behaviour of the corporate sector, especially in sustainable production and resource efficiency. At the national level legislative frameworks could stimulate corporate business compliance with allocation of funding for the sustainable development agenda, similar to positive examples shared of regulated by law allocation of 2% of corporate profits to sustainable development projects.

17. There was an agreement from all participants that enhanced political leaders' commitment and examination of challenges of political economy is of high importance for advancing the development of an accountability framework, particularly at the regional level.

18. The panellists and discussants emphasized the relevance of people-centered accountability and of strengthening national accountability mechanisms that included civil society organizations, particularly those that represented marginalized and vulnerable groups such as youth, persons with disabilities, or migrants. Calls were made for using a rights-based approach in the accountability mechanism to make sure that "no one would be left behind" and to integrate existing global commitments, such as the Beijing Platform for Action in national and regional accountability mechanisms.

19. The panel also highlighted that key concerns such as deepened poverty and inequality, and pervasive violence against women required structural changes, which included redistributive justice, decent work for all, social and gender justice, gender parity in political and economic decision-making, and the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence.

20. The panel also noted that key youth concerns included creating decent job opportunities and providing a platform for youth participation. Given that Asia and the Pacific has the largest population of youth in the world, with 717 million young women and men aged between 15 to 24, their voices needed to be heard in the formulation of the post-2015 development agenda. Youth could also be mobilized to contribute to the post-2015 accountability framework, particularly in respect to monitoring and evaluation of progress and achievements. Through the use of ICT, including social media, youth would be in the position to help collect data, track progress and share facts with appropriate bodies.

21. There was a broad agreement that regional level monitoring will offer a peer review mechanism for assessment and cross-fertilization. The Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) has the potential to evolve into a platform for monitoring and accountability, while complementing national efforts and supporting regular assessment.

22. There is a need for a broader agreement on contours and scope of a regional accountability mechanism with the focus on review, monitoring and evaluation and on how regional monitoring and accountability would complement and reinforce the voices of civil society and the private sector including in their efforts to reshape national systems. It was highlighted to examine options that will enhance regularity and openness, inclusiveness and timeliness.

23. It was recommended that the partnership among existing regional and sub-regional mechanisms such as the ESCAP Committee on Statistics, ASEAN Community Statistical System, the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development for Central Asia, ESCAP Statistical Institute for Asia and the Pacific, the Asian Development Bank and other institutions be strengthened to provide a coherent platform for countries to adopt agreed standards and make concerted efforts for improvements.

24. It was recommended to more fully engage the private sector to allow their expanded engagement and contribution beyond resource provision. More specifically, it was recommended that the private sector be engaged in identifying the data needs for SDG monitoring to facilitate their enhanced contribution to data production for accountability. Similarly establishment of CSR tracking mechanisms at the regional level was encouraged.

25. It was also recommended that the regional bodies/UN/Regional Commissions create platforms for young people to engage in accountability processes especially in monitoring progress on employment, technology transfer (newest technologies), bridging the gap between rich and poor countries, and others.

Accountability and a Renewed Global Partnership

26. In a wide ranging dialogue the session discussed several dimensions of a renewed global partnership for accountability. The fundamental importance of reducing the trust deficit was stressed, and in this regard, the evolving nature of global partnership and the progress made was highlighted. There is now global consensus on a paradigm shift from aid effectiveness to effective development cooperation; this would better support the implementation of a universal development agenda. Although the long-standing north-south divide seemed no longer workable or relevant, south-south cooperation should not replace development finance, and the needs of the LDCs and other countries with special needs must remain in focus.

27. Global partnership should be inclusive and include proportional representation of civil society, including those most marginalized, in a non-discriminatory environment. It was underlined that CSOs can only be effective as fully independent development actors.

28. Dialogue to foster learning and improvement was proposed to support changes in behaviour and mind-sets and complement monitoring and “naming and shaming.” A comprehensive approach to global partnerships is needed to push national capacity to address implementation needs.

29. The dialogue brought governance front and centre. Although this raised important but difficult questions about the diversity of democratic contexts in which any accountability framework would have to operate, it was shown that even non-binding commitments could influence significant national action. At the same time, incentives were needed to ensure ownership of the global agenda.

30. Further work is needed to get the SDG framework right to support transparency and stakeholder engagement - a preliminary review shows

significant deficits in the data that would be needed to support the current SDG proposals. Investments in information and data capacity should be given top priority.

31. The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) was challenged to become a meaningful forum for inclusive intergovernmental dialogue, and the Development Cooperation Forum should play a larger role. Open, participatory, intergovernmental space should be provided for review of partnerships developed in the name of sustainable development.

32. A greater focus on vertical accountability was urged. The disconnect between the grassroots levels and the global level was emphasized as a barrier to local-level impact, and all were reminded that the digital world was still not fully inclusive. The international community must “walk the talk” in order to be more accountable to its member States and to support a global partnership.

33. Accountability mechanisms were also discussed and recommendations shared. Although there is support for peer reviews that have worked well, objective examination of the peer review mechanism to determine actual impacts, is needed. Other recommendations regarding mechanisms included: a global reporting mechanism that includes the voices of civil society; the establishment of an open, transparent and participatory intergovernmental space for oversight, monitoring and to review any partnership developed in the name of sustainable development; and to utilize the human rights architecture, including treaty bodies, special procedures including special rapporteurs, and the universal peer review mechanisms for accountability for sustainable development. Where accountability should also deliver justice, legally binding measures are needed, such as the legally-binding obligations for transnational corporations which were positively noted.

34. Implementation of any accountability framework should start with developing a shared understanding of what accountability is, through a participatory process, including at the grassroots level. Similarly, greater awareness and understanding of rights-based approaches to development, which emphasizes equality, non-discrimination, inclusion, participation, attention to vulnerable groups, and the rule of law, is needed. The rights-based approach should be built into the implementation of all the goals, and the UN system should organize a dialogue on a rights-based approach to the post-2015 development agenda.

Innovations and partnerships for the future we want - The role of the private sector

35. In recognition of the breadth and complexity of sustainable development goals, panellists emphasized the need for multiple actors to be engaged in addressing the global and regional development challenges, inclusive of the private sector and philanthropic organizations. It was noted that there has been growing recognition of, and commitment to, corporate social responsibility principles and social investment within the private sector, partly related to such commitment contributing to business growth.

36. The private sector and philanthropic institutions are recognized as contributing both human and financial capital, with a focus on building knowledge and capabilities, taking risks and long-term perspectives; undertaking research; applying innovative means of unlocking resources and finance; targeting action in recognition that one entity cannot solve all development challenges, such as renewable energy and climate change; and operating at different levels, from the local to global. It was also observed that attention needs to be given to the challenge of balancing what is deemed to be the public good with the profit motivate of private sector companies.

37. Within the context of multi-stakeholder engagement and public-private partnerships, panellists identified challenges in achieving global development goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including defining “the future we want”; fostering understanding of the SDGs across stakeholders; addressing the complexity of development challenges through common language and understanding; ensuring accountability of all actors, including of the private sector and to local communities, and attending to the balance between collective welfare and individual interests.

38. In her intervention, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP emphasized the importance and effectiveness of partnership between the United Nations and the private sector; harnessing the comparative advantages of the various stakeholders to achieve the ambitious SDGs. She noted that partnerships with the private sector should be workable, simple and deliverable. It was further noted that ESCAP has a role to assess and share the Asia-Pacific region’s good practices in partnerships with the private sector in meeting development goals, including through measurement and evidence of impact of effective partnerships and models.

39. In terms of pursuing inclusive and equitable sustainable development, dialogue with critical review of the prevailing narratives and practices, the engagement of the private sector in ways that go beyond giving, reinforcement of the central role and accountability of governments, utilization of regional and local capital, and attention to rights were identified as key to successful outcomes.

40. The session concluded with a summary of the key messages, specifically that there is a real potential to align business and development objectives to maximize development impact and support inclusive growth; that the engagement of the private sector creates opportunities for innovative financing mechanisms for development that move beyond the reliance on official aid, and that continued multi-stakeholder public-private dialogue is critical within the context of a development agenda beyond 2015 in order to ensure “The Future We Want”.

Conclusions

41. The following recommendations emerged from the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation, with regard to the strategies and actions for promoting accountability for the post-2015 development agenda in Asia and the Pacific:

- (a) The UN system should play a role in furthering the process to shape an effective accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda. Such support can include analysis of

accountability mechanisms such as peer reviews, sharing of experiences on successful mechanisms, and continuing the dialogue in key areas, such as for developing a shared understanding of accountability, and on the application of a rights-based approach to the implementation of the SDGs.

- (b) ESCAP together with other UN regional commissions should have a more specific task to support the development of effective regional accountability frameworks while linking national and global efforts. It would provide a platform for a collective multi-stakeholder review of regional progress on the post-2015 development agenda, based on national assessments of progress. It should also be engaged in the global development cooperation framework, through inter alia transmitting regional voices to global deliberation processes.
 - (c) The annual APFSD should evolve into an effective regional platform for monitoring and accountability on sustainable development and SDGs building on existing practices on sub-regional and regional mechanisms where feasible. To save resources and time, it is better to mainstream regional monitoring and accountability into the APFSD.
 - (d) ESCAP Statistics Committee should be strengthened, including through closer collaboration with sub-regional statistical bodies. All national, regional and international partners should prioritize and work together to bridge the data gaps related to the proposed SDGs.
 - (e) Subregional consultations and processes should be facilitated to support regional deliberations on accountability mechanisms for the development agenda beyond 2015.
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Annex

Proceeding of discussions at the Asia-Pacific Regional Consultation on Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

1. Welcome remarks were delivered by Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, and, Ms. Amina Mohammed, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning.

2. In her opening remarks, Dr. Akhtar emphasized the centrality of effective accountability and monitoring in successful implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. She underscored that the lack of a complete framework of inter-related institutional commitments contributed to the underachievement of the Millennium Development Goals and that lessons from this experience need to be taken into consideration in discussing the post-2015 development agenda. She highlighted that, in order to ensure successful implementation, an effective monitoring and accountability framework should encompass all intergovernmental tiers, involving global, regional and national players as well as key stakeholders. The framework should be supported by stakeholders' ownership on goals and targets and clearly lay out commitments of all stakeholders and the way it functions. A focus on development cooperation is also important to reinforce the means of implementation. She called for a complete framework that includes mechanisms to redress and remedy. She solicited the participants' views and experiences which will be captured in the outcome document to be reported to the High-Level Stocktaking Event planned by the President of the General Assembly in September, and included in the Secretary-General's Synthesis Report later this year.

3. Ms. Amina Mohammed provided the context of the discussion on accountability for the post-2015 development agenda by recapitulating the discussions at the Open Working Group. She stressed the complexity of the development challenges to be addressed and the high levels of ambition of the post-2015 development agenda. The principles of universality, inclusiveness, and a transformative agenda have been weaved into the proposed goals by the Open Working Group. A great number of contentious issues remain in the proposed goals including goals on climate change, peace and justice, as well as environmental issues for further deliberation at the General Assembly, and means of implementation are discussed over each development goal. Highlighting the result of the My World Survey, which showed people's strong call for honest and responsive government, she expressed her hope that an accountability framework would engage all stakeholders, be inclusive and benefit from broad based ownership and engage the community at all levels. She also underscored that a data revolution is also needed and the UN Secretary General would establish, in response to this need, an independent advisory group of experts on the data revolution. She outlined the inputs to the stock-taking event that will be hosted by the President of the General Assembly to bring together all of the inputs from 11-12 September 2014. The last session of the two day stocktaking will be informed by this session.

Session 1 - National Leadership on Accountability for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

4. A diverse panel of government, civil society, statisticians and United Nations agencies deliberated on the role and innovative mechanisms for strengthened ownership and effectiveness of national accountability mechanisms for the post-2015 development agenda. Overall, the discussion highlighted that accountability should foster an enabling environment of meaningful democratic participation and people's active engagement in shaping, monitoring and challenging development policies, programmes and results.

5. The panel, moderated by the Chair of the meeting, was composed of Ms. Amina Mohammed, Special Adviser of the Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning; Ms. Noumea Simi, Assistant CEO of Finance (Aid Coordination Debt Management), Ministry of Finance, Samoa; Ms. Gemma Van Halderen, First Assistant Statistician, Population, Education and Data Integration Division, Australia; and Ms. Emmeline Verzosa, Executive Director, Philippine Commission on Women. Ms. Nobuko Horibe, UNFPA Regional Director representing Regional the United Nations Development Group Asia-Pacific Team and Prof. Leonor M. Briones, Social Watch, Southeast Asia, Philippines participated as key discussants to the panel session

Session II - Regional Platforms for Accountability - Role and Functions for Asia and the Pacific

6. The purpose of the session was to examine and to draw on best practice and lessons learned of existing subregional cooperation platforms and accountability mechanisms, including formats for monitoring and review, statistical standards for cross-national data comparability, reporting requirements and engagement of civil society and private sector. The session also examined the critical role and future format of regional platforms for accountability, and in particular that of the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, as well as the opportunity for data revolution at the regional level.

7. The session was moderated by Dr. Shamshad Akhtar, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP. Panellists on this session, following the order of speaking were Mr. Djalil Buzrukov, Head of the Scientific Information Centre of the Interstate Commission on Sustainable Development (ICSD) for Central Asian Countries, Tajikistan; Mr. Alfred Schuster, Development Cooperation Advisor, Pacific Island Forum Secretariat; Dr. Malee Wongsaroje, Deputy Director General, National Statistical Office, Thailand; and Ms. Govind Kelkar, Senior Advisor to LANDESA Rural Development Institute, India and a Member of the Regional Council of the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development. Discussants on this session, following the order of speaking were Mr. John Hyde, Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development; Mr. Jerry Bernas, Programme Director of the ASEAN CSR Network; and Ms. Anuradha Rajivan, Advisor, Strategy and Policy Department, Asian Development Bank.

Session III - Accountability and a Renewed Global Partnership

8. The panel was intended to discuss how renewed global partnerships can learn from the past and be grounded in effective accountability to play a key role in the post-2015 development agenda

9. The panel was moderated by Ms. Amina Mohammed, Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning. Panellists in this session were: H.E. Bektas Mukhamedzhanov, Vice Minister of Environment and Water Resources, Kazakhstan; Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, United Nations Under-Secretary General and High Representative for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS; Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Distinguished Fellow, Centre for Policy Dialogue and Chair, Southern Voice; and Ms. Marjolaine Nicod, Senior Policy Adviser, Global Partnerships and Policy Division, Development Co-operation Directorate. Ms. Virginia Dandan, UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and International Solidarity contributed as discussant.

Special Session - Innovations and partnerships for the future we want - The role of the private sector

10. The fourth session of the special event on accountability for the post-2015 development agenda addressed the issue of the engagement of the private sector in achieving the goals of global development agendas. The purpose of this session was threefold: to increase awareness on the role of philanthropic organizations, and the private sector, in support of the post-2015 development agenda; to enhance knowledge on innovative delivery and partnerships, including how the comparative advantage of philanthropic organizations and the private sector are being used to achieve development objectives; and to identify the role that the United Nations, including such entities as ESCAP, can play in supporting more effective, inclusive and strategic philanthropic and private sector engagement in a development agenda beyond 2015.

11. The fourth session was moderated by Gwen Robinson, Senior Asia Editor for the Nikkei Asian Review and Senior Fellow at the Institute of Security and International Studies, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok.

12. The panellists of the fourth session of the special event on accountability were Kobkarn Wattanavrangkul, Chairperson, Toshiba Thailand Co. Ltd.; Ashvin Dayal Associate Vice President, Managing Director, Asia, Rockefeller Foundation; Chandran Nair, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Global Institute for Tomorrow, and Andrew Muirhead, Executive Vice Chairman, Asian Venture Philanthropy Network.

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