



No.04
JUNE 2015

POST-2015 POLICY BRIEF



A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

Why this proposal

Throughout the pre-negotiation process, UNCTAD has maintained that the post-2015 development agenda should aim at both a new economic development paradigm and a revitalized global partnership. The new paradigm should enable the international community to achieve poverty reduction via economic structural transformation on the one hand and a socially inclusive and green economy on the other.¹ The revitalized global partnership should leverage trade, investment, technology, finance and other “enablers” to contribute towards national efforts on sustainable development.

In negotiating the post-2015 development agenda, it is crucial that the international community also seek a framework that will help countries to deliver that agenda. The first step in delivering the agenda will be to adapt the targets of the post-2015 development agenda to existing national development strategies and to local constraints. The second essential step will be to monitor and review results. By monitoring and reviewing, countries can assess, according to their own specificities, the effectiveness of policies and partnerships and ultimately the transformational impact of the sustainable development goals at the national, regional and global levels.

In his synthesis report on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda of December 2014,² Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon suggested the need to consider a universal review process with the following components: (a) a country-led national component for accountability; (b) a regional component for peer reviewing; (c) a global component for knowledge-sharing; (d) a thematic component to chart global progress; and (e) a component

to review the global partnership for sustainable development.

This conceptualization of a review process can be converted into a tangible and workable framework within the United Nations system. Drawing on UNCTAD’s hands-on experience in conducting different types of policy reviews, this policy brief elaborates the objectives, guiding principles and organizational framework within the United Nations system of such a process (see box).

UNCTAD’s institutional experience

This preliminary proposal is based on UNCTAD’s experience with both national policy reviews (in the areas of trade policy, services, trade and gender, technology and innovation, debt management, etc.) and peer reviews (investment policy, competition policy). It also builds on UNCTAD’s direct involvement in the Millennium Development Goals monitoring exercise, as well as in the assessment by the Millennium Development Goals Gap Task Force. It takes into account UNCTAD’s experience with the two main institutional changes in the multilateral system in Geneva: the Universal Periodic Review that was brought about with the historic change of the Human Rights Commission into the Human Rights Council in 2006 and the Trade Policy Review Mechanism institutionalized when the World Trade Organization succeeded the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1995. Lastly, this proposal builds on the broader institutional experience within the United Nations and other international organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and other institutional experience at the regional level, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism.

¹ The green economy as defined by the Rio+20 Conference outcome document, entitled “The future we want”.

² See A/69/700, paras. 148–149.

Objectives and principles of a sustainable development review process

The two overarching objectives of a sustainable development review process would be to (a) facilitate each Government's progress towards achieving the sustainable development goals by generating enabling conditions at the regional and global levels; and (b) assess the transformative impact of the sustainable development goals at the global level, via the aggregation of national and regional experiences and the evaluation of repercussions of national actions on human sustainability on the planet.

Several basic principles should guide the sustainable development review process to achieve these objectives. First, it should be seen as a cooperative framework among United Nations Member States and the United Nations system. It should not be used as a compliance mechanism, since the goals will not be mandatory or the same for all. The review should be conducted in a manner that is objective, transparent, non-selective, constructive, non-confrontational and non-politicized, taking into account the level of development and specificities of countries involved.

Second, the sustainable development review process proposed would be a voluntary performance review by peers, based on mutual accountability. It would be an intergovernmental process that relies on existing best practices. Driven by United Nations Member States and action oriented, it would fully involve the countries under review.

Third, the sustainable development review process should be transparent and participatory and as such involve all relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations. Multi-stakeholder partnerships, though not a substitute for government responsibilities and intergovernmentally agreed commitments, complement and enhance government actions directed towards achieving sustainable development.

Fourth, the principle of subsidiarity should apply and in particular the sustainable development review process should not replace, undermine or overload existing specialized and mandatory

review mechanisms (such as the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council or the Trade Policy Review Mechanism of the World Trade Organization).

Fifth, at the operational level the review process should be supported by the United Nations system with a clear division of labour and joint involvement of specialized agencies. This would be an opportunity to deliver as one United Nations. A sustainable development review process should not result in the proliferation of new United Nations bodies or be overly burdensome to the concerned Member State or to the agenda of the United Nations Secretariat. The process should be realistic and not absorb a disproportionate amount of time or human and financial resources.

How would a sustainable development review process work?

The following explains how the UNCTAD proposal on a sustainable development review process would be linked to each component of the universal review process outlined in the Secretary-General's synthesis report.

A country-led national component

At the country level, the objective of the sustainable development review process should be to review four basic subcomponents:

1. The progress made in the achievement of sustainable development goals (i.e. improvement against national indicators).
2. The means of implementation (including financial) available to a particular country.
3. The challenges faced by Members States, as the main actors of the sustainable development agenda.
4. The functioning of partnerships in sustaining the efforts of Member States.

This approach would contrast with that used in the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, which focused on the indicators of progress towards the Goals, rather than the comprehensive review now proposed.

³ The synthesis report (paragraph 149) suggests that such reports at the national level could include a government report, a national stakeholder report, with contributions from national non-governmental actors, and a report compiling existing information and data from United Nations agencies and international financial institutions.

In this sense, it should be noted that an effective review depends on having a logical common approach across all national reviews, i.e. harmonized formats for reports to be prepared at the national level.³ Such a format should encompass:

(a) the metrics for the progress made in achieving the sustainable development goals (i.e. improvement against national indicators);

(b) the means of implementation (including financial) that were or could be mobilized domestically, regionally or internationally for the country concerned;

(c) a common taxonomy of challenges that may be encountered by different stakeholders in the country concerned in delivering on the sustainable development goals; and

(d) the identification of existing or missing specific global partnerships that could support each country's efforts.

A regional component for peer reviewing

The synthesis report calls for a “regional component for peer reviewing” to be “undertaken by existing mechanisms”. Its function would be “to... identify regional trends, obstacles, commonalities, best practices and lessons learned and to generate solutions and mutual support”. The core value of a regional review process, as UNCTAD understands it, is that such a process would promote cooperation and coordination of government actions at the regional and/or subregional levels with a view to achieving the sustainable development goals. These regional reviews could take place at the level of institutions for regional cooperation, under the auspices of the United Nations regional commissions.

A thematic component to chart global progress

The synthesis report also suggests a “thematic component” that would “help to identify challenges and bottlenecks” in an issue-specific manner with a view to identifying and mobilizing actions to address such challenges. It likewise recommends that a thematic review should “... rely on relevant coordination and review ‘platforms’”, which would include “... existing specialized or functional commissions, councils or committees that convene United Nations and other multilateral entities,

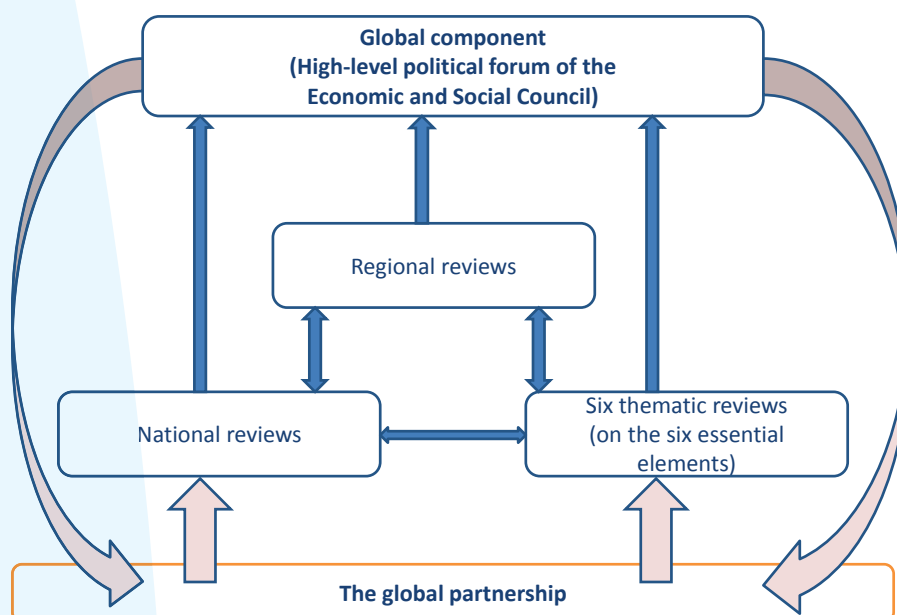
relevant treaty body reviews and outcomes, as well as Member States, partners from civil society, science, academia and the private sector that could monitor and advance each respective thematic area”. Such thematic clusters could be designed based on the “six essential elements” for delivering on the sustainable development goals suggested in the synthesis report (paragraphs 66–86), which are dignity, people, prosperity, planet, justice and partnership.

A global component and a component to review the global partnership

The synthesis report calls for a “global component for knowledge-sharing” as part of a periodic universal review to “discuss lessons learned in each country's implementation of the agenda and the opportunity to review both short-term outputs and long-term outcomes related to attaining the goals”. In parallel, the synthesis report calls for another component to “review the global partnership for sustainable development”, particularly with respect to the mobilization of the means necessary for implementing the sustainable development goals at the national level.

UNCTAD finds it crucial that all results of the thematic national and regional reviews should be reported to a United Nations body for the purposes of assessing and monitoring. Such a global review process would enable the international community to holistically assess the synergies and the discourses across different themes at all levels (national, regional, and global), as well as spillover effects of actions by one country (or group of countries) on other countries and, ultimately, on achievement at the global level of the sustainable development goals. That is, the global component of a sustainable development review process should bring all reviews together, with a view to holistically and comprehensively evaluating global progress towards achieving sustainable development in the economic, social and environmental dimensions, based on reviews of national actions. At the same time, it should be the role of the global component of a sustainable development review framework to examine countries or segments of the world population that are left behind and come up with a response measure that is functional. Such actions would require political decisions, and this is why the high-level political forum convened under the auspices of the General

Sustainable Development Review Framework



Assembly would remain the ideal body for the global component.

This “global component for knowledge-sharing” should also integrate ongoing initiatives to harmonize and improve statistical sources of importance for development monitoring. It should serve as a basis to establish convergence and coherence among these initiatives, which is essential to effectively assess progress among various Member States of the United Nations, including the least developed countries.

How UNCTAD’s experience could help

UNCTAD has a wealth of well-tested tools to help the review process at the national, regional and global levels. At the national level, UNCTAD could draw on its experience in supporting countries in their national assessments, using existing tools such as the reviews it conducts on investment policy, services policy, national green export, and information and communications technology.⁴

At the regional level, UNCTAD could share its experiences and would continue to substantively collaborate with the existing

regional mechanisms. The Trade and Development Board of UNCTAD could also be used as a platform to present and discuss the findings of the regional commissions on trade-related matters.

For thematic reviews, UNCTAD is ready to become an active member of a thematic review process for the element “prosperity: to grow a strong, inclusive and transformative economy” and offer services to Members States based on (a) its experiences in United Nations-wide theme-specific monitoring activities and (b) the integrated approach of the three pillars of UNCTAD activities (i.e. intergovernmental consensus-building, research and analysis, and technical assistance), which cut across issues in economic development, i.e. trade, investment, technology and finance. The possible platforms that UNCTAD could propose as a basis for a thematic review process include its flagship reports and use of the Trade and Development Board.

At the global level, as the focal point for economic development in the United Nations system, UNCTAD would continue contributing throughout the process to revitalize the global partnership.

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⁴ For more information, see <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/Investment%20Policy%20Reviews/Investment-Policy-Reviews.aspx>, <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DITC/Trade-in-Services.aspx>, <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DITC/Trade-and-Environment/Green%20Economy/National-Green-Export-Review.aspx> and <http://unctad.org/en/pages/PublicationWebflyer.aspx?publicationid=880>.