

Partners for Review (P4R)

A transnational multi-stakeholder network for a robust review process of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Fifth network meeting, 6-7 November 2018, Berlin, Germany

Brief report

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List of abbreviations

BMU	German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety
BMZ	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
CSO	Civil society organization
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
GRI	Global Reporting Initiative
HLPF	United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
P4R	Partners for Review
SAI	Supreme Audit Institution
SCP	Sustainable Consumption and Production
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
UN	United Nations
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UN ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
VNR	Voluntary National Review

1) Major messages

In view of the fact that the 2030 Agenda constitutes the framework for sustainable development for more than three years now, the fifth Partners for Review network meeting dealt both with existing issues in greater depth and picked up new emerging trends. Various formats were applied for these diverse discussions during the meeting, including the use of design thinking-based “Solution Teams” for the first time. Several **messages** repeatedly surfaced in these varied settings, including the following:

- Proposals for improvement of the VNR preparation process and reform of the HLPF:
 - Provide specific guidelines for second and subsequent VNRs from countries, to ensure that governments report back to the HLPF on implementation experiences following the previous VNR;
 - Make more use of opportunities at the regional level to convene substantive exchange and peer learning;
 - Review SDG 16 each year along with SDG 17;
 - Strengthen the voice of non-governmental stakeholders in shaping reforms;
 - Agree that the VNRs can use non-official data;
 - Publish shadow/spotlight reports together with official reports;
 - Increase the time during the HLPF devoted to each VNR presentation; and
 - Increase the number of days allocated to the HLPF each year and/or convene a separate “spring meeting.”
- The value of testing ideas, admitting challenges, and learning from each other, with participants suggesting that governments make more of the mutual learning element of the follow-up and review process and ensure that they have a “real dialogue” during the HLPF.
- The increasingly active contributions of supreme audit institutions, including through “preparedness reports”, to ensure accountability of national review processes.
- Enhanced parliaments’ participation in SDG review and implementation, e.g. through setting up parliamentary action plans for SDGs or thematic caucuses.
- The emerging role of cities as initiators of local SDG reviews.
- The importance of a legal framework (e.g. for data privacy) in the context of efforts to use available data from alternative data sources, and the value of journalism and storytelling for enhancing the impact of data.
- The interest in and demand for peer reviews. In various sessions, the value of peer reviews was highlighted to facilitate peer learning across countries and stakeholder groups.
- The need for critical assessments of stakeholder participation to ensure it is not just pretended, but meaningful.
- Discussions noted the need for better integration of civil society in SDG implementation as partners with governments, as well as a desire to reconsider the role of “shadow” or “spotlight” reports to ensure they are making a difference.
- On specific SDGs, discussions underscored that:
 - SDG 12 may be the “most difficult” because of the behavior changes required and the complexity of decoupling resource use from growing prosperity;
 - SDG 16 may be the most interlinked Goal with all the others; and
 - SDG 10, and its consideration during the 2019 HLPF, could set up the year as a phase of connecting the SDGs and human rights.
- Tension between the need for urgent, transformative action and the need to establish data sets and indicators to measure progress.

2) Context

Partners for Review (P4R) is a transnational multi-stakeholder network for government representatives and stakeholders from civil society, academia and the private sector who are involved in national processes to review and monitor action taken to achieve the SDGs. P4R was initiated by Germany's Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU) and Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH is in charge of the implementation. The network aims to gather constructive, effective and workable solutions for delivering on the joint commitment to review progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda at national level. P4R enables dialogue on the review of SDGs and coordinates the demand for and supply of policy advice among practitioners.

Convened by BMZ and BMU in close cooperation with UN DESA, the event in Berlin, Germany, on 6 and 7 November 2018, was the fifth in a series of P4R network meetings. Previous meetings took place as follows: inception meeting in November 2016 in Bonn, Germany; second meeting in March 2017 in Bogotá, Colombia; third meeting in October 2017 in Kampala, Uganda; and fourth meeting in April 2018 in Tbilisi, Georgia.

A total of 126 participants attended the Berlin event, representing 48 countries from all five UN regions, and a range of UN and other regional and international organisations. The objective was to promote robust national-level SDG review processes by enabling peer-to-peer dialogue on common challenges and facilitating the identification of good practices and determinants of success. The meeting featured innovative formats for discussion, brainstorming and feedback, including the use of "Solution Teams" in which small groups of participants convened to address specific challenges through the use of design thinking elements.

3) Sensing and scene-setting

The network meeting included three optional segments the day before the in-depth thematic discussions commenced. During these field visits at offices of SDG-related entities around Berlin, on 5 November, participants learned about efforts and instruments, as well as trends and challenges related to SDG implementation, follow-up and review in Germany. These on-site visits were intended to allow for a more substantive immersion into the subject matter, by enabling to understand a system from the perspective of different stakeholders, particularly at the federal level, in civil society organizations and with regard to data and statistics.

There were three parallel excursions according to the thematic pillars of P4R:

1. National coordination:
 - Federal Chancellery;
 - German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE);
2. Stakeholder engagement:
 - German NGO Forum on Environment and Development (Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung);
 - Association of German Development and Humanitarian Aid Non-Governmental Organisations (VENRO);
3. Addressing data challenges:
 - German Federal Statistical Office (Destatis) and
 - GIZ Data4Development initiative.

At Destatis, the German Federal Statistical Office, for example, participants heard a presentation on 'Are the SDG indicators "fit for purpose"?' They debated the value of disaggregating data by all of the categories noted in the 2030 Agenda, in each country; the need to collect data in a different way than in the past in order to complement official statistics; the primacy of data availability and access; and the "credibility issue" when national data is changed for the UN's yearly report. Destatis shared Germany's plans to develop its national reporting platform using an open-source framework.

4) Outcomes of the thematic discussions

The key outcomes of each discussion are presented below, addressing:

- i. Voluntary National Reviews
- ii. Different levels of reporting on the SDGs
- iii. Different roles, different engagement: What and how can stakeholders contribute to follow-up and review?
- iv. Different challenges, different solutions? New answers to old problems – or vice versa?
- v. Quo vadis HLPF?
- vi. Other topics discussed

i. Voluntary National Reviews

Three working groups set the theme for discussing VNRs, with parallel sessions that addressed: the preparation of 2019 VNRs; experiences and trends from the VNRs 2016-2018; and different dimensions of VNR follow-up activities.

Preparation of 2019 VNRs

Discussion in this session centered around ways to increase the impact of and strengthened follow-up to the VNRs as well as expectations for the HLPF review process in 2020. DESA explained the preparations leading to the HLPF 2019. On whether and how VNRs can serve as “drivers of change,” DESA highlighted that the national process of VNR preparation can:

- Create space for ministries to focus on the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs and national implementation;
- Initiate or increase national consultations and stakeholder engagement on implementation;
- Foster communication and coordination within government, helping to dissolve silos; and
- Provide feedback and analysis of policies, gaps and challenges.

Despite such benefits, participants pointed to areas of criticism of the VNRs, including that they do not ensure that countries share their challenges and make use of the review’s “mutual learning function.” Instead, speakers said that many countries choose to only showcase successes and effort expended.

During the discussion, it was also highlighted that the current VNR format lacks a formal system to track “what happens next” – actions taken in each country after the HLPF. As part of the HLPF review, governments could consider tracking implementation of VNR outcomes, such as by calling for subsequent reviews from each country to follow up on its previous VNRs. A suggestion arose to create specific guidelines for second and subsequent VNRs to ensure there are links to previous VNRs.

Participants also stressed the need for:

- Including multiple stakeholders in the preparation of VNRs;
- Outreach (digitalization of reports, awareness raising beyond social media);
- Aligning development plans at different levels; and
- Ensuring that “real dialogue” takes place during the HLPF in New York.

VNRs 2016-2018: Experiences and trends

This session elicited observations of VNR presentations with a focus whether the quality of SDG reporting is increasing. The P4R Secretariat presented the key findings of an analysis of the VNRs of 2018 in comparison to those of 2016 and 2017, highlighting that in the three years of VNR reports to date:

- Countries have reported against an increasing number of SDGs;
- Their reports have become more evidence-based as an increasing number of countries provide more comprehensive data; and
- The presentations include a greater focus on raising public awareness about the SDGs.

Despite these positive trends, several challenges remain:

- The ‘data challenge’ prevails as a common major obstacle (availability and quality of data, disaggregation, etc);
- Low public awareness hinders meaningful participation of non-governmental actors.

Discussions also drew attention to “who is holding the pen,” how stakeholders are consulted, and how their views are represented at the HLPF. A noteworthy development mentioned was that countries are increasingly planning annual SDG reviews and fora at country level.

On the experience of presenting two VNRs in 2016 and 2018, Colombia shared that the second report increased the government’s learning and changed its perspective. Colombia aims to improve its national monitoring strategy, including by identifying “lead” and “collaborating” partners for each SDG. Towards this end, it has piloted a project to measure the private sector’s contribution with support from GRI and UNDP.

Different dimensions of VNR follow-up activities

In this session, stakeholders from different countries reported on follow-up activities they undertook after presenting their VNR at the HLPF. Discussions addressed the key question of what would be a meaningful follow-up strategy. The session also highlighted the need for more awareness raising, and urged continuing to engage stakeholders after the VNR is prepared.

Belize shared that after presenting its VNR in 2017, it conducted a “post-VNR process assessment” and generated “Post-VNR Strategic Actions”, including the establishment of an institutional framework, a statistical system and the alignment of budgets with sustainable development. El Salvador said the VNR should not be viewed as an end in itself, but as a baseline and an opportunity to identify the specific difficulties and actions that should be taken. The representative noted the need to balance a focus on data with a focus on challenges and action. Germany highlighted the multi-stakeholder peer review that it commissioned on its national sustainable development strategy as an option for a peer review mechanism and follow-up.

Two presenters discussed the importance of storytelling, noting that “journalism is a precondition to implementing the 2030 Agenda.” Additionally, they said journalists should be engaged in a participatory manner, not have the SDGs “imposed” on them.

ii. Different levels of reporting on the SDGs

This set of five working groups addressed: localized SDG reporting; the role of UN regional commissions; institutional mechanisms for policy coherence; how to include foundations’ SDG contribution into the VNRs; and SDG 16.

Localized SDG reporting: Examples from Bristol, La Paz and three cities in Japan

Representatives from Bristol, La Paz, three cities in Japan¹, and Cities Alliances shared their experiences of reporting at local level. The discussion highlighted good practices for localized reporting, such as:

- Prioritizing the most relevant SDGs and targets;
- Identifying indicators that are meaningful for cities, as the global indicators were not written for cities; and
- Accounting for what the community wants.

Participants stressed the importance of urban populations in achieving the SDGs and highlighted the value of “Voluntary Local Reviews” to the HLPF, conducted by major cities and following VNR guidelines. They also noted the need to address jurisdictional questions in case there is no legislative decision-making power

¹ Kitakyushu City, Toyama City and Shimokawa Town.

at local level, especially in decentralized countries. Finally, they underscored the need for national governments to create frameworks for subnational level reporting, which can feed back into the national reporting.

Role of UN Regional Commissions

This working group focused on the role of the regional Economic Commissions in the follow-up and review mechanism to the 2030 Agenda, notably on information exchanges. The Commissions defined their roles at the regional level as i) think tanks for integrated knowledge products, ii) conveners of multi-stakeholder and inter-governmental platforms, iii) providers of policy advocacy, and iv) providers of capacity building. Participants stated that a more meaningful exchange can happen at the regional level, especially in terms of cross-border issues such as river management.

Based on the exchanges taking place at the regional level, the Commissions identified common challenges applicable to all regions, notably the mainstreaming of the 2030 Agenda into budgetary processes, data gaps (due to lacking capacities in collection, disaggregation, and baseline monitoring), analysis of interlinkages, as well as monitoring and evaluation of national implementation processes.

While noting that it is a work in progress, speakers suggested that a lot has been done already to involve civil society organizations in regional discussions and work. Participants also discussed the trade-offs involved with a recommendation for regional commissions to push for transformation, while needing to respect the mandates and constituents of the regional commissions.

Institutional mechanisms for policy coherence

This working group focused on the question how to best break silos. Country representatives from Greece, Guatemala, and Mongolia shared their experiences with the audience. The main findings of a study conducted by the P4R Secretariat on the whole-of-government approach were presented, highlighting key institutional mechanisms for policy coherence.

Participants said the challenges include setting up a monitoring system that also includes non-state actors and educating and incentivizing different parts of the government to facilitate working together. They considered the advantages and disadvantages of different leadership and coordination mechanisms against the criteria of whether a mechanism helps to break the silos. They also questioned whether breaking silos and delivering more comprehensive services can ensure that services are delivered in a coherent and efficient manner. Participants repeatedly highlighted that policy coherence as well as considering and deciding on trade-offs required both political leadership and technical expertise.

Including foundations' SDG contribution into the VNRs

In this working group, representatives of foundations discussed opportunities to integrate their SDG contributions to national VNR processes. Participants highlighted that foundations can take risks to “get the transformation going” since they have freedoms that political actors do not have. In addition, they can help develop more engaging narratives about the SDGs, contribute to city- and state-level strategy development and localizing the SDGs, as well as generate helpful and constructive criticism from the bottom up.

It was noted that foundations are already making a difference for sustainable development that is not being captured in the current follow-up and review framework. Speakers suggested that they should engage with the VNRs, but at the same time capitalize on the potential for better aligning their work with the SDGs.

SDG 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions)

Participants said that in the VNR reports to date, SDG 16 has been “left behind” more than others, amounting to a reporting gap. An NGO described efforts to “emotionalize” the SDGs and the problem of

corruption in order to get more public traction. The discussion also highlighted journalism as a driver for change by connecting data to stories.

Key messages included that:

- SDG 16 is linked with every SDG, and the specific linkages need to be better illustrated for governments;
- So-called “shadow reports” should be formally included in the VNR process in order to make a difference in the country, while there is also a need to assess the value of shadow reports;
- Human rights offer a legally binding framework to be applied to the SDGs. The year 2019 will be important for connecting SDGs and human rights because of the goals under review (SDGs 10, 16), and national human rights institutions’ engagement should be promoted;
- Plans for 2019 include national workshops on SDG 16 in VNR countries, and there is potential to partner with other parties organizing such workshops or operating in the relevant countries.

As a possible message for the HLPF review in 2020, participants considered calling for SDG 16 to be reviewed each year along with Goal 17.

iii. Different roles, different engagement: What and how can stakeholders contribute to follow-up and review?

These five working groups addressed the engagement of: the scientific community; parliaments; the private sector; civil society; and supreme audit institutions.

Scientific engagement during the VNR process: Country case South Africa

This panel discussed challenges involved with the science-policy interface and the importance of mechanisms to bridge the gap. Participants considered whether the South African SDG Hub could serve as a role model for other countries.

The Hub supports SDG implementation by enabling access to relevant knowledge resources, provides policy advice, promotes dialogue and builds capacity. Speakers highlighted that scientific advice needs to be legitimate, credible and salient for decision makers to take it on board. Participants also encouraged countries to identify knowledge gaps in their VNRs as a way to let the scientific community know what research topics would be relevant for their decision-making processes, calling the VNRs a “treasure trove” for researchers.

The differences between traditional research and the type of research needed for SDG policy setting were highlighted, with speakers noting that university researchers receive more recognition for theory-focused papers than for policy-focused research. To spur the production of SDG-relevant research, stakeholders could create additional incentives and improve the targeted feeding of scientific findings into the policy process. A speaker suggested that governments could look to universities when commissioning research, noting that consultants do not always deliver high-quality outputs.

The role of parliament in follow-up and review

Parliamentarians from different countries shared their experiences with parliamentary involvement in the SDG review process focusing on the key question whether the SDG review is a constitutional responsibility. Participants acknowledged the importance of the legislative branch in reviewing and following up on national SDG implementation. In all cases, parliamentary oversight relies on constitutional mandates, and overall awareness of SDGs is low. In Georgia, parliament monitors to what extent state agencies fulfill the SDGs, and one non-standing committee had committed to an individual action plan – however, government does not seek parliamentary approval. In Kenya, two standing committees co-lead the review process and the VNR to be submitted to the HLPF is subject to parliamentary approval. Beyond that, MPs reportedly investigate how to make SDGs a case for parliament across party lines, e.g. by involving caucuses, parliamentary faction leaders, and awareness raising among constituencies.

Private sector: Incentives for an increased engagement in follow-up and review

Private sector representatives discussed approaches to engagement, asking each other whether – and why – business should report on their SDG impact. According to one view expressed in the session, investors increasingly ask for information on SDG impact, and some governments have introduced and enacted legislation on disclosing such information. However, one speaker said that while a company's financial reports are widely read, “no one cares about their sustainable development reports.” One speaker called for all information relevant for the future of the company to be provided in one document.

Participants also queried about the incentive for a private company to disclose and supply data that could be used to monitor SDG implementation.

Civil society: Watchdogs, experts and/or delivery partners?

In this working group, participants exchanged views on the meaningful participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in follow-up and review. Participants highlighted that participation is meaningful when all actors are equal conversation partners. However, the independence of CSOs should be maintained under all circumstances. In the discussion, it was highlighted that meaningful participation does not happen overnight, as the necessary preconditions, such as trust, can only develop over time.

Participants said CSOs should advocate for the use of non-official data in VNRs in areas where official data is insufficient, e.g. with regard to leaving no one behind. In addition, shadow/spotlight reports could play an important role as complements to official VNRs, published either together with the government's report or separately, depending on national circumstances.

Auditing the SDGs: Examples from Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs)

Representatives of SAIs exchanged practices in assessing governments' readiness to implement the SDGs. It was highlighted that SAIs could play an important role in helping to foster policy coherence and monitor the effective implementation of the SDGs – a new role and topic that is gaining increased traction among SAIs globally.

The discussion considered whether institutional setups and policies in countries are indeed “fit for purpose” to implement the goals, and how SAIs can be of value and support implementation. Participants said SAIs and their audits could push ministries to put issues on the agenda and ensure that governments are held accountable, contribute to improved policy design by providing recommendations and are essential to achieve SDG 16 through sound public financial management. Challenges highlighted by speakers and participants were the novelty of their role, the diversity and specificity of mandates of SAIs, the need to move from financial audits to performance audits, as well as the need for more human, statistical, methodological and financial resources in order to fulfill their role. Participants also emphasized the importance of SAIs publishing and communicating their reports with readers beyond the audit world, in order to create impact on policy and raise awareness among non-state actors.

iv. Different challenges, different solutions? New answers to old problems – or vice versa?

This set of four working groups addressed: tracking the SDGs; the 2030 Agenda and the new actors of the data landscape; multi-stakeholder data partnerships for SDG reporting; the cross-cutting nature of inequalities (SDG 10); and measuring sustainability of consumption and production (SDG 12).

Tracking the SDGs - Country case: Colombia

During this session participants discussed a country example from Colombia, demonstrating efforts to inform citizens and to increase transparency and accountability towards achieving the SDGs with the help of an official online tracking tool. A key question for further consideration was how digital tools could support tracking and evaluation of SDG progress.

It was noted that official data covers only part of the SDG indicator set. In the presented case, Colombia has worked with GRI to include private sector data in its efforts to track the SDGs. Furthermore, an online tool is being used to communicate with stakeholders and to feed into the country's second VNR.

A key challenge encountered has been building trust among businesses to share their data, where data "anonymization" has been helpful. Additionally, political will was highlighted as especially important for building a successful, trusting partnership.

The 2030 Agenda and the new actors of the data landscape: Challenges and opportunities for change // Multi-stakeholder data partnership for SDG reporting: Country case Denmark

This section showcased the joint PARIS21-P4R draft paper *National SDG Review: data challenges and opportunities* on the emerging data ecosystem and the need of national statistical systems to learn how to engage with multiple stakeholders and how to coordinate the participation of new data providers. As one example of such a coordination within a data ecosystem, Denmark presented its initiative on multi-stakeholder reporting. Key questions included:

- Whether the right mechanisms and capacities are being developed to face the challenges of the data ecosystem for effective follow-up and review; and
- Whether Denmark's experience could be replicated in other countries.

Participants noted that, in the case of Denmark, the Partnership for SDG Data was established because Denmark's national statistical office recognized that it could not solve the complex reporting task alone, and engaged with other stakeholders, which was described as "unusual." The process has faced challenges including varying interests of stakeholders, and the complexity of using multiple data sources. On the other hand, advantages include the acceptance of data, access to data, and a consensus of reporting. Making data meaningful requires openness from all sides, the discussion underlined.

Questions around the PARIS21-P4R paper included the importance of trust and bridging actors, and the need to rethink capacity development and the skills needed to navigate the data ecosystem. Partnerships were highlighted as a mechanism to integrate new actors into the data ecosystem.

Interlinkages of SDGs: Crosscutting nature of inequalities – SDG 10

In this session, participants considered a methodology developed by UN ECLAC to align national development plans with the 2030 Agenda, and discussed how this methodology could support planning to achieve SDG 10 as one example and identify the need of cross-sectoral coordination.

Speakers noted that each sector may feel that "we have our SDG," but their issues impact all the others, and vice versa, and these interlinkages must be addressed. Speakers cited a need for a tool to identify interlinkages and to support cross-sectoral coordination. As a way to prioritize or rank actions, the tool could identify virtuous and vicious circles.

The discussion stressed that the tool's theoretical work would need to be contextualized by the national and subnational context, to account for – and ensure – real action and implementation.

Global responsibility: Measuring sustainability of consumption and production – SDG 12

The expert input in this group updated participants on work to link environmental, social and governance (ESG) datasets with the SDGs, particularly in the context of global trade, and to analyze both positive and negative spillover effects. The presentation noted that affluence and consumption per capita – not population – drives resource-intensive consumption patterns (material footprint), as well as carbon footprint. Also highlighted was the forthcoming SDSN SCP Index and Dashboard to help companies assess and mitigate their environmental impacts.

In the discussion, participants posed questions and expressed uncertainty around ways to affect real change in the area of SCP, with one noting: "this is one of the most difficult goals and it is hard to find the

right questions to ask,” and it is also hard to make the needed changes in the ways we live. Another participant noted that despite extensive quantitative work, no impacts are apparent, as no country has made headway in reducing consumption footprints. One speaker suggested that the major changes needed also relate to manufacturing and other corporate sectors, not only consumer habits, as the consumer can only buy what is available and should not be burdened with making the more expensive choice.

A key theme of discussion addressed the viability of “decoupling” prosperity from natural resource use. Besides, the question of a different growth model instead of pure economic growth patterns was raised. By one view, efficiency and technology allows for the needed changes without lifestyle upheavals. Others said, however, that decoupling cannot take place without sectoral changes that will include job losses, and therefore any required change in consumption habits will be met with fear and be regarded as a sacrifice in developing countries. The moderator of the working group noted that this raises questions around the “right to development.”

v. Quo vadis HLPF?

A discussion on “where the HLPF is going” featured comments from four experts, who shared plans for the HLPF in 2019 and 2020 as well as ideas for improving the HLPF through the review process.

On the HLPF’s plans for 2019 and early 2020, updates included that:

- The outcome of the July 2019 HLPF session will be a Chair’s summary. A Political Declaration will be adopted at the UNGA-convened HLPF on 24-25 September 2019 (SDG Summit), and the declaration is expected to be negotiated in 2019.
- The HLPF review could call for increasing the time allotted to discuss each VNR, increasing the number of days allocated to the HLPF each year, and increasing the emphasis on mutual support and learning among countries.
- The review of the HLPF will be conducted in conjunction with the review of ECOSOC.

On reforming the HLPF, a few clear messages emerged from the experts’ input, as they explored the “huge potential” of the coming year to address the Forum’s perceived weaknesses. One expert noted that “genuine dialogue is important,” and should last throughout the year, with particular potential for peer learning at the regional level. Another affirmed that there is a “missing dialogue” between countries and regions during the VNR discussions at the HLPF, in favor of a “heavy emphasis” on performance highlights and descriptions of governments’ activities.

Other proposals for the next “cycle” of the HLPF included: placing greater emphasis on the interlinkages between SDGs, with “more frank evidence” from governments about dilemmas in balancing one goal against another and how this has been handled; and creating a “spring meeting” for technical discussions about SDG progress in countries to inform the ministerial declaration, followed by a “political moment” in July. Following the July meeting, the ministers would be able to return to their countries with concrete plans for implementation. Finally, one expert said that after civil society’s close involvement in negotiating the SDGs, the partnership between governments and other stakeholders on implementation needs more attention.

vi. Further topics discussed in “Solution Teams”

In addition to the discussion sessions summarized above, the network meeting featured a four-part “Solution Team” process, in which small groups of participants applied design theory to improving elements of the national review process. Over the course of the two days, each Solution Team met four times to progressively develop an idea to share with the wider group. Each team was assigned one of the following questions:

- How might we elaborate a checklist for quality criteria to draft a relevant VNR Report for 2019?
- How might we design an inclusive national process to elaborate the VNR?
- How might we report systematically on our SDGs contribution to the VNRs including all of our foundation work?

- How might we ensure a good follow-up to a national VNR?
- How might we improve the current structure of the High-Level Political Forum?
- How might we define criteria for an efficient partnership at national level in the follow-up and review?
- How might we find a structure for a meaningful and coordinated civil society engagement at national level?

Two of the resulting solutions were proposals for a Digital Platform for Better National Partnerships, and for a mobile app called 'SDG Tracker' (similar to those that already exist, e.g. in Colombia) to allow users to help monitor progress and to enable urgent responses when a problem spikes. A further interesting approach in the area of private sector engagement was the so called 'SDG Lotto', in which private companies who are interested in engaging with the SDGs can buy in and in case of winning, use the jackpot to implement an SDG related project of its own interest.