



## *Discussion Paper*

**in support of our CALL FOR URGENT REMEDIAL ACTION of Major Shortcomings of the Secretary General's Report on "Critical Milestones toward Coherent, Efficient and Inclusive Follow-Up and Review at the Global Level" (Jan. 2016)**

The overriding goal of any policy is to achieve stated policy objectives. The expectations and aspirations of the governments from around the world who endorsed the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on the 25<sup>th</sup> September 2015 are no Exception.

The SDGs include key goals such as reducing poverty and inequality; eradicating hunger; ensuring universal access to essential social services such as health care, education, water, and energy; and safeguarding the global eco-system. All these goals are vital to the peace and prosperity of our societies.

### **A) "Effectiveness" is not mentioned**

In order to achieve these goals, governments and all public institutions need to first function in an efficient and effective manner. It surprises us that no direct reference to "effectiveness" is mentioned in the SD's report.

This oversight could render the global review exercise "ineffective" and stuck with "business as usual"; rather than allowing the SDGs to serve as drivers for a fundamental change.

**Recommendation 1: Bring back the emphasis on "effectiveness" in implementing SDGs.**

### **B) "Monitoring is Missing"**

"There is nothing as useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."  
(Peter Drucker).

We have witnessed many transformative efforts that failed during the past 40 years. Often governments could not respond to the stated performance objectives due to either weak or absent *feedback signals* which could have been used for proactive responses, corrective actions, emerging opportunities and institutional innovations. Institutional development supported by feedback mechanisms is necessary in order to achieve the agreed 2030 development agenda. The multi-layered review processes embedded in the SDG Goal 17 will be critical to advance the SDGs and ultimately lead to the fulfilment of the "leaving no one behind" objective. Such review process should go beyond efficiency criteria and include assessment of effectiveness when reviewing countries SDG implementation.

This is why it is so urgent for civil society stakeholders to ensure that the SG Report to the General Assembly in September 2016 titled "Critical Milestones toward Coherent, Efficient, and

Inclusive Follow-Up and Review at the Global Level” will include monitoring and process data tracking as critical elements of the proposed global SDG review system.

The current draft of the SG’s Report mentioned only one single time “monitoring” (of the SDG implementation)! Instead, disproportional emphasis has been put on the term “review”, i.e., 280 times!!! One wonders how valid or effective such a global review could be when little structured and systematic data are collected, and no robust bottom up monitoring infrastructure ensures relevance of data and inclusiveness of data collection and data dissemination.

SDG reviews are supposed to take place every four years at the global level and at national level but on voluntary basis only. Such an overemphasis on reviews is akin to an ex post scorecard, looking back without reflection on the underlying systemic assumptions or operational models that might have affected negatively the results of attempted SDG implementation. Instead, a monitoring system is needed to empower governments in close collaboration with their respective citizens to make informed and evidence based policy choices on an ongoing basis fitting the country’s aspirations.

Without process monitoring, the international community has to be content with reviews scheduled to be held every four years, on a voluntary basis and with little evidence of community participation. This leaves little opportunities for people to hold governments accountable for their actions in regard to SDG implementation nor to hold governments accountable for lack of innovations and improvements. For these reasons, the Review System proposed by the UNSG draft should be strengthened by incorporating text which explicitly mentions the need for monitoring mechanisms.

The omission of monitoring contradicts the SDG Resolution itself that calls for “strengthening the means of implementation and revitalising the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” (SDG Goal 17). In particular, SDG Target 17.19 aims to “build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complements gross domestic product, and to support statistical capacity-building in developing countries” by 2030. Without a robust and integrated monitoring mechanism to stimulate innovation and transformation, the SDG process would be nothing more than “business as usual” and the SDG agenda runs the risk of becoming remote controlled by external drivers rather than by day-to-day practices inside the countries.

**Recommendation 2:** We, the representatives of civil society community, explicitly request the UNSG to make SDG 17.19 a priority objective rather than a “nice to have” operational target and to incentivize the governments and development partners to invest in this vital institutional infrastructure building process.

### **C) Wrong Timing of Reviewing Capacity Development of All Governments in regard to SDG Implementation**

SDG 16 aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and **build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels**. SDG 16 needs to be given priority! Any delay of implementing SDG 16 would delay the whole SDG process. **The institutional aspects SDG 16 and its crosscutting implications should**

**instead be highlighted, i.e., “building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” right from the start and data should be collected for baseline comparison and continual innovations on an ongoing basis.**

The current UNSG Draft report suggests a time table of country reviews during the next four years. The time table proposed defers the review of SDG 16 to the Year 2019 which means to a date that would account for a third of the 15 year implementation frame!! The assessment of progress in implementing Goal 17 could also be delayed as it is only suggested to be reviewed every year and not mandatory. Such a voluntary approach will negatively affect the policy prioritisation on “means of implementation”. The table of the UNSG report is copied below:

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Theme of the HLPF	Ensuring that no one is left behind	Ensuring food security on a safe planet by 2030	Making cities sustainable and building productive capacities	Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness: peaceful and inclusive societies, human capital development, and gender equality
Suggested non-exclusive subset of SDGs for (thematic review)	SDGs 1, 6, 8, 10 SDG 17	SDGs 2, 13, 14, 15 SDG 17	SDGs 7, 9, 11, 12 SDG 17	SDGs 3, 4, 5, 16 SDG 17
Comment on the choice of SDGs for review		The subset would address the theme through the angle of food security, climate change, terrestrial ecosystems and oceans	The subset would look at the linkages between energy, cities, and industrialization, and sustainable patterns of consumption and production.	The subset would look at the relationships between peaceful and inclusive societies, gender equality, education and health

Nudging governments to start implementing the SDGs should start now. Since operationalising the 2030 development agenda and documenting progress towards this goal remains a national responsibility, it makes no sense to leave this most challenging aspect of SDG implementation to the last moment of the first full review cycle. Reviewing of SDG 16 needs to start in 2016 and should be reviewed every year!

SDG 16 which is a crucial transversal sustainable goal, especially targets 16.6 and 16.7 that need to be tracked, monitored and reviewed right from the beginning similar to that of SDG Goal 17. Goal 17.9 on Capacity Building stipulates “*enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South, and triangular cooperation*”. Various development finance instruments have been devised by the development partners, e.g., Payment by Results (PbR), Evidence based Management (EbM), or Public Private Partnership (PPP), and being championed by various donor governments and international organisations. An earlier review of these innovative approaches would hasten the global learning process and knowledge transfer.

**Recommendation 3: Advance the Timing of reviewing SDG 16 and SDG 17 of All Governments to ensure successful SDG Implementation.**

Monitoring makes it possible to accumulate process data in order to better analyse a system’s “success”, “failure “or “impasse” and should be the corner stone of transparency, accountability, efficiency and effectiveness of a development or change processes. Therefore a revised Timetable for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) should be scheduled annually according to the following revised Timetable below:

**Revised Timetable for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) for the period 2016-2019  
(suggested by authors of this open letter)**

	2016	2017	2018	2019
Theme of the HLPF	Ensuring that no one is left behind	Ensuring food security on a safe planet by 2030	Making cities sustainable and building productive capacities	Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness: peaceful and inclusive societies, human capital development, and gender equality
Suggested non-exclusive subset of sectoral SDGs for (thematic review)	SDGs 1, 6, 8, 10	SDGs 2, 13, 14, 15	SDGs 7, 9, 11, 12	SDGs 3, 4, 5,
<b>Our Comments on the choice of SDGs for review</b>		<b>The subset of SDGs proposed should address the theme through the angle of food security, climate change, terrestrial ecosystems and oceans</b>	<b>The subset of SDGs should look at the linkages between energy, cities, and industrialization, and sustainable patterns of consumption and production.</b>	<b>The subset of SDGs should look at the relationships between peaceful and inclusive societies, gender equality, education and health</b>
Our suggestion of a non-exclusive subset of transversal SDGs for (thematic review)	SDG 16, 17	SDG 16,17	SDG 16, 17	SDG 16, 17

**Revised Timetable for the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) for the period 2016-2019  
(suggested by authors of this open letter) (can't)**

<p><b>Comments on our choice of SDGs to be reviewed</b></p>	<p><b>SDG 16: review the “current state” and existing Capacity Building (CB) initiatives of the public administration at national and sub-national levels and create location specific information data banks related to the thematic review;</b></p> <p><b>SDG 16.6 develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels</b></p> <p><b>16.7 ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels</b></p>	<p><b>SDG 16: review the “current state” and existing CB initiatives of the public administration at national and sub-national levels and create location specific information data banks related to the thematic review</b></p> <p><b>SDG 16.6 &amp; 16.7</b></p>	<p><b>SDG 16: review the “current state” and existing CB initiatives of the related public administration at national and sub-national levels and create location specific information data banks related to the thematic review</b></p> <p><b>SDG 16.6 &amp; 16.7</b></p>	<p><b>SDG 16: review the “current state” and existing CB initiatives of the public administration at national and sub-national levels and create location specific information data banks related to the thematic review</b></p>
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The first HLPF review should **not** address “progress made” in general and instead specifically **focus on mapping the landscape of institutional capabilities crosscutting all other 16 SDGs and the governance capacity of these sectors in order to establish the baseline for future comparison.** Shying away from bringing SDG 16 forward in the HLPF agenda would amount to “business as usual” and would impact negatively on the overall progress, since the lack of proper governance and institutional capabilities has been the reason why the MDG process did not result in higher achievements. The unfinished MDGs in many developing countries are a loud testimony to the peril of neglect in closing institutional capacity gaps and mitigating weak governance in many developing countries. **Allocating the review of SDG 16 to 2019 is a bad idea! Neglecting the necessary institutional capability of self-monitoring is also a bad idea! Both should be changed as fast as possible.**

**Recommendation 4: Prioritising the Medium Term Institutional Development Objectives as the Starting Point for SDG implementation by the international community**

The international community needs to help weaker states identify effective entry points when operationalising SDGs in order to address more difficult and complex targets later on. Incremental success begets confidence and commitment for achieving bigger, harder and more ambitious targets!

Institutional capacity building and public service delivery improvement need to happen concurrently. Formalisation of evidence based management reviews at all levels of

administrative hierarchy of national governments and transparency of policy choices would enable institutional efficiency and effectiveness. These are elements and positive impacts of good governance that can enrich the local administration and encourage political entrepreneurship in generating new solution sets when facing development challenges.

Countries who are implementing the SDGs in earnest should get recognition. Such recognition is especially warranted when governments took on the challenge of building administrative capacities to deliver essential basic services to un-served or underserved population. Such gear shifting implies re-prioritisation, re-configuration or outright administrative reform.

Best practices identified through the suggested 2016 mapping exercise of SDG 16.6 & 16.7 during the first thematic review need to be compiled and reflected so that knowledge sharing and replication can be accelerated. Waiting for every four years until a review allows for public scrutiny will make most countries lose precious four years needed to build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions - foundation in implementing the SDGs - based on their own experiences in their own contexts. It also deprives other countries from learning from countries of similar background and from creating their own secondary innovations.

The UNSG Report exalts the positive benefits of national reviews and stresses that reviews could provide information on how a country has adapted its institutional framework in order to implement the 2030 Agenda. It is suggested, that a robust and institutionalised monitoring system would create such an enabling environment leading to a shift of institutional framework toward closer alignment with the SDGs. *Transformation is a learning journey*. Scorecard and forward looking recommendations for improvements will require more competent human resources and financial resources. Both are in short supply in resource constrained countries. Monitoring the SDG implementation process and providing just-in-time feedback for correction at the national and sub-national level leading to increased efficiency and effectiveness should follow an annual cycle instead of waiting for a once every four year review.

The UN Secretary General's Report on "Critical Milestones toward Coherent, Efficient and Inclusive Follow-Up and Review at the Global Level" will be a crucial arbitrator of the success of the global effort in achieving sustainability for all. While important overall milestones have been identified in the UNSG's Report, no specific indicators were yet set for assessing progress of individual goals. Measurable indicators have been identified at the March 2016 session of the UN Statistical Commission. 231 Global Indicators have been adopted by the IEAG-SDGs with 80 of the 231 indicators "requiring refinements" (Tier III). On close examination of these 231 indicators, most of the Tier III indicators fall into the category of institutional performance and infrastructure.

Specifically indicators related to the institutional performance such as Targets 16.6, 16.7, 16.10, 16.a; partnership in capacity building (target 17.9) and sustainable development (Target 17.17); systemic issue (Target 17.14); and monitoring and accountability (Targets 17.18 and 17.19) require substantive work to establish the methodology and to start data collection at the global level.

**Recommendation 5: Improve Process Governance of SDG implementation through Systematic Monitoring, Feedback Loops and Big Data**

Reporting regular process monitoring of institutional performance as stipulated in the related Goals and Targets would enforce the institutional “learning” process in many developing countries and encourage learning and innovation. A monitoring system<sup>1</sup> is needed to record and document the various decisions taken to address the development needs of the population in specific territories. Such a monitoring system could also strengthen the process toward accountability and governance.

Deficient and poor quality data would render the drive for “institutional learning” and “accountability” void and nil at the country and subnational level. It also makes regional and global reviews a pro forma exercise only simply because there will be no data to analyse and no way to assess to what extent the SDGs and related targets are being achieved or missed.

Accessibility to monitoring information and evaluation findings needs to be provided to allow for measuring effective achievement of Goal 17.19. Without such accessibility, it would be hard to entice greater stakeholders’ engagement in the transition towards developing more sustainable communities and societies. Therefore to review Goal 16 and Goal 17 concurrently right from the start of the 15 year cycle towards 2030 would strengthen the interlinkages between the two.

**For sustainability to “work” for people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnership, the necessary milestones and reporting requirements are clear: the transformation of the public administration must begin in earnest, including assisting countries to establish a process oriented monitoring system that documents how implementation is being done and where blockages are at the national and subnational levels. The international community must not let slide the urgently needed work of developing appropriate indicators to measure institutional performance and instead should push for process indicators to ensure institutional learning.**

**Recommendation 6: The review of SDG 16 should not wait till 2019. Instead, reviewing of the SDG16 needs to be done as in 2016 and be consistently measured year after year thereafter.**

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<sup>1</sup> An action proposal entitled “ MONITORING OF SDG IMPLEMENTATION Infrastructure and Methodology – Proposal for Action” is available at

[http://www.csend.org/images/articles/files/Monitoring\\_SDG\\_Infrastructure\\_Methodology.pdf](http://www.csend.org/images/articles/files/Monitoring_SDG_Infrastructure_Methodology.pdf)