Towards strong accountability for sustainable development
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IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, envisions sustainable development as a path that leads to a just and prosperous world, which values and conserves nature by ensuring, through effective and equitable governance, that its resources are used sustainably. The post-2015 development agenda with the proposed Sustainable Development Goals, as they currently stand, represent a step towards such a world.

A strong follow-up and review mechanism is essential to ensure an increased level of accountability at all levels. When appropriately set up, it allows tracking progress, spotting challenges and mobilizing additional action.

IUCN, without intending to present a full-fleshed mechanism at this point, wishes to highlight in this paper the key elements that should be at the core of a follow up and review mechanism to measure progress towards achieving the SDGs:

✓ The follow up and review mechanism **should be state-led;**

✓ At the same time, it should establish procedures to **ensure meaningful participation by civil society and other relevant stakeholders;**

✓ **The roles and responsibilities in implementation and reporting need to be allocated in a manner that ensures integration** of the various dimensions of sustainable development;

✓ A level of **independence** in the review mechanism should be ensured through schemes such as **peer review** systems;

✓ The review and follow-up mechanism should be **built on existing reporting and monitoring mechanisms**;

✓ The follow up and review mechanism should be **science-based**; hence, the **indicators framework** should be at the basis of it;

For more information, please contact :

Cyriaque Sendashonga
Director, Programme and Policy Group
Head, Global Policy Unit
cyriaque.sendashonga@iucn.org

Constanza Martinez
Deputy Head
Global Policy Unit
constanza.martinez@iucn.org

Narinder Kakar
Permanent Observer
IUCN Permanent Observer
Mission to the United Nations
narinder.kakar@iucn.org

Maximilian Mueller
Junior Policy Officer
Global Policy Unit
maximilian.mueller@iucn.org

IUCN World Headquarters
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland
Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 999 0000
Fax: +41 22 999 0002
www.iucn.org/SDGs

It is widely recognized that one of the main reasons for shortcomings in achieving sustainable development over the past decades has been the lack of rigorous accountability mechanisms. Accountability can be defined as "the obligation of power-holders to take responsibility for their action"[1] (UNDP, 2010) or inaction. An accountability system is composed of a web of rights and obligations for each actor in the governance system. That is, to achieve sustainable development all stakeholders involved are responsible to contribute within their roles and it thereby extends beyond national governments. By establishing a properly designed follow-up and review mechanism, that involves regular reporting and peer review, all stakeholders agree to a non-intrusive process to be transparent about achievements and challenges to mobilize further action, and, most importantly, to ensure mutual accountability.

The overall success of the post-2015 development agenda is thus intimately linked to the establishment of a rigorous follow-up and review mechanism that increases mutual accountability. A well designed mechanism will be able to show in which areas progress is lacking, why progress is lacking and who can do something about it.

IUCN supports the design of a review and follow up system as a multi-layered mechanism, with elements at the national, regional and global level. Actual implementation occurs at the national level. At the same time, national implementation is impacted by regional factors (economic, social, cultural, biophysical, etc.). In addition, there are also global circumstances and forces that have impact on the regional and national levels. It follows that a follow-up and review mechanism needs to be of a multi-layered nature, responding to the specificities of each level.

The environmental and human rights fields have much to contribute to the discussion on a follow-up and review mechanism, due to its long experience with different accountability frameworks and good governance. This paper does not intend to present a full-fledged mechanism but rather to highlight core elements that should be at the core of a follow up and review mechanism to measure progress towards achieving the SDGs:

✓ **The follow-up and review should be a state led.** The discussions on the post-2015 development agenda have been led by governments, as all global policy processes are. However, this is the first of its kind, as the framework is aspirational and universal. The design and operability of the follow-up and review mechanism should reflect this nature. In this context, the reporting mechanism established for measuring progress towards the achievement of the MDGs present some experiences and lessons learned. Governments report into the Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) under ECOSOC. It has been noted that, one of the major challenges of this process is the poor participation of governments and lack of incentive to point out real problems and challenges. The strong commitment of all governments is essential for this mechanism to produce meaningful outcomes. The objective of the process should not be about naming and shaming, but rather about providing the space for a constructive dialogue for improving implementation by all (reflecting the universal nature of the framework). In addition, all the goals and targets should be reported on, including those related to means of implementation. Progress on the fulfilment of financial commitments should also be reported.

✓ **The follow-up and review mechanism should** establish procedures to **ensure meaningful participation by civil society and other relevant stakeholders.** Civil society and other relevant stakeholders have been significantly involved in the post-2015 development agenda discussions and they should continue to play an important role in implementation and in the follow-up and review mechanism. The appropriate processes should be put in place to ensure that all relevant stakeholders participate meaningfully at the follow up and review instances at national, regional and global level. The appropriate and meaningful participation of civil society and stakeholders may address the challenges

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[1] UNDP. Fostering *Social Accountability: From Principle to Practice – Guidance Note*. August 2010

learned through the reporting of progress of the MDGs, as described above. Civil society and stakeholders participation also increases ownership of the post 2015 development agenda and increases the level of implementation. As stated in the Chair's summary of the UNECE regional meeting on accountability, it *"should be understood as a participatory and inclusive process, which envisages cooperation and an interactive dialogue between multiple stakeholders, thus resulting in wide ownership."* Finally, different stakeholders can provide complementary information on the progress in a given country and contribute to the development of eventual recommendation for the way forward. Under the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters mechanisms and processes have been developed over the years. These processes may be used as examples for this context.

✓ **The roles and responsibilities in implementation and reporting need to be allocated in a manner that ensures integration** of the various dimensions of sustainable development. The post-2015 development agenda and its SDGs are revolutionary in the manner in which they interconnect the different dimensions of sustainable development; social, economic and environmental. This is one of the characteristics making this framework truly sustainable and transformative. IUCN has continuously argued for the integration of biodiversity and ecosystem services across all goals and targets to guarantee this interlinkage. This approach needs to be reflected in the distribution of roles and responsibilities in the implementation of and reporting on the framework.

Any reports elaborated by governments, international organizations or other stakeholders need to reflect this approach. The information to be included in the reports should be gathered and discussed in an integrated manner. At the national level, pertinent information will be available in many different ministries and they all need to be compiled into an integrated report. Therefore the necessary institutional structure and process needs to be set up at the national level. Formats that prompt for the inclusion of the necessary data reflecting integration, could be developed and used.

✓ **A level of independence in the review mechanism should be ensured through schemes such as peer review systems.** To ensure that the process is as independent as possible, a peer review mechanism could be implemented, particularly at the regional level. This would reinforce the governance at that level which is of utmost important for trans-boundary natural resources and environmental problems. In addition, existing commonalities of the geophysical and socio-economic characteristics of the countries allow for a more relevant exchange. The regional peer review would enable spotting common challenges and facilitate sharing of lessons learned among "similar" countries. The peer review must permit participation by other relevant stakeholders to complement the

> The Universal Periodic Review (UPR)
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> An interesting example at the global level that includes some of the elements called for in this paper is the Universal Periodic Review carried out by the Human Rights Council. It is **transparent**, **state-led**, a **peer review** and allows for **participation by civil society** actors at different stages of the process. The UPR is a process that reviews the human rights situation in all countries. Each government has to periodically report on the human rights situation in their country and is then reviewed by its peers. Civil society actors are producing a complementary report that is taken into consideration in this state led process. There is much interaction between the state under review and other states and civil society actors. It results in the adoption of a set of recommendations that is then reported on in the next cycle. A group of three states is chosen at random in advance and works on drawing up the outcome report of the process for the given country.

information shared by governments and to bring new and innovative ideas on how to overcome such challenges. There are already some peer reviews at the regional level, such as the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), which results in a national programme of action with goals set for the short, medium and long term. These should be considered more closely to inform the creation of the post-2015 regional review mechanism. Besides being a peer review system, a particularly interesting feature of the APRM is the existence of expert missions to the country for evaluation and assistance.

- ✓ **The review and follow-up mechanism should be built on existing reporting and monitoring mechanisms.** The SDGs framework pulls together a range of issues which have already been addressed through other international agreements and fora. Governments of countries Parties to/members of those agreements and fora have to comply with reporting and review obligations under them. Governments' reports to the work in building these reports should be included in the follow-up and review mechanism for the post 2015 development agenda. In the environmental field, vast information has been gathered through national reporting. Governments have had to undertake inventories and establish baselines to fulfill reporting requirements for many multilateral environmental agreements. The follow up and review mechanism should include a system to incorporate all this work. In doing so, a mechanism to build common methodologies to collect and analyze data should be put in place. This should also be built in a manner to increase consistency and coherence among different reporting obligations as well as to avoid overburdening governments with duplicative reporting.

  The example in the box above presents a good illustration of the different elements described in this paper applied in the Human Rights Councils' Universal Periodic Review.

- ✓ **The follow up and review mechanism should be science-based; hence, the indicators framework should be at the basis of it.** The review and follow-up mechanism needs to be supported by the best available science and an established, scientifically sound indicators framework. This is not only important for the credibility of the process but also to identify the real issues preventing progress and attribute the necessary solutions by comparing similar situations across countries. A transparent reporting process based on scientific data is crucial towards ensuring that the process can be results oriented and mobilize the necessary action to accelerate progress.

  IUCN recommends that the indicators framework be designed based on the following principles:
  - Indicators should be specific to the SDG targets
  - Ideally, there should be a limited number of indicators, e.g. one indicator per target, although there are cases where one target may need many indicators
  - Indicators should link multiple targets across the different goals
  - The indicators framework should be built on existing indicators and processes currently designing indicators
  - Indicators should rely on scientifically sound data
  - Standardized processes for gathering and analyzing data need to be put in place so that indicators applied at the national level allow for aggregation globally
  - Data deficiency and lack of technical capacity of national statistical institutions and other relevant stakeholders should be addressed.

  Please refer to our brief on the indicators framework for detailed information. Available online at
  www.iucn.org/SDGs