

# Sustainable Development in Action

## Special report on Voluntary Commitments and Partnerships for Sustainable Development, 2014 July edition

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# Introduction

Partnerships and voluntary commitments for sustainable development are multi-stakeholder initiatives voluntarily undertaken by Governments, intergovernmental organizations, major groups and others stakeholders to contribute to the implementation of inter-governmentally agreed development goals and commitments, as included in Agenda 21, the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the Millennium Declaration, the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) entitled “The Future We Want”, and the upcoming post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

In a development era with a mix of state and non-state actors as essential partners in the implementation of sustainable development, the importance of engagement at all levels has been repeatedly emphasized at various international conferences and their follow up processes.

The Rio+20 Conference demonstrated enhanced inclusiveness in its deliberations. With the presence of hundreds of thousands of participants from governments, the United Nations System, business, civil society groups, universities, as well those virtually following from afar, the Conference further strengthened the role of non-state actors in shaping the international agenda for a sustainable future. It created unprecedented momentum in parallel to the political process in witnessing the announcements of over 700 concrete multi-stakeholder partnerships and voluntary commitments for the implementation of sustainable development and poverty eradication.

The intergovernmental process duly acknowledged the complementary nature of these voluntary initiatives to the political outcome. The Secretary-General was invited, through paragraph 283 of the outcome document the *Future We Want*, to establish and maintain a comprehensive registry of voluntary initiatives - which were to be periodically updated, fully transparent and accessible to the public.

The United Nations Secretariat following its designated mandate launched the *SD in Action Registry* shortly after Rio+20. The registry, which contains detailed descriptions of all registered voluntary initiatives, also facilitates access to other registries and initiatives that promote sustainable development - or “Action Networks” as they are referred to - that have catalyzed voluntary commitments around specific themes. These include the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative (SE4All), United Nations Global Compact, Every Woman Every Child (EWEC), the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI), the Action Network on Sustainable Transport, and the action network on Partnerships for Small Island Developing States, which has emerged in the lead up to the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, to be held in Apia, Samoa later this year (September 2014).

In an effort to provide updated information to all stakeholders, the Rio+20 Secretariat, through the Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), prepared a progress report on voluntary commitments and partnerships for sustainable development in collaboration with the Action Network partners on the one-year anniversary of Rio+20, in July 2013.

The present document is the second edition of that report, its launch coinciding with the second meeting of the *High-level Political Forum (HLPF) on Sustainable Development*, which

is the designated forum at the United Nations for monitoring progress on sustainable development and follow-up on commitments made at Rio+20. The HLPF will also be the home for follow-up on progress of the post 2015 development agenda, including monitoring of the sustainable development goals, set to guide the international community at the conclusion of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015.

It's been two years since Rio+20 and the announcement of over 700 voluntary commitments and partnerships for sustainable development. What has happened since then? Are these voluntary initiatives on track in delivering as they set out to do? How can progress best be measured? And who has the authority to do so?

This 2014 edition of the annual report on voluntary commitments and partnerships for sustainable development takes a look at how various "Action Networks" monitor progress of their stakeholder's commitments, and how progress is enforced when deliverables are off track. The report will also look at options for an enhanced effective accountability and monitoring framework of voluntary initiatives in the post 2015 development era.

## Sustainable Development Action Networks and other initiatives

Sustainable Development Action Networks - referring to their focus on action and implementation - are thematically driven initiatives that aim at catalyzing new commitments within a certain thematic area. Action networks have proven to be very useful in focusing efforts within the priority area and to prompt results.

Some of the action networks covered in this report are well matured in terms of governance structure, available human resources, funding structures, networking opportunities; others are more informational in nature and have the opportunity to be further strengthened in welcoming key organizational drivers for pushing its agenda forward.

## Small Island Developing States – genuine and durable partnerships

2014 is a big year for Small Island Developing States.

The Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States – the SIDS Conference – will be held in Apia, Samoa (1-4 September 2014).

2014 is also the *International Year of Small Island Developing States*, which has the objective of highlighting economic, social and cultural contributions from this group of countries - and at the same time raising awareness of the SIDS Conference.

The SIDS Conference, which has the overarching theme of "*sustainable development of small island developing states through genuine and durable partnerships*", will include - as part of the official programme and outcome of the Conference – six multi-stakeholder partnership dialogues (Partnership Dialogues), each of which will be devoted to a cluster of key priorities for SIDS, and how partnerships can address those priorities. The Partnership

Dialogues will include reviews of existing successful partnerships, and act as a launch pad for new and innovative partnerships that can advance the sustainable development of Small Island developing States.

Member States agreed have agreed that a “SIDS SMART” criteria for selecting partnerships for the Partnerships Dialogues should be followed, which draws from the original SMART criteria as outlined in the first edition of this report.

The SIDS SMART criteria:

- **SIDS-SPECIFIC**
- **MEASURABLE & MONITORABLE**
- **ACHIEVABLE & ACCOUNTABLE**
- **RESOURCE-BASED & RESULTS FOCUED**, with
- **TIMELINES** for implementation & **TRANSPARENCY** by ALL PARTIES

A web-based SIDS Partnerships Platform has been developed by the Conference Secretariat, and is available at [www.sids2014.org/partnerships](http://www.sids2014.org/partnerships). It is devoted to recognizing of existing, and for the announcement of new, innovative and SIDS specific partnerships.

The impact-oriented “Action Networks” are proven to be extremely effective in raising awareness, mobilizing resources, and to catalyze actions and commitments within their respective areas of focus.

Similarly, a multi-stakeholder driven SIDS partnership framework – a *SIDS Action Network* - could be useful in raising awareness within the international community on issues related to the sustainable development challenges of SIDS, and to help drive new, and monitor progress on existing, multi-stakeholder partnerships that work towards advancing sustainable development of Small Island developing states.

An SIDS Action Network could consider including:

- **Steering Committee** – a multi-stakeholder steering committee with the objective to provide broad guidance to the network and to identify opportunities for collaboration. Members could include both SIDS member states and non-SIDS member states in order to keep the political will and visibility at the top.
- **Accountability Framework** – to enable transparent recognition and tracking of progress of multi-stakeholder SIDS partnerships and its commitments, and to facilitate feedback and capacity building for all involved partners in implementation, a accountability framework to ensure progress and accountability would be crucial to include.
- **SIDS Partnerships and Partner Platform** – dedicated web-based platform of registered partnerships to ensure transparency of deliverables, as well a network of registered partners for the promotion and identification of innovative ideas and dissemination of best practices, and opportunities for new partnerships. The platform should allow for reporting back on progress as part of the accountability framework.

Genuine and durable partnerships are based upon mutual trust, equality, respect, accountability and transparency. Partnerships in all forms for SIDS need to be enhanced and strengthened to ensure a meaningful engagement of all stakeholders in achieving sustainable development for SIDS.

A *SIDS Action Network* could make sure that SIDS remain high on the political agenda by having participating partners take part in relevant sessions of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which has the mandate from Rio+20 to follow-up and review progress in implementing sustainable development commitments, including follow-up on the outcome of the SIDS Conference.

As the post 2015 development agenda is shaping up with a set of sustainable development goals at its core, it is vital that the objectives of a potential emerging SIDS Action Network or framework, and subsequently the deliverables of its multi-stakeholder partnerships, are aligned with relevant sustainable development goals and targets to ensure the full support of the international community, as well for the purpose of monitoring progress and subsequent learning.

2014 has the potential of creating a well-needed push for multi-stakeholder partnerships that advance the sustainable development of Small Island Developing States. The outcome of the SIDS Conference in Samoa in September will provide further guidance and directions.

## Every Woman Every Child

The Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health (Global Strategy) was launched by the UN Secretary-General at the UN Leader's Summit for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September 2010 ([www.who.int/pmnch/activities/jointactionplan/en/](http://www.who.int/pmnch/activities/jointactionplan/en/)). The aim of the Global Strategy is to save and improve the lives of millions of women and children through increasing visibility and political support, mobilizing resources and catalysing a renewed effort to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the health-related MDGs (4,5,6).

The Every Woman Every Child movement, also launched in 2010, puts into action the Global Strategy to mobilize and intensify global action to improve women's and children's health. Since 2010, the movement has mobilized over 300 financial and non-financial commitments from a wide range of constituency groups, including NGOs, the private sector, global partnerships, foundations, academic and research institutions, health care professional organizations, multilateral organizations and governments ([www.everywomaneverychild.org](http://www.everywomaneverychild.org)).

Partners in the Every Woman Every Child movement work together across three workstreams: implementation of commitments at the country and global level; ensuring accountability for resources and results at the global, regional and national levels; and mobilizing and keeping momentum across world leaders and global stakeholders.

The implementation of commitments at the country-level is also supported by the Health 4 Plus (H4+, which includes UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, WHO and the World Bank), the lead technical partners for the Global Strategy. The H4+ specifically focuses on supporting countries to assess and strengthen their human resources and service delivery for women's and children's health; to tackle the root causes impacting their health, such as

gender inequality, limited access to education for girls, and child marriage; and to establish the implementation of commitments.

In the last year, both the implementation of commitments to the Global Strategy and the pace of disbursements have accelerated. Progress on the implementation of commitments has been made in a number of key areas, such as increasing the training of health-workers; increasing the number of health-care facilities; improving commodity availability and supply systems, including previously neglected commodities; and increased policies for reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health financing and service delivery.

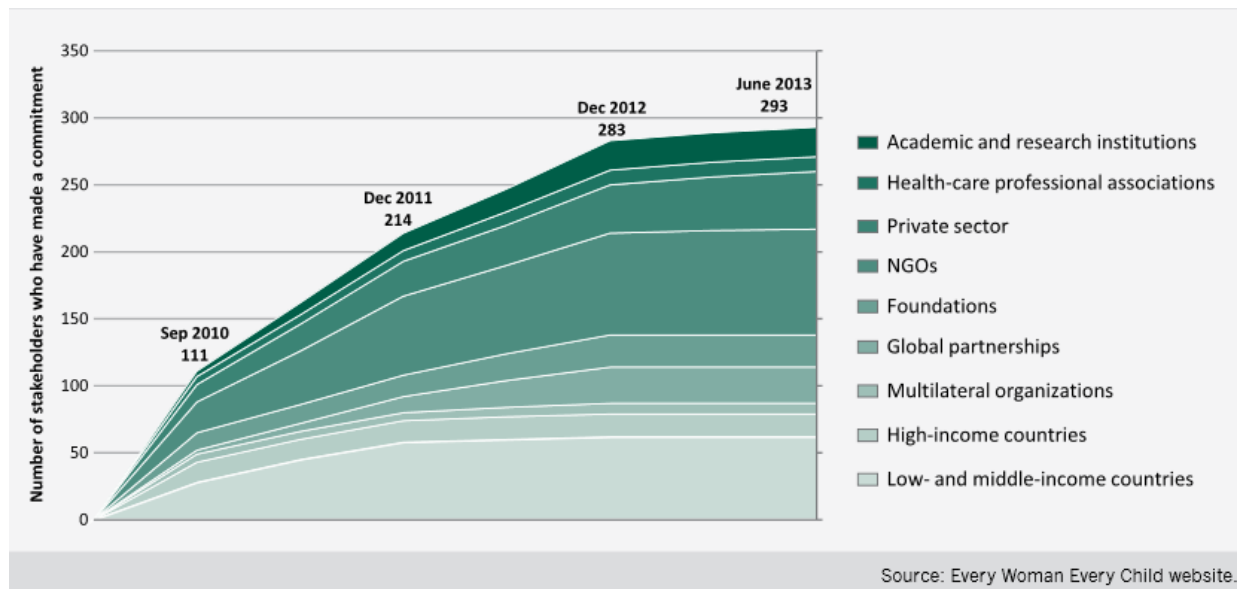


Figure 1: Stakeholders with commitments to the Global Strategy, by constituency, September 2010 – June 2013 (for the most up-to-date list of commitments, please visit [www.everywomaneverychild.org](http://www.everywomaneverychild.org)).

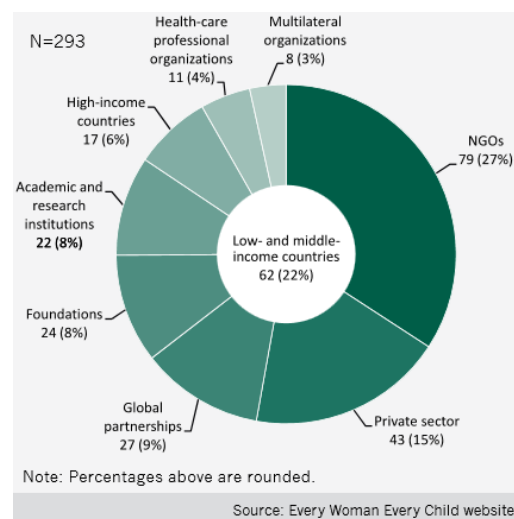


Figure 2: Commitment-makers by constituency group, as of June 2013.

## **Accountability at the core**

Accountability has been at the cornerstone of all efforts under the Every Woman Every Child initiative. Just after its launch, a time-limited Commission on Information and Accountability for Women's and Children's Health was established in December 2010, led by co-chairs, President Kikwete of Tanzania and Prime Minister Harper of Canada. The Commission developed an "accountability framework" to ensure that promises of resources for women's and children's health are kept and that results are measured. This framework sets out a continuous process of monitoring, review and action, with clear responsibilities at the country and global levels.

The Commission also agreed on a core set of 11 indicators to monitor the status of women's and children's health and issued 10 recommendations, which seek to ensure better information for better results; better tracking of resources for women's and children's health; and stronger oversight of results and resources, nationally and globally.

One of the recommendations of the Commission was to establish an independent Expert Review Group (iERG) to track progress on the implementation of the Commission's recommendations and review progress of the Global Strategy, until 2015. The core functions of the iERG are to assess stakeholder commitments to the Global Strategy and COIA, track flow of resources, review progress on implementation, identify obstacles to implementation, identify good practices and make recommendations.

The iERG progress review work is based on the country context and priorities; and uses already existing mechanisms, processes and data sources, as far as possible to reduce the reporting burden on countries. This fall the iERG will submit their third annual report to the Secretary-General.

Demand from countries has elevated action on accountability and also created an immediate need for financial investments in countries. Through the Accountability Framework, countries have adopted national accountability, measurement and transparency measures as a means to achieving the Global Strategy goals, although progress is slower in fragile states. This has resulted in greater inclusion of civil society, media and parliamentarians in monitoring progress toward women's and children's health and taking on new methodologies and approaches for tracking resources and vital statistics.

## **Key lessons learned**

In order for the accountability frameworks to be successful, high-level political engagement, at both the global and national level, is critical to keep the momentum high and advance progress on the accountability work.

Adequate financial resources are needed in order to fully implement and deliver on the recommendations made by CoIA and the iERG.

Further work needs to be done to link data with national review processes and decision-making.

There needs to be defined roles for each of the various partners, including donors, civil society, and governments, to ensure accountability.

EWEC serves as an “open source” model of accountability, which works well for a multi-stakeholder partnership. The various actors involved determine their own ways to hold themselves and others to account. This diverse approach recognizes the numerous methods of accounting for both donor and developing countries

### **Review of the EWEC Accountability Mechanisms**

The Executive Office of the Secretary-General has contracted two external consultants to conduct a review of the accountability mechanisms for women’s and children’s health under Every Woman Every Child. Complementary reviews by the iERG and WHO are part of this process. The aim of the review is twofold: i.) to understanding gaps in accountability and where efforts can be scaled up to make a stronger last push to achieve the MDGs and ii.) to offer experience and lessons learned to help inform Member States’ discussions on an accountability framework for the post-2015 agenda.

### **Next steps for the Every Woman Every Child initiative**

Every Woman Every Child has proven itself as an innovative model to tackle our most pressing global development challenges. In 2014-2016, Every Woman Every Child will focus on:

- Accelerating action on the health MDGs and delivering and reporting on results
- Addressing the most vulnerable and hardest to reach, especially those facing conflict or humanitarian disasters
- Mobilizing new partnerships and sustainable financing
- Examine and manage the bridging of Every Woman Every Child from the MDGs to the new development era, including its accountability mechanism

## **Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All)**

Sustainable development is not possible without sustainable energy. Access to modern energy services is fundamental to human development and an investment in our collective future.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim are calling on governments, businesses, and civil society to commit to taking concrete actions to achieve *Sustainable Energy for All* by 2030. These actions will provide significant benefits, including strengthened economic growth, expanded social equity, and a cleaner environment.

The Sustainable Energy for All initiative brings together top-level leadership from all sectors of society – governments, business and civil society. Since its launch in September 2011, Sustainable Energy for All has registered close to 200 commitments to action from governments, businesses, international institutions, and civil society:

- **81 governments** from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Small Island Developing States have signed up to participate. Most have already initiated or completed energy sector assessments and gap analyses, laying the groundwork to scale up



action in priority areas, undertake policy reforms where needed, and attract new investments and financial support.

- **Businesses and investors** committed more than USD \$50 billion toward the initiative's three objectives.
- **A number of multi-stakeholder partnerships** have been forged with potentially transformative impacts. Focused on more than 40 "High-Impact Opportunities" identified by the initiative's *Global Action Agenda*, these partnerships promote key sectoral and cross-cutting priorities, including: zero-emission vehicles, lighting technologies for the rural poor, clean cooking solutions, and gas flaring reduction.
- **Hundreds of actions and commitments** are under way in support of Sustainable Energy for All, supported by businesses, donors, entrepreneurs, organizations, artists, and individual volunteers.

A new business model is emerging at the United Nations – one where governments, businesses, investors, and civil society gather to solve global problems. In line with this new model, the Sustainable Energy for All initiative – like the Every Woman Every Child initiative before it – presents a new cooperative path to encourage the energy transformation that the world requires.

Accountability is a critical aspect of the Sustainable Energy for All initiative. A robust *Accountability Framework* will enable transparent recognition and tracking of voluntary commitments to the initiative, facilitating feedback and learning. The *framework* will complement the initiative's *Global Tracking Framework*, which measures overall progress on the three objectives of: 1) providing universal access to modern energy services; 2) doubling the global rate of improvement in energy efficiency; and 3) doubling the share of renewable energy in the global energy mix.

More information: <http://www.se4all.org/>

SE4All      Accountability      Framework:      <http://www.se4all.org/tracking-progress/accountability-framework/>

## Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI)

In December 2002, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 57/254 to put in place a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD: 2005-2014) based on a recommendation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002). The overall goal of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is to equip everyone with the values, skills, knowledge and behaviors required for a sustainable future and for positive societal transformation.

As important centres of research and learning, higher education institutions (HEIs) play a crucial role in generating and disseminating knowledge by integrating the principles of sustainable development into all university curricula as well as educational and research

programmes. HEIs are also expected to serve as local knowledge bases for sustainable development by providing relevant knowledge and skills to the local community.

The **Higher Education Sustainability Initiative (HESI)** was launched during the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012. It calls upon HEIs to make a commitment to sustainable practices such as teaching sustainable development concepts; encouraging research on sustainable development issues; greening campuses; and supporting sustainability efforts in the communities in which they reside. As of June 2013, a total of 272 organizations in 47 countries have made commitments to support these actions.

Marking the final year of the DESD, the **International Conference on Higher Education: Higher Education Beyond 2014** will be organized by United Nations University (UNU) on 9 November 2014 in Nagoya, Aichi, Japan in close partnership with relevant UN agencies and international organizations such as UNESCO, UNEP, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), UN Global Compact's Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) initiative and the International Association of Universities (IAU). The conference is a joint effort of HESI partners as a follow-up to the engagement of HEIs with the Rio+20 Conference recommendations and initiatives. It is also recognized as a public event organized by members of the UN Inter-Agency Committee for DESD, the annual meeting of which will be held a day earlier.

The conference aspires to celebrate the achievements of various higher education initiatives throughout the DESD by highlighting their contributions to addressing sustainable development through transformative changes in the vision, leadership, and knowledge structure in relation to other systems of knowledge, and through engagement with other critical sectors. The conference will also identify the major challenges and pathways for transformation of HEIs, with a focus on scaling up and mainstreaming innovative practices in learning and knowledge development and research.

The conference outcomes will be shared and reflected in the discussion at a workshop during the UNESCO World Conference on ESD, which will be held from 10 to 12 November 2014 in Nagoya, Aichi, Japan. The HESI will be the co-organizers of the workshop together with IAU. This occasion will provide a great opportunity to review commitments, set new goals and develop new strategic partnerships with the view to playing a key role in contributing to the Global Action Programme on ESD as well as the Post-2015 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. More details will be available through the conference website which will be open in late July.

## Sustainable Transport and SLoCaT

Voluntary commitments are an important instrument for the sustainable transport community to promote action on the development of sustainable, low carbon transport infrastructure and services. An initial 17 Voluntary Commitments on transport were made at the Rio+20 Conference including the unprecedented \$175 billion Voluntary Commitment for more sustainable transport on behalf of the world's 8 largest multilateral development banks. An additional 6 Voluntary Commitments were made in June 2013 on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Rio+20 Conference.<sup>1</sup> The importance attached to voluntary commitments as a change instrument in the transport sector was further demonstrated in the Ascent Meeting in May 2014 in Abu Dhabi, where out of the 31 proposed initiatives on climate change in support of the Secretary General's September 2014 Climate Summit, 6 were on transport.<sup>2</sup> The Partnership on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport has taken on the responsibility to coordinate the reporting on the Rio+20 Voluntary Commitments on Sustainable Transport and serves as the coordinator of the Action Network on Sustainable Transport.

### Current Accountability and Reporting Approach

#### Approach

The SLoCaT Partnership aims to ensure annual updates on the status of the implementation of the transport Voluntary Commitments. To send out a strong signal on the importance of annual reporting the SLoCaT Partnership produced a comprehensive progress report in June 2013: "[Creating Universal Access to Safe, Clean and Affordable Transport](#)" Report."

The 2014 reporting cycle is on going. Results will be made available at: [www.slocat.net/rio20-VC](http://www.slocat.net/rio20-VC). Organizations that made commitments are reporting on the implementation status of the deliverables and the challenges faced in the implementation of the deliverables.

Of all reporting efforts on the Voluntary Commitments, the one by the MDBs on the \$175 billion is the most comprehensive. In February, the 8 MDBs behind the \$175 billion VC published the first Progress Report (2012–2013) of the MDB Working Group on Sustainable Transport<sup>3</sup>. It is intended that the progress reports will continue to be published annually in the coming years.

#### Challenges

Effective reporting on the Rio+20 Voluntary Commitments is challenging because of the diverse nature of the Voluntary Commitments. This makes it difficult to make comparisons on progress across commitments. Also, organizations making the commitments did not always consider the need for reporting and monitoring when designing the Voluntary Commitment. In those cases where there was not a detailed, quantified monitoring framework this tends to result in qualitative reporting whereby the focus differs from year to year, which makes it difficult how the implementation of a specific commitment evolves

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<sup>1</sup>All transport related voluntary commitments are documents at <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1570>.

<sup>2</sup><http://slocat.net/transport-initiatives-abu-dhabi-ascent>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/mdb-wgst-progress-report-2012-2013.pdf>

over time. In the case of the MDB \$175 billion Voluntary Commitment, the establishment of a special technical working group to develop a monitoring approach helps to overcome these challenges.

### **Proposed approach to reporting on Voluntary Commitments in the post 2015 development era**

To ensure that the Rio+20 Voluntary Commitments on Sustainable Transport will continue to be an effective change instrument two complimentary strategies are being considered:

#### **a. Link the Transport Voluntary Commitments to SLoCaT Results Framework on Sustainable Transport and the post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals**

To promote the integration of sustainable transport in global policies on sustainable development, the SLoCaT Partnership started the development of a Results Framework on Sustainable, Low Carbon Transport in October 2013. It is intended that this Results Framework will result in: an agreed common set of targets and indicators, defining sustainable, low carbon transport by 2030; this to guide the transport and development community in the development of transport infrastructure and services in support of economic and social development. Once the Results Framework is finalized the organizations that made Voluntary Commitments on Sustainable Transport will be invited to include linkage to the targets and indicators as part of their annual reporting.

It is expected that in 2015 the UN General Assembly will adopt a number of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) accompanied by targets that will further operationalize these SDGs. It is expected that there will be a number of transport targets under different SDGs. To enhance the relevance of reporting on the Voluntary Commitments it is suggested that a linkage is created with the transport targets in the post 2015 development framework.

#### **b. Increase the visibility of the (Transport) Voluntary Commitments**

Organizations will take their Voluntary Commitments, including the reporting, more serious if these Voluntary Commitments are more visible. At the general level this would be the responsibility of UN-DESA, which is providing periodic updates on the Voluntary Commitments. This can also be helped by the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC), which through the Cloud of Commitments has played a lead role in publicizing the Voluntary Commitment Process. The detailed character and functioning of the High Level Political Forum (another key outcome of Rio+20) can also influence the visibility of the Rio+20 Voluntary Commitments. Linked to this is the status of the Action Networks on Sustainable Development. If these were to be given more visibility and prominence it is likely that the Voluntary Commitments that are part of these Action Networks would also receive more prominence.

The specific visibility of the transport Voluntary Commitments is expected to benefit from the establishment of the Secretary General High Level Advisory Group on Sustainable Transport, which is expected to kick off in the coming months. The SLoCaT Partnership is in the process of setting up the SLoCaT Foundation, which is expected to lead to a strengthening, and increase in capacity, of the SLoCaT Secretariat. This will make it possible to put greater emphasis on the tracking of the Voluntary Commitments on Sustainable Transport.

## Natural Resource Defensive Council (NRDC) and Cloud of Commitments

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an environmental civil society organization undertaking project delivery and policy development work in Asia, Latin America, Europe, and North America. In the run up to the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, NRDC launched the [\*Cloud of Commitments\*](#) to showcase the hundreds of commitments to action pledged there to deliver concrete means of implementation toward the negotiated outcome document. The *Cloud of Commitments* website aggregates and tracks specific commitments to action made by countries, corporations, communities, and civil society groups through a variety of platforms and networks.

### Update on Progress

One year after Rio+20, NRDC and Stakeholder Forum conducted a report entitled [\*Fulfilling the Rio+20 Promises\*](#) to provide third party independent review of the implementation of the major commitments from Rio+20. NRDC focused on 11 “cornerstone commitments” announced at Rio+20 that have the potential to be game-changers in their fields. We found Microsoft had fulfilled their commitment to become carbon neutral within a year, the government of Australia had tripled the size of its marine protected reserves to create the largest network in the world, and eight multilateral development banks were on track with their 10 year commitment to invest USD \$175 billion in sustainable transport in developing countries. NRDC will be releasing a brief update to the report in late summer 2014.

In November 2013, NRDC held a major international conference at Yale University themed [\*Rio+20 to 2015: A New Architecture for a Sustainable New World\*](#). The conference brought together a diverse mix of leading thinkers and doers to consider the institutional frameworks needed to accelerate action on climate change and the broader challenge of sustainable development. In total, 180 people from the United Nations system, government, civil society, academia, business, and students participated in the meeting, representing over 25 countries. The conference stimulated a response to the challenge set out by Hillary Clinton who, in her final speech as U.S. Secretary of State, called for a “new architecture for a new world” to address climate change and other multi-faceted global challenges. The new architecture Ms. Clinton called for is “more Frank Gehry than formal Greek” recognizing the need for a more dynamic and diverse mix of institutions and actors.

The *Rio+20 to 2015* conference assessed the multi-level governance architecture for two critical UN processes culminating in 2015: a new climate agreement and the post-2015 development agenda. Participants discussed institutional structures to encourage commitments to action and partnerships with all stakeholders to truly deliver on globally agreed goals. Four primary themes emerged from the conference: 1) the world has changed immensely since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit in fundamental ways; 2) top-down global frameworks, while necessary, are not delivering the results needed to address complex sustainable development challenges; 3) there is a much broader spectrum of means of implementation available today with multi-stakeholder networks becoming a primary vehicle to drive action on climate change and sustainable development at all levels; and 4) multi-stakeholder networks and commitments must be supported and strengthened through more robust and dynamic institutional architectures.

### Structural Accountability Recommendations

NRDC is working with officials, experts, and advocates integrating commitments to action into the institutional framework of the post-2015 development agenda. NRDC is advancing this endeavor on many fronts, but have found accountability for commitments to action to be a critical bottleneck. We were delighted that the Presidents of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council decided to convene a thematic debate on “The role of partnerships in the implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.” NRDC’s President Frances Beinecke provided remarks during the session on accountability for partnerships and stressed the following five best practices to structure accountability for commitments to action:

We need to focus more on the front end of accountability for commitments. It is often unclear who is responsible for commitments, where the necessary resources will be found, or when they will be completed. Following UN DESA’s leadership, we strongly recommend that all commitments to action are structured SMART – specific, measurable, accountable, resource-based, and time-bound – from the start.

We must ensure that more civil society partners, from all Major Groups and other Stakeholders, are involved in the process of formulating and operationalizing commitments. This internal form of accountability allows civil groups to evaluate and call out participants when action stalls. We recommend giving civil society partners a seat at the table from the start, so they can support implementation from the inside – encouraging, problem-solving, and moving toward delivery.

The UN and its Member States should invest in a data revolution for a concurrent accountability revolution. Dynamic commitment platforms around specific global goals and targets can provide regularly updated information to make commitments more transparent, facilitate geographic and thematic coordination, and identify gaps in implementation. Aggregating progress on commitments through the platforms will enable measurement against established targets and indicators. The new standard for recognition should be the *fulfillment* — not the *announcement* — of specific commitments to action.

Citizens and other stakeholders should be supported to contribute user-generated data on commitment progress through commitment platforms.

By putting monitoring and accountability tools in the hands of society, people themselves will be the witnesses to whether global goals are being achieved.

The UN and Member States need to provide ongoing staff support and financial resources to encourage, support, and report on commitment progress. Registering a commitment on an electronic platform is an important first step, but we need real follow-up from real people. Sustained follow-up and check-in with commitment-makers over the course of the year can ensure commitments don’t remain static entries on a platform, but become dynamic and fully realized actions.

### **Strengthening Commitments to Deliver the Post-2015 Development Agenda**

How can we strengthen commitments to action and partnerships including all stakeholders to achieve the post-2015 development agenda including the Sustainable Development Goals? Our conviction is that global goals can best be delivered by mobilizing thousands,

even millions, of people — including governments at all levels, the private sector, and civil society — working in a spirit of a *new global partnership*.

In order to build a culture of implementation for the post-2015 agenda, we also need a new institutional architecture for the new global partnership. The institutional structure of the post-2015 agenda must be multifaceted and encourage, strengthen, and hold accountable the constellation of commitments to action from the full range of stakeholders. National and issue-based commitment platforms, such as Every Woman Every Child, should be linked to national plans and objectives and ultimately to the sustainable development goals and targets (Figure 1).

Such an institutional framework can drive action and accountability by linking global goals with concrete actions by all stakeholders to ensure their implementation. By recognizing the tens of thousands of existing and potential commitments to action, the post-2015 development agenda can harness a truly transformative new means of implementation.

We are also hopeful that the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) will institutionalize a review mechanism to systematically evaluate the contributions of commitments to action from all stakeholders. In line with the HLPF's mandate to provide a "platform for partnerships" (para. 8c), commitments to action could be reviewed and best practices defined, and the forum could also commission independent reviews to provide legitimacy and credibility. Proactive review, monitoring, and accountability processes in a regular manner can provide crucial information on the performance of commitments to action and partnerships that is currently difficult to acquire.

The UN is at a crossroads. It is the only institution that has global legitimacy. The UN can become the convening platform where countries, communities, corporations, and civil society come together to commit to action in pursuit of shared objectives. We need 2015 to be a "AAA" year – of scaled-up Actions, of ambitious Agreements, and of enhanced Accountability.

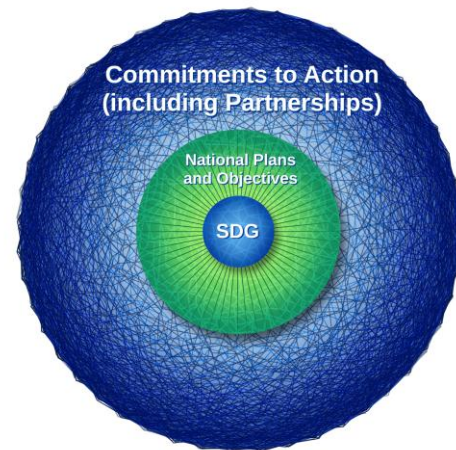


Figure 1. A new architecture for a new global partnership.

## Accountability Framework and existing mechanisms

### Introduction

The importance of accountability and effective follow-up on voluntary commitments and partnerships has been stressed repeatedly in various inter-governmental settings and international conferences related to sustainable development. Without accountability and transparency, including monitoring progress and measurement of the *impact* of voluntary



commitments and multi-stakeholder partnerships, the announcement of such initiatives run the risk of losing its legitimacy in the long run.

Following the discussions from the most recent inter-governmental processes and dialogues, including the General Assembly Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG), the joint event of the General Assembly (UNGA) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) on “*The role of partnerships in the implementation of the Post-2015 Development Agenda*”, (9-10 April 2014) and the interactive dialogue on “*Elements for an Accountability Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda*” held by the President of the General Assembly (1 May 2014), among others, it is clear that accountability is a crucial issue and will play a key role in the success of implementing the post-2015 sustainable development agenda in an all-inclusive, leave-no-behind, manner.

The post-2015 development agenda will require an even stronger engagement of stakeholders than in the past. Not one government, business, UN entity, or non-governmental organization can alone solve the puzzle of sustainable development, but it requires the full involvement of all stakeholders. In a world of increasing complexity and inter-linkages, partnerships are the natural vehicle to bring stakeholders together. By involving actors from different sectors, partnerships can build bridges across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Multi-stakeholder partnerships need to reconcile the respective interests of governments, business and civil society. The involvement of more than one major group – as defined by Agenda 21 - in a partnership can help ensure a balance between the various dimensions of sustainable development, and increase its overall accountability to its stakeholders.

*Governments* play a key role in fostering an enabling environment where multi-stakeholder partnerships can thrive and enjoy full integration among various sectors of society. Governments should continue to provide, both at the national and multilateral levels, policy frameworks and oversight mechanisms to ensure sufficient monitoring and transparency of the progress of the post-2015 development agenda, including those voluntarily undertaken by various stakeholders.

The *United Nations* also plays an important role in this field. With its strong convening power, the United Nations is in a unique position to promote and provide broad guidance of voluntary initiatives and multi-stakeholder partnerships, including in its implementation stage, and through regular monitoring and review processes at appropriate inter-governmental settings, such as the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Partnerships also need to have *built-in strong governance structures*, and provide regular and open reporting to ensure transparency.

## Existing accountability mechanisms

The first edition of this report (June 2013) laid out three pillars of a “*voluntary accountability framework*”:

- 1) Annual report on progress of voluntary initiatives (this report)
- 2) Maintaining a transparent and up-to-date SD in Action Registry



- 3) Welcoming and relying on independent third-party reviews, also known as “shadow reporting”, which is fostered through maintaining a *transparent and updated publicly accessible registry* (2<sup>nd</sup> pillar).

While the SD in Action Registry remain up-to-date, open, transparent and accessible to the public, its mandate (*paragraph 283, Future We Want*) does not include a strong monitoring mechanism to *ensure* accountability, as included through the various SD Action Networks such as the Sustainable Energy for All, Every Woman Every Child, and the action network on Sustainable Transport, as described in detail in the SD in Action chapters (above), among others.

The below provides a short summary of some accountability mechanisms. Some are from “Action Networks” which are of this report, others are not an “action network”, but has been included for comparison reasons. The below reviews should be seen as indicative and illustrative, rather than exhaustive.

- **Sustainable Energy for All (SE4All)** - the SE4All initiative measure progress towards the initiative’s three objectives - energy access, energy efficiency, and renewable energy - on two levels:

- Accountability Framework - at the level of individual commitments, stakeholders are responsible for establishing milestones to keep track of progress, and to report back on progress on an annual basis.

Individual commitments should follow the cycle of: development of commitment, recognition (commitment registered), action (execution of commitment), reporting back, review (by SE4All staff), learning (sharing of best practices and achievements), and recognition of successful actions.

Additional recognition may be given if an organization opts to have its progress report reviewed and audited by an independent third party.

Commitments might be *delisted* if they are significantly off track or not seriously being pursued.

- Global Tracking Framework - the SE4All initiative has developed a *Global Tracking Framework* which assess on a global level the reach of energy access, the share of renewables, and the rate of improvement of energy efficiency to assess whether the world is on track to achieve the objectives of Sustainable Energy for All. The framework provides a status report on a biennial basis.

- **Every Woman Every Child (EWEC)** - the EWEC initiative established in 2011 a Commission on Information and Accountability for Women’s and Children’s Health

(COIA) to ensure that commitments to advance the Global Strategy were measured and tracked. The Commission produced *“Keeping Promises, Measuring Results”* a framework with a set of 10 recommendations for global reporting, oversight and accountability on women’s and children’s health. An independent Expert Review Group (iERG) was set up in 2011 to report annually to the United Nations Secretary-General on the results and resources related to the Global Strategy, and on progress towards implementing the 10 recommendations.

An independent Expert Review Group (iERG) was set up in 2011 to report annually to the United Nations Secretary-General on the results and resources related to the Global Strategy, and on progress towards implementing the COIA recommendations. A number of reports have since then been produced which tracks the implementation of commitments and inform the iERG’s reporting to the United Nations Secretary-General on progress on women’s and children’s health and the implementation of the COIA recommendations.

- **United Nations Global Compact**

- Businesses that commit to United Nations Global Compact’s (UNGC) ten principles (<http://www.unglobalcompact.org/AboutTheGC/TheTenPrinciples/index.html>) are required to issue an annual Communication of Progress (COP) report on progress made in implementing the ten principles of the UN Global Compact, and in supporting broader UN development goals. The report is publicly published on the UNGC website.

Failure to submit the COP report will lead to changing a business participant to “non-communicating” and could eventually lead to expulsion from the UN Global Compact network.

- **Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in consultative status with ECOSOC**

- The first avenue by which non-governmental organizations (NGOs) took a role in formal United Nations deliberations was through the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Consultative relations between NGOs and ECOSOC are governed by ECOSOC resolution 1996/31.

An organization in consultative status with ECOSOC may participate in ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies and functional commissions. It may also participate in various international UN conferences and other inter-governmental processes. This recently includes the Rio+20 Conference, the upcoming Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, and the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

Consultative status with ECOSOC also provides physical access of NGOs to United Nations premises.

Contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and the work of the United Nations is one of the main purposes of granting consultative status to NGOs. ECOSOC monitors the contribution made by NGOs in consultative status through the requirement of the NGO submitting – every four year – a brief progress report on the activities of the organization, in particular highlighting its contribution to the work of the United Nations, the MDGs and other internationally agreed goals. The ECOSOC Committee on NGOs reviews the report, and once cleared, it becomes part of the United Nations publicly available official documentation system (<http://ods.un.org>).

Failure to submit a quadrennial report in time by an organization which is required to do so, will lead to a suspension - and ultimately withdrawal - of the organization's consultative status with ECOSOC, including all its rights. This process is governed by *ECOSOC Resolution 2008/4 - Measures to improve the quadrennial reporting procedures*.

- **The Universal Periodic Review (UPR)** is a unique process, which involves a review of the human rights records of all UN Member States. The UPR is a State-driven process, under the auspices of the Human Rights Council, which provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to fulfil their human rights obligations. As one of the main features of the Council, the UPR is designed to ensure equal treatment for every country when their human rights situations are assessed.

The UPR was created through the UN General Assembly on 15 March 2006 by resolution 60/251, which established the Human Rights Council itself. It is a cooperative process, which, by October 2011, has reviewed the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States. Currently, no other universal mechanism of this kind exists.

- **African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM)** - The APRM, established in 2003, is a mutually agreed instrument voluntarily acceded to by the Member States of the African Union as a self-monitoring mechanism.

Performance and progress are measured in four substantive areas: *Democracy and Political Governance; Economic Governance; Corporate Governance; and Socio-economic Development*.

There are four types of review:

- 1) A base review, which is the first country review carried out within 18 months after a country becomes a member of the APRM
- 2) A periodic review that takes place every two to four years
- 3) A Member country may, for its own reasons, request a review outside the framework of the periodically mandated Reviews
- 4) Early signs of impending political and economic crisis in a member country could also be sufficient cause for commissioning a Review.

## Options for enhanced Accountability Framework

While the SD in Action Registry will remain up-to-date, open, transparent and accessible to the public, as mentioned above, its mandate does not include a strong monitoring mechanism to *ensure* accountability. The visibility provided to third-party reviews might have vaguely provided the monitoring element, but it does not constitute a robust monitoring mechanism.

In order to maintain the legitimacy of the SD in Action Registry, it could be suggested that individually registered initiatives – those outside the scope an action network – that do not provide an update on its progress every two years, would be listed as inactive or be delisted all together from the registry.

SD Action Networks, with its focus on certain thematic areas, are proven useful vehicles for catalyzing new actions and commitments that deliver real impact on the ground. They are also useful for building capacity by sharing of knowledge and best practices among its networks and constituencies.

It is expected that the upcoming post 2015 development agenda, with a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) at its core, would encourage further strengthening of existing action networks and inspire the creation of new ones.

The SD in Action Registry will continue to support emerging action networks by including dedicated space on its web-based platform, as well including its commitments and actions in its registry.

### Access to High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which has been mandated to *“follow up and review progress in the implementation of sustainable development commitments”*, provides a platform for reviewing multi-stakeholder partnerships and their progress. HLPF will play a key role in folding these voluntarily undertaken initiatives into the intergovernmental cycle in the post-2105 development era by devoting sessions to review and discussions on the importance of voluntary commitments and multi-stakeholder partnerships in the implementation of sustainable development commitments.

The second meeting of the HLPF, being held 30 June to 9 July 2014 will include a session on *“Multi-stakeholder partnerships and voluntary commitments for sustainable development – ensuring accountability for all”*, during its ministerial segment, on 8 July 2014, fostering discussions on how to best create an enabling environment for the creation and realization

of voluntary multi-stakeholder initiatives, to share best practices, and how to effectively follow up on their progress.

### **Sustainable Development Goals Voluntary Monitoring Framework**

As the Millennium Development Goals are set to expire in 2015, a new United Nations development agenda is emerging – one with a set of *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs) at its core. These goals will guide international development efforts in the years beyond 2015.

The SDGs – currently being formulated by the *Open Working Group of the General Assembly on Sustainable Development Goals*, tasked with preparing a proposal on the sustainable development goals - are expected to be limited in number, aspirational and easy to communicate.

In following the discussions of the sessions of the OWG - which carries from March 2013 through July 2014 - as well reading available literature and background papers set forth by the group, it could be expected that *targets* will accompany the SDGs, and elaborated through indicators focused on measurable outcomes.

In an effort to increase the monitoring elements of the SD in Action Registry – which is designed to compile and provide access to voluntary policies, plans, programmes, projects and actions that promote sustainable development and poverty eradication – the containing initiatives, and its deliverables, could be considered being aligned to the upcoming SDGs and its possible targets, to ensure a compatible review against these goals and targets in the post-2015 era.

The current structure of voluntary initiatives contained in the SD in Action Registry consist of information such as; name of initiative, list of implementing partners, its objective, methodologies, coordination mechanisms and arrangements for capacity building.

It also includes date bound deliverables and information on devoted resources for carrying out the voluntary initiative (financing, in-kind contributions, staff/technical expertise, or other).

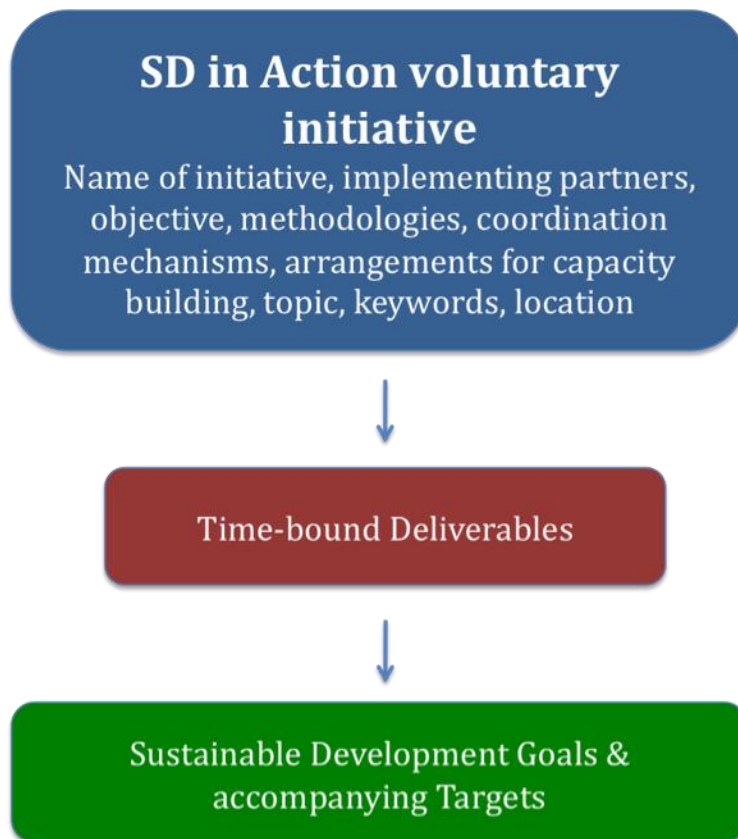
This together forms the elements of a SMART initiative – one that is Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Resourced based and Time bound.

An updated structure of the SD in Action Registry could consist of aligning each voluntary initiative to a specific *sustainable development goal*, or goals, and its deliverables to certain targets.

This would show the intended ambition towards the achievement of internationally agreed goals of voluntary initiatives on an *individual level*, but also provide a global overview of work voluntarily being undertaken – and in turn to identify gaps in implementation - in pursuit of reaching various goals and targets.

The updated SD in Action Registry, with the *SDGs Voluntary Monitoring Framework* in place, could provide a compliment for future reporting exercises on the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda, including through this report.

The High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development could also use the underlying data for further review and consequent discussions at its dedicated sessions, as appropriate.



**SD in Action Registry - SDG Monitoring Framework**

## Conclusion

Looking forward, what the post-2015 era needs is a new architecture that is inclusive of all stakeholders to participate and commit to concrete actions. One that is capable of delivering real impacts on the ground.

An enhanced accountability framework for voluntary commitments and partnerships that advance sustainable development will need to take into account this new architecture, which will demand both inclusiveness and strong accountability.

The impact-oriented "Action Networks" are proven to be extremely effective in raising awareness, mobilizing resources, catalyzing actions and commitments on their respective areas of focus. It is expected that the upcoming post 2015 development agenda, with a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs) at its core, would encourage further strengthening of the existing "Action Networks" and inspire the creation of new ones, which in turn would

encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships to align their deliverables accordingly and bring about much-needed changes for a more sustainable future.

Regardless of the format of its review of multi-stakeholder voluntary commitments and partnerships, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) should strive to maintain the momentum initiated in Rio+20 to inspire more effective implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals through multi-stakeholder partnerships.

The Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States – the SIDS Conference – will also provide further guidance and precedence on the role of multi-stakeholder partnerships, as it will include a unique parallel track to the political process in form of six multi-stakeholder partnership dialogues. These Partnership Dialogues, being an integral part of the SIDS Conference, will be not only be part of the outcome of the Conference – *the SAMOA Pathway* – but also its follow-up process.

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