Arab Consultative Meeting on an
Accountability Framework for the Post-2015 Development Agenda
15-16 September 2015, Tunisia

Remarks on ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Reviews
by
Mr. Navid Hanif
Director, ECOSOC Office
UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs

Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the organizers, especially the UN Economic Commission for Western Asia and the League of Arab States, for the opportunity to participate in this meeting. Thanks to the host government as well. I am honoured to be here.

I must congratulate ESCWA for the high quality of background documents, especially the paper prepared by Mr. Talat Abdel Malik.

My presentation is in three parts. First, what are the objectives and key features of accountability. Second, how the ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Reviews were conceived and implemented to achieve these objectives. How far did we succeed and what are the lessons learnt? Third, some preliminary ideas about the emerging contours of the multi-layered accountability. I will not go into details on the last parts, as it will be covered by Talat and Ms. Amina Mohammad tomorrow.

Why Accountability now?

Accountability is meant to ensure that everyone meets his/her commitments. It is more than monitoring and review. It is about behavior change. It is about achieving results.

Accountability is about transparency and answerability. It is about incentives. It is also about effective and efficient use of resources. It is about outcomes.

In the context of post-2015, it is about sustainable development results at scale. It is about universal applicability of voluntary commitments.

To ensure that these voluntary commitments are fulfilled, we have to create a culture of accountability. A culture that nurtures accountability by providing incentives to governments, institutions and stakeholders. In fact, we have to create the CWC of accountability. I mean Culture of Accountability, a Web of Accountability and a Circle of Accountability. I will revert to these concepts towards the end of my presentation.
ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Reviews

Let me now focus on the Annual Ministerial Reviews. What inspired them? How these were conducted? What are the lessons learnt and how those lessons should be used in designing the accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda.

Prior to the AMR, there were reports prepared on the MDG implementation by the UN system and governments but there was no dedicated inter-governmental platform to discuss these monitoring reports. A visible political platform was needed to review not only the implementation of the MDGs but also other internationally agreed development goals. To address this gap, the 2005 World Summit decided to launch Annual Ministerial Reviews in ECOSOC. These were meant to review implementation at all levels and then make recommendations for further action.

Since 2007, the Economic and Social Council has held eight Annual Ministerial Reviews (AMRs) with a focus on the internationally-agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

The Reviews draw on a combination of thematic assessments, global and regional reviews, and national voluntary presentations (NVPs).

The global reviews have resulted in an in-depth analysis of development progress. The regional reviews have assessed regional progress and injected regional perspectives into the global policy discussions.

The 78 National Voluntary Presentations – several from Arab countries [Kuwait, Sudan, Qatar, State of Palestine] – have shared good practices and the challenges in implementing national development strategies and policies. The voluntary and open nature of the Presentations has been conducive to sharing development experiences not only regarding policies that have been successful, but also in areas where Member States may need extra support.

The Annual Ministerial Reviews, however, have built a critical mass of information useful for policy-makers. There is now sufficient experience, accumulated over the past eight years, from which to draw valuable lessons for the way forward. These lessons include the following. First and foremost the reviews should be placed in a broader framework of accountability.

**Enhanced follow-up:** There is currently no systematic follow-up process in place to monitor the integration of policy recommendations into national planning documents and the impact of their implementation on national development. A feedback system should be part of the review process for post-2015 implementation.
Comparability of reports: Due to a lack of a common template, reports from different countries in the review cycles are not always easily comparable. This can be addressed within the new framework.

Stronger engagement of Reviewers: During the National Voluntary Presentations, selected reviewers take the role of friendly questioners in the interactive discussion. There is scope for stronger engagement of Reviewers in both the preparatory dialogue and presentation. In fact, the next stage is to turn these into peers that not only review but are also part of the preparatory work.

Wider participation of stakeholders: While the involvement of development partners and stakeholders is encouraged, it has been left up to each presenting country to decide upon their level of engagement. The engagement of civil society, the private sector and the UN development system has varied.

Country coverage: The number of volunteer countries has varied between 4 and 13 per year. While a larger number of participating countries offers a range of experiences and a full picture of lessons learned, it also limits the space for dialogue. Annual reviews should therefore include a limited number of reports.

Implementation will take place primarily at the national. A workable framework for tracking, reviewing and reporting on progress must begin at this level, with full stakeholder engagement. To make the reporting more effective, the national reports could take place at the regional level and seek to bring out systemic issues that are relatively common across countries in the same region.

At the global level, the number of presenting countries could be perhaps limited to five per year – taken from each of the five regions. The emphasis could remain on overcoming gaps and recommending actions to accelerate progress.

Let me just mention some numbers here. If every country were to make national presentations by 2030 then HLPF, under the auspices of ECOSOC, will have to handle 13 National reports a year, which is impractical.

What does it mean for the future

These reviews offer significant insights for an accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda.

First, a new accountability framework is necessary to support the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda. An accountability system should be guided by national ownership and leadership, and also involve all stakeholders.

Building institutional capacity and skills for data gathering and monitoring at the national level is of critical importance.
Second, monitoring, review and reporting will remain voluntary for all countries.

An accountability framework will have to maximise the benefits of experience and information sharing among partners and must be appropriately incentivised.

Third, some degree of comparability should be facilitated across countries, leading to the aggregate benefit of tracking global progress. Such a framework should therefore be underpinned by data and empiricism, with features that apply to countries at all levels of development.

Fourth, there is a need to encourage review and accountability, including peer reviews, at the regional level. Countries in the same region share similar challenges and are likely to make greater progress by collectively addressing them.

Fifth, national and regional accountability frameworks need to be anchored in a global accountability system. A multi-layered approach could work, engaging parliaments and other institutions at the national level, peer-review mechanisms at the regional level, and with the High-level Political Forum and Economic and Social Council at the global level.

Sixth, follow-up implementation of review findings and policy guidance will be crucial. A report-back mechanism would also be desirable.

In conclusion, I would like to come back to the CWC. We have to create a culture of accountability across governments, UN institutions and other stakeholders. Whether commitments are voluntary or legally binding, once made then the parties are accountable for their actions. This should be embedded in our work so that everyone is focused on results and outcomes. This is the culture that we need to nurture.

The Web of Accountability should be built around national, regional and international institutions. The regional organizations that are already conducting such reviews like in the African Union could help in linking these institutional platforms so a world wide web of accountability is created.

By circle of accountability, I mean a feedback loop at all levels but particularly at the global level. This circle sometimes should also be seen as a spiral that raises the bar for everyone.

I am not going to touch upon the technical details for the accountability framework, as those will be presented later today and tomorrow.

Thank you for your attention.