



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Major Groups and Other Stakeholders:

**A Review and Evaluation
of the Engagement
in the 2020 and 2021 Sessions of the
High-level Political Forum
on Sustainable Development (HLPF)
and Areas to Strengthen Participation in 2022**

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Disclaimer: The views expressed in this research paper are that of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations.

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INTRODUCTION

The major groups and other stakeholders (MGoS) were integral to the development and adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since its adoption, MGoS have been actively working towards its implementation, through projects, initiatives, advocacy, knowledge-sharing, and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. MGoS are also active in the annual follow-up and review process of the 2030 Agenda, which culminates in the annual High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF).



The opportunities open to the MGoS to participate in the HLPF include but are not limited to submitting official discussion papers on the theme of the HLPF, otherwise known as executive summaries; extended position papers; paragraph 89 reports; participation in Expert Group Meetings; submission of oral contributions to the Ministerial Declaration; collaboration with UN DESA in the organization of the MGoS official session; nomination of lead discussants in the official thematic sessions; nomination of representatives to make interventions from the floor during official thematic sessions; nomination of representatives to ask questions to countries presenting voluntary national reviews (VNRs); hosting side events; and participating in VNR Labs and special events.

There are currently 21 major groups and other stakeholder constituencies. The Organizing Partners from each of the MGoS constituencies form the MGoS–Coordination Mechanism, an autonomous and self-organizing space for coordination among social groups and societal constituencies interested and committed to the advancement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its follow-up and review process, with special but non-exclusive reference to the all-year round preparations for the HLPF. Three new constituencies joined the MGoS–Coordination Mechanism prior to the 2021 HLPF, namely the ECE Regional Civil Engagement Mechanism (ECE RCEM), the Africa Regional Mechanism for the MGoS (ARMMGoS), and the Stakeholder Group for Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD).

In preparation for the 2021 HLPF, it was anticipated that there were several remnant challenges from the 2020 Virtual HLPF which could disrupt the engagement and participation of MGoS at the 2021 HLPF. Some of the primary challenges included the imposition of national lockdown restrictions and the lack of personal internet access available to MGoS constituents. In addition, it was anticipated that the introduction of a new MGoS–Coordination Mechanism co-chair, new Task Group leaders, and the three new constituencies prior to the 2021 HLPF could result in the loss of institutional memory in preparation for the various engagement and participation processes. Despite these challenges, it appears as though there has been an increase in the overall engagement and participation of the MGoS at the HLPF between 2019 and 2021, as demonstrated by the table below.

HLPF	In-person		Virtual		Hybrid	
	Did submit	Did not submit	Did submit	Did not submit	Did submit	Did not submit
Executive Summaries	11	7	15	3	15	6
Position Papers	11	7	15	3	16	5
Thematic: Panelists	6	N/a	5	N/a	5	N/a
Thematic: Lead Discussants	15	N/a	13	N/a	15	N/a
Thematic: Interventions	16	2	9	9	18	3
Side Events	13	5	12	6	14	7

Figure 1: Table displaying how many MGoS constituencies engaged in the various written and oral opportunities made available to contribute to the HLPF between 2019 and 2021

There is, understandably, a notable dip in the engagement and participation of MGoS between the 2019 HLPF, which was held in-person, and the 2020 HLPF, which was held virtually. For the purposes of the evaluation, it is also worth noting that the number of MGoS constituencies grew from the 18 in 2020 to 21 prior to the 2021 HLPF. The table does not include figures relating to the submission of paragraph 89 reports on the theme of the HLPF or exhibitions given that representatives typically engage in these processes on behalf of their ECOSOC accredited organizations rather than MGoS constituencies. Similarly, MGoS constituencies do not collaborate with UN DESA to organize VNR Labs or special events and so their engagement and participation in unofficial sessions of the HLPF is more difficult to evaluate.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

It was anticipated that Covid-19 would have adversely affected the number of official discussion papers on the theme of the HLPF, known as 'executive summaries', submitted by MGoS. In 2019, 11 out of 18 MGoS constituencies (61%) submitted executive summaries. Despite the impact of Covid-19, the number of executive summaries submitted by MGoS increased to 15 out of 18 (83%) in 2020.



Figure 2: Submission of executive summaries between 2019 and 2021

In 2021, following the introduction of three additional MGoS constituencies, the number of submissions stabilized, in that 15 out of 21 MGoS constituencies submitted executive summaries, although this represented a lower percentage of MGoS constituencies overall (71%).

Despite the impact of Covid-19, MGoS constituencies have been provided with the same opportunity to provide official written submissions to the HLPF between 2019 and 2021. In fact, a greater number of MGoS constituencies have submitted executive summaries since the advent of remote working. It's worth noting that MGoS constituencies have been using shared platforms, such as Google Docs, to invite inputs from constituents and collaborate on shared submissions prior to 2019, but the necessity of remote working may have driven the increase. What is not known is whether or not Covid-19 had an impact on the breadth of constituents and the number of constituents within each MGoS constituency who contributed to the submissions. The MGoS constituencies do not typically share the number of contributors or signatories to each executive summary.

Discounting the three newest constituencies, what we do know is that 9 out of 18 MGoS constituencies have submitted executive summaries year-on-year between 2019 and 2021, namely, the Local Authorities Major Group; NGO Major Group; Scientific & Technological Community; Women's Major Group; Workers and Trade Unions Major Group; Stakeholder Group on Ageing; Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities; Volunteers Stakeholder Group; and the Asia-Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism. Three MGoS constituencies have only submitted one executive summary during this time period, namely, the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group; Sendai Stakeholder Mechanism; and the Civil Society Financing for Development Stakeholder Group. Only one MGoS constituency has failed to submit during this period, the Farmers Major Group.

POSITION PAPERS

It was anticipated that the impact of Covid-19 on the submission of non-official position papers by the MGoS constituencies would correlate with the submission of executive summaries. Position papers also focus on the theme of the HLPF and are extensions of the executive summaries.

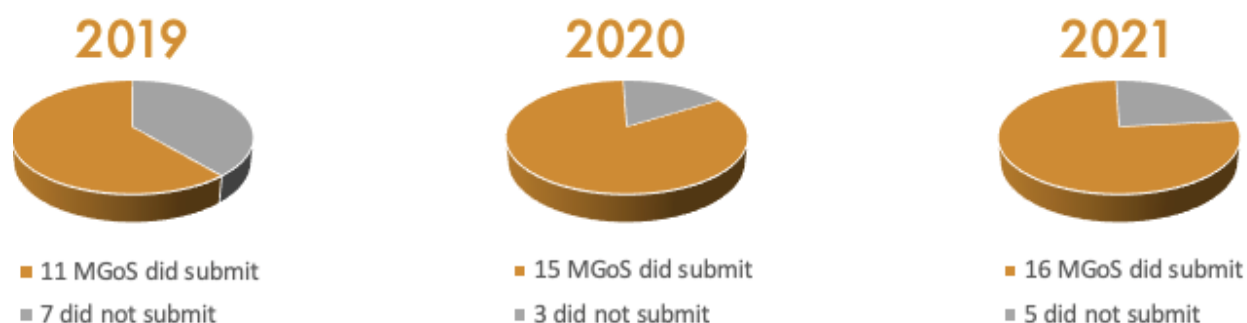


Figure 3: Submission of position papers between 2019 and 2021

In 2019, 11 out of 18 MGoS constituencies (61%) submitted position papers. Despite the impact of Covid-19, the number of position papers increased to 15 out of 18 (83%) in 2020. This number increased again in 2021 when 16 out of 21 MGoS constituencies (76%) submitted position papers.

Once again, 9 out of 18 MGoS constituencies submitted position papers year-on-year between 2019 and 2021. There is a direct correlation between the MGoS constituencies who regularly submit position papers and those that regularly submit executive summaries. Of the 9 MGoS constituencies who submitted position papers each year between 2019 and 2021, 8 also submitted executive summaries each year, namely, the NGO Major Group; Scientific & Technological Community; Women's Major Group; Workers and Trade Unions Major Group; Stakeholder Group on Ageing; Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities; Volunteers Stakeholder Group; and the Asia-Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism. While the Indigenous Peoples' Major Group and the Sendai Stakeholder Mechanism submitted one position paper during this period, the Farmers Major Group and the Civil Society Financing for Development Stakeholder Group are the only constituencies who failed to submit a position paper at all.

THEMATIC SESSIONS: PANELISTS

In preparation for the HLPF, the MGoS-Coordination Mechanism is asked to submit a slate of representatives to participate as panelists in the official thematic session, which focuses on the visions and priorities of MGoS. Four MGoS participants have been invited each year between 2019 and 2021. Typically, one additional MGoS representative is put forward to moderate this session. In 2019, the MGoS-Coordination Mechanism opted to have two moderators. The opportunities afforded to MGoS in this regard have remained consistent despite the impact of Covid-19.



Figure 4: Number of MGoS participants in the MGoS official thematic session of the HLPF

THEMATIC SESSION: LEAD DISCUSSANTS

The MGoS-Coordination Mechanism is also asked to submit a slate of Lead Discussants to participate in each of the official thematic sessions of the HLPF. In 2019, 15 lead discussants participated across 14 official sessions. There was a decrease in the number of official thematic sessions in 2020. Thirteen lead discussants participated in 13 official sessions. In 2021, however, this number increased to 16 lead discussants across 13 official sessions. It is not uncommon for the MGoS-CM to request that separate lead discussants from the Business and Industry Major Group and the Workers and Trade Unions Major Group are nominated for a thematic session which focuses on SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth in order to provide balanced perspectives. From this, it is evident that the opportunities for MGoS to engage in the thematic sessions of the HLPF are being safeguarded.



Figure 5: Number of MGoS Lead Discussants per official thematic session at the HLPF

Over the course of the 40 official thematic sessions between 2019 and 2021, the MGoS-Coordination Mechanism has submitted 44 lead discussants. During this period, there have been 2 instances where the same lead discussant has been nominated. There have also been 2 instances where the lead discussant had previously appeared as a panelist in the MGoS official thematic session. The lead discussants have otherwise been comprised of new representatives.

THEMATIC SESSION: INTERVENTIONS

In 2019, MGoS made 43 interventions from the floor during the official thematic sessions of the HLPF. This represented approximately 3.9 interventions per session. With the advent of the virtual HLPF, this figure dropped to 23 interventions. This represented approximately 2.1 interventions per session. This figure increased once again in 2021, where MGoS made 36 interventions, representing approximately 2.8 interventions per session. MGoS interventions during the MGoS official session are significantly higher than those in the other thematic sessions and have therefore been removed so as not to distort the final figures.

The simple explanation for the higher number of interventions in 2019 is that the length of the official thematic sessions during the in-person HLPF was longer. To some extent, capacity to engage with the HLPF in 2020, as well as familiarity with online virtual meetings, account for the increase in interventions between 2020 and 2021. One of the most drastic improvements, however, was the fact that MGoS interventions in 2021 were interspersed with those of Member States rather than left until the end of the session. It also meant that MGoS were far less likely of having their microphone time curtailed to one minute, rather than two, when making their interventions.

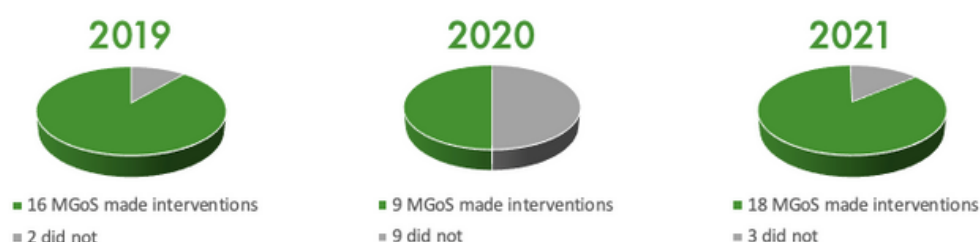
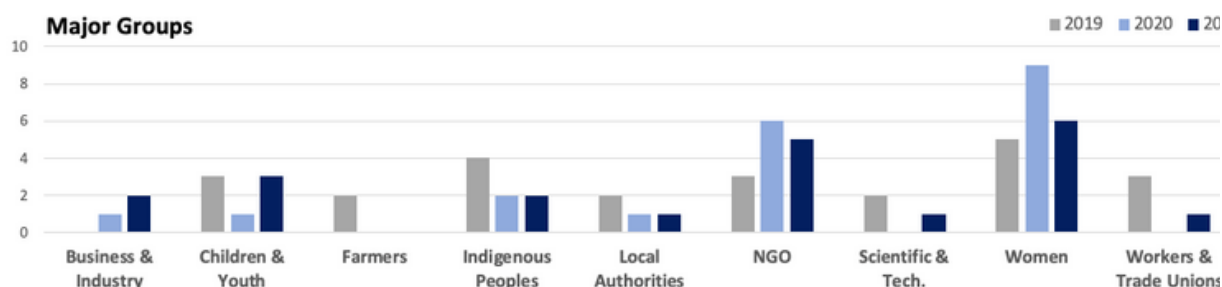
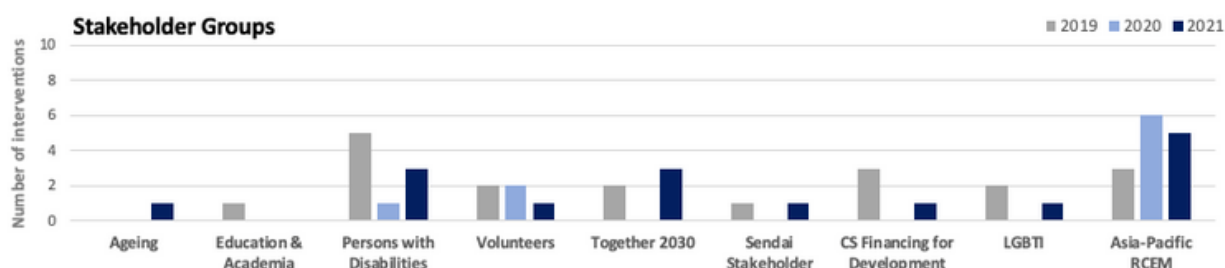


Figure 6: Number of interventions from the floor made by MGoS during the official thematic sessions of the HLPF

In 2019, 16 of the 18 MGoS constituencies made at least one intervention during the official thematic sessions. In 2020, only 9 of 18 MGoS constituencies made at least one intervention. This figure rose to 18 out of 21 MGoS constituencies in 2021.





Figures 6 and 7: Number of interventions the floor per MGoS constituency during the official thematic sessions of the HLPF between 2019 and 2021

By looking at the number of interventions made by each MGoS constituency from 2019 to 2021 in greater detail, it becomes apparent that MGoS interventions are largely dominated by the NGO Major Group; Women’s Major Group; and Asia-Pacific Regional Civil Society Engagement Mechanism. Having worked closely with the Selection Task Group of the MGoS–Coordination Mechanism, these constituencies do not deprive other constituencies of opportunities, but rather have representatives that are ready to participate in each and every thematic session.

SIDE EVENTS

MGoS constituencies have maintained interest in hosting in-person side events in parallel with the official sessions of the HLPF. In 2019, 14 out of 18 MGoS constituencies hosted virtual side events. In 2020, 14 out of 18 MGoS constituencies hosted virtual side events and in 2021, 17 out of 21 MGoS constituencies hosted virtual side events. The advent of the virtual HLPF has meant that side event applicants are no longer vying for the limited number of conference rooms that are available in the UN building during the peak mid-session hours of an in-person HLPF.



Figure 8: Number of side events hosted by MGoS 2019-2021

VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

During the 2021 hybrid HLPF, MGoS engaged in the question-and-answer segment of the VNR official sessions virtually. 42 countries presented VNRs at the 2021 HLPF. Out of those 42 presentations, there were 39 occasions whereby MGoS posed a question. Of the three occasions where MGoS did not ask a question, two were as a result of the MGoS representative not being able to unmute their microphone in a reasonable time despite being given adequate time by the chair. One was as a result of technical failure on UN DESA's side which meant that no opportunity was provided.

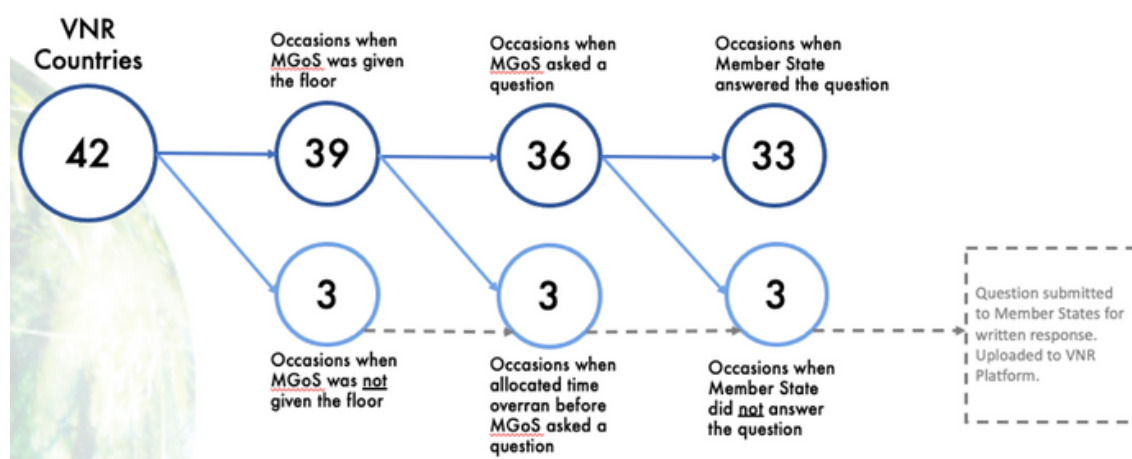


Figure 9: Infographic of the number of MGoS questions answered by VNR countries 2021

Of the remaining 39 occasions where MGoS took the floor, there were three occasions where the MGoS representative overran their allotted time and did not get to the question at the end of their submission.

Of the remaining 36 occasions where MGoS representatives took the floor and asked a question, there were three occasions where VNR countries did not answer the question. In these instances, VNR countries either failed to address the question posed or stated that due to the limited time available, they would answer the question in writing instead. As demonstrated by the diagram above, when VNR countries did not answer a question, for any of the reasons outlined above, the question was submitted in writing and responses were uploaded to the VNR Knowledge Hub.

In 2021, 33 of 42 questions from MGoS were answered "live" rather than in writing, this represented 79% of the total. There has been a stark increase from the 2020 virtual HLPF where 27 of the 47 MGoS questions were answered "live" rather than in writing, this represented 57% of the total. The MGoS VNR Task Group encourages a broad participation across the MGoS constituencies when drafting statements and questions to VNR countries. The MGoS constituency which asks the question is of little relevance and so figures outlining engagement and participation across the MGoS constituencies has not been provided here.

The impact of Covid-19 and unfamiliarity with virtual conferences were no doubt significant factors on the 2020 figures. In addition, early identification of the MGoS representatives who would be asking questions in 2021 meant that UN DESA could provide support for MGoS representatives in advance of the HLPF. In one instance, the UN Country Team in Angola provided internet connection and office space for one MGoS representative who asked a question. It has been seen that MGoS representatives are more familiar with platforms such as Zoom and WebEx and are therefore able to find the mute buttons more quickly than on unfamiliar platforms such as Interprefy.

OVERALL IMPACT

Overall, UN DESA has provided the same if not a greater number of opportunities for MGoS to engage and participate at the HLPF while having to endure the restrictions imposed by Covid-19. While the outcomes of the virtual and hybrid HLPF demonstrate a best effort by UN DESA, a virtual forum is no substitute for an in-person forum. The in-person HLPF allows for more meaningful engagement between participants not only in conference rooms but the corridors and cafes of the UN building. The 'MGoS Engagement Statistics HLPF 2019-2021' Excel sheet, which accompanies this short report, will hopefully help to continue to compare levels of MGoS engagement in future. The 'MGoS - Recommendations to strengthen engagement and participation at HLPF' document, will hopefully help to identify new practices to adopt for both hybrid and in-person forums in years to come.



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