High Level Political Forum 9th-20th July 2018

Introduction

It was our great opportunity to participate at High Level Political Forum at the UN. It helped me to know how the advocacy takes place at higher level and how we can share our grassroots work at the side event. We all reached in New York on 7th July. The next day we had orientation of HLPF done by the Emilia and Stefano. This orientation was specially prepared by the Coordinators of the NGOs major groups for new participants. To communicate and update us for all the details of the HLPF a watts app group and Google email group was formed. This really helped me to know the process of the HLPF.

Morning Briefings

I truly appreciate the efforts of the UN DESA and the major groups’ coordinating mechanism who had briefings for all the participants every morning. These briefings set the tone for the day. There were groups who were continually working on the parallel reports of the countries who presented the VNRS. This task force collected all the shadow reports and complied them for publications. Some of the team members kept in touch with us gave all the updates of the forum particularly if we wanted to get in the conference room where actual forum was taking place.

Opening Session

The opening session on 9th July was very thought provoking and challenging for all of us present at the forum. There were member states, delegates from different organizations and members of the NGOs. For me the speech of Jeffery Sachs who bluntly challenged the richest people of the world to mobilize financial resources to achieve SDGs and above all to implement SDGs in the developing countries so that no one is left behind. He mentioned two obstacle in our society and that is greed and investment which are keeping us back and not letting us achieve our goals. He also emphasized that SDGs are our way/ roadmap towards global happiness.

Panel discussions

There were number of panel discussions on different cross cutting issues like women, children, people with disabilities and data gathering. Particularly panel discussion and input on data was new learning for me and how data can be effective for us. Qualitative and quantitate data helps us to see the real picture what is happening at ground level. With accurate data the policies can be influenced at country level. All the countries have to do their own surveys and gather the data to analyze the real picture of those who are furthest left behind. If we as NGO have reliable and accurate data, we can contribute and challenge the government. We can also participate in gathering the data at national and international level.

Youth and children

There were a lot of inputs and discussions from different countries on youth and children. How the role of youth is essential for achieving SDGs in each countries. We are informed at the forum that 8.10 billion young people are at the age of 15-25 and we need their involvement and energy to achieve our agenda 2030. In Pakistan 64% population is below the age of 30. I am convinced
that if every country and specially Pakistan uses the potential of the young and initiate the projects for them surely we can achieve SDGs in Pakistan.

**VNRs (Voluntary National Reviews)**

There were various countries who presented their reports of their countries. The process of VNR was interesting and there were a lot of learning for me. The VNRs were presented very effectively, clearly and creatively. There were interventions by the member states at the forum after each VNR. Their interventions were challenging for the member states and they had to answer all the questions properly. Some of the countries were very true and realistic and presented their short comings in implementation of SDGs.

**Side Events**

There were 600 applications which were registered for the side events at HLPF, but not everyone had the chance to have side event at UN. Many had their side events outside and shared their interesting projects and implementations of SDGs. I happened to attend some of them. Their stories were effective and helped us to understand how differently we can localize the SDGs. We were preparing and looking forward to our own side event which was on 17th July. Four of the coordinators shared their work of SDGs very creatively. Many people present at the event appreciated our grassroots stories of SDGs.

**Conclusion**

The forum was a big eye opener and a challenge for us. As global community we have a long way to go and only 12 years are left to achieve the agenda. We the civil society and the governments have to collaborate with each other if we want a bright future for our coming generations.

Submitted by Shazia Lal Gill