



TREATY BODY FOLLOW-UP REVIEW PILOT SERIES FINAL REPORT

*Evaluating National and Regional Models
for Mid-Term Follow-up Reviews within
the New 8-Year Review Cycle*

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Introduction

The Treaty Body (TB) Follow-up Review Pilot Series is one of the latest initiatives launched by the Geneva Human Rights Platform (GHRP) in light of the ongoing efforts to strengthen the UN Human Rights TB system, sparked by UN General Assembly resolution 68/268 in 2014.¹ To implement this project, the GHRP teamed up with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Pacific Community. The resolution aimed to create a more efficient system, which would enable TBs to operate independently and impartially while ensuring that states effectively fulfill their obligations.

In 2020, the President of the General Assembly mandated Switzerland and Morocco to facilitate informal consultations with member states, OHCHR, and other stakeholders. The consultations aimed to outline recommendations for enhancing the treaty body system. One significant recommendation was to consider strengthening the involvement of TBs with member states by organizing “reviews in regions”.² This approach aims to foster stronger ties with national stakeholders, increase the system's visibility, and improve interaction with national and regional human rights systems, ultimately providing more participation opportunities for actors facing difficulties with the regular review procedure in Geneva.

In 2022, the Chairs of the TBs, during their 34th meeting, agreed on developing “an eight-year cycle for full reviews with follow-up reviews in between”.³ The longer periodicity of full reviews with focused follow-up reviews in-between aims to alleviate the burden for States of the review process overall, allow for equal treatment among them and keep the cost of the system reasonable. The length of the eight years’ review cycle is compensated by follow-up reviews that focus on up to four specific priority issues, striking a balance between the importance of following up on critical issues in a timely manner, the cost-effectiveness of the review process and the time and resources invested by States and other stakeholders.⁴

The OHCHR was tasked with developing an action plan to implement these conclusions. In 2023, the OHCHR adopted the “Working Paper - Options and guiding questions for the development of an implementation plan for the conclusions of the treaty body Chairs at their 34th meeting in June 2022”.⁵

¹ A/RES/68/268, [Strengthening and enhancing the effective functioning of the human rights treaty body system \(2014\)](#)

² A/75/601, [Report of the co-facilitators on the process of the consideration of the state of the UN human rights treaty body system \(2020\)](#), para. 67-69.

³ [Conclusions of the Chairs of the treaty bodies at the 34th meeting of the Chairs of the treaty bodies \(2022\)](#), para 6

⁴ OHCHR [Working Paper - Options and guiding questions for the development of an implementation plan for the conclusions of the treaty body Chairs at their 34th meeting in June 2022](#) (May 2023), p. 13

⁵ Ibid.

The working paper proposed three options for follow-up reviews:

1. **Direct Correspondence:** Between the Committee and the State, which is the simplest and cheapest, but least substantive.
2. **Direct Correspondence with Constructive Dialogue:** A hybrid or online format, which is more comprehensive and more expensive.
3. **In-situ Visits:** By a delegation of treaty body members, which offer the most comprehensive engagement but also incur the highest costs.⁶

The consultations did not result in a consensus among states, and preferences varied.⁷ However, a coalition of prominent international CSOs emphasized the need for a “meaningful mid-term exercise”, and highlighted the importance of an interactive dialogue between the Committee and the state delegation, as well as the engagement of all relevant stakeholders.⁸

In response to the move towards a predictable review calendar and regular mid-term follow-ups, as described above in the introduction, the GHRP considered it “crucial to explore how follow-up reviews could be undertaken at the national and regional levels, thereby making the UN TB system more relevant, responsive and closer to rights holders and duty-bearers.”⁹

The Follow-up Review Pilot Series

In line with the recommendation from the 2020 co-facilitators report to consider organizing follow-up reviews at the regional level, further emphasized by the option proposed in the OHCHR working paper to conduct the review through in-situ country visits, the pilot series consisted of three Treaty Body Follow-up Review Pilots in three different regions. The GHRP and the Commonwealth Secretariat conducted Follow-up Review Pilots in Sierra Leone and Grenada. For the Follow-up Review Pilot in the Pacific Region, the Pacific Community (SPC) joined as a partner, contributing significantly to the project.

⁶ Ibid. para. 32 - *Options for the modalities of follow-up reviews (c)*

⁷ Informal briefing convened by the High Commissioner on 1 November 2023, for more info see <https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies/treaty-body-strengthening>

⁸ Amnesty International, Child Rights Connect, International Service for Human Rights, International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims and others. Statement available at <https://childrightsconnect.org/conclusions-35th-annual-meeting-of-chairpersons-of-human-rights-treaty-bodies/>

⁹ For more information, see the Follow-up Review Pilot portal, available at <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/geneva-humanrights-platform/initiatives/detail/85-follow-up-review-pilot-series>.

The aim of this pilot series has been to test two different modalities:

1. **Sierra Leone:** Held from 7 to 9 December 2021 in Freetown, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the Government of Sierra Leone. This pilot focused on **follow-up review at national level**.¹⁰
2. **Grenada:** the pilot took place in St. George's from 22 - 24 March 2022, in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Government of Grenada. This review also focused on the **follow-up review at national level**.¹¹
3. **Pacific Region:** Implemented from 28 to 30 November 2023 in Nadi, Fiji, in partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC), the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the Governments of Fiji, Tonga, and Vanuatu. This pilot tested a **regional-level review model**, involving multiple countries from the same region.¹²

These pilots aim to assess the viability of the follow-up review process, ensuring a more effective and engaging approach to monitoring human rights compliance. Expanding on the ideas from Treaty Body Chairs', Co-facilitators' report, and OHCHR Working Paper, and building on national-level experiences, the TB Follow-up Review Pilot Series introduced an important feature: the combination of follow-up reviews for multiple TBs simultaneously. This approach not only results in cost savings, but also highlights the universality and mutually reinforcing nature of the recommendations and demonstrates the positive overlap among them.

These pilots provide critical insights into the effectiveness of different models of follow-up review. The national-level follow-up reviews in Sierra Leone and Grenada have highlighted the strengths and challenges of country-specific follow-up mechanisms, and how the national context influences the implementation and monitoring of human rights recommendations. The regional-level pilot in the Pacific, which involved multiple countries, highlighted the benefits of regional cooperation and experience sharing. It showcased how regional dynamics and shared challenges can be addressed collectively to promote broader stakeholder engagement, peer to peer learning and more cohesive regional human rights strategies. Importantly, this pilot also underscored the value the use of UN regional hubs, such as the sub-regional hub Fiji, which can facilitate enhanced cooperation and accessibility for multiple countries in the region.

The different models tested through these pilots are essential for refining the follow-up review process. They provide a deeper understanding of the practicalities, resource requirements, and potential impact of both national and regional follow-up reviews. The lessons learned will inform decisions on the most appropriate mechanism for follow-up

¹⁰ For more information, see Sierra Leone Follow-up Review pilot report is available at https://www.geneva-academy.ch/joomlatools-files/docman-files/FRSL%20Project%20Report_for%20website%20.pdf

¹¹ The Grenada Follow-up Review pilot report is available at <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/joomlatools-files/docman-files/Grenada%20Report.pdf>

¹² The Pacific Follow-up Review pilot review report is available at <https://www.geneva-academy.ch/joomlatools-files/docman-files/Pacific%20FUR%20report.pdf>

reviews under the new 8-year cycle. This will ensure that the follow-up reviews are tailored to maximize effectiveness, stakeholder engagement and resource efficiency. Overall, these pilots aim to optimize the follow-up review process and ensure that it effectively supports the implementation of human rights recommendations and strengthens human rights overall.

The selection of TBs involved in these pilots was based on the last Concluding Observations (COBs) issued to the country under review in the past 10 years that remain unaddressed. For Sierra Leone, the TB delegation included one member each from the Human Rights Committee (HRC), the Committee against Torture (CAT), the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The pilot in Grenada included one member each from CEDAW and CRC. In the Pacific region pilot, the delegation included one member from the CEDAW, CRC and the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). All participating TB members were nominated by their respective committees to participate in their personal capacity.

All three pilots followed a similar approach for the participation of national stakeholders (CSOs and Ombud's offices). Namely, government institutions joined together in national task forces to better coordinate their participation.¹³ Statutory bodies with human rights mandates were also involved¹⁴, along with CSOs that were actively involved in reporting to the TBs and had relevant thematic expertise¹⁵.

In the first two pilots, the OHCHR played an important consultative role: the divisions involved included the Secretaries of the relevant TBs, the TB Capacity Building Programme, and the OHCHR Regional offices.¹⁶

Regarding the selection of recommendations in the follow-up review pilot, the organizers relied on the recommendations that were identified as most urgent and implementable

¹³ In Sierra Leone, the task force included representatives from 25 ministries and government institutions, who were led by the Inter-ministerial Committee; in Grenada, 10 ministerial representatives were selected by the National Coordinating Committee for Human Rights (NCC), led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; in the Pacific region, the Ministry for Women, Children, and Social Protection of Fiji and the Ministries of Justice of Tonga and Vanuatu played a key role in selecting the 21 representatives from relevant ministries.

¹⁴ In Sierra Leone, the relevant statutory bodies who participated in the pilot were the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone (HRCSL) and the National Commission for Children (NCC), due to the link between their mandates and the participating treaty bodies; in Grenada, the statutory bodies who participated in the pilot were the Office of the Ombudsman, the Child Protection Authority and the Grand Bacolet Juvenile Rehabilitation and Treatment Centre participated; in the Pacific region, the three independent human rights institutions that participated were the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission of Fiji, the Office of the Ombudsman of Tonga and the Office of the Ombudsman of Vanuatu.

¹⁵ Eleven CSOs from Sierra Leone participated in the first pilot, divided according to the relevant TBs' areas of competence. In the second pilot, ten CSOs from Grenada participated, and in the third and final pilot in the Pacific region, eleven CSOs from the three involved countries took part.

¹⁶ One representative from the West Africa Regional Office (OHCHR-WARO) and one representative from the OHCHR Regional Office for Central and Dominican Republic (RO-CADR), the UN Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean Multi-Country Office (MCO) participated as observers in the Sierra Leone and Grenada pilot respectively.

within one to two years by each TB at its last review (recommendations under the follow-up procedure).¹⁷ For CRC a different methodology was applied, considering that the Committee had not yet adopted a follow-up procedure per se. Therefore, the review focused on the most urgent issues identified in the Committee's official findings.¹⁸ The three Treaty Body Follow-up Review Pilots adopted a similarly structured approach to reviewing treaty body recommendations. Given the number of recommendations and frequent thematic overlap, they were clustered around core themes, enabling a holistic approach to addressing underlying issues. Discussions followed an "all mechanisms approach," highlighting recommendations from relevant TBs and other UN human rights mechanisms, such as the UPR and Special Procedures.

Main Outcomes and Challenges of the Treaty Body Follow-up Review Pilots

Participants' evaluations of the three pilots provided critical insights into outcomes and challenges. The following sections of the report detail these recurring outcomes and challenges. They offer insights that could shape future follow-up process, whether they are conducted at the national or regional level.

Key Findings

Enhanced Accountability and Focus through Regional Follow-up Reviews

Regional follow-up reviews significantly strengthen the accountability system by ensuring that TB recommendations are more context-specific and effectively disseminated. By clustering recommendations around regional key themes, these reviews focus on the most pressing issues, fostering a comprehensive approach to addressing them. This methodology promotes the sharing of best practices among countries, leads to a better

¹⁷ The recommendations for follow-up were clustered around core themes for each TB involved. In Sierra Leone, the HRCtee focused on abortion, adolescent pregnancy, and maternal mortality, prohibition of torture and ill-treatment, and pretrial and arbitrary detention; the CAT tackled the absolute prohibition of torture, fundamental legal safeguards, prompt, thorough and impartial investigations, excessive use of force, including lethal force, and pre-trial detention; the CEDAW's key themes were the constitutional and legislative framework, harmonization of laws, and discriminatory laws. In Grenada, the CEDAW worked on recommendations concerning the national machinery for the advancement of women and violence against women. In the three countries of the Pacific region, the CEDAW addressed recommendations concerning access to justice, gender-based violence against women, and the impact of climate change and natural disasters on women; the CRPD focused on women with disabilities and education.

¹⁸ During the Sierra Leone pilot, the CRC recommendations under review focused on the following topics: freedom of the child from all forms of violence, sexual exploitation, abuse and gender-based violence, harmful practices, children with disabilities, adolescent health, education, rest, leisure, recreation and cultural and artistic activities. During the Grenada pilot, the CRC recommendations under review concerned the harmonization of legislation, discrimination, corporal punishment, and juvenile justice. During the pilot in the Pacific region, the CRC recommendations focused on the allocation of resources, data collection, birth registration, corporal punishment, sexual exploitation and abuse, children with disabilities, respect for the views of the child, health and health services, mental health, adolescent health, impact of climate change on the rights of the child, education, including vocational training and guidance.

understanding of regional challenges and solutions. In addition, the regional reviews increase the visibility and accessibility of recommendations, promote broader stakeholder engagement and more robust monitoring and reporting processes, thereby enhancing overall accountability.

Strengthened Capacities of National Human Rights Actors

The follow-up reviews have significantly strengthened the capacity of national human rights actors and provided a comprehensive understanding of the Treaty Body (TB) system, its practical functioning and state obligations. These reviews clarified methods of engagement with TBs and the role of each national human rights actor in implementation, assessment and reporting. This process increased awareness and confidence among participants in engaging with the TB system.

Improved Access for National Stakeholders

Conducting the follow-up reviews within the state or region significantly expanded participation opportunities for national stakeholders. Unlike the regular review process in Geneva, which often excludes many national stakeholders due to travel costs and logistical challenges, the on-site reviews allowed for direct participation. This accessibility allowed stakeholders, including grass-root level CSOs and sub-national government structures, to actively engage in the review process, discuss relevant issues, and contribute to a more comprehensive assessment of their country's progress.

Enhanced Cooperation among National Human Rights Actors

The follow-up reviews facilitated cooperation among national human rights actors, involving various ministries and statutory bodies. The formation of national task forces improved preparation for discussions with TB members and other stakeholders. This process fostered direct engagement between the government, independent state institution and CSO representatives and emphasized the importance of communication to ultimately develop strategies for effective implementation and timely reporting. At the regional level, the interaction encouraged peer-to-peer learning, and enabled representatives from different countries to share best practices and address common challenges together.

Greater Specificity and Attention to the National/Regional Context

By having TB members on-site, the follow-up reviews allowed for more comprehensive and contextualized discussions on the implementation of the recommendations. National stakeholders appreciated the opportunity to raise pressing issues directly with TB members, who gained a deeper understanding of the situation on the ground. At the same time, in-situ visits to institutions relevant to the recommendations under follow-up review facilitated a deeper understanding of the situation on the ground by TB members. This approach potentially leads to more informed preparation for the standard full TB reviews and more contextualized Concluding Observations.

More Constructive Environment

Face-to-face interactions with TB members in their own country or region provided a sense of safety and proximity and allowed national stakeholders to discuss challenges more freely. This approach was perceived as less formal and adversarial compared to the Geneva set-up and encouraged an open dialogue on the implementation of TB recommendations. Notable outcomes included increased representation and trust among national stakeholders.

Increased Visibility of the TB System

The presence of TB members in the country or region received significant media coverage, which increased the visibility of the review process and the TB system. This raised awareness among national institutions and the general public of the state's obligations under the human rights treaties and reporting obligations, and created momentum for reporting on the recommendations and enhancing accountability.

Challenges

Despite the positive outcomes, several challenges were identified in the pilots. Some issues arose from the informal and "pilot" nature of the exercise, which might not persist if the follow-up review was integrated into the official reporting cycle.

Timeline and Pre-Follow-up Review Guidance

A key challenge was the overly stringent timeline. Participants indicated that an earlier submission date for the replies to the recommendations for follow-up and earlier project notification would have been beneficial. A more structured timeline would improve preparation and engagement.

Submission of Replies to the Follow-up Review Questionnaire

The response rate to the follow-up review questionnaire was not entirely satisfactory for all three pilots. Submission from national stakeholders, especially CSOs, is crucial for an effective review. The lack of comprehensive responses forced TB members to rely on desk research, which limited the effectiveness of the review.

Further Challenges

All three pilots primarily involved representatives of national institutions (governmental and NHRI), with *limited participation from local (sub-national) institutions*. Involving these actors would provide a more reliable account of the human rights situation, as local perspectives often differ significantly from those in the national capital. Online participation proved unsatisfactory due to *poor internet connections and low-quality audio-visuals*. Face-to-face participation is a key benefit of the in-country follow-up review, and alternative participation methods did not contribute equally to the quality of the process. *Greater involvement of UN agencies is necessary*, as they have insights into the human rights situation of the country under review and can contribute to the implementation of

TB recommendations. Finally, *regional representation should be taken into account when selecting TB delegation members*. Inclusion of members from the region under review could lead to a more insightful analysis and dialogue, and enrich the review process and be more cost effective.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The assessment of the three follow-up review pilots shows that the quality of states' performance in the TB reporting process can be significantly improved

Clustering recommendations around key thematic areas allows national stakeholders to comprehensively address the underlying issues and avoid repetitive recommendations from different UN mechanisms. A major shortcoming of the regular review process in Geneva is the limited participation of national stakeholders (governmental and CSOs) due to travel costs. Bringing TB members into their respective contexts increases inclusivity, as all relevant national stakeholders can contribute to the discussions. Greater involvement leads to a more reliable account of progress and challenges in implementing the recommendations. Direct interaction with TB members helps national stakeholders better understand their roles in the country's monitoring and reporting process. This informal and practical interaction allows them to point out difficulties and receive practical suggestions, promoting better cooperation between government representatives and CSOs.

A regional approach to follow-up reviews combines the benefits of inclusivity and context-sensitivity. It brings the dialogue closer to the countries concerned while enabling a comprehensive approach, that allows actors from different countries to compare experiences, share best practices and enable peer-to-peer learning. This approach also encourages the participation of different regional stakeholders, provides an overarching assessment of the human rights situation and highlights common issues. In addition, a regional approach limits financial and logistical challenges. It reduces travel expenses for national stakeholders and efficiently uses funds for TB members' travel by bringing several countries together in one location. A regional approach strategically improves the state party follow-up reporting by improving inclusivity, fostering collaboration, and increasing visibility.

The Follow-up Review Pilot Series align with the overall objectives of OHCHR's efforts to strengthen treaty bodies, which include the adoption of an 8-year review cycle with follow-up reviews in-between, regular review of countries' compliance, enhanced engagement through regional follow-up reviews, and improved efficiency and harmonization of treaty body procedures. The introduction of a regional approach to the follow-up review procedure addresses logistical challenges of both the standard review procedure in Geneva and the national-level follow-up review. It increases inclusivity and fosters collaboration between different stakeholders, making it a strategically beneficial method to advance countries' TB reporting system.

Recommendations on Employing a Regional Model for Follow-up Reviews:

In light of the 36th Annual Meeting of the Treaty Bodies Chairpersons (June 2024) and the upcoming bi-annual General Assembly resolution on the human rights treaty body system (December 2024), the results of the Follow-up Review Pilot Series can provide guidance to devise the most effective follow-up review procedure as part of the new “eight-year cycle for full reviews”. Considering the outcomes of the pilots, the regional approach could enhance the interaction of TBs with states and improve state reporting and implementation.

Potential Methods for Incorporating the Regional Approach

1. **Roving Delegations:** TBs could adopt a “roving” practice, in which members from multiple TBs form a delegation to conduct follow-up review sessions at regional UN offices on a predictable schedule.¹⁹ The delegation would focus on thematic areas relevant to states in the region. This method reduces the financial burdens on states and enhances participation of different national stakeholders, fostering collaboration and providing more accurate information. Experience from the African and Inter-American system shows that mobility leads to greater visibility and improved monitoring functions.²⁰ Additionally, conducting reviews at regional UN offices ensures neutrality and accessibility, maximizes the role of UN Country Teams in terms of the most efficient monitoring and implementation, and facilitates the participation of both state and non-state actors without the logistical and financial challenges of long-distance travel. This inclusivity is critical for gathering diverse perspectives and fostering a comprehensive understanding of the human rights situation in each country.
2. **Targeted Regional Follow-up Review sessions for LDCs and SIDS:** TBs could use the regional approach upon demand by Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) when conducting follow-up reviews. With the support of OHCHR and other UN agencies, TB delegations could hold sessions at regional UN offices upon request of regional country groups to address urgent issues. This approach increases participation opportunities for stakeholders in remote and financially constrained regions, and improves TBs' understanding of contextual challenges. It also leverages regional expertise and facilitates peer learning among countries facing similar challenges, promoting the sharing of best

¹⁹ The regional offices are based in East Africa (Addis Ababa), Southern Africa (Pretoria), West Africa (Dakar) South-East Asia (Bangkok), the Pacific (Suva), the Middle East and North Africa (Beirut), Central Asia (Bishkek), Europe (Brussels), Central America (Panama City) and South America (Santiago de Chile).

²⁰ In the African and Inter-American human rights system, both the Commission and the Court carry out periods of sessions away from headquarters. For more information see Heyns and Idowu-Ojo, [Human rights treaty bodies in the field: The experience of the African regional system \(2018\)](#), and Abi-Mershed, [Human Rights Treaty Bodies in the field: The Inter-American Regional System and sessions away from headquarters \(2018\)](#).

practices and innovative solutions. By bringing the review process closer to these states, TBs can better appreciate the unique circumstances and resource constraints they face, resulting in tailored and practical recommendations.

3. **Online or Hybrid Constructive Dialogues:** As a minimum, and to enrich the correspondence-based follow-up review, TBs should introduce dialogues with national stakeholders in an online or hybrid format. These dialogues allow for more contextualized discussions and enhanced participation, although challenges such as poor internet connections, low-quality audio-visuals, and time zone differences must be taken into account. Despite these challenges, online and hybrid formats offer a flexible and cost-effective way to engage a wider range of stakeholders who would otherwise be unable to participate due to geographical or financial barriers. They can also facilitate timely and frequent interactions, maintain the momentum of the follow-up process and ensuring continuous dialogue and feedback. However, technical support and capacity-building efforts are essential to mitigate connectivity issues and ensure effective communication.

The GHRP and the Commonwealth Secretariat recommend the adoption of **Option 1: Roving Delegations**, whereby members from multiple TBs form a delegation to hold follow-up review sessions at regional UN offices on a predictable schedule. This method reduces financial burdens on states, enhances participation, and fosters collaboration. We suggest this approach be considered in the budget formula, to be updated in the upcoming General Assembly resolution on the treaty body system in December 2024.

Integration with the Treaty Body Capacity Building Program

More generally, the regional follow-up review methodology can benefit OHCHR's Treaty Body Capacity Building Program in contributing to ongoing efforts. OHCHR could utilize this methodology to strengthen the capacity of states to implement and report on recommendations. Conducting regional follow-up review sessions as capacity building exercises enables human rights officers and experts to better understand and address issues affecting these processes in different national and regional contexts, tailoring their activities to meet specific needs.

Such regional capacity-building initiatives can foster a sense of community and shared purpose among participating states, encouraging mutual support and cooperation. They can also provide a platform for experts and practitioners from all regions to contribute their knowledge and experience, enriching the capacity-building efforts and making them more relevant and impactful. The methodology employed during the Follow-up Review Pilot Series may contribute to enhancing the inclusivity, effectiveness, and contextual relevance of the TB follow-up review procedure, ultimately strengthening the overall TB system.