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## **Expert Group Meeting on “Science and Sustainable Development Goals”**

In partnership with ICSU and ISSC  
United Nations Headquarters, 20-21 March 2012

### **Background**

One of the main outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, was the agreement by Member States to launch a process to develop a set of sustainable development goals (SDGs). A 30-member open working group (OWG) of the General Assembly is tasked with preparing proposals on the SDGs. The Rio+20 outcome document provides that the OWG should develop modalities to ensure the full involvement of relevant stakeholders, including the scientific community. Rio+20 also established a high level political forum, which, among other things, is tasked with strengthening “the science-policy interface through review of documentation, bringing together dispersed information and assessments, including in the form of a global sustainable development report, building on existing assessments”.<sup>1</sup>

The Rio+20 outcome document recognizes the need to strengthen the science-policy interface in order to facilitate informed policy-making.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, it is crucial that the best available research informs the development of goals, targets and indicators at global, regional and national levels. Accordingly, the overall purpose of the expert group meeting is to provide an entry-point for natural and social science communities to inform the work of the Open Working Group on SDGs.

### **Objectives and approach**

The aim of the EGM is to support informed policy-making by the OWG as they begin to deliberate some of the key questions surrounding the conceptualization of the SDGs. The multi-dimensional nature of sustainable development lends itself to a multi-disciplinary approach, which draws on the findings and insights of the natural and social sciences alike. On the one hand, policy-making ought to be informed by an understanding of impacts and bio-physical limits. On the other, policies are made and implemented in a context – economic, social, and political. The SDGs will seek to balance the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development; in this regard the question of how to integrate the social and environmental sciences should be further explored.

The EGM will leverage and build on the existing structured engagement with the scientific community through the Scientific and Technological Community major group. The main organizational interlocutors for the meeting will be the International Council for Science (ICSU) and the International Social Science Council (ISSC). In addition, members of leading scientific assessment efforts will also be invited to share their experiences.

While a great deal of information is available in the form of assessments and academic literature, the EGM will distil key findings of particular relevance to the task of framing and formulating the SDGs.

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<sup>1</sup> Paragraph 85(k) of the outcome document [A/RES/66/288](#).

<sup>2</sup> [A/RES/66/288](#), paragraphs 48, 76, 85, 88, 204 and 276.

It is anticipated that the EGM will conclude with a half-day briefing to members of the OWG and the broader UN membership, who will benefit from the opportunity of a face-to-face exchange with representatives of the scientific community, as they present the results of their discussions on these issues.

### **Structure of meeting**

The two-day meeting will consist of the following parts:

1. Opening and aims of the meeting (representatives of UNDESA, ICSU, ISSC, assessment expert/keynote speaker)
2. Half-day: Mixed break-out groups of natural scientists and social scientists deliberate on priorities and key messages
3. Half-day: Report and back and discussion on agreed common themes, e.g. priority areas for the SDGs
4. Half-day: Interaction with members of the OWG (or other special GA event) on key priorities and common main messages