

Questionnaire on scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report of the UN Division of Sustainable Development

Reply of the EU and its Member States

I. General remarks

As indicated in §20 of the HLPF resolution 67/290, and upfront in the Rio §85, the aim of the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) should be to bring together dispersed information and assessments, building on existing assessments and work in the area of science-policy interface. The ‘prototype Global Sustainable Development Report’ that was presented at the occasion of the inaugural meeting of the HLPF last September noted already that there are countless assessments available, albeit mostly focused on specific sectors and widely different in terms of scope, scale, organization, process, participation, resources and perceived political relevance. Our overriding concern therefore is that a Global Sustainable Development Report should not duplicate these efforts, but could – for example through an integrated assessment of assessments – aim at a cross-sectorial analysis reflecting progress, obstacles and discuss options for integrated policy action from the perspective of the three dimensions of sustainable development, including intergenerational equity. The HLPF could then use the report, as well as other inputs, to make decisions on recommended policy action. Its preparation should follow a pragmatic approach building where relevant on existing capacity and processes.

Considering the above as a key principle to be reflected throughout the preparation of the GSDR the EU and MS welcome the questionnaire on scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report as foreseen in the above mentioned GA resolution. The global report can serve an important monitoring and accountability function in the work of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and in the post-2015 development agenda. An important aspect in the considerations on the global report is how to avoid duplication of work and to provide added value for strengthening the science-policy interface as agreed in Rio+20. The report should be based on scientific knowledge but oriented towards policy action. While being science and evidence-based, the main target audience of the report would, consist of policymakers and key stakeholders.

However, it should be kept in mind that final decisions on the scope and methodology of this Global report will have to be taken at the next HLPF meeting.

1. In your view, what would be the scope of future editions of the GSDR, in terms of issue focus, geographic coverage, time horizon, and scientific knowledge?

It is too early to tell exactly what the scope of the Report should be. But too broad a remit and its output will lack value. As such, we would advocate that it reflect predominantly on the implementation of the post-2015 development agenda to allow it to properly assess the full range of issues captured within them, without pre-empting what would be the system of reporting. Therefore, it should fully take into consideration the three pillars of sustainable development, including issues relating to the follow up decisions/commitments from Rio+20 (“the Future we want”) It should have a global scope, including all countries. Issues are global, and the actions required are universal, but

implemented in country-specific circumstances. The report should have a clear transformative long-term vision with a realistic, positive and pragmatic approach. As long as readability is assured it could highlight regional and national experiences in specific topics, focussing on particular vulnerabilities of certain countries or global regions (for example a periodic focus on Sub-Saharan Africa or Small Island Development States). As well as successes appropriate for replication.

2. What are the key national, regional and global priority issues that you would like to see reflected in the global report

Global priorities should look beyond nationally driven political agenda setting and be linked to global challenges highlighted in other processes such as the post-2015 development agenda. And dealt with in the 3 Rio Conventions (CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD). It could also include issues which will have to be omitted from the new set of goals due to the need to limit their number, but which are still very important including the issues related to the Rio+20 outcome document *The Future We Want*.

In addition to the global priority issues reflected in the future goals of the post-2015 agenda the GSDR could usefully have a thematic focus linked to the thematic focus of the HLPF (see para 7c of resolution A/RES/67/290). The GSDR should provide a basis for political discussion at the HLPF meetings.

3. Should the report have a role in identifying new and emerging issues? If so, how to identify these issues?

Clearly the global report can have a role in identifying new and emerging issues. However, it should not be considered the only source for such analysis. How these issues will be identified and followed up in the UN processes and structures for sustainable development will have to be defined once the post-2015 follow-up and review mechanism is agreed, keeping in mind the role of the sectorial UN structures associated to the post 2015 process and the HLPF. The report could usefully highlight barriers to progress in delivering the post-2015 development goals. As an 'assessment of assessments', from key UN organizations, global conventions and other global policy frameworks and programmes dealing with emerging issues in specific areas, it will not be in a position to conduct primary scientific research in new and emerging issues.

The identification of these issues should be based on sound scientific evidence. In a way science can help addressing global challenges and international scientific cooperation can offer substantial benefits, although bearing in mind that research spending still largely takes place in national context.

4. Should it report on past and future trends, report on policy lessons learnt, and/or report on scientific findings indicating potential areas for policy action?

All the quoted tasks could be relevant depending on the focus determined for any given edition of the global report. The content should be relevant for policy makers, notably at the highest level.

5. Should the report be part of the monitoring and accountability framework for sustainable development goals and the post-2015 development agenda?

As things stand it would make sense that the report would be part of or contribute to the monitoring and accountability framework for the post-2015 development agenda. Nevertheless, this framework will be only agreed in 2015, and therefore the issue of the report should be revisited in light of the final outcome of the Summit. It is too early to decide what role the Report could play in the

monitoring and accountability framework for the post-2015 development goals. It will already serve as an opportunity to raise awareness of sustainable development issues among civil society. However, it should not develop new but built upon existing indicators, which will be agreed as part of the post-2015 development process.

6. What should be the periodicity of the report?

Periodicity will need to be based on the needs of the HLPF and the post-2015 development agenda. With a view to have the greatest political impact, the main regular publication of the report could take into account the four-year cycle of meetings of the HLPF under the auspices of the UNGA.

That decision should be taken later on and finally agreed at the next HLPF meeting.

7. How should the preparation of the global report be organised? How should the thematic focus of a given edition be decided? What would a preparation process look like? Who should be involved and how?

The preparation of the GSDR should build up on existing reports such as the Human Development report, the World Development Report and the Global Environmental Outlook and others as mentioned in the GDSR prototype, as well as reports from the International Resource Efficiency Panel. The preparation of the prototype might be a good way of how the GDSR preparation should be organized. Thematic focus should be related to the thematic priorities decided in the proceedings of the HLPF (which is itself closely related to the ECOSOC annual cycle) and the outcome of the post 2015 summit. The Chief Scientists (or equivalent) of relevant UN Agencies, such as UNDESA, UNEP, UNDP, ILO, WHO, FAO, CBD, UNFCCC, UNESCO, UNCCD and UNIDO should collaborate in the preparation process. UNDESA could play a prominent role.

8. Which principles and scientific methods should be employed in preparation of future editions of the global report?

It would be important to consider in the report both scientific elements and official data, to create greater buy in from stakeholders, experts and government representatives. As mentioned in answer 7, the prototype approaches to the report made available by the UNSG on the occasion of the first meeting of the HLPF in September 2013 provide a useful basis on the methodological side. Moreover, the Report, if it is decided to focus predominantly on the post-2015 development agenda, should follow agreed post-2015 development goals' indicators and monitoring methodology. The Report should not seek to establish a separate set of indicators and reporting mechanisms.

9. What would be the best way to organise national and regional contributions to the global report? Would a network of national and regional focal points and regular consultations with them be useful?

The Report should make use of existing structures avoiding new regional and national focal points and preparatory processes. Any such mechanisms are likely to require an increase in financial resources which EU and MS would not support. The independent nature of the reporting process must be ensured.

10. What concrete steps do you propose to involve scientists from your country and region in a global report? Which institutions, communities or networks should be mobilised? Should a scientific advisory group be constituted?

The existing network of National Academies, Joint Research Centre and statisticians from EUROSTAT would be an appropriate entry point for Europe, to peer review the Report. The involvement of independent scientists is important. The role of the scientific advisory board under the auspices of UNESCO, UNDESA, UNEP, UNDP, ILO, WHO, FAO, CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD and UNIDO and closely related to the HLPF should be substantial in that regard.

11. Should all countries institute a national sustainable development report process? If so, how?

This need will depend on the global report process and methodology to be decided, as well as on how, under the auspices of the Economic and Social Council, the HLPF will conduct regular reviews on the follow-up and implementation of sustainable development commitments and objectives, starting in 2016 and which would also be looking into progress made visible through the registry of voluntary commitments, as indicated in Rio § 283.

However, it is likely that some kind of a national process would be useful to feed the report. Different options could be considered, which will have to reconcile the need for a streamlined reporting mechanism for all countries with flexibility for countries to operate their own reporting systems according to their specific national context and circumstances, and in line with national sustainable development strategies and their reporting as well as official statistics. National consultations with relevant stakeholders (scientists, but also representatives of civil society and the private sector) could be part of the process. Provisions could be made available to, upon request, support countries in strengthening their reporting capacities.

12. How should the report inform the work of the High-Level Political Forum? In agenda setting? In providing scientific analysis of issues in the HLPF agenda? In follow-up analysis of implementation of decisions taken?

It should be for the High Level Political Forum to consider how to respond to the Report. However, the report will only be one of a number of inputs into the HLPF and would not be the sole determinant of what the forum would discuss and agree. Two of the three proposals would seem to be appropriate tasks for the global report. The latter is particularly promising as far as the relation with the follow up to the post 2015 framework is concerned. The GSDR should prominently focus on the monitoring of the new set of goals of the post-2015 framework. A monitoring of the HLPF decisions and its implementation should not distract from this main purpose. With the same thematic focus as the HLPF meetings the GSDR could also provide scientific analysis to issues on the HLPF agenda. The report should provide analysis and guidance in order to allow the HLPF to take informed political decisions based on sound scientific data.