



Response of Switzerland to the Questionnaire on Scope and Methodology of a Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)

Questionnaire on scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report

§20 of General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/290:“ Decides that the forum shall strengthen the science-policy interface by examining documentation, bringing together dispersed information and assessments, including in the form of a global sustainable development report, building on existing assessments, enhancing evidence-based decision-making at all levels and contributing to the strengthening of ongoing capacity-building for data collection and analysis in developing countries, and requests the forum to consider, in 2014, the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report, based on a proposal of the Secretary-General reflecting the views and recommendations of Member States, and relevant United Nations entities, including the Committee for Development Policy;“

Preliminary remarks / Key issues to be considered:

A. Integration and Coherence: The GSDR should be a joint effort fostering collaboration and coherence among institutions and focusing on the integration of all three dimensions of sustainable development, thus having a real added value. The idea was never to produce another flagship report of one single UN entity / produced under the single authority of one single UN entity.

B. Added Value: We believe that the added value of such a report could consist of three aspects (based on ideas of the *UN Global Sustainability Panel*, where the original idea of a Global Sustainable Development Outlook/GSDR was formulated and then included in the *Rio+20 Outcome Document/FWW* and the *Report of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the post-2015 development agenda*):

- 1) collecting and consolidating in one document information from various existing sectoral reports, focusing on cross-sectoral links (interlinkages);
- 2) fostering collaboration between analytical teams of different institutions (UN agencies, as well as the Bretton Woods institutions) and thus gradually converge some of their analyses;
- 3) Serve as an instrument for the new body/institution to replace the CSD (ultimately the HLPF) and for the post-2015/SDGs framework.

C. Focus on Interlinkages / Methodological challenges of bringing the 3 dimensions of SD together: There are many sectorial reports on the different issues of the SD agenda. However, the interaction of the 3 dimension and the analytical tools to address these remain a challenge. There, the GSDR could have an added value. The focus should be on the integration and interlinkages (we have no methodological approach with regards to this respect; currently, sectorial approaches are predominating).

D. Focus on Implementation: The focus of the GSDR should be on “implementation” of sustainable development, more specifically implementation of the SDGs/post-2015 agenda (e.g. lessons learned, best practices and new challenges). The GSDR has not to come up with a new agenda, but should address the interlinkages and give indication on how they should be addressed and what the leverages and gaps for the implementation of the post-2015 agenda/SDGs are. The science-policy interface should be seen as a mean to advance implementation in an effective way.

E. Data Capacity / Monitoring of data availability: One of the key challenges will be both the lack of data and the lack of capacity of data analysis in many countries and fields. A proactive role of the report could therefore be to address and monitor data availability, quality and analytical methodologies (in close collaboration with relevant international institutions and agencies).

F. The GSDR as a basis for deliberation at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (with a focus on agenda-setting for implementation). The GSDR would bring together findings of scientific assessments as input for policy deliberations at the HLPF and beyond.

G. Complementarity: The GSDR should have a real added value compared to existing reports and assessments. It should not duplicate other sectoral processes.

The answers provided in this questionnaire are to be seen as preliminary and might be further developed in the light of the international discussions.

Scope

1. In your view, what should be the scope of future editions of the Global Sustainable Development Report, in terms of issue focus, geographic coverage, time horizon, and scientific knowledge?

See preliminary remarks above (p. 1). In addition:

The GSDR should be part of a larger monitoring and accountability framework for the post - 2015 agenda. However, this framework has to rest on the following pillars, for instance:

1. National reporting by countries and national stakeholders;
2. Monitoring of targets and indicators of the post-2015/SDG agenda at international level (this is likely the role of the enlarged UNDG interagency report / as successor of the MDG reporting);
3. Sectorial in-depth reporting (as done by the specialized agencies and others, e.g. IPPC, UNEP/GEO, WHO, ILO, etc.);
4. Analysis of interlinkages, data availability, science policy interface etc. This could be the role of the GSDR [instead of having separate reports this part could also be included in the report(s) mentioned under 2.).]

Issue focus:

Entire sustainable development agenda – A possible focus could be given via the future post-2015/SDG goals. The issues should be of “planetary importance”. National and regional priorities should be reflected. By its very nature, sustainable development covers a vast area of issues. Instead of covering all the salient issues in-depth, the GSDR could focus on inter-linkages.

Geographic coverage:

The main focus should be on the global dimension (which cannot be dealt with without including the regional and national dimensions to some extent as they are adding up at the global level).

Time horizon:

We propose a more advanced style / in-depth report to support the HLPF Meeting at UN GA level with Heads of States taking place every 4 years and which is supposed to provide policy guidance based on lessons learned. This report could be complemented by a more condensed/focused report to support HLPF meetings “under the auspices of ECOSOC”.

Scientific knowledge:

The focus should be on multidisciplinary analysis as added-value of the future GSDR.

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

The GSDR should be oriented at the post-2015/SDG agenda, focusing on interlinkages and implementation challenges at all levels.

Priority issues are currently being discussed in the context of the post-2015/SDG agenda (see Switzerland's preliminary position, published on 26 June 2013).

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

There might be a contradiction between the orientation of the report on the Post-2015/ SDG agenda and its role in addressing new and emerging issues.

However, Switzerland believes that the focus of the report should be on "implementation". The GSDR's role is not to come up with a new agenda, but to address the interlinkages and give indication on how they should be addressed and what the leverages and gaps for the implementation of the post-2015 agenda are. The science-policy interface should be seen as a mean to advance implementation in an effective way.

How?

- look at inter-linkages and the integration of all the dimensions of sustainable development;
- focus on implementation and support an effective priority-setting within the post 2015 agenda

Such an approach will most probably also raise/put in front new and emerging issues.

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?

See preliminary remarks above (p. 1).

The GSDR has not to come up with a new agenda, but should address the interlinkages and give indication on how they should be addressed and what the leverages and gaps for the implementation of the post-2015 agenda/SDGs are.

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

The report should be part of a larger monitoring and accountability framework for the post - 2015 agenda. However, this framework has to rest on the following pillars, for instance:

1. National reporting by countries and national stakeholders;
2. Monitoring of targets and indicators of the post-2015/SDG agenda at international level (this is likely the role of the enlarged UNDG interagency report / as successor of the MDG reporting);
3. Sectorial in-depth reporting (as done by the specialized agencies and others, e.g. IPPC, UNEP/GEO, WHO, ILO, etc.);
4. Analysis of interlinkages, data availability, science policy interface etc. This could be the role of the GSDR [instead of having separate reports this part could also be included in the report(s) mentioned under 2.).]

Re: 1): a synthesis of lessons learned based on national reviews of sustainable development commitments could feed into the Global Sustainable Development Report submitted to the HLPF Meeting under the UN GA every 4 years.

6. What should be the periodicity of the report? (e.g., yearly, every x years)

We propose a more advanced style / in-depth report to support the HLPF Meeting at UN GA level with Heads of States taking place every 4 years and which is supposed to provide policy guidance based on lessons learned. This report could be complemented by a more condensed/focused report to support HLPF meetings “under the auspices of ECOSOC”.

Methodology

7. How should the preparation of the global report be organized? How should the thematic focus of a given edition be decided?

See preliminary remarks above (p. 1) and below question 8.

As the GSDR is to inform the HLPF it would make sense if the thematic focus of a given edition coincides with the theme of the HLPF meeting. Overall, the GSDR should be oriented at the post-2015/SDG agenda.

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

See also below, question 10.

The preparation of the future editions should be based on lessons learned from other similar processes and assessments (IPCC model and other “assessments of assessments”, and other examples, such as the GEO model which includes the regions in a successful way etc.). An idea would be to first start mapping, looking at existing mechanisms and assessments and analyze different approaches before deciding on principles and methods

We see a focus on multidisciplinary analysis as a key added-value of the future GSDR.

Overall guiding principle which needs to be taken into account is the integrative approach (integration of all dimensions of SD) and legitimacy. Legitimacy at the global level requires that the scientific organizations or the scientific advisory mechanisms involved are
1) representative of the scientific community worldwide; 2) preferably have already some track record of providing scientific advice to policy making bodies; and 3) the functioning of the organization and/or the process is fully transparent. Making participation in science-policy processes open, inclusive and geographically balanced is indispensable for ensuring a politically legitimate ‘product’.

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

One way of ensuring national and regional contributions to the GSDR could be via the national and regional sustainable development reports (see question 11).

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

The national and regional sustainable development reports should involve scientists. "By examining documentation, bringing together dispersed information and assessments,..” the scientific world will be mobilized.

The relationship with the recently established UN Science Board needs to be clarified. In order to leverage synergies and to avoid duplication it is proposed to (also) use the Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The existing UNSG-Scientific Advisory Board should constitute the reference group at the global level for the GSDR.

See A/68/588, President Summary of the inaugural meeting of the HLPF in September 2013: "31. Leaders and other participants noted with appreciation the announcement by the Secretary-General of the establishment of a scientific advisory board hosted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and looked forward to its involvement in work of the forum."

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

Yes. Countries should be encouraged to produce national sustainable development reports on a regular basis. These reports should address the targets and indicators of the SDGs/post-2015 agenda and address as well any additionally national priorities and specificities, e.g. all relevant policy areas of the national sustainable development strategy.

The reports should be based on scientific and statistical data. Developing countries should receive support and capacity building to build up statistical data systems.

The national report should involve relevant stakeholders in the reporting and priority setting process.

The reports should be made public, inform the national decision-makers and constitute a relevant basis for policy making and accountability.

The national reports are building blocks of an international reporting system.

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

See preliminary remarks above (p. 1), and answers to questions 1 and 3.

The answers provided in this questionnaire are to be seen as preliminary and might be further developed in the light of the international discussions.