



Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report

Brief 1 Introduction

Historical context

There has been a large amount of scientific literature on sustainable development since the late 1960s. Natural and social scientists highlighted a series of sustainable development issues and recommended integrated policy action in many areas, e.g. on development, poverty, hunger, employment, equity between generations and countries, gender equality, environmental pollution, resource scarcity, and on the “means” to achieve policy objectives in these areas, such as technology, finance, capacity building, trade, etc. The Brundtland report of 1987, entitled *Our Common Future*, defined the concept of *sustainable development* which was subsequently adopted by Governments at the *Earth Summit of 1992 in Rio de Janeiro*, together with a set of *Rio Principles* and a global action plan, *Agenda 21*, which included many goals and targets.



In 1999, the US National Research Council published a book entitled *Our Common Journey*. It was the first comprehensive global sustainable development report, albeit with a developed country perspective as a starting point. In 2012, the Secretariat for Rio+20 in collaboration with 178 scientists produced a series of reports under the *SD21 project* financed by the European Union in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (“Rio+20”). The SD21 project documented the range of perspectives among scientists on sustainable development issues with a view to identifying common ground. However, to-date, there exists no comprehensive, authoritative *global sustainable development report* which would bring together the range of existing assessments, review global progress and future pathways in a truly integrated way, taking into account the range of perspectives in different scientific communities across the world. This is despite the policy prominence and the existence of many topical assessments.

Follow-up to Rio+20

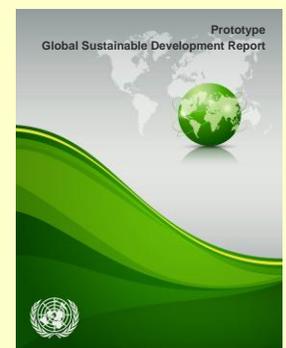
In 2012, the *Secretary General’s High-level Panel on Global Sustainability* in its final report in preparation for Rio+20 detailed the importance of basing sustainable development policy-making on the best and most up-to-date evidence and in this regard recommended a *Global Sustainable Development Outlook* which would bring together assessments across sectors in an integrated manner.

The recommendation was considered by Rio+20. In its outcome document, Rio+20 decided to establish a universal, intergovernmental high-level political forum (HLPF) which would, as one of its functions, “strengthen 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” (\$85k).



In response, the Secretary-General tasked the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) to undertake “*in-depth analysis and evaluation of trends and scientific analysis in the implementation of sustainable development, including lessons learned, best practices and new challenges, and cross-sectoral analysis of sustainable development issues*”. Further details were provided in the revised programme budget endorsed by the General Assembly in 2012.

In early 2013, work began at DESA’s Division for Sustainable Development on a Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report to support Member States’ deliberations in the high-level political forum on the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report.



Contents of the prototype report

The Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report is a UN publication that brings together findings of scientific assessments, as input for policy deliberations at the high-level political forum (HLPF) and beyond.

It maps the sustainable development assessments and related processes and highlights emerging issues identified by scientists; assesses sustainable development progress; tells the “stories” of future pathways toward sustainable development based on the literature and discusses investment and technology needs; assesses various approaches to measuring sustainable development progress; identifies lessons learnt from national, regional and global case studies of the climate-land-energy-water-development nexus; presents illustrative science digests for decision-makers; and suggests a number of issues for consideration.

Outputs

In preparation of the prototype report, a number of interim outputs have been produced by individual scientists and partner organizations, including in-depth background reports, briefs and a geo-referenced database. An integrated, CLEWS nexus global model has been collaboratively developed using an open source, open data approach.

Substantive starting point

The prototype report has made use of existing scientific research and in-depth studies from a wide range of sources, including the large number of scientific contributions for Rio+20.

It considered hundreds of assessments, including 57 international assessments, 69 national sustainable development reports, 125 flagship publications of the UN system, 23 outlook reports prepared by intergovernmental organizations and more than 1,000 academic articles and think-pieces.

National and regional reports

The prototype report also drew upon the findings of national reports, as well as regional reports prepared by the UN Regional Commissions. A bottom-up approach could be considered in a future Global Sustainable Development Report.

UN system effort

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Division for Sustainable Development led the preparation of the Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report. DESA reached out to scientific communities and to colleagues in the UN system to provide focused inputs to the report. The following UN entities have joined the effort: CBD, DESA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA, FAO, IAEA, ILO, IMO, OHRLS, UNCCD, UNCTAD, UNESCO, UNFCCC, UNFPA, UNEP, UN-Habitat, UNIDO, WFP, and the World Bank. The IMF participated as an observer.

Participating scientists and “crowd-sourcing”

Views differed as to the optimal approach to selecting participating scientists as contributors for the prototype report.

Considering the limited time available for the preparation of the report, scientists in the aforementioned initiatives as well as scientists suggested by UN partners were approached first, as were major scientific groups, such as ICSU and ISSC. A crowd-sourcing platform developed by Princeton University was used to collect even wider views from thousands of scientists across the world, especially the younger generation. In fact, key messages and findings of the prototype report are crowd-sourced rather than being decided by UN or selected scientists.

Expert group meetings & consultation

In addition to informal consultative meetings and briefings, a series of expert group meetings have been organized to support the preparation of the Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report. Meetings have taken place in New York, Stockholm, Lund, Dubrovnik and Beijing which established informal networks of scientific contributors, provided background studies, reviewed text and identified key messages for the prototype report.



More information

For further information, see the website of the Prototype Global Sustainable Development Report at: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport>