

ICSU organizes side event at UN High Level Political Forum

The International Council for Science organized, together with UN-DESA and UNEP, a side event this week at the meeting of the High-Level Political Forum in New York focusing on the importance of science in the SDGs for monitoring progress and achieving the goals.



ICSU President-elect Gordon McBean (l.) chaired the session.

The event, chaired by Prof Gordon McBean, President-elect of the International Council for Science, was entitled “Strengthening science-policy links for reviewing progress on sustainable development”. The main theme of discussion was how policymakers can collaborate with science to support the effective implementation and monitoring of sustainable development.

One way to do this is via a prototype global sustainable development report under discussion at the [HLPF](#) this week. Alexander Roehrl from the UN Division for Sustainable Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs presented the current prototype version, which brings together contributions from scientists, existing scientific assessments, as well as consultation of member states and across the UN system on the scope and methodology for the report. Three options are currently under consideration for the final report:

1. Conventional UN flagship publication model driven by the UN and staff with the support of selected experts
2. A multi-stakeholder model also linking to voluntary national processes also involving a publication drafted by the UN but with wider involvement of scientists, governments, and stakeholders
3. A variation of the IPCC model in which member states nominate experts to form an Intergovernmental Panel on Sustainable Development

The report will be a centrepiece in the monitoring and accountability framework for reviewing progress on the SDGs and the post-2015 Development Agenda.

Nebojsa Nakicenovic, Deputy director of the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), noted that science-policy links could be strengthened via an assessment of sustainable development which would provide integrated scientific data and information to support the monitoring and reporting on progress towards sustainable development, in particular through the global sustainable development report. Taking the example of the

global energy assessment, he emphasised the value of assessments for analysing trends and exploring pathways to achieving commonly agreed goals.

Ambassador Kőrösi, co-chair of the UN Open Working Group on SDGs, addressed policy needs towards science. Noting that agenda-setting was well under way, he called on the scientific community to help develop a good set of indicators for the SDGs, to test the coherence of the sustainable development goal framework, and track progress towards achieving the goals.

Science should provide real-time information, early warnings on risks and thresholds approaching or being crossed, and a better understanding of the risks societies face and how they may be mitigated. He noted that science had a role to play helping policy makers to consider options, but that critical data needs to be translated into “the language of economy and society”.

“We need you [the scientific community] on board everyday,” he said, calling for institutional arrangements to be developed to allow for that.

Tanya Abrahamse, CEO of South African National Biodiversity Institute; member of the United Nations Scientific Advisory Board, underlined that “we need to change the narrative of what science is”, broaden its scope to include local knowledge, and democratise science.

“As scientists, we are often the makers of our own questions”, she said, and emphasised that [Future Earth](#) was set up to break down the silos in science in order to identify opportunities and solutions for sustainable development.

Elliott Harris, Officer-in-Charge of the UNEP North America Office, presented the Live initiative, a global data and knowledge management platform, and the importance of assessments (such as UNEP’s Global Environment Outlook) to support evidence-based decision making, from the national to the global scale.

He emphasised that science has a critical role to play in identifying emerging issues to analyse trends, develop scenarios assessing the range of policy options and provide recommendations to governments.

Chair of the session, McBean, emphasised the need for the UN and the scientific community to work closely together to effectively put into practice a strong science-based monitoring framework for sustainable development.

Download the presentations and Flyer here:

<http://www.icsu.org/news-centre/news/top-news/icsu-organizes-side-event-at-un-high-level-political-forum>