



CONCEPT NOTE & DRAFT AGENDA

Expert group meeting for the Global Sustainable Development Report: A systematic approach to science and technology issues for the attention of policy makers

Room XXIV, Palais des Nations, 1211 Genève, Switzerland, 28-29 May 2015

Context

The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) is a United Nations publication aiming to strengthen the science-policy interface at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF), which serves as the United Nations platform providing political leadership and guidance on sustainable development issues at the international level.

In outlining the functions of the Forum, the Rio+20 outcome document, the *Future We Want*, provides: “85. *The high-level forum could: [...] (k) 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*”.¹

The scope of the report has been fleshed out in reports of the Secretary-General. Thus the synthesis report of the Secretary-General, entitled *The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet*, in the context of thematic reviews on progress and challenges, states that: “...the United Nations would provide annual global thematic reports, aggregating available data, together with the global sustainable development report mandated by Rio+20”.²

A Prototype edition of the GSDR was prepared for the 2014 session of the HLPF.³ Among other things, the Prototype mapped sustainable development assessments and related processes and highlights emerging issues identified by scientists, as well as assessing sustainable development progress and tells the “stories” of future pathways toward sustainable development based on the literature and discusses investment and technology needs. It also summarized various views of Member States and others on the process, methodology and scope of future reports.

In early 2014, all Member States, political groups and all 53 UN organizations of ECESA-Plus were invited to make proposals on the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report, inter alia, through a questionnaire. The views expressed in these inputs agree on most key elements relating to scope and methodology of the Report. Reflecting these views, the Secretary-General in his report E/2014/87 of June 2014 proposed 3 options: Option 1: Conventional UN flagship publication model; Option 2: Multi-stakeholder, multi-level approach; Option 3: Intergovernmental Panel on Sustainable Development.⁴

At the second meeting of the HLPF, overwhelming preference was expressed for the second option - a multi-stakeholder, multi-level approach to preparing future reports. The Ministerial Declaration of the 2nd meeting of the HLPF reconfirmed the need for and the mandate to prepare the GSDR.

¹ United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), informally referred to as “Rio+20. The outcome document was endorsed in its entirety by General Assembly resolution A/66/288 of 27 July 2012.

² See also A/67/591 of 27 November 2012.

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport/2014/>

⁴ http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2014/87&Lang=E

The 2015 edition of the GSDR which is under development builds upon the Prototype. The overarching theme of the 2015 GSDR is the science-policy interface (SPI) for sustainable development. The report also examines illustrative cross-cutting issues, in the context of the emerging post-2015 development agenda.⁵ The identification of new and emerging issues is one function of the science-policy interface. While many approaches exist, common features include the involvement of experts and formalized processes drawing on scientific evidence, assessments, and projections. In this context, chapter 7 of the 2015 GSDR reports the process and results of a complementary approach to identifying emerging issues. This experiment involved the “crowd-sourcing” of science briefs from interested scientific communities around the world.

The open call for science briefs resulted in 187 accepted contributions⁶ that were submitted by 367 natural and social scientists from 46 countries most of which from developing countries. China topped the list with the most contributions. The briefs cover topics ranging from antibiotic resistance, karst and caves, through to the health of the oceans.⁷ The issues highlighted by these contributors differed in important ways from those identified through traditional expert group meetings; academic literature review; UN system staff participation; or the many existing UN mechanisms to identify “emerging issues”.

Against this background, a more systematic approach is needed to identify and address science and technology issues for the attention of policy makers in the context of the High-level Political Forum.

Objectives

The ultimate objective of the meeting is to support policy deliberations on the GSDR at the High-level Forum in July 2015, with a view to strengthening the science-policy interface for sustainable development.

The identification of emerging issues forms part of the science-policy interface. Policymakers are exposed to a broad range of analyses, rankings, and advice concerning so-called emerging issues, prepared from a multitude of perspectives. In the context of the contribution of the HLFP, the issues to be addressed by policymakers should be informed by sustainable development perspective.

To this end, building on the work done for the 2015 GSDR, the aim is to discuss approaches and methodologies for systematically identifying the range of issues for consideration by policymakers, in particular in the HLFP.

Results may also be useful scientific input for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in the future.

Expected outputs:

- Summary of approaches and methodologies for systematically collecting science and technology issues for the attention of policy makers, reflecting three dimensions of sustainable development

⁵ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport>

⁶ 136 were in English, 41 in Chinese, 6 in Spanish, 3 in French, and one in Portuguese. No briefs were received in Russian or Arabic.

⁷ Please refer to <https://gsdr2015.wordpress.com/> and <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics/science/crowdsourcedbriefs>

- Recommendations for constructing systematic collection / index of science and technology issues for the attention of policy makers
- Indicative commitments of possible collaboration and development of work plan

After the meeting, we will cooperate on a paper to be submitted to an academic journal.

Approach

Scientific and organizational contributions will be fully acknowledged. Written inputs by participants can be featured on the UN Website as official inputs for the Global Sustainable Development Report. Further publication in peer-reviewed journals is also encouraged.

The meeting will be a hands-on, working-level meeting. Formal presentations will be the exception and most time will be allocated to discussions. The expectation is that the meeting will result in concrete proposals and options for the way forward.

Participants will be requested to provide written inputs to be shared among participants before the meeting.

Participants will receive more detailed background notes and materials before the meeting.

Participants

Participants comprise of scientists, policy analysts, UN system staff and other experts. Efforts will be made to keep the number of participants to no more than 15.

Management arrangements

Overall responsibility rests with UN DESA, which will prepare invitations, manage the agenda, and provide funding for participation of scientists, in line with UN rules and regulations. The meeting will be hosted at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland.

Participants will be responsible for making their own accommodation arrangements.

Tentative structure of the meeting

Day 1: 28 May 2015 (9:30-17:00)

- 1) Welcome and introduction of participants
- 2) Introduction to the Global Sustainable Development Report and the process for chapter 7
- 3) Discussion around key questions: Based on a sustainable development perspective, what are approaches for identifying science and technology issues for policymakers? How can such approaches be formalized/systematized, e.g. in form of an index? How can we ensure coverage of social and economic dimensions?

Evening: Social get-together with continued work on the model.

Day 2: 29 May 2015 (10:00-17:00)

- 4) Discussions continued
- 5) Next steps and conclusion

Contact

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalreport>

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