

Thematic Review:

Perspectives of society: Session organized with major groups and other stakeholders

Thursday, 12 July 2018, 11:00-13:00, United Nations Headquarters, Conference Room 4

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FINAL VERSION

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

It is an honor to speak for the Major Group Science & Technology at this official session of the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development.

The scientific and technological community has a crucial role to play in providing the evidence, expertise and data to inform, measure and monitor the implementation of the SDGs.

The challenges to sustainable development have been the subject of research for a long time. There is a vast body of scientific knowledge available. Knowledge that is important to be synthesized and to be utilized – and to be advanced.

In addition to better understanding the problems and challenges, the scientific and technology community is also actively engaged in contributing scientific knowledge to the solutions. For this, we need to combine – and not mutually exclude – disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches; as well as fundamental and applied research.

When turning scientific inquiry more towards solutions, there is an important role for the social sciences, the humanities, and arts. Because, even our best models and monitoring systems, or our most innovative technologies, are insufficient to, for example, explain why certain policies and institutions work, and others don't; or how we can safeguard equity, participation, and accountability, while at the same time improving the speed and quality of the decision-making for the transformative changes needed.

And there is another, new, exciting scientific challenge. That is, assessing and explaining the steering effects of the SDGs. The ambition expressed in the goals and targets is overwhelming. Yet, we need to ask: Will this governance through goals approach be effective in resolving the pressing challenges? Science has tended so far to focus on concrete institutions, actors and practices—not on aspirational goals that bring little in terms of normative specificity, stable regime formation or compliance mechanisms.

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That brings me to the first question from the moderator – that of monitoring and review.

Here the contribution of the scientific and technological community is obvious as this is part of our daily work.

One example of an innovative tool that demonstrates how science can contribute, is the *World in 2050* project. This modelling project integrates a wide array of heterogeneous data, giving countries and organizations potential pathways to achieve the SDGs.

One major review effort underway, is the development of the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report. 15 independent scientist are working hard on this report which will be an important component in the follow-up and review process.

However, despite these valuable contributions, sustainable development is contextual. It is therefore alarming that scientific capacity is so unevenly distributed across the globe. To achieve Agenda 2030 we need to create capacities, and strengthen scientific knowledge production everywhere but in particular there where it is under-represented today.

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That brings me to the second question – that of coherence.

In 2017, the International Council for Science published a guide to SDG interactions. It shows that actions under one goal can reinforce progress in other goals. Similarly, actions taken to achieve an SDG may hinder progress in achieving another. Understanding and managing these interactions is key.

From experiences in co-designing and co-producing knowledge, we are also progressing in seeing key intervention points in large, complex systems, and in the development of coherence across sectors.

But whether and under what conditions the SDGs advance institutional integration, that is, stimulate increasing normative coherence and institutional and actor alignment, is not a given. The degree to which the goals and their targets have been achieved over time, will be the test of the widely assumed hypothesis that higher degrees of institutional integration will advance goal achievement.

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One more example of how the scientific and technological community contributes to the SDGs. That is, through teaching.

Most scientific knowledge creation takes place at universities, and most scientists at universities also teach. The students at universities now or in the years to come, could be – and will have to become – the groundbreaking scientists, the innovative entrepreneurs, the sustainable business leaders, or the member state delegates and civil society representatives in the decennia to come.

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Transformation to sustainable development, understood as intentional – not as evolution or revolution through chaos – needs to bring together knowledge and societal agreement. It requires access to, and the application, advancement, and fostering of cutting-edge scientific knowledge. It needs open science and better science-policy mechanisms – at all levels of governance, as well as within the HLPF.

Thanks you!