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Science, Policy, and Society: A Trinity That Can Accelerate the 2030 Agenda



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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

The 2025 UN High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development rightly focused on improving scientific evidence and science-policy relations for more effective and coherent implementation of the whole 2030 Agenda.

However, the traditional science-policy concept excludes societal stakeholders, and hence misses out on non-scientific knowledge and innovative solutions as well as on identifying societal questions.

A side event at the 2025 HLPF hosted by Stakeholder Forum identified problems and solutions and called for tri-polar peer learning among science, policy, and society.

By Louis Meuleman, Irena Zubcevic, Ingeborg Niestroy, and Dmytro Zlenko, [Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future](#)

Evidence-informed policymaking has become a no-brainer for most sustainability professionals. The EU's Joint Research Centre (JRC) recently completed a comparative study on science-policy

ecosystems in seven countries. The central theme of the UN 2025 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) mentions it explicitly: '[Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for leaving no one behind.](#)'

The science-policy interface serves as a bridge between research and policymaking, enabling the identification of evidence-informed solutions. Strengthening this interface is critical for fostering coherence, effectiveness, and innovation in SDG implementation.

However, without engagement of the entire spectrum of societal stakeholders, the science-policy interface will not effectively accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which is an integrated agenda, needing the whole of society and leaving no one behind. For practicable and practical solutions to sustainability challenges, we also need non-scientific knowledge and real-life experiences, and innovative solutions deriving from that, as well as the input for identifying and formulating questions and needs rooted in society, proposed by and carried out by societal stakeholders.

This was a key conclusion of the HLPF side event themed, '[Science-policy Interface for Integrated Decision-making for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda and Beyond](#),' held on 18 July 2025 at UN Headquarters. The event was organized by the Permanent Mission of the Dominican Republic to the UN and Stakeholder Forum and co-sponsored by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and the International Science Council (ISC).

The premise behind this event is that an effective science-policy interface is a precondition for acting now and in the future on the global sustainable development agenda. Science is forward-looking, exploring emerging issues and new solutions. But science alone cannot do the trick. Hence, it is better to speak about evidence-informed than about evidence-based policymaking. Engagement is needed from different stakeholders – governments, intergovernmental organizations, academia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector. Knowledge broker organizations are key.

As a typical HLPF event with diverse speakers highlighting different aspects of the issue, the discussion was more agenda-setting than conclusive. Ultimately, all agreed that it is important to create more meeting places where representatives of science, policy, and societal organizations can hold open discussions about the facts, vision, values, and interests around concrete SDG implementation challenges.

In an opening statement, Luis Madera, Vice Minister for Monitoring and Government Coordination of the Dominican Republic, underlined that good knowledge is central to the work of governments.

Juwang Zhu, Director, DESA, recalled that science is deeply embedded in the SDGs agenda, but science and policymaking are organized in silos and not communicating effectively.

In her keynote, Marianne Beisheim, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), identified a key challenge, namely that the science-to-policy system is still organized linearly, preventing collaboration and co-production. It has to be more visible in a politically appealing way, she said.

In addition, there is a lack of understanding of methodology (for example, the difference between correlations and causality). And many problems are so complex and 'wicked' that even with the best science, it may not be possible to find a clear solution.

Science-policy ecosystems are often not comprehensive but cover only one specific area. 'One Health' is an example of a broad area focusing ultimately on the health sector and its research, said Doreen Robinson, Deputy Director, UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

According to Morgan Seag, International Science Council, the science and policy arenas have different expectations, different timing, and there is no common language; hence, miscommunication exists. For example, for scientists, uncertainty refers to the unknown, but for the general public this suggests ignorance.

Ingeborg Niestroy, Stakeholder Forum, argued that knowledge broker organizations like advisory committees are essential to bridge the different spheres of science, policy, and society.

Kehkashan Basu, Green Hope Foundation and UN Human Rights Champion, emphasized that the science-policy discourse should not leave stakeholders behind. The general public seems to be ignored in debates on evidence-informed policymaking, she observed.

Similarly, Divine Ntiokam, Climate Smart Agriculture Youth Network Global, observed that SDG policies are often designed in a science-policy "classroom," lacking inclusivity, leaving out community-based knowledge, and missing translation of knowledge into concrete actions.

From a country perspective, Eeva Furman, Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, pointed out that policymaking for the SDGs has become more evidence-informed over the years.

According to Magnolia Jerez, National Office of Statistics of the Dominican Republic, data disaggregation and data production for localizing the SDGs are additional challenges.

Stefan Bauernfeind, Germany's Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN), gave the example of a science-policy platform for sustainability that helps mutual understanding, among others, for problems around the timing of scientific advice.

During discussion, David O'Connor, Stakeholder Forum, recalled as great challenges the data generation and coordination between traditional and citizens science.

In closing, event moderator Louis Meuleman, Chair of Stakeholder Forum, concluded that many obstacles are preventing effective science-policy interactions. Most of them require a societal dimension. We should, therefore, reframe the science-policy dichotomy into a science-policy-society trinity or triangle. He suggested a series of peer-learning workshops with representatives of these three arenas to generate concrete recommendations for next year's HLPF.



SDGs

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