



Earth Negotiations Bulletin

HLPF 2015

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iisd Reporting Services

A Reporting Service for Environment and Development Negotiations

Online at <http://www.iisd.ca/hlpf/2015/>

Vol. 33 No. 12

Published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Tuesday, 30 June 2015

HLPF 2015 HIGHLIGHTS: MONDAY, 29 JUNE 2015

The 2015 meeting of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), continued on Monday, 29 June. A morning meeting with member states addressed “How science can inform policy making.” In the morning and afternoon, moderated discussions addressed: “Supporting national action through HLPF outcomes”; “Keeping science involved in SDG implementation”; and “The GSDR as a bridge between the SDGs and the scientific communities.”

“HOW SCIENCE CAN INFORM POLICY MAKING”

Martin Sajdik, President of ECOSOC, introduced the session, noting that discussions aimed to address practical measures and recommendations for enabling scientists to engage with policy makers.

Lucilla Spini, International Council for Science (ICSU), urged governments and institutions to interact with organizations like ICSU. William Colglazier, American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), called for scientists to be clear on what science “can or cannot say” when providing advice to policy makers.

Patrick Paul Walsh, University College Dublin, Ireland, and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), New York, lauded the GSDR as an interface between scientists and policy makers. Paul Shrivastava, Executive Director, Future Earth Secretariat, lamented that the science discourse can be quite fragmented.

Luis Augusto Galvão, Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), urged using science to establish guidelines for policy making. Maria Ivanova, University of Massachusetts Boston, and Member, Secretary-General’s Scientific Advisory Board, suggested greater involvement of scientists in the HLPF.

Guilherme de Aguiar Patriota, Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN, Brazil, noted that, in Brazil, scientists are a part of the political arena and help shape and form the debate.

In the ensuing discussion, participants addressed: the possibility of holding a science-policy forum back-to-back with HLPF sessions; mechanisms to ensure mutual benefits; research funding; capacity building; and the potential for harmonization of science.

In closing, Nikhil Seth, Director, UN Division for Sustainable Development, urged, *inter alia*, for dialogue to “go beyond those taking place during inter-sessional periods” and to take place at all levels.

“SUPPORTING NATIONAL ACTION THROUGH HLPF OUTCOMES”

ECOSOC Vice-President María Emma Mejía Vélez, Colombia, introduced the panel, highlighting, with Moderator Aisa Kirabo Kacyira, Deputy Executive Director, UN-Habitat, the importance of integrated planning and implementation, and policy coherence to achieve the SDGs.

Moderator Kacyira urged delegates to look at the “bigger picture” in a critical and less diplomatic manner, stressing that success at the local level can only be achieved if the sustainable development agenda is met.

Pio Wennubst, Assistant Director General, Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation, called for cohesion and incentives, saying that cohesion should be built upon trust, with clear “rules of the game,” to better address challenging political issues. He said that incentives should be included within the review mechanism, drawing and learning from each other’s experiences. He stated the processes should happen within a multi-stakeholder framework at national, regional and global levels to facilitate harmonization for effective outcomes.

Gustavo Adolfo Meza-Cuadra Velásquez, Permanent Representative to the UN, Peru, and Chair, ECLAC Committee of the Whole, highlighted the importance of national and regional level perspectives within the post-2015 development agenda. He stressed the need for human-centered development with local, citizen-led, multi-stakeholder, participatory processes driven by incentives to facilitate an effective global-level partnership.

Manish Bapna, Executive Vice President and Managing Director, World Resources Institute, said that delegates should look at key characteristics to be embodied in the post-2015 development agenda, citing a transformative, universal and integrated agenda. He queried how integration is achieved, suggesting that to deliver this, steps needed include: bold political leadership; new institutions; active engagement of local actors; flexible funding mechanisms; and quick early wins.

For successful SDG implementation, Evelyn Ugbe, Women Environmental Programme, Nigeria, for WOMEN, urged the HLPF to: review institutional architecture; “leave no-one behind”; entrench review processes at the national level; support national level implementation through technology transfer that is, among others, gender sensitive; effectively undertake monitoring and evaluation; and improve capacity building efforts.

During discussions, delegates emphasized: the role of parliaments in national implementation and political leadership, and their link to the HLPF in terms of follow up and review; follow up and review on MOI; support for national-level capacity building, including on data collection and analysis with attention to data disaggregation accounting for gender; partnerships, in particular as put forward in the SAMOA

This issue of the *Earth Negotiations Bulletin* © <enb@iisd.org> is written and edited by Olivia Freeman, Sandra Gagnon, Ph.D., Kate Louw and Anna Schulz. The Digital Editor is Francis Dejon. The Editor is Pamela Chasek, Ph.D. <pam@iisd.org>. The Director of IISD Reporting Services is Langston James “Kimo” Goree VI <kimo@iisd.org>. The Sustaining Donors of the *Bulletin* are the European Union, the Government of Switzerland (the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment (FOEN), the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)), and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. General Support for the *Bulletin* during 2015 is provided by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB), the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, SWAN International, the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, the Japanese Ministry of Environment (through the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies - IGES), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Funding for translation of the *Bulletin* into French has been provided by the Government of France, the Wallonia, Québec, and the International Organization of La Francophonie/Institute for Sustainable Development of La Francophonie (IOF/IFDD). The opinions expressed in the *Bulletin* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of IISD or other donors. Excerpts from the *Bulletin* may be used in non-commercial publications with appropriate academic citation. For information on the *Bulletin*, including requests to provide reporting services, contact the Director of IISD Reporting Services at <kimo@iisd.org>, +1-646-536-7556 or 300 East 56th St., 11D, New York, NY 10022 USA. The ENB team at HLPF 2015 can be contacted by e-mail at <anna@iisd.org>.



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Pathway, with the suggestion to hold an HLPF session exclusively on partnerships; the importance of peer review systems; and the incorporation of youth in review and follow up.

Delegates also addressed: inclusion of local processes within national progress reports; the role of communication of the agenda at national and local levels; technology as an enabling factor for effective implementation; the importance of coherence, especially in review and monitoring processes with common indicators across countries; the need for stronger parliamentary involvement; inclusive, transparent and accountable public deliberations at the national level; and the need for both incentives and accountability mechanisms.

ECOSOC Vice-President María Emma Mejía Vélez closed the panel, underlying the importance of political will at local and parliamentary levels and communication with regional organizations, congresses and citizens.

“KEEPING SCIENCE INVOLVED IN SDG IMPLEMENTATION”

ECOSOC President Martin Sajdik opened the afternoon session stressing the need for integrated science and policy approaches and strengthening scientific capacity especially within LDCs.

Gabriel Vallejo López, Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, Colombia, highlighted the importance of integrating science into local and regional decisions to address sustainable development, in particular related to climate change. Expressing science should be a priority alongside policy, he stated that without science “everything we are working on will only take us half way there.”

Wu Hongbo, UN Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs, summarized the results of the GSDR. Highlighting its timely release for decision making in this historical year, he highlighted the importance of integrated science and policy approaches to achieve an ambitious, transformational pathway towards sustainable development.

Panel Moderator Paul Shrivastava, Executive Director, Future Earth Secretariat, noted that the main mechanism for the involvement of science in the SDGs is the science-policy interface.

Lucilla Spini, ICSU, stated that one of the roles of the science-policy interface is to provide a platform where all communities come together to advance sustainable development. She said that ICSU can be an invaluable tool for engaging the scientific community within the HLPF, underscoring that the scientific and technological community is ready to work with the HLPF to “ensure science’s voice in the SDGs.”

Luis Augusto Galvão, PAHO, stressed that the health sector is where climate change and sustainable development intersect. He provided an outline of the sustainable development challenges faced by the health sector, calling for new mechanisms to address challenges such as inequality and the need for a common language.

Maria Ivanova, University of Massachusetts Boston, and Member, Secretary-General’s Scientific Advisory Board, discussed the roles of science in the science-policy interface and in identifying the causal connection between natural and human systems. She reported that the analysis of the implementation of ten global environmental Conventions reveals higher reporting rates when the Secretariat is highly engaged with member states and when they feel their reports actually count and are useful.

In the ensuing discussion, delegates focused on: continuous dialogue between the scientific community and policy makers at UN level that goes beyond the HLPF; implementation of technology facilitation mechanisms; science as a tool to analyze progress, inform policy at all levels and provide disaggregated data; and fair and just mechanisms for technology transfer.

Other points raised included: using evidence-based results for effective interventions; further promoting scientific collaboration across countries and disciplines; developing a new paradigm for a knowledge community that is not only based on technology; creating expert groups to support HLPF processes; seeing the zero draft as an opportunity to strengthen science-policy integration; and needing to work on science and policy on a practical level, as the scientific and technology community does not have all of the answers.

In closing, Shrivastava stressed that there is clearly a need for a different kind of science that is impactful, holistic, respects differences and engages all stakeholders.

“THE GSDR AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE SDGS AND THE SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITIES”

Moderator Patrick Paul Walsh, University College Dublin, Ireland, and SDSN, New York, highlighted, *inter alia*: the importance of more bottom-up contributions to the GSDR; the innovative dialogue involving the scientific community, policy makers and stakeholders that should also take place at all levels and engage on specific themes; and that the report should energize global participation, helping to implement the vision “on the ground.”

William Colglazier, AAAS, suggested, *inter alia*: building a science advisory “ecosystem”; and analyzing each SDG for challenges, actions that can make a difference and potential innovative solutions; and developing knowledge-based societies.

Lucilla Spini, ICSU, stressed that the GSDR is an important tool for both science and policy communities and has advanced sustainability science while acting as an important evidence-based decision-making tool. She stated the GSDR also plays a role as a mechanism to involve science, policy and practice actors in implementing SDGs and identifying science and policy gaps.

In the ensuing discussion, participants elaborated on the scope, purpose and content of the GSDR, noting that the report should be an assessment of assessments, collaborative, and easily communicate key messages. Others underscored that the report should use the latest available science and identify new and emerging issues. Other issues addressed included: the GSDR as a flagship publication for sustainable development and the SDGs; using expertise beyond the UN system; and better linking the GSDR with the SDGs so that they play mutually reinforcing roles.

Delegates also raised issues on: linkages with other processes and related reports in order to create synergies and avoid duplication; outreach to educators; and outreach to the scientific and technological communities so the report is credible, legitimate and transparent.

IN THE CORRIDORS

The second day of the HLPF opened with discussions on the role that the HLPF could play in the science-policy interface, the GSDR as a bridge between science and policy, and supporting national action. As these discussions progressed, delegates were heard pondering that some may consider this HLPF session to be a “placeholder,” given that the post-2015 development agenda has not yet been agreed upon and only once that happens can decisions start being taken on the future role of the HLPF.

Others noted though that the session still provides a valuable opportunity to discuss and share opinions to advance a common understanding of the potential for the HLPF ahead of the September summit. As the day closed, some noted this keenly as they identified an emerging consensus on the role of science in the HLPF, with one delegate underscoring that there had been many calls by member states and others to ensure that the scientific and technological communities play a larger role in the HLPF, beyond that of an observer.