

# **The Global Sustainable Development Report: Emerging issues and peer review**

**United Nations Expert Group Meeting**

ICSU headquarters, Paris, France

13 - 14 October 2015

Co-organized by

Division for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA/DSD)

and International Council for Science (ICSU)

Hosted by  
ICSU Secretariat

The present document is the report of the UN Expert Group Meeting for the Global Sustainable Development Report: Emerging issues and peer review, held at ICSU headquarters, Paris, France, on 13 to 14 October 2015.

Background material on the Global Sustainable Development Report is available at:  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsreport>

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors of the report and do not necessarily reflect the views of the UN.

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## **Context and objectives of the meeting**

In 2014 and 2015, DESA's Division for Sustainable Development published two editions of the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR): a Prototype (2014) and a first edition (2015). Following the mandates of the Rio+20 conference and UNGA resolution 67/290, the two reports adopted an “assessment of assessments” approach that brings together findings of scientific assessments, as input for policy deliberations at the high-level political forum (HLPF) and beyond.

Due to its mandate and nature, the GSDR relies critically on input from scientists, both as providers of contributions to the report and as part of the quality assurance process for the report. The 2015 GSDR was based on inputs from more than 500 scientists and scientific institutions across the world.

The outcome document of the UN Summit on the Post-2015 Development Agenda assigned to the GSDR the critical goal of informing global reviews of the new agenda at the High-Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF). Specifically, the GSDR “*shall strengthen the science-policy interface and could provide a strong evidence-based instrument to support policy-makers in promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development*”.

The outcome document of the UN Summit on the Post-2015 Development Agenda also mandated further consultations among UN Member States on the scope, methodology and frequency of the Report.

UNDESA is going forward with the preparation of the next editions of the report. The HLPF will next meet under the auspices of the UN General Assembly in 2019, with a mandate to undertake a comprehensive review of the new agenda. It is expected that a full-fledged Global Sustainable Development Report will be prepared for that occasion; and that three

shorter reports will be issued for the HLPF in 2016, 2017 and 2018 respectively.

In this context, the Expert Group Meeting on “*The Global Sustainable Development Report: Emerging Issues and Peer Review*” was co-organized by the UN Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) and the International Council for Science (ICSU). The meeting was a follow-up to previous consultations with scientists organized during the past three (3) years in the context of the preparation of the GSDR. ICSU, as organizing partner for the Scientific and Technological Community (STC) Major Group, has been very actively involved in the Global Sustainable Development Report.

The meeting was organized back-to-back with the 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee on Scientific Planning and Review (CSPR<sup>1</sup>) of ICSU. In this way, the meeting benefited from the presence of several members of the Committee, some of whom extended their stay in Paris and attended the second day of the meeting. The other participants were scientific experts, many of whom had been involved in the preparation of the last two editions of the GSDR; as well as other experts who have not been involved in the 2014-2015 editions in 2014-2015 (e.g., a young scientist from the Major Group on Children and Youth).

The meeting was focused on two specific topics in relation to the GSDR: identification of emerging issues, and peer review. These are both areas where the contribution of the organized scientific community will be instrumental for the GSDR. Sessions were organized in an interactive way, with short presentations from various experts as a way of sharing information, followed by interactive discussion. The organizers structured the discussions so as to elicit concrete proposals

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<sup>1</sup> The CSPR was established in 1998, to coordinate the development of proposals for major new scientific initiatives by ICSU and to advise the Executive Board (EB) on priorities for such initiatives. The Committee also reviews the activities carried out by ICSU's Interdisciplinary Bodies, advises the EB on the future course of these activities, and oversees the ICSU Grants Programme. Further information at [www.icsu.org](http://www.icsu.org).

for contribution to the GSDR 2016, in addition to suggestions as to how to structure the GSDR process in the medium-term context of the four-year cycle of the HLPF.

The following describes the main issues raised during the meeting. Because some subjects were mentioned in various sessions, we chose to mention issues only once, and therefore the summary here does not necessarily reflect the exact content of each session.

### Tuesday, 13 October

#### **Opening remarks**

Chair: Lucilla Spini, Head of Science Programmes, ICSU

The meeting was opened by Heide Hackmann, Executive Director, ICSU; Jinghai Li, Chair, Committee on Scientific Planning and Review, Vice President for Scientific Planning and Review, ICSU, and Vice-President, Chinese Academy of Sciences; and David Le Blanc, UN Division for Sustainable Development.

#### **Session 1: Strengthening the science-policy interface through the GSDR**

Chair: Gisbert Glaser, former Senior Advisor, ICSU

The first session of the meeting was dedicated to a sharing of information on various platforms that cater to the science-policy interface. This was intended as a way to bring all participants to the same level, before discussing issues more in detail. The meeting and the context of the GSDR process was introduced by Richard A Roehrl, UN Division for Sustainable Development. Presentations reflecting various science-policy perspectives were made by David Black, Secretary-General, ICSU; Fumiko Kasuga, Global Hub Director Japan and Member of the CSPR, ICSU; Lucien Chabason, IDDRI; Zitouni Ould-Dada, UNEP/DTIE; and Julia Nechifor, UNESCO.

Participants recognized the value of the GSDR as an unprecedented, new entry point for scientific communities to the global political process in New York (High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development [HLPF]). In this context, reference was also made to the new Technology Facilitation Mechanism.

### Wednesday, 14 October

#### **Session 2: Emerging issues**

Chair: Moa M Herrgård, Deputy Organising Partner UN Major Group for Children & Youth

This session was dedicated to the identification of emerging issues in the general context of the GSDR. Chapters on emerging issues are foreseen to be a recurrent feature of annual GSDR editions. Richard A Roehrl, UN-DESA, introduced the session and the experience with identifying emerging issues in the GSDR process. Presentations were made by: Lucilla Spini, ICSU Head of Science Programmes, Ludgarde Coppens, UNEP; Emmanuelle Quillérou, Independent Consultant; and Patrick Paul Walsh, University College Dublin and SDSN. The main points raised included the following.

There was a discussion on how to define emerging issues. It was pointed out that, given the mandate of the GSDR, the relevant criterion for “*emerging issues*” was in fact that of getting on the radar of the political processes at the UN. From this perspective, many issues that science has identified for a long time are still “emerging” due to lack of take-up by political processes.

It was suggested to make use of visioning exercises, scenario analysis and “pathways” to sustainable, resilient economies and societies, in order to identify issues with future policy relevance. Crowdsourcing was highlighted as a promising approach that can complement traditional approaches. The Sutherland method was emphasized as a promising approach to narrowing down a long list of issues. ICSU venues for identification of emerging issues were also highlighted, also with reference to the upcoming

development of the ICSU Third Strategic Plan, and establishment/review of ICSU programmes and committees (e.g., Future Earth, Urban Health and Wellbeing).

In this context, a distinction was made between emerging issues and emerging approaches, that is, new ways to address issues, for example, adopting nexus approaches to enhance policy coherence across sectors or reconciling scenarios made under different processes.

One of the main challenges identified for the GSDR is how to create a coherent framework for synthesizing and bringing together the results of the various existing emerging issues identification exercises (e.g., in UNEP, World Economic Forum, GSDR, ICSU), for consideration by policy makers. In this context, examples were provided that highlighted the difficulties with issues prioritization exercises. In particular, the experience of Future Earth was detailed.

It was mentioned that, in addition to existing recurrent institutional processes, many large international conferences include their own process of definition and prioritization of emerging issues in their field of interest, and that they could thus become an important source for the GSDR. It was suggested to maintain a dedicated calendar of such events and systematically engage them.

A number of obstacles to the contribution to the GSDR by scientists worldwide were identified. They will need to be addressed in the context of the GSDR: the need to balance the geographical representation of scientists; the need to work in different languages; and the need to find a recognition system to acknowledge individual contributions to the report and to its review process.

In his presentation, Paul Walsh proposed a systematic approach for eliciting science-policy briefs from scientists all over the world, in a sustained, bottom-up partnership between scientific communities and UN libraries. He

indicated the partnership to be at an advanced stage of discussion with all relevant partners. The proposal was made in recognition of the efforts in the last edition of the GSDR to attract ideas from scientists outside organized science networks, in multiple languages, through an open call for briefs. An organized system for production of science (or science-policy) briefs could benefit the GSDR and the science-policy interface more broadly while creating incentives for scientists, and in particular young scientists, to contribute. Paul Walsh provided a concept note detailing his proposal which was welcomed by the meeting.

Other important issues raised in this session included:

- The importance of looking at the role of science, technology and innovation in the implementation of the SDGs;
- How to reduce the time lag between scientific findings and policy action, an issue which was explored in chapter 7 of the GSDR 2015;
- How to look not only at trends but also at policy responses;
- How to address geopolitical issues that impact sustainable development (e.g. new “cold-rush” to the Arctic);
- How to reflect the need for different SD tools at different scales (e.g. vulnerability assessments);
- The need to reflect how issues highlighted in the GSDR impact different country groups.

### **Session 3: Ideas for a chapter on emerging issues in GSDR 2016**

Chair: Richard A Roehrl, UN DESA/DSD

This session focused on ideas for a chapter on emerging issues in the GSDR 2016. It is expected that this chapter will build on the open call approach adopted for previous editions of the report (see chapter 7 of GSDR 2015), possibly focusing on a broad theme linking with other chapters of the report.

Presentations were made by: Cheikh Mbow, Senior Scientist, ICRAF, Nairobi, Kenya, Future Earth Science Committee Member; Claire Weill,

Secretary General, Conference CFCC-2015, INRA, Paris, France; Muhammad Saidam, CSPR Member, ICSU and Chief Science Officer, Royal Scientific Society, Jordan; Anne-Sophie Stevance, Science Officer, ICSU; and Salvatore Arico, UNESCO. The following issues and concrete proposals were made.

It was proposed to not only identify but also to categorize issues, for example: from general to specific (e.g., SDG goal, targets, sub-issues etc.); by type (e.g., game changers, trajectories of change, tipping points); topical vs. cross-cutting; and differentiating emerging issues (e.g., ocean acidification) from emerging approaches and methodologies (e.g., CLEWs Nexus).

It was suggested to more systematically engage with academies of sciences and other national institutions such as research councils, e.g., by asking them for consolidated summaries of what they consider to be the “emerging issues”. The GSDR is expected to stimulate actions by governments, private sector and civil society at the national level. The importance of national roadmaps and plans was emphasized in this context.

It was proposed to systematically engage with major scientific events and related intergovernmental scientific discussions, in order to identify emerging science and science/policy issues. In particular, it was suggested to encourage event organizers to provide science-policy briefs to the GSDR. Examples included the Planet under Pressure Conference; the Science Conference “Our Common Future Under Climate Change” held ahead of COP21; and the upcoming World Science Forums in Hungary (2016) and Jordan (2017).

It was proposed that the GSDR serve as an avenue for scientific discussion of the overall consistency of the SDG framework and of the synergies and trade-offs between SDGs/targets in various contexts.

Measures of vulnerability were suggested for identifying emerging issues in line with the 2030 agenda’s objective to leave no one behind. In this context, the importance of capturing the multitude of definitions of vulnerability was emphasized.

It was proposed that the GSDR be the place where issues and policy actions identified by the various sectoral and thematic expert groups and committees come together.

The importance of addressing STI capacity and incentive structures was emphasized to mobilize contributions from scientists world-wide. In particular, a dedicated fund for scientists’ participation was proposed.

A number of emerging issues were proposed for in-depth analysis/presentation in the GSDR, including: land competition; rural-urban flows in low income countries; smart cities, big data; peaceful and inclusive societies; vulnerability/resilience; and STI capacity.

## **Session 4: Options for peer review**

Chair: David Le Blanc, UN DESA/DSD

The session on peer review aimed to gather ideas on how a formal process of review for the GSDR could look like in the context of a 4-year cycle, and what the contributions of the scientific community to that process could be.

The point of departure for the reflection was a presentation of the likely cycle of the GSDR, aligned with that of the HLPF, and of entry points for scientists to contribute to peer review at different levels in this context.

Presentations were made by: William Colglazier, AAAS; Tom Beer, CSPR Member, ICSU; Robert Lindner, UNU-IAS/Future Earth; and Lucien Chabason, IDDRI.

It was mentioned that peer review by scientists, beyond contributing to enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of the GSDR, could also play the role of raising the awareness of the scientific community on the SDGs. This in turn could stimulate national work on roadmaps and

national sustainable development reports. It was felt that it was important to involve national science bodies, such as academies of science and research councils/foundations. ICSU, the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP), the Global Research Council (GRC) and others could play a role in such outreach.

The role of incentives and recognition for participation in the review process was mentioned as important. One question was whether reviewers should participate in their individual capacity or as part of their institutions. There were different opinions on this point. All recognized that the science briefs should be individually authored.

Another question related to when in the production process of the GSDR various groups and institutions should be involved. In this context, a clear roadmap of the production process for the GSDR over the next four (4) years, including time windows for contributions, was identified as a key missing piece of information.

There was a question relating to the role of UN Member States in the production and review process of the GSDR, with various suggestions ranging from co-design to regular sharing of information with Member States on the status of the report. The IPCC model was cited as a reference; in particular, it was mentioned that, in the case of IPCC, only the summary for policy-makers is vetted by the political side. Participants wondered whether there was an analogy to be made with the GSDR. The UNEP Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) process was also mentioned. Some also mentioned the importance of involving non-scientists in the production / review of the report. A suggestion was made to consult with individuals with experience of various review processes in the past to inform the reflection.

## **Session 5: Next steps**

Chairs: Richard A Roehrl, UN DESA/DSD; Lucilla Spini, Head of Science Programmes, ICSU

The last session of the meeting was dedicated to the recapitulation of the many concrete suggestions offered by participants during the meeting. The GSDR team will follow up on them, with a view to ensuring a solid input from the scientific community to the GSDR 2016.

Two deliverables from the UN team in charge of the GSDR were identified as critical to enable the full participation of scientists to the GSDR:

- a) Clear terms of reference for eliciting inputs for different chapters;
- b) A roadmap for the GSDR for the next four years highlighting milestones for inputs from stakeholders;

Participants made a number of specific proposals and agreed to follow-up on them. The GSDR team in the UN will follow up on these proposals with the various participants, with a view to ensuring a solid input from the scientific community to the GSDR.

### Emerging issues:

- 1) Define and develop categories of emerging issues, approaches and tools. Consider also clusters (“nexus”) of issues.
- 2) Build an editorial partnership in UN depository libraries to use Open Journal systems and digital repositories to crowd-source science-policy briefs for the GSDR.
- 3) Develop an ICSU platform for science engagement for the GSDR and HLPF in cooperation with other science organizations, ICSU policy committees (CSPR), programmes (e.g. Future Earth, Urban Health and Wellbeing) and membership (National Members and Unions Members), in particular on the identification of emerging issues and peer-review.
- 4) Enable linkages/dialogues with academies of sciences, national research councils and relevant national scientific organizations and encourage them to summarise top “emerging issues” identified in their studies. Prepare a consolidated summary of these issues.

- 5) Encourage national roadmaps and scenarios in the context of the SDGs, supported by national scientific institutions and organized science organizations.
- 6) Explore identification of emerging issues at the regional level.
- 7) Promote partnerships and scientific studies with a futures perspective towards the SDGs in 2030, including on horizon scanning, scenario analysis to identify desirable pathways and actions that are potential “game changers”. Include these issues in the GSDR to report progress.
- 8) Promote partnerships and scientific studies on innovative ways of measurement of progress, (including on integrated indicators). Consider these issues in the GSDR to report progress on what exists and what is being developed.
- 9) Work towards a systematic approach to developing science-policy briefs on issues and lessons learnt from key scientific conferences, events and assessments (e.g., World Science Forum 2017).
- 10) Assemble a small group of experts to work on a framework to regularly synthesize the results of emerging issues identification mechanisms in UN system and other international institutions, and to develop channels for exchanging views on assumptions used in these mechanisms, including in outlook reports.
- 11) Explore options for a dedicated fund to support scientists' participation worldwide in the GSDR process and regular

conversations with policy makers in the HLPF.

- 12) Consider for in-depth analysis in the next GSDR edition the emerging issues that were identified in the meeting: land competition; rural-urban flows in low income countries; smart cities, big data; peaceful and inclusive societies; vulnerability/resilience; and STI capacity.

Peer review:

- 1) Explore options for peer review of the GSDR and draft a brief (2 pages).
- 2) Prepare for and organize peer review by international scientific institutions (e.g., ICSU, ISSC, Inter-Academy Council, Global Research Council).
- 3) Prepare for and engage the national level in the review (e.g., involving academies of sciences and national sustainable development report processes). Assemble a group of experts to work out specific details.
- 4) Further explore options for conducting multi-stakeholder reviews of the GSDR, through expert input.
- 5) Identify incentives and recognition for participation in the review process.

In concluding remarks, participants were invited to follow up on their interests in contributing to these actions by contacting UNDESA in writing.

## Annex 1: Meeting participants

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## Annex 2: Meeting agenda

### **Expert Group Meeting for the Global Sustainable Development Report: Emerging issues and peer review**

**ICSU headquarters, Paris, France**

**13 - 14 October 2015**

#### **Programme**

| <b>Day One – 13 October 2015</b> |   |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 16:15-16:30                      | <i>Registration &amp; Coffee/Tea</i>  |
| 16:30-17:00                      | <p><b><u>Opening</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Chair: Lucilla SPINI</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opening remarks (UN/DESA)</li><li>• Welcome remarks (Heide Hackmann, Executive Director, &amp; Jinghai Li, Chair, Committee on Scientific Planning and Review, ICSU)</li><li>• Introduction of participants</li><li>• Introduction to the meeting: expectations, objectives and working methods for the EGM (UN/DESA)</li></ul>  |
| 17:00-18:00                      | <p><b><u>Session 1: Strengthening the science-policy interface through the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Chair: Gisbert Glaser</u></b></p> <p><i>Recent developments with respect to the GSDR and guidance received.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Video with statements on the GSDR [4min.]</li><li>• Introduction to the context of the GSDR: science-policy interface, high-level political forum on sustainable development and its themes, the post-2015 development agenda, GSDR 2014 and 2015, and the role of the scientific community in the GSDR process (UN/DESA) [15 min.]</li><li>• <b>David Black</b>, Secretary-General, ICSU: ICSU Committees and ICSU Programmes/IBs at the science/policy interface for the benefit of society [3 min.]</li><li>• <b>Fumiko Kasuga</b>, Global Hub Director Japan, Future Earth: Future Earth and the science/policy/practice interface (tbc) [3min.]</li><li>• <b>Lucien Chabason</b>, IDDRI: IDDRI and science-policy interface (tbc) [3 min.]</li><li>• <b>Zitouni Ould-Dada</b>, UNEP/DTIE: UNEP science-technology-policy interface [3 min.]</li><li>• <b>Julia Nechifor</b>, UNESCO: UNESCO science-policy-society interface [3 min.]</li><li>• Feedback and discussion</li></ul> |
| 18:00-19:00                      | <i>Cocktail at ICSU</i>   |
| 20:00 – 22:00                    | <i>Discussions over Dinner (<b>own arrangements</b>)</i>  |

| Day Two – 14 October 2015 |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| 08:00 – 08:30             | <i>Coffee discussion</i>   |
| 08:30 – 10:00             | <p><b><u>Session 2: Emerging issues</u></b><br/> <b><u>Chair: Moa M HERRGÅRD</u></b></p> <p>This session will explore the range of ways and means to engage scientists in the identification of emerging issues to be included in the GSDR for consideration by policy makers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to emerging issues identification in GSDR 2014 and 2015 and results of the UN expert group meeting on science issues for consideration by policy makers (UN/DESA) [15min.]</li> <li>• <b>Lucilla Spini</b>, ICSU Head of Science Programmes, and <b>Oyewale Tomori</b>, CSPR Member, ICSU: emerging issues and ICSU: development of Strategic Plan and development/review of new programmes (Lucilla Spini, Head of Science Programmes, ICSU) [10 min]</li> <li>• <b>Ludgarde Coppens</b>, UNEP [10 min.]</li> <li>• <b>Emmanuelle Quillérou</b>, Independent consultant: emerging issues in environmental economics [10 min.]</li> <li>• <b>Patrick Paul Walsh</b>, University College Dublin and SDSN: A systematic approach engaging scientific communities and libraries, piloting national processes and common templates [10 min.]</li> <li>• Open discussion on a systematic engagement of scientists in a multi-year process for the identification of emerging issues</li> </ul> |
| 10:00 – 10:30             | <b><u>Coffee Break</u></b>   |
| 10:30 – 12:00             | <p><b><u>Session 3: Ideas for a chapter on emerging issues in GSDR 2016</u></b><br/> <b><u>Chair: Richard Alexander Roehrl</u></b></p> <p>The second part of this session will aim to collect ideas and commitments for producing a chapter on emerging issues for GSDR 2016. It will discuss the role of crowdsourcing and means and ways of engaging participants' expertise for reducing "longer lists" of emerging issues from various sources. The session will be interactive without formal presentations. Brief introductions (mini-presentations) are encouraged by the experts listed below and those who send inputs/ideas before the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Cheikh Mbow</b>, Senior Scientist, ICRAF, Nairobi</li> <li>• <b>Claire Weill</b>, Secretary General, Conference CFCC-2015 (tbc)</li> <li>• <b>Muhammad Saidam</b>, CSPR Member, ICSU</li> <li>• <b>Anne-Sophie Stevance</b>, Science Officers, ICSU</li> <li>• <b>Salvatore Arico</b>, UNESCO</li> </ul> <p>This session will also discuss outreach to groups and potential contributors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Outreach strategy and possible roles of partners (e.g., ICSU, ISSC, Future Earth, SDSN)</li> </ul>  |

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 12:00 – 13:00 | <i>Lunch Break – Lunch provided at ICSU</i>  |
| 13:00 – 14:30 | <p><b><u>Session 4: Options for peer review</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Chair: David le Blanc</u></b></p> <p>The session will aim to collect ideas for peer reviewing the GSDR 2016–2019. This issue is expected to be considered by member States in the coming months, as they further examine the scope and methodology of the GSDR. The session may include presentations but be interactive. Brief introductions are encouraged by the experts listed below and those who send inputs/ideas before the meeting.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lessons-learnt from peer review in GSDR 2014 and 2015 (UN/DESA) [10min.]</li> <li>• <b>William Colglazier</b>, AAAS [10 min]</li> <li>• <b>Tom Beer</b>, CSPR Member, ICSU [10 min.]</li> <li>• <b>Robert Lindner</b>, UNU-IAS/Future Earth, Japan [10 min]</li> <li>• <b>Lucien Chabason</b>, IDDRI [10 min.]</li> <li>• Interactive discussion</li> </ul> |
| 14:30 – 15:00 | <i>Coffee Break</i>  |
| 15:00 – 16:15 | <p><b><u>Session 5: Next steps</u></b></p> <p><b><u>Chairs: Richard Alexander Roehrl and Lucilla Spini</u></b></p> <p><i>This session will discuss next steps for collaborations, including elements of a work plan</i></p>  |
| 16:15         | <i>Closing</i>   |