HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Under the auspices of ECOSOC

Session 5: Keeping science involved in SDG implementation*

29 June 2015, 3.00 – 5.00 pm

Science is critical to help meet the challenges of sustainable development, as it lays the foundations for new approaches and technologies to identify, clarify and tackle global challenges for the future. But for science to significantly contribute to sustainable development, it must broadly understand sustainable development in an integrated way. Such an understanding is one of the prerequisites of science for sustainable development. Such integration calls for integrating disciplines of the natural sciences and the social sciences, and bringing together people and ideas from those and other disciplines to jointly frame problems, devise methodological approaches and analyze data. It also requires involving non-scientists and participatory approaches, reaching out to various communities and considering non-scientific knowledge, such as from local and indigenous communities. Other aspects of science for sustainable development include the need to consider the social responsibility of science, and to ensure ethically acceptable, sustainable and socially desirable innovation processes.

Among other functions, the HLPF is to "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". Science-policy interfaces (SPIs) are the many ways in which scientists, policy-makers and others link up to communicate, exchange ideas, and jointly develop knowledge to enrich policy and decision-making processes and/or research.

SPIs cover a very wide range of structures, situations and methods. They can be formal structures, designed for a specific purpose, e.g. scientific advisory bodies of international conventions, intergovernmental panels, scientific advisory boards, chief science advisors -- or informal e.g. policy workshops gathering scientists and policy-makers for discussing research results or issues. Commonly accepted criteria for assessing the effectiveness, influence and impact of science-policy interfaces are credibility, relevance and legitimacy. Communication between scientists and policy-makers is essential: scientific information is more likely to be used if it is delivered in appropriate formats, at the right time and through the appropriate channels.

The HLPF is envisaged to play an important role in follow-up and review of the post-2015 development agenda. There is a desire to make reviews more robust and evidence-based. The HLPF could strengthen the science-policy interface by: (a) promoting the provision of policy-relevant data, analysis and information; (b) supporting enhanced dialogue between science and policy and its translation into policy.

Possible questions for discussion:

1. How can the HLPF promote the identification of new and emerging issues through sound scientific evidence and assessments?
2. What is the coverage, integration and coherence of international assessments in sustainable development goal areas?
3. How can the HLPF facilitate improved access to the findings of existing assessments and highlight synergies and trade-offs?
4. How can the HLFP help identify areas where research, data and science-policy interface mechanisms would need increased resources for developing countries?