

Talking points from Åsa Persson, member of the Independent Group of Scientists to prepare the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report

- First, speaking as a citizen and as a mother, poor progress on a set of goals is no reason to give up on the goals. A poor performance review for a student in school is a reason to double down, not give up. Part of that is of course rethinking your strategy; how can it be more focused, more geared towards results in practice, how can we adjust our theory of change. We can discuss optimism vs pessimism at length, but it needs to translate into determination.
- GSDR output: Speaking on behalf of the Independent Group of Scientists (IGS), we are committed to making the SDG Summit impactful for accelerating on the SDGs, by doing our best to ensure the meeting is underpinned by science and evidence. This involves both evidence on the situation we are in, with too slow progress, and what is causing it, and ideas and evidence on transformation; how to nurture the emergence of innovation and new more sustainable practices – whether technological, social or policy tools; how to accelerate uptake of these innovations; and how to then stabilize the new practices, to prevent fallback or backlash.
- GSDR process: Although the GSDR will be a very tangible product, presented to the SDG summit, we believe the process of preparing is critical, to both ensure the best input possible, ensure scientific quality through peer review and build buy-in, understanding and demand – with a view to ensuring it will be used and useful beyond the SDG summit. We have already been presenting early findings and thoughts to stakeholders, and will this fall conduct regional consultations and a scientific peer review process organized by the ISC. We will then make it available for Member States. It is of course challenging to prepare a report and gather the evidence at the same time as consulting on preliminary findings, but we feel the urgency, the need to be inclusive and to build on the many good experiences with doing science ‘in real time’ that was one of the positive outcomes of the global pandemic.
- Data, monitoring and accountability: In the GSDR work, we engage a lot with questions around data, monitoring and accountability of the SDGs. It is a major obstacle to the follow-up and implementation of the SDGs that we don’t have better data, and that time lags have increased even more after the pandemic. Closing the data gap is something that member states could recommit to at the SDG summit. It should not be acceptable to not be able to effectively follow up Agenda 2030 at its mid-term. But, there is also innovation to be made.
 - In the GSDR, we are for example looking at emerging data from the explosion of scientific studies of SDG interlinkages (synergies and trade-offs). This is a real impact of the SDGs; that they enabled scientists to look more systematically at both the trade-offs and synergies of pursuing sustainable development across domains and sectors. There is much potential to work even more with policy-makers and other actors to co-develop this knowledge on SDG interlinkages and translate it into action.
 - In the GSDR, we are also looking at how to synthesise data on international spill-overs, positive and negative, of the SDGs. These data are really crucial to show we are globally interdependent when it comes to achieving the SDGs, and we simply have to collaborate and expand the notion of success from the national level only.
 - To facilitate more accountability for SDG results and actions alike, there is also a need to enable more simple tracking and visualization of progress. A novel trend in science is to develop such real-time tracking, for example of which covid responses countries were adopting and the diffusion of net zero climate targets around the

world. Making the information more accessible, will make it easier for citizens, stakeholders and the media to hold different actors accountable. We should pursue a culture of constructive accountability, where also good performance is rewarded.

- Possible outcomes of the SDG summit: starting with some essential outcomes and moving to wishes:
 - A formal re-commitment to the SDGs at mid-term and accelerating implementation by member states is needed. There could be a parallel effort for non-state stakeholders to recommit, for example people's declarations, or corporate declaration.
 - A concrete programme or framework for acceleration. We can learn from the MDG Acceleration Framework, where countries were invite to prioritise among the targets, to identify the most critical bottlenecks, and then together with donors work out how they could be addressed in mainstream processes, such as budgeting and national poverty reduction strategy papers. While the SDGs are inherently comprehensive and cherry-picking should be avoided, the scientific studies and tools for looking at interlinkages between goals and targets offer an excellent help to make informed prioritization.
 - A science-policy-society compact: In times where we have problems like misinformation and distrust, as well as pressing crises that can lead to reduced investments in STI, we should reaffirm science as a basic pillar for moving forward and to reduce the global inequalities in science. But we should also think fresh and prioritise. Some possible new initiatives:
 - Establish mechanisms for co-developing science for the SDGs at regional and national levels, and to even out the current knowledge imbalance. A specific initiative, that also stems from the 2019 GSDR is the idea of science missions.
 - Pursue a two-track strategy: i) enhance evaluation research, to really find out 'what works' for achieving SDGs, and what is the most effective and the best practice, as opposed to catalogues of 'good practice', and ii) co-develop regional and national scenarios and foresight studies, to show the future promises and ensure the SDGs make societies fit for the future. The scenario science is today unfortunately heavily concentrated in the global North. Making SDGs central to futures studies, foresight and futures lab could also be connected to Our Common Agenda.
 - Commitments to open science
 - Transformation story-telling: the GSDR will focus a lot on how we need to more actively nurture and steer transformations, and what the needs are during different phases of transformation. Transformations are possible, and also inevitable. There are impediments along the way, but they can to some extent be foreseen. It would be very inspirational and infectious if member states and other actors could at or ahead of the SDG summit, share their transformation stories and journeys on selected issues. What obstacles did they overcome? What were the moments when bold decisions and political courage was needed? The emphasis should be on the journey, in relation to starting point, and not only for showcasing the final achievements. These could be open meetings or smaller focus groups, to enable informal dialogue.

- Novel format: the SDG summit could be preceded by an 'accountability summit' where participants focus only on results and delivery on past commitments, rather than introducing new ones. They could answer to youth representatives.
- Specific coalitions and initiatives: some examples
 - Making progress on new metrics for wellbeing and going beyond GDP: the SDG summit can be a milestone where this long-standing issue makes some significant progress. The need for new metrics also came out strongly from the Stockholm+50 meeting.
 - Data partnerships: can SDG data gaps be plugged by partnerships with digital and data providers, and philanthropies?
 - Focus on sustainable consumption and production: as a root cause of some of the SDGs lagging furthest behind (SDG 13, 14, 15) and with interlinkages across the SDGs, an outcome could be to launch new initiatives under the One Planet new global strategy.
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