

Thematic Review:

Perspectives of society: Session organized with major groups and other stakeholders

Thursday, 12 July 2018, 11:00-13:00, United Nations Headquarters, Conference Room 4

Panel contribution **Mr. Ruben Zondervan**, Executive Director, Earth System Governance Project, Lund University, Sweden, and Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, UK (*Science and Technology Major Group*)

DRAFT version of 12 July, 14:00

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman,

It is an honor to speak at this official session of the 2018 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development for the Major Group Science & Technology.

The scientific and technology community has a crucial role to play in providing the evidence, expertise and data to inform, measure and monitor the implementation of the SDGs and help deliver solutions.

The underlying challenges to sustainable development have been the subject of research for a long time already. There is a vast body of scientific knowledge available. Knowledge that is important to synthesize and utilize, and to further advance as an essential component to the implementation of Agenda 2030.

Importantly, in addition to better understand the problems and challenges, the scientific and technology community is also actively engaged contributing scientific knowledge to the solutions. For this, we need to combine – and not mutually exclude – disciplinary, inter- and transdisciplinary approaches; as well as fundamental and applied research.

When turning scientific inquiry to solutions, there is an important role for the social sciences, the humanities, behavioral and communication sciences, and the arts.

Because, even our best models, monitoring systems, or our most innovative technologies, are insufficient to, for example, explain why certain policies and institutions work, and others don't; or how we can safeguard equity, participation, and accountability, while at the same time improving the speed and quality of the decision-making for the transformative changes needed.

And then there is another, new, exciting scientific challenge: That is, assessing and explaining the steering effects of the SDGs. The ambition expressed in the goals and targets is overwhelming. Yet, we need to ask: will this governance through goals approach be effective in resolving the pressing challenges? Science has tended so far to focus on concrete institutions, actors and practices—not on aspirational goals that bring little in terms of normative specificity, stable regime formation or compliance mechanisms.

Can global governance through goals nonetheless be effective—and under which conditions?

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That brings me to the first question – that of monitoring and review.

Here the contribution of the scientific and technology community is obvious as it is our daily work.

One example of an innovative tool that demonstrates how science can contribute is the The World in 2050 project. This has been presented in Tuesday's morning session and this data modelling project integrates a wide array of heterogeneous data, giving countries and organizations potential pathways to achieve the SDGs.

One major review effort underway as we speak, is the development of the 2019 Global Sustainable Development Report. 15 Independent scientist are working hard on this report which will be an important component of the follow-up and review process.

Status and scope of that report have been presented in yesterday's morning session of the HLPF.

Sustainable development is contextual and knowledge thereof is a prerequisite. It is therefore alarming that scientific capacity is so unevenly distributed across the globe. To achieve Agenda 2030 we need to fill the gaps, create capacities, and strengthen scientific knowledge production everywhere but in particular there where it is under-represented today.

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That brings me to the second question – that of coherence.

In 2017, the International Council for Science published a guide to SDG interactions which provides a framework for describing the level of interdependency between goals and targets. It shows that actions under one goal can reinforce progress in other goals. Similarly, actions taken to achieve an SDG may hinder progress in achieving another. Understanding and managing these interactions is key.

Side-event by the International Science Council and others this evening, 6pm, on "Managing interactions between SDGs".

From experiences in co-designing and co-producing knowledge, we are also progressing in seeing key intervention points in large, complex systems, and development stages of coherence across sectors.

But whether and under what conditions the SDGs advance institutional integration, that is, stimulate increasing normative coherence and institutional and actor alignment, is not a given. The degree to which the goals and their targets have been achieved over time, will be the test of the widely assumed hypothesis that higher degrees of institutional integration will advance goal achievement.

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Transformation to sustainable development, understood as intentional – not as evolution or revolution through chaos – needs to bring together knowledge and societal agreement. It requires access to, application of, and fostering of the best available scientific knowledge. It needs better science-policy mechanisms – at all levels of governance, as well as within the HLPF

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And to conclude, a final example of how the scientific community contributes to the implementation of Agenda 2030: Teaching.

Most scientific knowledge creation takes place at universities, and most scientists at universities also teach. They teach the students now at university, who could be – and will have to become – the groundbreaking scientists, the innovative entrepreneurs, the sustainable business leaders, and the effective member state delegates or civil society representatives in the decennia to come.

Because, the quest for sustainability and the need for scientific knowledge and technological innovation, and the need for innovative and knowledgeable people will not be over in 2030.

Thanks you!