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Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft
German Research Foundation

Measuring Sustainable Development

International Conference
23 – 24 April 2015, New York City

The upcoming decision on the Post 2015 Development Agenda and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** by the General Assembly in **September 2015** was a key factor in choosing the topic of this conference. UN member states are currently involved in a complex negotiating process concerning the identification and phrasing of an appropriate formulation of the SDGs. The question of how the implementation of these goals can and should be monitored, measured and assessed poses a series of particular challenges.

The conference “Measuring Sustainable Development” will focus on these issues. It will provide an arena for leading scholars from all parts of the world to contribute their specific expertise in addressing the environmental, political, economic and social aspects of monitoring and steering sustainable development and discuss their findings with experts, practitioners and policy makers involved in the ongoing negotiations.

The conference will thus provide a unique opportunity to collaborate – in at least two dimensions:

Firstly, sustainable development has been recognized as a high-level priority for different research communities; accordingly, networks, partnerships, global initiatives and international programs have been set up addressing various aspects of sustainable development. The conference will bring together members from some of the key initiatives in this field: Future Earth, the Scientific Advisory Board to the UN Secretary General, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), as well as other scholars. It will present the opportunity to discuss cross-cutting issues and overcome institutional boundaries.

Secondly, the conference aims at confronting science with the practice of politics and civil society. Therefore, we will invite decision makers and stakeholders who work on the Sustainable Development Goals to actively participate in all sessions.

Thus, the conference addresses scholars as well as experts and practitioners in relevant political arenas. It should offer the opportunity to discuss possible solutions in an intellectually stimulating atmosphere without institutional or normative restrictions. Besides exploring ways in which science can support the Post-2015 discussion, the conference also aims at identifying new **research field** questions.

The conference will be divided into four sessions

1. Indicators and Monitoring

This session will take stock of how the proposed set of SDGs and its target and indicator framework relate to existing initiatives, both globally and locally. Conceptual issues, like the information content of indicators, should be addressed as well as ways to communicate diverse sets of indicators in a comprehensive and comprehensible manner.

2. Assessment and Evaluation

The second session will provide an overview on the assessment and evaluation issues that are relevant to measuring SDGs with a special focus on interlinkages and challenges concerning scale. It will also look at past experiences with lessons to be learned for assessing SDGs.

3. Synergies and Tough Choices

While this session will not challenge the SDGs in their present stage, it will address possible trade-offs and synergies between the different goals and ways to handle them and turn obstacles into opportunities.

4. Ownership

Real world effects of the SDGs will critically depend on their adoption by influential societal groups within member states. This session will address the question: What are the conditions that positively influence and promote ownership for SDGs at various levels of civil society and other stakeholders?

The program will be concluded by a **wrap-up session** that is intended to outline challenges for new research and for evidence based implementation of SDGs.

During a **closing event** at the UN-headquarters, findings from the four sessions will be presented. These reports will be followed by a panel that discusses the relevance of the findings for the political arena. The panel will include representatives of the Scientific Advisory Board to the Secretary General, Future Earth, the Sustainable Development Solutions Networks (SDSN), the scientific community, and UN agencies involved in the SDG process. The closing event will be open for all relevant stakeholders, including members of interested UN bodies, the Diplomatic Corps, NGOs, academia and the business community.

The conference is being organized by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in close collaboration with the United Nations University (UNU).

Responsibility for the program lies with the Scientific Program Committee:

- Joseph Alcamo, University of Kassel, Center for Environmental Systems Research, and former Chief Scientist of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP)
- Anita Engels, University of Hamburg, Center for Globalization and Governance, and Speaker of the DFG Cluster of Excellence "Integrated Climate System Analysis and Prediction (CliSAP)"
- Jakob Rhyner, Vice Rector in Europe of the United Nations University, and Director of the Institute for Environment and Human Security, Bonn
- Thomas Risse, Freie Universitaet Berlin, Center for Transnational Relations, Foreign and Security Policy, and Director of the DFG Research Center "Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood"
- Christoph M. Schmidt, President of the Rheinisch-Westfaelisches Institut fuer Wirtschaftsforschung (RWI), Essen, and Chair of the German Council of Economic Experts
- Martin Visbeck, GEOMAR - Helmholtz Centre for Ocean Research Kiel, and Chair of the German National Committee on Future Earth

