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Options for the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/290 on the “*Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development*” of 9 July 2013.

The report puts forward several options for the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report. These options are based on responses by Member States and UN system entities to a questionnaire on the subject. They also draw on lessons learned from an exploratory, multi-stakeholder process to produce a prototype edition of a global sustainable development in order to illustrate potential content and process for such a report.

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I. Context

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution A/RES/67/290 on the “*Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development*” of 9 July 2013. Paragraph 20 of this resolution decided “...that the forum shall strengthen the science-policy interface by examining documentation, bringing together dispersed information and assessments, including in the form of a global sustainable development report, building on existing assessments, enhancing evidence-based decision-making at all levels and contributing to the strengthening of ongoing capacity-building for data collection and analysis in developing countries...” and requested “...the forum to consider, in 2014, the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report, based on a proposal of the Secretary-General reflecting the views and recommendations of Member States, and relevant United Nations entities, including the Committee for Development Policy”. In the following we refer to a “global sustainable development report” as the “*Report*”.

2. All Member States, political groups and all fifty-three UN organizations of ECESA-Plus were invited to make proposals on the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report, inter alia, through a questionnaire. The Secretary-General expresses his appreciation for their contributions to the present report. Written responses were received from China, Costa Rica, Croatia, the EU, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, Russian Federation, Switzerland, Tunisia, and the UK, as well as from CDP, ECLAC, ESCAP, UNCTAD, UNEP and WMO. Related inputs were considered from experts and UN partners who participated in expert group meetings, including from CBD, ECE, FAO, IAEA, UNEP and UNESCO.

3. Section II draws lessons learned from an exploratory, multi-stakeholder process to produce a prototype edition of a global sustainable development. Section III provides a synthesis of responses by Member States and UN system entities to a questionnaire on the subject, and section IV sets out my recommendations for consideration by Member States.

II. Prototype edition of a global sustainable development report

A. Introduction

1. The concept of sustainable development has a very long history in science. As early as 1713, Hanns Carl von Carlowitz referred to sustainable yield in the context of sustainable forestry management. In 1987, the Brundtland report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, entitled “*Our Common Future*”¹, popularized the concept which was subsequently adopted by the UN Conference on Environment and Development (“*Earth Summit*”) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, together with a set of *Rio Principles*² and a global action plan, *Agenda 21*³, which

¹ UN (1987). Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: *Our Common Future*. World Commission on Environment and Development, Transmitted to the General Assembly as an Annex to UN document A/42/427 (“Development and International Co-operation: Environment”), <http://www.un-documents.net/wced-ocf.htm>

² <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/aconf15126-1annex1.htm>

³ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>

included many goals and targets. Some of these goals became part of the Millennium Development Goals a decade later.

2. Science has become increasingly present in the UN sustainable development debate since the 1990s, especially due to efforts of academies of sciences to reconnect science with policy. For example, the US National Academy of Sciences created a Board on Sustainable Development in 1995 which sought to make the concept of sustainable development manageable and measurable by focusing on a minimal sustainability transition over two generations until 2050.⁴

3. It should be noted, however, that the policy framework for sustainable development initially emerged with little science. There were no scientists on the World Commission on Environment and Development and little science was present in Rio in 1992. Ten years later at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, there was some scientific presence. In 2012, scientists were among the most prominent groups at the side events for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (“Rio+20”). The Secretary-General’s Scientific-Advisory Board (SAB) composed of 26 scientists convened for the first time in January 2014.

4. Sustainability science emerged as a new inter-disciplinary, unified scientific endeavour around the year 2000. It is a field defined by the problems it addresses rather than by the disciplines it employs. The number of authors who publish articles has doubled about every eight years since the early 1970s. In 2010, about 37,000 scientists from 174 countries authored articles with “sustainable development” or “sustainability” in the title. Google scholar registered more than 150,000 such academic articles published in 2012 alone - six times more than ten years ago.

5. Yet, to date, there exists no comprehensive, authoritative global sustainable development report that would bring together the range of existing assessments, review global progress and future pathways in a truly integrated way, taking into account perspectives of scientific communities across the world. This is despite the policy prominence of many topical assessments.

6. In 2012, the Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Global Sustainability in its final report in preparation for Rio+20 detailed the importance of basing policy on the best scientific evidence and called for a “*Global Sustainable Development Outlook*” to bring together assessments across sectors in an integrated manner.⁵

7. In the Rio+20 outcome document, Member States decided to establish a universal, intergovernmental high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) which would, as one of its functions, “*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*” (§85k).⁶

8. In response, the Secretary-General tasked the Division for Sustainable Development (DSD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) to

⁴ U.S. National Research Council, Policy Division, Board on Sustainable Development, *Our Common Journey: A Transition Toward Sustainability* (Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1999), http://www.nap.edu/openbook.php?record_id=9690

⁵ <http://www.un.org/gsp/gsp/report>

⁶ A/66/288 and <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html>

undertake “*in-depth analysis and evaluation of trends and scientific analysis in the implementation of sustainable development, including lessons learned, best practices and new challenges, and cross-sectoral analysis of sustainable development issues*”. Further details were provided in the revised programme budget adopted by the General Assembly at the end of 2012.⁷

9. In early 2013, work began at DESA’s DSD on a prototype edition of a global sustainable development report that could illustrate potential content, alternative approaches and various ways of participation, in order to support member States’ deliberations on the scope and methodology of future editions of the Report. An Executive Summary was presented at the inaugural session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development on 24 September 2013.⁸ Following further review, a comprehensive prototype Report will be presented at the 2nd session of the HLPF in July 2014.⁹

B. Process

10. The prototype report is the result of a collaborative effort of many scientists, experts, UN staff and government officials.

UN system effort

11. DESA’s DSD led the preparation of the prototype edition. It reached out to scientific communities and to colleagues in the UN system to provide focused inputs to the report. The Secretary-General expresses his appreciation to the UN entities which have joined the effort to date: DESA, CBD, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA, ECE, FAO, ILO, IMO, IAEA, OHRLS, UNCCD, UNEP, UNESCO, UNCTAD, UNIDO, UNFCCC, UNFPA, UN-Habitat, WFP, and the World Bank. The IMF participated as an observer.

Consultations

12. In 2013, a series of eight expert group meetings and consultation meetings were organized to support the preparation of draft chapters and to explore informal networks of scientific contributors. The meetings differed greatly in terms of content focus, geographic focus, and meeting participants. One of these meetings hosted by the Government of Croatia resulted in the “*Dubrovnik Declaration*” which provided a “*regional perspective on science-policy interface for a sustainable future*”.¹⁰

13. The substantive starting point for the prototype report comprised existing scientific research and in-depth studies from a wide range of sources, including the large number of scientific contributions, issue briefs and official submissions prepared for Rio+20; international scientific assessments; science-policy briefs of academies of sciences; institutional reports; Government-sponsored research; and national and regional sustainable development reports.

14. Views differed on the optimal approach to selecting contributing scientists for the Report. In view of the limited time available, DSD approached scientists who

⁷ A/67/591

⁸ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/975GSDR%20Executive%20Summary.pdf>

⁹ The Report and background information is available here: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport>

¹⁰ UN GA A/C.2/68/8 of 18 November 2013, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/C.2/68/8

participated in recent DSD initiatives, scientists suggested by UN partners and by major scientific groups, notably ICSU and ISSC.

15. To date hundreds of contributors and reviewers from 46 countries have supported the Report, including 57 UN staff from 21 entities, 35 government officials, 2 major groups, 161 named academics and scientists, inputs from 178 experts that had participated in a DSD project in preparation for Rio+20¹¹, and an international team of young scientists and research students from several universities.

16. Many of the Report's messages and findings were "crowd-sourced" using Web-based social science methods¹². A multi-lingual¹³ crowd-sourcing platform was used to collect views from thousands of social and natural scientists, and a special effort was made to reach the younger generation.

17. The prototype report considered hundreds of assessments, including 57 international assessments suggested through the crowd-sourcing Website, 78 national sustainable development reports, 125 flagship publications of the UN system, 23 outlook reports prepared by intergovernmental organizations and more than 1,000 academic articles and think-pieces.

Contents and outputs

18. The prototype Report includes a description of the landscape of sustainable development assessments; an assessment of sustainable development progress since 1950; an analysis of global sustainable development scenarios ("*future pathways*"); a review of measures of progress including official as well as "big data" approaches; a review of investment needs; science digests; and – as a special theme – case studies of the climate-land-energy-water-development nexus in Australia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Cuba, Chile, China, Comoros, Germany, India, Jamaica, Lithuania, Mauritius, Qatar, South Africa, Syria, Thailand, USA, UK, Madagascar, Seychelles, Zanzibar (Tanzania), California (USA), Tarawa (Kiribati), and the river basins of Danube and the Nile.

19. In support of the Report, the team developed two quantitative models: an open-source global climate-land-energy-water-development model that is being further developed to allow development of SDG scenarios; and a stylized integrated tourism model especially suited for SIDS.¹⁴

20. Contributors also provided support to ongoing capacity building projects which proved useful as inputs to the Report. Others have worked on a geo-database for socio-economic indicators. Work on quantifying innovative measures of progress continues.

C. Lessons-learnt for future editions

21. There are thousands of relevant scientific assessments at various temporal and geographic scales. Most of them focus on specific systems and sectors. For example, there are 1,023 assessments in the database of the *Assessment of Assessments on*

¹¹ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sd21.html>

¹² Salganik, M.J., and Levy, K.E.C (2012). Wiki surveys: open and quantifiable social data collection, <http://arxiv.org/pdf/1202.0500v1.pdf>

¹³ Inputs were made in English, Spanish and Chinese. In the future, a much wider range of languages might be used.

¹⁴ <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport#tools>

Oceans and 182 assessments at multiple scales in the database of the *Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. These lists are growing and have to be updated on a regular basis.

22. Assessments differ greatly in terms of scope, scale, organization, process, participation, resources and perceived policy relevance (Table 1). Three broad groups can be distinguished: intergovernmental scientific assessments; scientific-technocratic assessments; and scientific research collaborations. When asked about their preferred assessment model for future editions of the Report, experts typically suggested either the conventional UN flagship publications model, a multiple stakeholder model with national contributions, or the IPCC model. Experts from developing countries tended to be more sceptical of the IPCC model, in view of its focus on peer-reviewed knowledge dominated by Western journals (accounting for 97 per cent of the references in IPCC reports).

Table 1.
Typology of international SD assessments

Type	Examples	Description	Link to political process	Participants nominated/selected by	Drafted by	Text approved by	Frequency	Normative or descriptive	Type of knowledge assessed
Intergovernmental scientific assessments	IPCC, IPBES	Regular intergovernmental scientific assessments	Formal	Governments	Scientists	Governments, peers	Regular	Primarily descriptive	Academic, peer-reviewed
	IAASTD	Ad hoc stakeholder, intergovernmental scientific assessment	Formal	Multi-stakeholder Bureau	Scientists	Governments	Ad hoc	Primarily descriptive	Academic and traditional/local knowledge of stakeholders
	GEO	Regular UN science publication with formal link	Formal	Governments, stakeholders	Scientists guided by UN	Peers	Regular	Descriptive and normative	Academic, peer-reviewed, UN
	Asian Highway expert group	Intergovernmental UN expert group	Formal	Governments	UN staff guided by experts	UN	Regular	Descriptive	Governments, UN, academic, private sector
Scientific, technocratic assessments	UN Committee for Development Policy	Standing UN expert groups with formal reporting to governments	Formal	UN Secretary General	UN staff guided by Committee members	Committee	Regular	Normative	Academic, peer-reviewed, UN
	High-level Panel on Global Sustainability	Ad hoc initiatives of the Secretary General	Formal, limited	UN Secretary General	UN staff guided by Panel	Panel	Ad hoc	Normative	UN, governments, academic, NGOs, stakeholders
	UN flagship publications: GBO, WESS, UN SD21 study	UN flagship publications, drawing on UN expert groups, and linked to UN process	Formal, weak	UN	UN staff jointly with experts	UN	Ad hoc or regular	Descriptive and normative	Academic, NGOs, UN, government, stakeholders
Scientific research collaborations	Global Energy Assessment	Collaborative collation of scientific knowledge	Informal	Peers	Scientists	Authors Peers	Ad hoc	Descriptive and normative	Academic, peer-reviewed
	Millennium Ecosystem Assessment	Identification of scientific basis and knowledge gaps for action	Non-governmental	Selected by science panel, endorsed by board	Scientists	Peers	Ad hoc	Descriptive and normative	Academic, peer-reviewed, stakeholders
	Census of Marine Life; Future Earth	Collaborative scientific research programme	Non-governmental	Peers	Scientists	Authors, Peers	Ad hoc	Descriptive	Academic, own research

Note: Increasing role of governments from bottom to top.

23. Many countries and some regions have established processes to prepare sustainable development reports, many of which are supported by local scientific communities and feature local priorities. Hence, a bottom-up approach for the

global Report would benefit from such rich and dispersed local policy-relevant knowledge.

24. “Crowdsourcing” proved a useful tool to identify new and emerging issues that scientists would like decision-makers to consider for action. The identified issues differed significantly from issues highlighted in the ad-hoc expert group meetings and from issues identified by the young researchers. Hence, for a balanced result, the global Report may want to allow for a wide range of participation through multiple channels and feature a wide range of perspectives. Yet, crowdsourcing has its limitations. Protocols for evaluating non-conventional sources of scientific knowledge might be needed.

25. The review of sustainable development progress provided evidence that impressive gains in some areas have come at the expense of worsening trends in other areas in recent decades. Hence, integrated assessment is needed to monitor inter-linkages between issues and themes.

26. Scientific assessments of progress can sometimes lead to rather different results compared to institutional assessments of progress against agreed goals or commitments. Both are important, but are different in nature. Hence, a traditional monitoring report focused on progress towards sustainable development goals (SDGs) might not by itself strengthen the science-policy interface.

27. Views differ across governments, civil society groups, academia, and the public on the progress made, remaining gaps and ways forward toward sustainable development. Some of the differences arise from the adoption of different system boundaries and time scales, ranging from current, local actions all the way to the Earth’s biota and a perspective of thousands of years. Interactions between system boundaries and time scales are non-trivial, and, in fact, policy recommendations derived from short-run and narrower approaches are often contradictory to those predicated on long-run, broader considerations.

28. A global scale and the time frame of the next two generations until 2050 – together with intermediate milestones – has proven to be a reasonable choice for addressing – in an inter-generationally equitable way – many of the issues on the sustainable development agenda, such as eliminating poverty and hunger; enabling livelihoods; feeding, nurturing, housing, and educating everyone; securing peace, security and freedom; and preserving the Earth’s life support systems.

29. Separate assessments and goals do already exist for all the thematic areas currently on the agenda of the Open Working Group on SDGs. However, an integrated assessment is lacking that could identify alternative “*future pathways*” that resolve trade-offs and build synergies between policy actions. In this context, scenarios can be useful and help in reducing uncertainties over the required levels of investment and international cooperation for achieving SDGs. Hence, the Report might promote in-depth cooperation on sustainable development scenarios.

30. Scientists and UN entities have promoted a long list of sectoral as well as aggregate indicators. They have been developed with different objectives and organizational interests in mind. In particular, there has been no agreement on a comprehensive, aggregate indicator of sustainable development progress that might complement GDP. Remote sensing and other “big data” approaches beyond official statistics show strong potential for assessing long-term sustainable development

progress at various spatial and temporal scales, especially in the poorest parts of the world where official data is scarce.

31. Selected science digests might be a useful way to involve scientists in highly specialized fields to engage in the broader science-policy interface at the HLPF.

32. Case studies of the climate-land-energy-water-development nexus illustrate the benefits of integrated approaches focusing on issue clusters rather than sectors or themes. They can help in identifying innovative and better solutions. As the “right” cluster of issues for integrated policy is case specific, future editions of the Report might analyse and identify other important issue clusters. Looking at these issues in an integrated way may support efforts for more integrated decision-making.

III. Response to the questionnaire on the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report

33. Responses to the questionnaire on scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report were received from China, Costa Rica, Croatia, the European Union, Indonesia, Japan, Jordan, the Russian Federation, Switzerland, Tunisia, and the UK, as well as from CDP, ESCAP, ECLAC, UNEP, UNCTAD, and WMO.¹⁵ In addition, related written inputs were considered from experts and UN partners who participated in expert group meetings that were convened in support of the Report in 2013.¹⁶ This includes, inter alia, written responses by CBD, ECE, FAO, IAEA, UNEP and UNESCO.

A. Overall direction

34. In their responses to the questionnaire, a number of member States and UN entities provide guidance on the overall direction for the Report.

Added value

35. Member States emphasize the need for the Report to be complementary to and to add value to existing processes and UN reports. In particular, a synthesising report is expected to add value and provide improved access to the findings of a large number of existing assessments and to highlight synergies and trade-offs between actions taken in various settings.

36. As an integrated assessment of assessments, the Report is expected to become a useful instrument for the HLPF, especially in agenda-setting and the post-2015/SDGs framework. The Report preparation process is expected to foster collaboration among analytical teams in the UN system, including the Bretton Woods institutions.

Focus and integration

37. Member States suggest focusing on the implementation of sustainable development and specifically the SDGs/post-2015 agenda, providing lessons-learnt and identifying good practices and challenges.

¹⁵ The questionnaire and the full text of the responses are available online at <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport/>

¹⁶ Inter alia, the “*Expert group meeting for a global sustainable development report - engaging national assessments*” (Beijing, China, 12-13 December 2013), and the “*Expert group meeting on sustainable development assessments*” (New York, USA, 3-4 September 2013), see <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport>

38. The emphasis should be on inter-linkages between issues and on tools to address them in an inter-generationally equitable way. This might include, in particular, cross-sectoral analysis of progress made, obstacles encountered and potential integrated policy options.

Capacity needs

39. High-quality data and analysis capacity remains an issue, especially in developing countries, and lessons are available from existing assessments in this regard. Member States envisage a consultative, participatory process that will require building data and analysis capacity for integrated assessments and future scenarios. A joint UN effort is needed to address and monitor data availability, quality and analytical methodologies.

Role of the report in the HLPF and post-2015

40. In line with the Rio+20 outcome document, member States envisage the Report to bring together findings of scientific assessments as input for the policy deliberations at the HLPF. The Report might have an important monitoring and accountability function and should be policy-relevant, but not make specific policy recommendations. Some member States also envisage the Report to become one of a number of contributions to supporting implementation of the future SDGs and post-2015 development agenda.

Audience

41. The audience would comprise policy makers, notably at the highest level, senior government officials, the UN system and a wide range of stakeholders.

B. Scope

Preferred scope in terms of issue focus

42. Many respondents suggest to capture the priority issues identified in the Rio process, including Agenda 21, the Rio+20 outcome document, as well as in other important internationally agreed goals and commitments.

43. Most respondents have a clear preference for a science-based, yet practical Report that identifies policy solutions and supports the deliberations of the HLPF, as well as the implementation of future SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda. The Report would focus on identifying opportunities and challenges/obstacles to sustainable development progress, and acknowledge the different priorities and capabilities of countries. Many respondents expect a focus on global issues considered by the HLPF, including new and emerging issues, whereas others suggest highlighting national and regional priorities.

44. One Member State suggests four sections for the Report: landscape, review of progress, opportunities and challenges, and policy recommendations. The analytical focus should be on the interaction among economic, social and environmental dimensions, on key drivers of change, and on clusters of strongly inter-linked issues (e.g., the food-water-energy nexus). Most would like the Report to present good practices of integrated policies and some would also like to see in-depth sectoral analyses.

45. Many respondents expect an empirical analysis of progress on the means of implementation. In particular, the Report could present good practices of leveraging financing, technology, trade, capacity building, international cooperation and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Some suggest reviewing existing mechanisms in support of sustainability and highlighting their advances or failures at different levels and time scales, including an analysis of the efficiency, effectiveness and financial and technical contributions of the institutional framework to support the achievement of the MDGs and SDGs.

46. In addition, a number of specific issues are suggested for inclusion: poverty eradication; inclusive growth; sustainable management of natural resources (water, energy, biodiversity, land use and soil protection); sustainable consumption and production; terrestrial and marine ecosystems management; climate change; sustainable development goals; international, technical and financial cooperation; technology transfer; health; resilience-adaptation-sustainability-development nexus; decision-making tools; and enhancing preparedness and building resilience.

Geographic scope

47. Most respondents agree that the Report should have a global and regional geographic scope, that it should be based on national reporting and use the five official UN regions and take into account the differences between developed and developing countries. Most respondents suggest DESA to continue coordinating the global scope and the UN regional commissions to assist with regional sections of the Report.

48. Many suggest to include analysis for country groups – for countries in special situations or with high vulnerability (e.g., SIDS, LDCs, LLDCs, SSA) and/or for country groups categorized by development stage (e.g., developing countries, developed countries, economies in transition) or by income (e.g., high-income, middle-income and low-income countries).

49. In view of the fact that global issues need to be addressed nationally and locally, many also suggest to report on trends and experiences at national and local levels, based on countries' own national sustainable development reports.

Time horizon

50. Most respondents recommend the report to adopt a long-term, transformative vision, while using a pragmatic, flexible approach to match the different time scales of sustainable development issues. Some define *long-term* as a time horizon of 20 to 30 or 50 years. In particular, it is suggested to report on or around 1992, today, 2030, and 2050, in order to reflect progress since Agenda 21, where we are now and where we will be heading. Other respondents suggest adopting the time horizon of the future SDGs. A particular focus might be on the preceding 4 to 5 years.

51. Interlinked sustainable development issues operate at widely different, but interacting, geographic and time scales.

Scope of scientific knowledge

52. Respondents suggest establishing a scientific, coherent and robust assessment framework. The Report might comprise an easily readable executive summary and a detailed scientific analysis covering all dimensions of sustainable development.

53. One group of respondents suggests including different types of knowledge, ranging from peer-reviewed literature and existing international assessments to local and multi-stakeholder knowledge, reflecting the perspectives of scientific communities and science users across the world. Another group of respondents recommends an exclusive focus on peer-reviewed scientific information and research.

Key national, regional and global priority issues to be reflected in Report

54. Global priority issues to be reflected in the report should be linked to global challenges, such as those highlighted in Agenda 21, the Rio+20 outcome document, and the future SDGs and post-2015 development agenda. The Report would focus on policy coherence, integrated policy, inter-linkages and implementation challenges at all levels.

55. Regional priority issues should be defined by each of the regions and national priority issues identified in national development strategies. Member States could each highlight the most important tasks which could then be reflected in the Report.

56. Respondents generally support a focus on the global aspiration for the next two generations to eliminate poverty and hunger; to feed, nurture, house, educate 9 billion people by 2050; to secure inclusive growth, equity and development; and to preserve the Earth's life support systems. In particular, respondents specifically referred to the following priority issues: poverty and hunger eradication; wealth creation; agriculture, food security and nutrition; sustainable consumption and production; resource intensity; employment and decent work; jobless growth; inclusive growth and income distribution; social equity and security; education and learning; health and sanitation; population; financing; ODA; international debt management; trade; green economy; science and technology innovation; access to and transfer of technologies; urbanization; energy; water; climate change; land use and soil protection; forests; oceans and seas; marine protection and fishing; ocean acidification; biodiversity and ecosystems; housing; sustainable tourism; waste management; infrastructure development; transport; universal access to safe water, sanitation, sustainable energy, quality education, health services; equality; social protection; resilience to the impacts of climate change; disaster risk reduction; resilient buildings and communities; urbanization; slums; land use; land degradation; desertification, drought and deforestation; environment-poverty-inequality nexus; resource management; mining; macro-economics; pricing; barriers and disincentives to sustainable industrialization; intergenerational equity and welfare systems; governance and institutions; ecological-civilization society; and peace and security.

Role of the Report in identifying new and emerging issues

57. All respondents do see a role for the Report in identifying and addressing new and emerging issues, through sound scientific evidence, assessments and forward-looking projections, taking into account ongoing discussions in other relevant UN fora. Some believe this role to be even imperative. Others emphasize the need for political independence and objectivity of the Report and believe that it should not be considered the only source for such analysis. Even those that want the Report to focus primarily on implementation believe that it will most probably need to raise new and emerging issues in the process of identifying barriers to progress.

58. In this context, respondents note a range of unexpected changes and shocks that typically lead to new and emerging issues. Examples include economic and financial crises, natural disasters, and social and political instability.

59. Many respondents suggest identifying new and emerging issues through a combination of analysis of existing assessments and peer-reviewed literature; expert surveys; multi-stakeholder inputs from scientific communities, government officials, decision-makers, and civil society (e.g., using crowdsourcing and local knowledge); analysis of international agreements, commitments, and meeting outcomes; and country-level consultations.

60. At the same time, several respondents emphasize that the identification of new and emerging issues has to be based on sound scientific evidence. Others suggest a process whereby each country would identify its emerging priority issues, based on evidence, followed by HLPF agreement on a list of emerging issues for the purpose of agenda setting.

Type of content

61. Most respondents suggest capturing past and future trends, policy lessons, and scientific findings indicating potential areas for policy action, in order to enable evidence-based decision-making of the HLPF. A particular focus might be determined for each edition of the Report.

62. The Report should provide policy-relevant advice, not policy recommendations per se. It should indicate how inter-linkages can be addressed and what the leverage points and gaps are for the implementation of SDGs and post-2015 agenda.

63. It might showcase good practices and innovative sustainable development policies, plans, programmes, initiatives and technologies from around the world, and identify enabling success criteria and conditions. Some suggest to emphasize both successful and unsuccessful national cases, and to capture the institutional and political dimension.

64. The Report is expected to feature scientific findings indicating potential areas for policy action. In this regard, it should take into account the work of independent, scientific advisory groups and cooperate with assessment initiatives.

Monitoring and accountability framework for SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda

65. Most respondents envisage the Report to be part of or to contribute to the monitoring and accountability framework for the future SDGs and the post-2015 development agenda. They also expect the Report to engage a broad range of stakeholders. However, several respondents that favour this approach think that such decision would be premature, as the post-2015 framework will not be decided before 2015.

66. One member State outlines potential elements of a larger monitoring and accountability framework for the post -2015 agenda:

- (a) *National reporting by countries and national stakeholders.* A synthesis of lessons learned based on national reviews of sustainable development commitments could feed into the Global Sustainable Development Report submitted to the HLPF session under the General Assembly every four years.

- (b) *Monitoring of targets and indicators of the post-2015/SDG agenda at international level* which is likely the role of the enlarged UNDG interagency report, as successor to the MDG reporting;
- (c) *Sectorial in-depth reporting*, as carried out by specialized agencies and others, such as the IPPC, UNEP/GEO, WHO, ILO, and others;
- (d) *Analysis of inter-linkages, data availability, science policy interface etc.*, which could be the primary role of the GSDR.

67. Another respondent suggests to have a separate accompanying report prepared on monitoring and accountability, and to summarize it in the Report.

68. Several respondents emphasize the intergovernmental, member States-driven nature of the processes under the GA leading up to the SDGs and post-2015 development agenda. Against this background, they suggest that the Report might be used by these processes, but that it would not be part of a monitoring framework. Instead, the Report's primary function would be to support deliberations of the HLPF which provides political leadership and facilitates sustainable development implementation at the global level.

Periodicity of the report

69. Respondents differ in terms of preferred periodicity of the Report, ranging from one to five years. However, those that favour a multi-year cycle with an in-depth report to be prepared every four or five years do suggest intermediate and/or focused reports every one (or two) years, in order to support all sessions of the HLPF.

70. Most respondents suggest an in-depth report to be produced every four years coinciding with the convening of the HLPF in the GA. The periodicity must be based on the needs of the HLPF and the post-2015 development agenda and take into account national reporting capacities. In particular, they suggest additional reports to be drafted in case of unpredictable circumstances with major impacts.

71. Those that would like to see a role of the Report in monitoring and accountability suggest more frequent quantitative indicator updates once or twice each year.

72. Some suggest adjusting the periodicity of contributing reports and assessments, such as the GEO report which is being produced every five years.

C. Methodology

Organization of the preparation of the global report

73. Most respondents expect an important role for the UN system in the preparation of the Report. They suggest a joint UN system effort (including the Bretton Woods organizations), coordinated by DESA DSD as Secretariat for the HLPF. In particular, some respondents suggest the chief scientists (or equivalent) of relevant UN entities¹⁷ to collaborate in the preparation process. The five UN regional commissions should coordinate consultative meetings to prepare regional reports as inputs for the global Report. Some welcome the preparation of the prototype edition as a good general direction for future editions of the Report.

¹⁷ e.g., UNDESA, UNEP, UNDP, ILO, WHO, FAO, CBD, UNFCCC, UNESCO, UNCCD and UNIDO

74. Many suggest national focal points to be part of this process in one form or another, and emphasize the need for UN technical support for developing countries. Some suggest encouraging national sustainable development reports for synthesis at the regional and global levels, whereas others prefer the Report to be drafted by scientists chosen by member States or the UN Secretariat.

75. The report would build on existing reports and assessments, such as those mentioned in the prototype edition of the Report, including national sustainable development reports, UN publications and international assessments. Many respondents suggest a multi-stakeholder process engaging scientists, experts, governments and civil society in undertaking analysis and assessments, possibly through joint working groups.

76. Transparency and fairness of the process is seen as essential, including in terms of selection of the experts. The Report should undergo a peer review process by scientists, policymakers and other relevant stakeholders. Data collection should be made through platforms spanning global, regional, national and local levels and engage international scientific platforms.

Choosing the thematic focus of a given edition of the Report

77. Many respondents suggest the thematic focus of a given edition of the Report to be related to or to coincide with the theme of the HLPF session. While some respondents suggest the HLPF to choose the thematic focus, others prefer a multi-stakeholder process under the HLPF which would include member States, relevant UN entities agencies, civil society, and regional consultations. Another suggestion is for the UN Secretariat to carry out a multi-stakeholder survey, the results of which would be considered and prioritized by member States.

Principles

78. Respondents suggest the Report to follow the spirit of the Rio Principles and of other internationally agreed principles. They further suggest using the same principles and methods which are being used for preparation of other UN reports, including objectivity and political independence of conclusions, as well as balanced reflection of country- and region-specific information and data.

79. In particular, respondents recommend the following guiding principles for the Report: universality; legitimacy; representativeness; common but differentiated responsibilities; uniformity; comparability; objectivity; accuracy; transparency; inclusivity; balance; accountability; clarity; accessibility; leadership by example; continuous improvement; and the right of each country to decide on their own development pathways. They emphasize the need for adequate funding. They suggest an integrated, scientific approach, timely information, and multi-stakeholder perspectives. Research presented should be replicable and verifiable; hypotheses must be tested; and analytical work should be peer-reviewed. Member States express a clear preference for a policy relevant – but not policy prescriptive – report that is aligned with public policy needs.

80. Legitimacy of the Report at the global level requires that the scientific organizations or the scientific advisory mechanisms involved are: representative of the scientific community worldwide; preferably have already some track record of providing scientific advice to policy making bodies; and the functioning of the organization and/or the process is fully transparent. Making participation in science-

policy processes open, inclusive and geographically balanced is seen as indispensable for ensuring a politically legitimate product.

Scientific methods

81. Many respondents agree that the prototype edition that was presented at the 1st session of the HLPF in September 2013 provides a useful basis on the methodological side for future editions. They suggest a multidisciplinary, integrated approach in the spirit of sustainability science and to draw on a multitude of sources and data. Respondents also suggest to learn from existing international assessments, and to allow scientists and member States the flexibility to choose the relevant methods on a case-by-case basis.

82. Respondents specifically recommend to consider the following elements: report both scientific elements and official data, in order to create greater buy-in from stakeholders, experts and government representatives; statistical analysis and evaluation of past and future trends; use of global sustainable development scenario models to analyze trade-offs across policy objectives; inductive and empirical methods using quantitative and qualitative data; sustainable development indicators; backcasting; likelihood approach and capturing uncertainties.

Best way to organize national and regional contributions

83. Respondents comprise two groups with different views on the best way to organize national and regional contributions. However, both groups agree that the process would combine research, analysis and consultations.

84. One group emphasises the need to make use of existing structures avoiding new focal points and preparatory processes. In their view, the existing networks and focal points can facilitate discussions and consultations at all levels and would allow for external expert participation.

85. The other group would like to see the establishment of a targeted network of national and regional focal points/experts who would be nominated by governments. Regular consultations with the focal points would ensure the consideration of stakeholder inputs across the world. The focal points would gather data, review progress and conduct focus group discussions. Some would like to see an IPCC-style model in which the nominated experts would meet regularly and draft the Report.

86. Many respondents in the second group suggest countries and regions to develop their own national and regional sustainable development reports - on a voluntary basis - as input for the global report. In this model, the UN system would provide capacity building and technical support. UN regional commissions would organize regional consultations. Existing national sustainable development councils or similar committees in charge of implementation of sustainable development would play an important role.

87. Some also suggest organizing a participatory process to define a template and web-based toolkit for national reporting for consideration by member States and supported by UN capacity building efforts.

Proposed concrete steps to involve scientists from a wide range of countries and regions

88. Respondents suggest a number of concrete actions. For example, the UN Secretariat might want to request countries to nominate candidates to the Report

writing team which would ensure consideration of views of scientific communities, practitioners and policy-makers. Others suggest using existing mechanisms of government consultation with civil society in order to seek policy advice and to create scientific forums around specific policy questions in support of the Report.

89. Several respondents also suggest various institutions, communities or networks to be mobilized for the Report, such as the existing networks of national academies of science; networks of scientific institutions; scientists among UN staff; the Secretary-General's SAB; UN system networks and communities; the Future Earth Initiative; Indonesian Institute of Science; Joint Research Centre; Sustainable Development Solutions Network; and statistical offices.

90. Several respondents suggest to involve all sectors and major groups identified in Agenda 21, including the UN system; planning agencies; prominent universities, research institutes, and think tanks; professional societies; scientific associations; civil society and opinion makers; experts and scientists from national academia and line ministries; independent scientists; civil society networks; knowledge exchange platforms, and R&D institutions in private and public domain.

Scientific advisory group or working group

91. While respondents agree on the usefulness of some kind of scientific advisory group (or working group) to provide overall guidance, they express different views on the composition and expected role of the group.

92. Some believe that the existing networks of national academies of sciences would best serve the role of an advisory group and also be the appropriate mechanism to peer review the Report. Others prefer the group of chief scientists of relevant UN entities to play an important role and envisage a scientific advisory board under the auspices of DESA, UNESCO, UNEP, UNDP, ILO, WHO, FAO, CBD, UNFCCC, UNCCD and UNIDO that would be closely related to the HLPF. Some of them emphasize the need for a mix of representatives from governments, the UN system and representatives of civil society and academic institutions. Still others would like to see an involvement of the Secretary-General's SAB.

93. Another group of respondents would like to see a stronger ownership by Member States. They encourage the UN Secretariat to consider establishing a working group of experts nominated by governments. In particular, they suggest following the practice of the Open Working Group on SDGs, in order to take fully into account geographical balance and representation. The UN system and other international organizations could provide inputs to the draft and the working group of experts would arrange meetings to interact with stakeholders on a regular basis.

94. In another variant of the member States-driven approach with national focal points, each country would establish a national scientific advisory committee that could be involved in national and global reports for which the UN would provide technical assistance.

National sustainable development report processes

95. Many respondents would like to see voluntary national sustainable development report processes and national experiences featured in the Report. However, there is a link to future HLPF decisions, including on regular reviews on the follow-up and implementation of commitments and objectives and the registry of voluntary commitments.

96. There are different options available which have to reconcile the needs for flexibility, streamlined reporting, and national consultations. Respondents suggest the national reports to become building blocks of an international reporting system. An advisory group might guide the preparation of the national reports. National reports would address the SDGs/post-2015 agenda and all areas of the national sustainable development strategy. Developing countries should receive capacity building support. National processes might include inter-ministerial dialogues.

How should the report inform the work of the High-Level Political Forum?

97. Many respondents suggest the Report to be integrated in and to provide scientific evidence to the deliberations of the HLPF, in order to enhance the science-policy interface for sustainable development. They would like to see the HLPF to consider the method of integration and to decide what role and follow-up it would see for future Reports.

98. The Report should play a role in providing the HLPF with scientific knowledge in an easily comprehensible way. It could be utilized by the HLPF as a source of scientific analysis for setting its agenda, but it would not be the only agenda-setting input.

99. Many respondents expect the Report to provide scientific analysis of issues on the HLPF agenda, to provide evidence in support of HLPF decision-making and follow-up analysis, to disseminate HLPF activities, to channel feedback from the international community, and to carry out scientific monitoring of the future set of post-2015 goals.

IV. Recommendations

100. As outlined above, Member States, the UN system and many scientists already agree on many of the elements that define the scope and methodology of a global sustainable development report. These elements are summarized in Table 2 and could be considered in the way forward.

Table 2

Common elements of majority agreement on scope and methodology of the Report

Element	Agreement
Added value	Easy access for decision-makers to findings of many scientific assessments. Highlight synergies and trade-offs between policy actions in various settings.
Focus	Focus on implementation, obstacles to progress, good practises of integrated policy
Capacity needs	Joint UN effort to support developing countries' participation
Audience	Policy makers, senior government officials and wide range of stakeholders
Scope in terms of issue focus	Priority issues identified in the Rio process, including Agenda 21, the Rio+20 outcome, as well as other internationally agreed goals and commitments. Supports HLPF and implementation of future SDGs and post-2015 development agenda
Geographic scope	Global and five UN regions, with analysis for groups of countries in special situations
Time horizon	Medium- (10 years) to Long-term (20 to 50 years)
Global issues covered	HLPF agenda, Rio+20 outcome document, Agenda 21, future SDGs and post-2015 development agenda
New and emerging issues	Identification based on sound scientific evidence
Coordination of report process	UN task team coordinated by the HLPF Secretariat (DESA's Division for Sustainable Development) at the global level and RCs at the regional level
Type of content	Past and future trends; lessons-learnt; scientific findings indicating potential areas for policy action; opportunities and challenges for implementation

Periodicity	In-depth report every four years coinciding with HLPF sessions under the GA, and focused report contribution for the HLPF sessions under the auspices of ECOSOC
Normative or descriptive	Policy-relevant content and options, but no normative policy recommendations
Monitoring and accountability framework for SDGs/post-2015 development agenda	The Report possibly to become one of several contributions to the framework. Details are to be decided after 2015
Scientific methods	Multidisciplinary, integrated approach in the spirit of sustainability science. Precise methods to be decided by scientists, but prototype report illustrates a useful basis on the methodological side for future editions
How to inform the work of the HLPF	To be integrated in and provide scientific evidence for the deliberations of the HLPF. The Report to become one of several inputs

101. Taking into account the different views on a number of elements, the following options could be considered (Table 3):

- *Option 1: Conventional UN flagship publication model*
- *Option 2: Multi-stakeholder model linked to voluntary national processes*
- *Option 3: Intergovernmental Panel on Sustainable Development*

102. Option 1 follows the conventional approach for UN flagship publications. The Report is drafted by UN staff who also select experts for ad-hoc contributions. Knowledge inputs comprise peer-reviewed literature and UN system expertise. The Report is peer-reviewed internally and approved by senior UN management. Inputs from Member States and stakeholders are based on ad-hoc requests and based entirely on existing UN structures, including those of the RCs. Advantages of Option 1 include its low cost (can be implemented within existing resources), quick turn-around times, no need for new structures or working methods, and the representation of a wide range of perspectives. Disadvantages include limited consultations, weak linkages to existing assessments and initiatives, and a potential for overlapping activities.

103. Option 2 goes further in terms of involving stakeholders and linking to voluntary national reviews. The Report would be drafted by a team of UN staff comprising all UN-ECESA Plus members, with contributions from scientists, government officials and stakeholders. The Report would undergo an external, multi-stakeholder peer-review process and be approved by UN senior management and/or a multi-stakeholder advisory group. Advice would be provided by representatives of academia, major groups, UN system and other international organizations. This might include the chairs of major international assessment initiatives (e.g., IPCC, IPBES), research programmes (e.g., SDSN, Future Earth), and academies of sciences (e.g., World Academy of Sciences, prominent national academies); representatives of major groups (ICSU, ISSC, WBCSD); and young scientists; chairs of key UN groups (e.g., CDP, London group, SG's SAB, SEA4all, GEO board); representatives of key UN reports and outlooks (RCs, UNCTAD, UNEP, UNESCO, UNDP, WB, IMF, CBD, UNFCCC); and representatives of relevant non-UN organizations (South Centre, OECD, regional development banks, European Commission). UN regional commissions are encouraged to hold regional consultations and prepare contributions to the Report. Existing national processes and/or voluntary national reviews under HLPF will become important partners. Most activities under Option 2 could be implemented within existing resources with in-kind contributions, but additional resources might be needed for expert participation and capacity support to ensure effective participation of

developing countries. Advantages include higher legitimacy, moderate cost, and strong link between international assessments, national reviews and policy making. Disadvantages include longer turn-around times due to extensive consultations and limited acceptance by certain scientific communities.

104. Option 3 follows an IPCC-style model in which member States nominate scientific experts to a writing team which drafts the Report to be adopted by member States. Cooperation agreements may be sought with existing assessment initiatives. Lessons-learned from IPCC reviews can be taken into account in the design of the Panel. In particular, there may be a need to compensate authors for their contributions, in order to avoid conflicts of interests. Advantages of Option 3 include a larger mobilization of scientific communities and of resources, and an institutionalized science-policy interface. Disadvantages include a higher cost (similar to those of other intergovernmental panels), inertia in the process due to a very large number of scientists involved, as well as the fact that the IPCC's consensus model based on peer-reviewed literature does not necessarily encourage the presentation of emerging issues or diverse views.

Table 3.

Overview of differences between the three options

Element	Option 1: Conventional UN flagship publication model	Option 2: Multi-stakeholder model linked to voluntary national processes	Option 3: Intergovernmental Panel on Sustainable Development
Report drafted by	UN staff	Team of UN staff with contributions from scientists, government officials and stakeholders.	Scientists nominated by member States
Experts selected by	UN staff	UN staff, assessment initiatives, member States, major groups	Member States
Peer-review	Internal to UN system	External, multi-stakeholder peer review (open process) including UN system	Peer review by participating scientists and external academic reviewers
Report approved by	UN senior management	UN senior management and/or multi-stakeholder advisory group	Member States
Scope of scientific knowledge	Peer-reviewed literature and UN system knowledge	All kinds of knowledge	Peer-reviewed literature
Regional priority issues identified by	Regional consultations coordinated by RCs	Multi-stakeholder regional consultations coordinated by RCs	Scientists
National priority issues identified by	Responses by member States to UN questionnaires	Voluntary, national consultations coordinated by Member States and supported by UN capacity building	Scientists
How to organize national and regional contributions	Desk study conducted by UN staff and inputs through ad-hoc UN request for inputs. Based on existing structures	Based on existing structures using existing focal points or channels for nominations. Organized by interested Member States with capacity support from UN system	New, formal group of scientists nominated by member States
Choosing thematic focus of each edition	UN senior management	HLPF in consultation with scientists and stakeholders	HLPF
National sustainable development process	No direct link	Partly based on voluntary processes and reports	No direct link
Scientific advisory group or working group	UN internal with ad-hoc external contributions	Multi-stakeholder group, including representatives of academies of sciences, SAB, CDP, and of key int'l assessments	New group of scientists nominated by governments