Informal summary of Breakfast Meeting with Academia
In preparation for the 2018 ECOSOC Special Meeting
“Towards sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies through participation of all”
8:15-9:45 AM, New York, 9 March 2018

Highlights

• The 2030 Agenda emerged from a participatory process, based on the vision of tolerant and inclusive societies that empower all. The Agenda highlights the role of young people as critical agents of change. It also stresses the need for multi-stakeholder partnerships in support of the SDGs.

• Academia represents a key actor in efforts to advance the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. Academic institutions provide education, support good governance and contribute to public policy making at all levels.

• Universities play a dual role in supporting sustainable, resilient and inclusive societies: They act as guardians of societal values, while simultaneously pushing frontiers of knowledge by advancing innovation.

• Quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data represent the foundation for the follow-up and review of the Agenda. Academic institutions play a vital role in providing data in support of the SDGs and its targets.

• There is further scope for partnerships between academic institutions as well as between academia and policy makers. Further strengthening of the research-policy interface is critical to support evidence-based policy making in support of the 2030 Agenda.

Informal Summary

Participation and inclusion in the SDG era

Fostering participation as well as social and political inclusion lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. Several targets across the 17 SDGs reflect the need for participation and resilient and inclusive societies for the achievement of sustainable development. Target 16.7, for instance, commits the international community to ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Target 5.5 calls for women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life. Target 4.7 seeks to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, through education for sustainable development, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and cultural diversity, as well as culture’s contribution to sustainable development.
Inclusion is not limited to any specific dimension of sustainable development, but is critical to the achievement of social, economic and environmental objectives of the Agenda. Inclusion cannot be achieved in a piecemeal way, but requires systemic change at all levels. At the global level, system-wide knowledge needs to be transformed into action. At the national level, policies need to be adapted to address the specific contexts and the challenges that hamper inclusion. At the local level, inclusion needs to be fostered across all policies, including by embracing grass-roots movements that act as change agents. The Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, a multi-stakeholder group comprised of several UN Member States, international organizations, global partnerships, and other partners, seeks to support systemic change at all levels by providing guidance on how to turn the targets relating to participation and inclusion into tangible action.

Advancing the 2030 Agenda and supporting policy making

Universities can promote resilience of societies in all dimensions of sustainable development - the economic, social and environmental. Social resilience is fostered by providing space for open discussions and public debates. Universities are building resilience in the economic realm by providing skills to individuals to succeed in the labor market, including through life-long learning. In the environmental realm, academic institutions have been at the forefront of research into a sustainable future for people and planet and in tackling challenges of environmental degradation and climate change.

In support of the 2030 Agenda, academic institutions also have a role in fostering awareness of the Goals and in developing specific policy approaches to implement them. The Universidad de los Andes recently launched the SDG Centre for Latin America, with the goal to promote the SDGs through academia. Several centers have already been created in other regions of the world, playing an integral role in advancing the SDGs through academia. Ideas for Action, a joint programme of the World Bank Group and the Wharton School, provides a platform for innovation that can advance the SDGs. Academia has also been actively engaged in sustainable urbanization (SDG11), given the importance of academic institutions in the urban context.

Examples from the national level highlight the role of universities in national policy making in support of the SDGs. Charles University, for instance, builds on its extensive research, including by its Environmental Centre to support policy making on climate change, energy, natural resources, as well as sustainable consumption and production. To promote linkages between academia and policy makers, Charles University has built partnerships with ministries in the Czech Republic to support evidence-based policy making. Universidad de los Andes has conducted research on priority areas for the development context of Columbia, including strengthening the research-policy interface on issues of deforestation and peace building. Some Member States also have taken concrete steps to encourage partnerships between relevant stakeholders to
Supporting the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda through reliable and readily available data represents a further area of engagement for academic institutions. LIS Data, a data archive and research center dedicated to cross-national analysis of income and wealth inequality, to advance understanding of inequality trends in support of achievement of SDGs 1 and 10. Research by the Stone Center at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York based on LIS data, have shown how relevant and timely data can inform evidence-based policy making in support of the SDGs.

The normative role of universities in fostering inclusion and participation

Beyond acting as knowledge hubs and catalysts for evidence-based support to policy making, universities can advance cultural values through education. The conference “Education and Academic Freedoms, Innovation and Open Society”, hosted by Charles University in Prague in May 2016, highlighted key principles of the work of universities at local, national and global levels. The outcome document of the conference, the Prague Declaration, highlighted the role of universities in the diffusion of universal values such as humanism, tolerance and openness. It also stressed that today’s global problems cannot be tackled without science and education, particularly through basic and applied research.

Concrete examples of universities’ engagement to foster participation of all showcase the role they can play in society. Prague’s Charles University, for instance, implemented a system of democratic governance, based on a self-governing representative academic body to achieve transparent and fair governance throughout the organization. Charles University also offers dedicated support for the education of students from countries in crises. The Universidad de los Andes uses innovative approaches to student tuition financing, based on a reciprocity agreement between present and future generations of students, to promote inclusion within its student body. By advancing universal values and building bridges between nations, the Erasmus programme represents a cross-national approach to education that can support resilient and inclusive societies.