

Joint Press Release

of the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)
and the United Nations University (UNU)

27. April 2015

How can science contribute to sustainable global development?

Joint Conference of the DFG and UNU in New York brought together research, policy makers and political and civil society organizations / "The source of wisdom is knowing the facts"

An international conference, which was organized by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG, German Research Foundation) and the United Nations University (UNU) with the assistance of the Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany to the United Nations (UN) in New York, focused on issues of global sustainability and the contribution of science to solving the pressing problems associated with sustainable global development. The meeting, which was held at the headquarters of the United Nations from Thursday, April 23 to Friday, April 24, brought together about 60 scientists from varying disciplines, UN policy makers as well as representatives from both political and civil society organizations.

The conference's four sessions each addressed the question of how scientific research can contribute to the development of both indicators and measuring instruments - tools which would make sustainable global development not only more feasible, but also easier to evaluate - because, as Deputy Secretary-General to the United Nations Jan Eliasson explained in his introductory speech, "the source of wisdom is knowing the facts." Science can make a significant contribution, because the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which will be agreed upon in the United Nations in the fall of 2015, can only be evaluated through meaningful indicators.

In his introduction, DFG President Professor Peter Strohschneider emphasized the length of the debate on sustainability by recalling a report published in 1987 by the Brundtland Commission which to this day has not lost its urgency. Critical advances can only be achieved, if science in all of its various dimensions (from basic to applied research), is deployed in the political decision-making process and this conference provided an ideal platform.

Discussions in the four sessions also explored possible conflicts between individual SDGs during their simultaneous implementation. Professor Jakob Rhyner, UNU Vice Rector in Europe, identified two such conflicts as, "the trade-offs and potential conflicts between different objectives as well as the conflicts between short and long-term prospects. A very targeted and sensitive approach to addressing such issues is critical for the successful implementation of the SDGs."

The final event, which was hosted by the Permanent Missions of Brazil and Germany to the UN, was held in the UN Headquarters. Among the 150 guests were scientists, experts from the UN as well as representatives from the countries currently involved in the ongoing negotiations on the post-2015 agenda.



UNITED NATIONS
UNIVERSITY

The results from the four academic sessions were presented at the closing event, during which senior UN staff were also given the opportunity to weigh-in on the discussion. Stefan Schweinfest, Director of the UN Statistical Division, stressed the importance of expanding statistical capacities in the countries and developing an “informative global indicator framework”. Thomas Gass, Assistant Secretary General of the UN for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, endorsed findings on synergies and trade-offs, that they are always context specific and therefore coping with has to be pragmatic and subject to a continuous learning process. Of equal importance were results with regards to “ownership”: Building ownership by different actors in different phases of the process is a continuous and time consuming process but essential to the whole implementation process.

Bringing together relevant expertise and diverse perspectives in a single program is an essential feature of this conference, as DFG Secretary General Dorothee Dzwonnek pointed out: "The goal of the conference has been just to do that, to bring in science and to open a forum of debate for scholars, practitioners, and policy-makers. Over the last two days, they have discussed various concepts and approaches, often passionately, but always with a clear focus on applicability. "

Amina Mohammed, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General of the UN on Post-2015 Development Planning, stressed in her address that now more than ever the window of opportunity is open: “2015 is the time for global action. This is our opportunity to take global action on a path to sustainable development and the future we want – and we need. (...) The broad consensus emerging is encouraging.” Professor Jörg Hacker, president of German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and member of the Scientific Advisory Board to the Secretary-General of the UN, was equally optimistic in his closing remarks of the conference: “the participation of members of the Scientific Advisory Board of the UN Secretary General was certainly helpful for the conveyance of science into the political process.”

Further Information

Media contact:

Marco Finetti

Head Press and Public Relations DFG, Tel. +49 228 885 2230, Marco.Finetti@dfg.de

Sijia Yi

Media Relations Officer, United Nations University, Tel. +49-228-815-0285, yi@vie.unu.edu

See more:

www.dfg.de

http://www.dfg.de/en/dfg_profile/head_office/dfg_abroad/north_america/reports/2015/150421_unu_ankuendigung/index.html

www.unu.edu