

Meeting of the Independent Group of Scientists: Support for the Global Sustainable Development Report

The drafting meeting of the Independent Group of Scientists in charge of drafting the Global Sustainable Development Report was held from 8 July to 12 July, 2018 at the UN headquarters Building in New York.

The Independent Group of Scientists was created to support the United Nations Secretary General's efforts to report on progress made in achieving Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals. This progress report titled the Global Sustainable Development Report will be published at the High-level Political Forum in September 2019. The High-level Political Forum in September 2019 will overlap with the UN General Assembly, and this will be the delivery date of the Global Sustainable Development Report but given that there will be a July 2019 meeting of the High-level Political Forum, this will also be an opportunity to showcase the report. This first report has been produced on a two-year timeline while future reports will be produced every four years.

The Independent Group of Scientists, responsible for drafting the new Global Sustainable Development Report reviewed the key developments since they met last. These key developments included:

- Port Elizabeth meeting,
- Africa Summit – how the Sustainable Development Agenda is aligned with the Africa development agenda 2063. The main message is that achieving these development agendas cannot be achieved without involvement of all African states with 'nothing about us without us' being the key message from African states. Other Key messages from the Africa meetings were:
 - Economic development in Africa
 - Using science for better development in Africa
 - Ensuring healthy lives in Africa
- Science, Technology and Innovation summit also had some key messages on Sustainable Development.
- Some key messages on the importance of Education for Sustainable Development, in terms of creating true transformation were provided.
- Cornell meeting was also instrumental in providing key sustainable development messages.
- Role of science in achieving Sustainable Development is essential. Science for decision making is key to achieving change. Indigenous peoples are also very important for achieving these goals.
- Africa and Sustainable Development Institute is doing good work in Tanzania
- Arab Sustainable Development annual meeting, regional economic commission meetings. Arab region is proceeding in a business as usual way towards the achievement of Agenda 2030 with very few scientists involved.
- Interacademy Partnership is also interested in how they can contribute on the education portions of Agenda 2030.

During the meeting of the High-level Political Forum in July 2019, Endah (co-chair of the Independent Group of Scientists) will provide a briefing on the development of the Global Sustainable Development Report. This will be combined with two other briefings on science, technology and innovation. The briefing will likely explore how the report will pick up the concerns of Member States and outreach and communications activities. Issues that might come up during the briefing is the level of finance available to help small island developing states adapt to climate change and environmental disasters, i.e. increasing resilience. The briefing will also cover 'what's new in the year that has gone by?' which will need to cover where the report is at, what remains to be done, how the report will achieve impact and respond to its mandate.

There have been several outreach events in Washington and information gathering workshops (e.g. Helsinki, Leopoldina, Port Elizabeth) in the last year to bring the report to where it is today. There has been an effort to reach out for expertise from other disciplines and to ensure input from different regions. These are expected to respond to questions about lack of diversity of expertise and lack of regional diversity.

With only six months of drafting time left, then a peer review followed by document production, there remains some work to be done. There is need to create a smaller working team that will fill the big holes still in the report. There are also some divergent report construction styles and parts that don't fit into the original outline, so there is a need to harmonize all of this.



The current zero-order draft of the report assesses three main areas, namely:

- The role of science in helping measure progress and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals;
- The need for transformation in several areas to be able to achieve the Goals, and
- The different pathways of transformation that could help achieve the goals in an integrated way.



Members of the Independent Group of Scientists at Dinner

As the sixth Global Environment Outlook is undergoing its last peer review before publication in March 2019, many of the findings from the report are relevant for the environmental dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals. For this reason, the UN Environment team responsible for the sixth Global Environment Outlook attended the drafting meeting of the Independent Group of Scientists. Data and findings from the sixth Global Environment Outlook will be used as needed during the drafting period.

The review period will follow the production of the next draft of the Global Sustainable Development Report and will follow procedures that are similar to those used by the Global Environment Outlook. Procedures similar to those of the Global Environment Outlook will also be used for managing citations and references, maps and graphs as well as the underlying data for the report.

Know an Expert: Global Environment Outlook Author Profile



In the 30+ years of his professional career, Mr. Peter Harris has worked as a marine geoscientist with interests in ecology, palaeoenvironments, oceanography and science management. He has a BSc (1981) from the University of Washington, Seattle USA, and a PhD (1984) from the University of Wales, Swansea UK. He has carried out research and published over 120 articles on marine science topics from the Great Barrier Reef to Antarctica. Since 2014 he has been the Managing Director of GRID-Arendal focussing on the science-policy interface.

His involvement in the sixth Global Environment Outlook is grounded in the UN World Ocean Assessment (WOA) in which he was involved in for over 6 years as a member of the group of experts appointed to draft the report. The report was then adopted by United Nations General Assembly in 2015. Mr. Harris was asked to assist the Global Environment Outlook by helping to synthesise the World Ocean Assessment report, update it as needed and work with the Global Environment Outlook team to identify the three or four most urgent issues affecting the oceans: namely the parlous state of global coral reefs impacted by warming oceans due to climate change; the scourge of plastic pollution of the oceans; and the urgent need for better management of global fisheries.

Peter's expectations of the sixth Global Environment Outlook are that it will lead to countries acting to address these issues. He sincerely hopes to see countries following the Paris agreement to reduce GHG emissions which is an essential first step to slow the rate of climate change that is harmful to coral reefs. He also hopes that decision makers will act to stop plastic waste from land getting into the ocean and to take steps to halt overfishing as well as put an end to damaging fishing practices that harm the environment. He hopes that this report will provide countries with the information they need to recognise these threats and allow them to respond appropriately.

New Team Member of the Global Environment Outlook



Orlane Jadeau is an intern at UN Environment's Science Division with the Global Environment Outlook (GEO) team. She is currently studying international business with a focus on green finance and circular economy at the Ecole de Management de Normandie, France. Before her internship, she worked at microDON, a French start-up of the social and solidarity economy. This opportunity to work at UN Environment has strengthened her choice to work in the field of sustainable management of the environment and for the promotion of a positive economy.

