



Science and sustainable development – the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) and African science-policy-interface

Pre-Event to African Sustainable Development Forum
Elephant Hills Resort, Matetsi Room, Victoria Falls

24 February 2020

Sven Grimm

In close coordination with the GSDR team (the Independent Group of Scientists, IGS) and UNDESA, several regional stakeholder consultation workshops were conducted. Besides DIE, the German Environmental Agency (UBA) and GIZ were mandated to carry out stakeholder consultation workshops on behalf of BMU. To create synergies, DIE therefore coordinated outreach activities with UBA and GIZ.

Regional workshops were conducted under the lead of DIE in Buenos Aires and Brussels, as well as with DIE participation in Dhaka and Amman throughout 2018 and 2019. The fifth regional workshop in the context of GSDR was conducted in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe as a pre-event to the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD) on **24 February 2020**. ARFSD is a format supported by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), held with the participation of numerous policy-makers from various portfolios across the African continent.

The opportunity was used to link the GSDR discussion to a continental gathering of policy-makers under the title “Science and sustainable development – the Global Sustainable Development Report and African science-policy-interface”.

The event saw around 40 participants, including a range of actors in the science-policy interface, inter alia representatives of the Ministry of Science of Tunisia, Ministry of Environment of Mauritius, the Central Bank of Eswatini, several African universities (Pretoria, Mekelle, Accra), the African Academy of Sciences and various applied research institutions (think tanks).

The logistical setting held some challenges, amongst them rainfall, subsequent power outages, and logistical difficulties connected to large events in relatively small towns (e.g. long queues at registration and security) on the day of the event. However, the participants of the ARFSD were the appropriate target group for debate.

Two African members of the IGS joined the event, namely Parfait Eloundou-Enjeyue (Cameroon) and Ernest Foli (Ghana). They presented the process and findings of the report. As keynote speaker after the GSDR presentation, Belay Begashaw of the SDG Center in Kigali, Rwanda, provided passionate and insightful input on African policy making and the relevance of the SDGs for African development. He specifically emphasized the responsibility of researchers to engage with development processes and the need for policy makers to consult researchers and thereby allow for co-creation of meaningful research results across the African continent. His insights as a former Ethiopian minister of agriculture were complemented by other policy actors, as well as by Rajaa El Moursli of the Academy of Science and Technology, Morocco, and a broader debate by the audience.

In the second half of the workshop, Parfait Eloundou-Enjeyue of the IGS and Sven Grimm of DIE specifically highlighted challenges to roles and mandates of researchers and aspects to consider when acting at the science-policy interface. Participants subsequently discussed four different themes in breakout groups:

- (1) topics for engagements on sustainability on the continent,
- (2) the mechanisms / structures in place for the science-policy interface,
- (3) the African practice of science-policy interface, and
- (4) international cooperation.

On (1) the *topics for sustainability research across Africa*, the group highlighted disparities and inequalities within societies, the adaptation to climate change (including biodiversity with a view to pollinators), and an exchange on pathways to development. Furthermore, agricultural mechanization and a proactive knowledge management as well as elements for effective knowledge-practice engagements were highlighted, e.g. with the establishment of centres of excellence.



On (2) the *mechanisms for a science-policy interface*, the need for multi-level and multi-directional communication between science and policy-making was emphasised. The group specifically highlighted the need to include policy outreach in the metrics of success for scientists also in African research institutions.

On (3) the *practice of science-policy interface in Africa*, points that were highlighted included the need for acceptance of scientific findings by policy-makers, and thus better policy making informed by scientific evidence. In this context, the need for better training of African researchers was highlighted, as they might lack credibility compared to international research. Researchers, for their part, need to communicate their findings in a more accessible language and need to explain beyond academic jargon. Furthermore, the political presence of big companies was particularly felt across Africa.

The group on (4) *international cooperation* presented some good practice, e.g. by Swedish, Canadian or German bilateral cooperation, as well as the role of the Commonwealth and specialized UN agencies, such as the World Organisation on Meteorology, and their respective relevance for scientific activities in African states and regional settings. An additional emphasis was put on transnational African research networks, such as Afrobarometer.

The event wrapped up discussions in a fishbowl debate with the Network of African Science Academies and the SDG Center Kigali, which discussed key take-aways from the discussion with strong participation from the audience.

Discussions saw the almost exclusive and continent-wide African participation (except for the facilitator, Sven Grimm of DIE), thus provided the necessary insights and legitimacy to be acknowledged as input to African discussions. The exchange focused specifically on good practice and challenges for science-policy interactions for sustainability across Africa. It was discernible that science-policy interfaces were extremely varied across the continent, with e.g. South Africa, Ghana and Tunisia as often providing African good practice, while others contexts were more exposed to political and economic challenges. The GSDR was thus served as a reference point for a “localized” discussion on good practice and challenges for science for sustainability across Africa.

Agenda

9:00 **Opening session**

- Words of welcome - Sven Grimm, DIE
- Introduction to GSDR process and key findings by Ernest G. Foli, IGS

9:45 **Keynotes** on the role of science for sustainability

Vera Songwe, UNECA

Belay Begashaw, SDG Center Kigali

Followed by questions and answer

10:45 **Coffee break**

11:15 **Interactive panel discussion:**

Science and science cooperation for sustainability

5-10 min input statements by the panellists

- Parfait Eloundou-Enyegue, IGS member
- Professor Rajaâ Cherkaoui El Moursli, Hassan II Academy of Science and Technology
- N.N.

These inputs are discussed in a World Café format, i.e. panellists host interactive discussion rounds at separate tables. Facilitated by Sven Grimm.

12:30 **Lunch**

13:30 **Interactive discussions: African strategies for sustainability**

BarCamp style, introduced and facilitated by Sven Grimm and resource persons.

Possible topics:

- Mechanisms, structures, interfaces for shaping transnational research partnerships on the African continent and beyond (science councils, higher education and research investments, etc.)
- Where are opportunities and incentives for transdisciplinary research?
- International dimensions of research and incentives for academia
- Science-policy-society interfaces in Africa – what works, what doesn't?
- Hot topics to be included in future research programmes

Resource persons and rapporteurs from discussion rounds:

- Jacqueline Olang Kado, Network of African Science Academies (NASAC)
- Konosoang Sobane, Human Science and Research Council (HSRC)
- Edward Nketiah-Amponsah, University of Ghana
- Kelemework Tafere Reda, Mekelle University
- Kanhye Parvatee, Ministry of Environment, Mauritius
- Mavis Zubork Dome. Centre for Development Development Ghana.



15:00 Closing session: African science policy actors and findings of the GSDR

Fishbowl session:

- Belay Begashaw, SDC Center Kigali
- Jacqueline Olang Kado, Network of African Science Academies (NASAC)
- N.N.
- N.N.

Chair: Sven Grimm

16:00 End of official programme, time for networking with coffee and cake