

United Nations University Dialogue: Exploring ties between science and policy making

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The United Nations University (UNU) of Tokyo is a global think tank functioning as a bridge between the international academic community and the United Nations institutions. The mission of the UNU is to contribute through collaborative research and education to finding innovative solutions to global issues of development and welfare that are of interest to UN Peoples and Member States. Throughout October the UNU, Tokyo organized a Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Dialogue Series which I found particularly poignant given the current stage of the EHPS's relations with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) at the UN. In April 2015 the EHPS was granted special consultative status which allows members of the EHPS-UN committee to actively attend UN/NGO meetings and discussions at the DPI and ECOSOC and connect with other professional psychological societies who are associated with the United Nations. However the EHPS is now at a stage where it's looking to contribute more actively by responding to policy recommendation calls and discussion panels such as the one announced for April 2017 "Promoting wellbeing in 21st century". In order to increase the effectiveness of our contribution it is important that EHPS communications reach both academic and non-academic audiences.

The Science, Policy & Capacity Building session brought together researchers and practitioners from different fields (behavioral science, engineering,

policy research) to discuss how the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals can be translated into regional and national priorities in the Asia Pacific region. Regional organizations have been recognized as vital in reconciling the global vision of SDG-s with specific regional priorities. A coherent approach is necessary to address increasingly complex challenges (social disparities, climate change, health challenges). Over the course of the discussion panelists identified the lack of a effective science-policy interface and insufficient capacity as major challenges undermining integrated implementation of the SDG agenda.

There are several findings that the EHPS in its current position could potentially benefit from. Firstly, it's important to understand that the contribution of scientists in discussing and formulating SDGs should not end with the formulation of SDGs. Scientists' engagement is needed in implementation, continuous monitoring and reassessment of SDGs. Dr Katinka Weinberger, chief of the Environment and Development Policy Section of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, has highlighted the issue of scientists engagement in SDG's and suggested that regional science-policy interfaces could be strengthened through, the creation of regional networks of academic institutions and think tanks. Secondly, Hein Mallee (Research Institute for Humanity and Nature) has stressed that the SDGs offer a unique opportunity for local and international science communities to reorganize their questions and research to complement an effort towards sustainable policies. Norichika Kanai (Keio University, UNU-IAS) concluded by

emphasizing the role of regional nodes such as the Asia Pacific Forum – as a platform for science-policy exchange and at the same time calling for more research on the institutional landscape, including how informal networks of scientists can be linked to formal networks.

This dialogue series comes in the era of so called post fact politics mirroring growing distrust in institutions and policy makers [1]. WHO Chief Scientist representative to the EU, Roberto Bertollini emphasizes the following challenges for knowledge brokering: Evidence is not communicated effectively (wrong targeting); evidence is not available when policy makers need it and in a form that they can use it; policy makers lack the capacity to find and use evidence and lack opportunities to discuss system challenges with researchers. One way of addressing these challenges would be to include a new way of doing science that is solution oriented, holistic and closely involves stakeholders as partners at the research/action interface. Cooperation and joining forces is necessary in order to achieve the SDGs. Academia should be closely involved in supporting actions for sustainable development from measuring implementation to testing solutions and identifying risks. Integration of natural sciences with social and human sciences is important for policy making in order to evaluate the 'implementability' of policy options and to form well-rounded policy decisions that take into account the local cultural context. Additionally, the interdependence between SDGs (breaking the 'silos mentality' to sustainable development) enforce an interdisciplinary scientific approach that would help identify critical trade-offs between policies targeting specific SDGs and would propose synergy solutions that could mitigate these trade-offs.

There is a widely accepted consensus that policy making benefits greatly from behavioral science. Whether policy-makers aim at changing behavior or designing better regulations, greater knowledge on

how people are likely to behave and adhere to policy regulations is an obvious benefit. The UK government has pioneered connecting policy making with behavioral science in a formal way by commissioning the Behavioral Insights Team in 2010 to test public policy interventions through randomized control trials. Their research has demonstrated ways to increase tax compliance, home energy conservation, and charitable giving through social and behavioral inducements. The US Government went a step further when president Obama signed an executive order in 2015 directing federal agencies to incorporate more behavioral science into their activities and services by formally establishing a federal Social and Behavioral Science Team (SBST) (<https://sbst.gov/>) , a group of experts in behavioral science tasked with translating scientific findings into improvements in federal programs. In such a way federal agencies will have to develop, test and evaluate strategies for applying behavioral science insights to ease Americans' access to federal programs through such methods as simplified communications and options that are made clear and user-friendly. Health psychologists are an intricate part of this academic team as psychological science have a proven efficacy in tackling social sustainability and examining the psychological effects of globalization.



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