

Global Agenda Council on Measuring Sustainability 2012-2014



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OF THE WORLD



Understanding/Context

The global sustainability landscape has become increasingly complex, particularly as a greater dependency on resources for economic growth puts the planet under constant pressure. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, world leaders have signed about 500 internationally recognized agreements in the past 50 years, including 61 related to the atmosphere; 155 on biodiversity; 179 related to chemicals, hazardous substances and waste; 46 land conventions; and 196 conventions broadly related to issues dealing with water. After trade, the environment is now the most common area of global rule-making. Awareness and understanding of global environmental and social problems and their trends and interrelations have increased. However, the complexity and level of uncertainty of these problems have also increased. This makes policy, investment and management decisions difficult to develop in a rational and integrated way.

Shaping the Agenda

To address the issue, the Global Agenda Council on Measuring Sustainability aims to incorporate existing facts and figures in an open data system and use this information to enhance decision support capabilities for geospatial risk and integrated resource management. Such a system could provide a service to governments around the world. At the same time, the system could make governments more accountable to citizens. For example, citizens would have access to credible and reliable data on which to base advocacy campaigns. It could deliver reliable performance indicators for corporate responsibility, and support efforts to reassess the meaning of competitiveness in a world of resource scarcity and potential conflict.

The urgency of addressing the issues of energy, water and food security led the Council to choose food security as a prototype to develop its data platform. During the first year of this term, the Council has submitted an authoritative review of existing sustainability frameworks, which will be published in an academic

journal in the next few months. This review will provide a new framework to support the rationale behind the data platform.

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In the coming year, the Council aims to design a data platform, an operational decision-support tool integrating sustainability metrics relevant to targeted regions within Africa. The intent is to leverage available data sets and platforms to create a shared data resource while adding key data sets and functionality in response to priority needs. Key data sets include:

- Geo-referenced information on World Bank-funded official development assistance projects
- Household and plot-level data on human well-being and farm behaviour from Vital Signs
- Detailed landscape-level data relevant to measuring ecosystem services from Vital Signs
- Basic climate, elevation and land-cover data from global data sources and local alternatives where available
- Agricultural production data and plan information from the regional agricultural security platform

Along with this resource, the Council will engage in a series of external communication activities. The ultimate goal of the Global Agenda Council on Measuring Sustainability is to raise awareness on the importance of metrics and to create an online data platform that can be used as a shared and common resource.

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