**Interdisciplinary PhD Workshop on Sustainable Development**

**SDSN Framework Discussion**

**April 13, 2013**

Moderator: James Rising

**Main themes:**

Divisions between academia and impacted communities

* **Incorporate impacted communities**
  + Why are people from impacted communities not involved in the formation of this network, and involved in discussions like this one? How can the planning process be improved?
* **Relation to networks of NGOs**
  + SDSN should not be only an academic endeavor. How can it incorporate a wider range of institutions?
  + Networks of NGOs have formed around climate adaptation, using their capacity to coordinate amongst many actors. How can they be incorporated or collaborated with?
* **Focus on applying solutions**
  + There are already many solutions available to SD problems. An under-served area of work is just to mobilize these solutions, and bring them to the people would most benefit from them.
* **Communicating natural science**
  + Academia has a responsibility to help identify risks and drivers, and then to communicate the results of research. There is considerable confusion about climate, and people want answers and don’t know whom to ask.

Local and Indigenous knowledge

* **Focus on social impacts**
  + An awareness of local impacts entails a focus on social impacts: how are the most vulnerable people affected, and how can they be brought center-stage?
* **Combining scientific and cultural knowledge**
  + How can scientific knowledge both complement cultural knowledge locally, and learn from indigenous knowledge to better understand social impacts?
* **Be wary of romanticizing**
  + Indigenous groups are often over-romanticized, which can be both distortive and hurtful. Their contributions should be respected without projecting unrealistic visions on them.

“Open-source” approaches

* **Localization through open-source**
  + Tools like Google Earth can be better used for knowledge sharing, and recognizing the spatial “spread” of our understanding of impacts. For example, academic studies can be constructed into a Google Earth layer, and made available for people to add to.
* **Forums for decision-making**
  + With the right structures, online forums are an effective way to discuss problems, and potentially come to decisions. wikiAdapt is an example of this, but how can research be more involved?
* **Open-source as action**
  + Open-source approaches used in hardware and software development provide a model for how decentralized action can happen, where people can seamlessly implement solutions, collaborate, and recognize problems.
* **Problems with quality**
  + There’s a “signal-to-noise” problem in many open discussion systems. Technologies exist to try to maintain high quality, but they need to be incorporated from the beginning.

Making SDSN Effective

* **Serving many constituents**
  + It’s important to recognize what the different groups want, to incentivize them to participate or work with the SDSN. Scientists might be happy to work on problems, but there might also be opportunities to share data. What about NGOs? Local people?
* **Looking at past examples**
  + There was a South-South cooperation network, built on similar principles, which showed a lot of promise before it faded. What worked and what didn’t? The network was centralized—could that have been part of the problem?
  + IFRI is a more targeted research consortium. How has it evolved?
  + Rio Grande do Sul has a state-wide 2020 planning process. What can we learn from their successes?
* **Extension agents**
  + Extensions services have been providing a related function. How can their networks be incorporated or extended?
  + How can SDSN help with capacity-building in local areas, developing best practices and dispensing them to regions?
* **Relation to UNU**
  + What role does the UNU have as a foundational part of this network?
* **Recognizing scale**
  + The SDSN will have enormous scale issues, and needs to be built as a cross-scale organization, providing groups working at different levels with ways to take advantage of and cooperate with the work happening at other levels.