

Foreword

*Prof. Dr. -Ing. Dr. h.c. Janos J. Bogardi,
Vice-Rector a.i., United Nations University, Bonn, Germany*

D4S stands for Dialogue for Sustainability. The importance of sustainability is acknowledged globally but local perceptions vary. What does sustainability mean to you? What does it mean in social context? How does it relate to norms and values? What is to be sustainable, for how long and where? We all recall the famous “first definition” of sustainable development by the Brundtland Commission: “development, which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). Many more definitions have appeared since, and their multitude points to the complexity of the issue. The definition of sustainability is inherently a definition of values and of the future of the society. The difficulty to define this concept becomes clearest when we compare different attempts to measure sustainability. All this underscores the urgent need for a basic common understanding and terminology to avoid the nightmare which could degenerate the emerging sustainability science into the construction of an interdisciplinary Babel tower. Practice cannot wait till theoretical debates are settled.

Sustainable Solutions – Science for Sustainability is a groundbreaking project focusing on establishing bilateral science policy dialogues between Germany and the world’s five key emerging economies, such as Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. The Dialogue evolved from the realization that pressing global problems of today disregard national borders. Thus time is ripe for a global research agenda. The initiative demonstrates the countries’ commitment to Agenda 21 and supports the promotion of fundamental political, social, economic and industrial change towards sustainability.

Dialogue for Sustainability is first about defining a joint vision and second about defining a joint research agenda and making progress towards this objective. While the first step must happen in the sphere of policy, the second step happens in the sphere of science. Yet neither policy nor science alone can create the solutions needed. Only together can we address the complexity of pressing global issues and provide adequate responses. Only together, through forging new partnerships and filling knowledge gaps, can we make progress.

The United Nations University (UNU) is dedicated to the generation and transfer of knowledge, and the strengthening of individual and institutional capacities in furtherance of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. The mission of UNU is to contribute, through research and capacity building, to efforts to resolve the pressing global problems that are a concern of the United Nations, its Peoples and Member States. In order to provide innovative solutions, policy-relevant science must go beyond traditional boundaries. By creating bridges between research and policy as well as by supporting thematic networking of scientific institutions worldwide, United Nations University contributes to building global coherence in research for sustainability and provides an international platform for this Dialogue.

I am therefore very pleased to present the proceedings of the Second German-Indian Conference on Research for Sustainability, which is an example of vital cross-border discussion. The publication addresses a broad range of issues related to land use and energy research in India and Germany and attempts to extend the understanding how research contributes to social, environmental, economic and institutional sustainability.