

Advocating for the Role of Academia, Science and Technology in the UN Sustainable Development Goals

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This policy impact enabled UCD to shape the United Nations SDGs and determine how they would be implemented.

SUMMARY

The United Nations has set Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for all nations to achieve by 2030 to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity. The goals came into effect in January 2016 and are contained in the UN document “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.”

Countries, in partnership with the private sector and civil society, all around the world are now working towards realising these goals by 2030. They will address global issues such as poverty, sustainable livelihoods, inequality, sustainable production and consumption, conflict and environmental damage to land, air and water.

For the first time in the UN’s history non-governmental representatives were given access to negotiate and set the agenda along with Nation States. Patrick Paul Walsh, Professor of International Development Studies at UCD, legally represented thousands of universities in the formation of these goals through eight months of UN Inter-Governmental negotiations as a member of the UN Major Group for Science and Technology.

Through his research and science policy interface with the UN system, Professor Walsh enabled the underpinning role of academia and the role of science and technology in the development of the SDGs and their subsequent implementation. As a result of his advocacy in the negotiations the term “academia” is firmly in the key definition of the multi stakeholders partnership in the final UN SDG document and most importantly in paragraph 52, which is central to the partnership on implementation.

UCD now has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council as a Non-Governmental Actor which provides UCD researchers with an ongoing pathway to influence global public policy with their research.

Professor Walsh’s research on modelling poverty and social protection is an example of academic research that he brought directly to the negotiations which influenced the development of the SDGs.

His work demonstrated the importance of the science / policy interface which has enabled UCD and Irish research to be part of shaping the partnership and the means of implementing the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development. The UN 2030 Agenda is now a driver of public policy, private sector and civil society sustainable development planning at global, regional, and national levels. Importantly, future research funding, such as the EU’s Horizon Europe will have the SDGs as the backdrop for its funding mission to address a set of global challenges.



RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

The United Nations conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, took place in Brazil in June 2012. At the conference Member States decided to launch a process to develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals, which would build upon the Millennium Development Goals and converge with the post 2015 development agenda.

Before this the main focus of the international community had been on security, but now through the UN SDGs sustainability and security are promoted on the same international footing. There is now a shared understanding that by having sustainable development as a focus of the international agenda, future wars can be prevented.

After RIO+20 in 2012, Government and non-governmental representatives were given work plans as a means to input into the UN 2030 Agenda that included the Sustainable Development Goals. One such work plan was mandated by Ban Ki Moon, Secretary General of the UN, to the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) to provide academic and technical oversight of the work plans in the post 2015 agenda. For the first time this gave academic and technical oversight of the process to universities and the UN Major Group for Science and Technology.

Professor Walsh actively engaged with this new pathway to influence global policy. He was a Senior Adviser to the UN SDSN, Earth Institute, Columbia University, New York during its input to the post 2015 Development Agenda. In December 2014 a summary of all work plans was given to the Inter-Governmental Negotiations by the UN General Secretary Ban Ki-moon.

Following this Professor Walsh represented the UN Major Group for Science and Technology during the Inter-Governmental Negotiations to produce the UN 2030 Agenda. Using his advocacy position in the SDGs negotiations Professor Walsh was able to include important academic contributions to underpin the development of the SDGs. For example, Professor Walsh's own research on modelling poverty and social protection was brought to the negotiations. His research demonstrated that on a global basis people largely flow into and out of poverty depending on circumstances such as commodity shocks, droughts, floods and illness. This research showed poverty as 'dynamic' and is an important perspective for policy makers to consider when seeking to protect against and alleviate poverty. It moves away from assuming that poverty is a state of continuous dependency and that it is restricted to particular regions of the world or particular groups of people.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



RESEARCH IMPACT

In total 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 SDG targets have been developed and these are now being addressed by the international community, resulting in Professor Walsh's work having impact in three key areas:

UCD's Special Consultative Status as a UN Non-Governmental Actor

In 2017 Professor Walsh addressed a plenary session of the United Nations General Assembly during the UN Ocean Conference on the emergency of governing the 'global commons'. This was the first ever address by a university to a plenary session of the United Nations General Assembly alongside interventions by leaders of Governments and UN Major Groups representatives including Women, Youth, Indigenous People, Trade Unions, Local Authorities, Researchers, Business and Farmers groups. This address was broadcast by UN TV and covered in the international press. Through this address and the other work outlined, University College Dublin was highlighted as a leader in International Development Studies. UCD now has special consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council as a Non-Governmental Actor which provides UCD researchers with an ongoing pathway to influence global public policy with their research.

Contributing to Development of SDG Goal 1, Target 3:

Professor Walsh's research on modelling poverty and social protection is an example of academic research that he brought directly to the negotiations which influenced the development of the SDGs. Identifying how 'structural' (permanent) and 'transitory' (short-term) poverty affects more than 5.8 billion of the world's population can help us to find ways to tackle poverty at a global scale by putting in place social protections. These protections might include removing discrimination against women or girls, who may be disadvantaged through a lack of access to property ownership or long-term education.

His contributions helped to develop SDG Goal 1, Target 3: "Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all ... and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable."

Citing of "Academia" in the UN SDGs

As a result of his advocacy of the role of academia in the negotiations, the term "academia" is firmly in the key definition of the multi stakeholders partnership in the final UN SDG Outcome Document and most importantly in paragraph 52, which was central to the multi-stakeholder partnership that would implement and review the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015, 70/1. Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

"52. 'We the peoples' are the celebrated opening words of the Charter of the United Nations. It is "we the peoples" who are embarking today on the road to 2030. Our journey will involve Governments as well as Parliaments, the United Nations system and other international institutions, local authorities, indigenous peoples, civil society, business and the private sector, the scientific and academic community and all people. Millions have already engaged with, and will own, this Agenda. It is an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people and this, we believe, will ensure its success."

Professor Walsh's work on behalf of UCD, UN SDSN and the UN Major Group for Science and Technology demonstrated the importance of the science policy interface. This has enabled UCD and Irish research to shape these important global goals that influence global public policy and the means to implement the SDGs. Importantly, future research funding, such as the EU's Framework 9 will have the SDGs as its foundation.





REFERENCES

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

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<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport/2015>

Patrick Paul Walsh, University College Dublin, Ireland, and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), New York, "Lauded the GSDR as an interface between scientists and policy makers" Earth Negotiations Bulletin Tuesday, 30 June 2015, Vol. 33, No. 12, Page 1

UN TV Video of Session IV HLPF 2015
https://link.brightcove.com/services/player/bcpid4005339337001?bckey=AQ~~.AAABPSuWdxE-,UHhNXUUBo6VgvRTiG_GhQXXPhev1OX58&bctid=4330259829001&secureConnections=true&secureHTMLConnections=true&linkSrc=twitter&autoStart=false&height=100%25&width=100%25&autoStart=true&secureConnections=true&width=480&height=270

Earth Negotiations Bulletin Tuesday, 30 June 2015 Vol. 33 No. 12 Page 2 "Moderator Patrick Paul Walsh, University College Dublin, Ireland, and SDSN, New York, highlighted, inter alia: the importance of more bottom-up contributions to the GSDR; the innovative dialogue involving the scientific community, policy makers and stakeholders that should also take place at all levels and engage on specific themes; and that the report should energize global participation, helping to implement the vision "on the ground."

UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2016
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/globalsdreport/2016>

UN TV of Session IV:
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&nr=872&type=12&menu=1807&template=1042&play=3048>
<https://www.facebook.com/universitycollegedublin/videos/10155446954456079/>

Earth Negotiations Bulletin Tuesday, 10 July 2016 Vol. 33 No. 21 Page 1 "Patrick Paul Walsh, University College Dublin, said more needs to be done to disseminate scientific findings at the national and global levels, and recommended: encouraging more science policy briefs from the public for the GSDR; reorienting research not just towards the economic good, but also towards inclusive and sustainable societies; and the inclusion of civil society perspectives".

Papers:

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- Patrick Paul Walsh (2016) 'The Implications of the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda for the OECD' In: Patrick Love (eds). Debate the Issues: New Approaches to Economic Challenges. Paris: OECD. , pp.153-157.
- Patrick Paul Walsh (2016) 'Implementing the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda in Ireland: A case for Hybrid Sustainable Development Parliamentary Committees'. Irish Studies in International Affairs, 27 :1-11.