



**Address by Flavia Schlegel, Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences
At the Inception Symposium on
Broadening the Application of the Sustainability Science Approach
In support of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

**UNESCO Headquarters, Room IX
5–6 April 2016**

Closing session

Distinguished participants in the Symposium,

I welcome this opportunity to address you on the occasion of the closing session of the Inception Symposium on Broadening the Application of the Sustainability Science Approach in support of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Symposium is a series of three in the context of a project generously supported by the Government of Japan. I believe it has a seminal nature in that it constitutes a key moment for bridging academic work on sustainability science with the growing interest for this approach on behalf of the policy-making community. It is time to bring the sustainability science approach to bear the needs of policymakers and society at large.

Recently a new ambitious sustainable development agenda was adopted. The international community of stakeholders is actively engaged in translating the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into action. In this regard, the many Targets accompanying the SDGs, together with the recently agreed SDG Indicators, will assist in determining realistic and measurable objectives. However, the question remains of:

What kind of knowledge is needed to inform the 2030 Agenda?

Moreover:

How can natural and social sciences engage in a dialogue with each other as well as with other relevant knowledge such as indigenous and local knowledge in producing the required knowledge basis?

Can co-design of research questions based on the involvement of multiple stakeholders be scaled-up from local realities to address national and international challenges?

How can the education sector adapt so as to promote inter- and trans-disciplinarity?

What are the new institutional settings that may be required for mainstreaming knowledge on sustainability issues?

Indeed many questions that are related to sustainability science and the need to move from discourse to action lay before us. I am aware that at this Symposium you have already dealt with several of these questions, as well as others. I am aware that the presentations given, the discussions held and the recommendations made at the Symposium pave a very solid basis for the planned two additional symposia in the context of our sustainability science project.

I am also confident that the Project's Steering Committee, many members of which personally attended yesterday's and today's symposium, will continue providing excellent guidance to the discharge of the planned activities under the Project. I wish to thank the Project Steering Committee for its work in framing the thinking, and for steering the Project activities, in a manner representative of the multiple schools of thought, research and practice in relation to sustainability science that exist. With its multidisciplinary composition, the Steering Committee's advice has proven crucial in identifying the main issue areas in relation to which sustainability science can contribute to society. Moreover, the Steering Committee has pointed to the importance of taking into account not only regional and sub-regional specificities, but also of the role of value systems and perceptions, when applying the sciences to solve societal problems. After all, science is a human endeavor, which takes place in given cultural contexts; therefore our project is sensitive to the current debate on the role and responsibility of science in different social, economic, environmental and cultural contexts.

I believe that this Symposium and the Project as a whole are seminal and clearly value-adding in that:

- 1) Sustainability science is an issue of a normative nature: it is an approach which will allow to capitalize on research as a tool to solve problems, by directing funding for research towards the fundamental as well as applied research topics that need urgent attention. It will assist in tackling complex problems related to sustainability, from disaster risk reduction to food, water and energy security, to societal decarbonized paths, by informing the design of integrated sectoral policies based on the best scientific knowledge available. Sustainability science can help us illustrate and codify the crosscutting role of the sciences in the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

For these reason I support that the final outcome of the Project be a set of guidelines defining sustainability science, setting the principles within which the approach should be undertaken, and providing guidance on its application at multiple levels;

- 2) Sustainability science provides us with the unique opportunity to translate the notion of inter- and trans-disciplinarity to action in the context of formal and non-formal education activities, with a focus on tertiary education. Redesigning research and education institutions so as to match the complexity of the problems posed by sustainability is – I believe – an imperative if we are to adapt our research and education systems to a world where uncertainty about the future is high and therefore has to be reduced through the production of integrated knowledge. Sustainability science thus becomes a clear tool for implementing the Nagoya Plan of Action o Education for Sustainable Development;
- 3) Resilience and adaptation are essential conditions in our quest for sustainability, and these must be informed by science and other knowledge. Therefore sustainability science should address the challenges laid out in relevant international provisions complementary to the 2030 Agenda, namely the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Sendai Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction.

Without your participation and contribution, this Symposium could not have been a success, so let me thank you wholeheartedly for your participation. I would like to also praise the very positive collaboration and synergistic work of the three UNESCO Sectors and Major Programmes involved: Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, and Education. I look forward to the steps in front of us in relation to the further implementation of this important Project, which I trust will be as successful as this Symposium has been. More specifically, I very much look forward to the second Symposium towards the end of this year, which will have a strong focus on regional approaches to the application of the sustainability science approach.

Last but not least, I would also like to thank the Government of Japan, through Ambassador Sato, and its Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, through Mr Fukuda, hereby present, for supporting this important endeavour.

Let us continue to work together to promote sustainability science as an essential investment in humanity's sustainable society and the sustainability of the planet as a whole.

I now declare the Symposium closed.

Thank you.