

Entrevista

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1. IISD has had an important role in the context of the Indicators for Sustainable Development, at all levels. Could you, please, summarize IISD work with Sustainable Development and the main contribution to the construction of indicators for decision making for Sustainable Development. What are the future perspectives?

IISD is a policy research institute that works with government, business, NGOs and other sectors in the development of policies that are beneficial to environmental, economic and social well being. IISD champions innovation for sustainable development through several program areas including international trade and investment, climate change and energy, sustainable natural resource management, knowledge networks, and measurement and assessment. The measurement and assessment program includes a spectrum of indicator and assessment related work, from innovating concepts and principles, to applied work often in partnership with governments and communities, to the development of assessment and reporting tools, and strengthening the indicator practitioner community through capacity building

courses and facilitating networks of practice. One of the leading edges for the program is looking at the use of outcome-based indicators and integrated assessment methods (e.g., scenario outlooks) by policy makers and incorporation into planning, budgeting and reporting systems. Another edge is working closely with communities to develop quality-of-life information systems, such as our work with urban First Nations people in the City of Winnipeg.

2. Considering these experiences, how do you see the present efforts to link global and local indicators?

Indicators are not a new phenomenon, although they are increasingly receiving more attention and use. The call to better connect local and global indicators is increasingly grounded in the desire to coordinate and share knowledge at hand. Understanding that the issues impacting well-being and/or sustainability are not solely confined to the small local scale is an important step in the realization of the larger picture.

At present, it is fair to say that efforts to link global and local indicators are in their infancy. Ideally it would be nice to see a system of information in

which an indicator set used in a community contains a few core indicators that not only inform community level planning and management, but also, when aggregated to a provincial level, informing decision making at that level. The same indicator aggregated to the national level could then inform national-level decisions, then similarly at the regional and global levels. Currently linkages are not yet this explicit. One could envision that some indicators could fit this multi-scale governance purpose, but most community indicators reflect local priorities, and necessarily so. Instances where the linkage might be more direct involve geo-spatial information, such as indicators of land use. But there are certainly thematic linkages between the global to local levels (e.g., water quality). The Global Environment Outlook of the United Nations Environment Program is one example. The thematic areas used to assess the state of the environment at a global level (e.g. GEO 4) are also similar to the capacity building efforts for national-level integrated environmental assessment (e.g. GEO Brasil), and similarly for cities via GEO Cities reports which are common across Latin America.

3. *Carissa, you have coordinated and facilitated the Canadian Sustainability Indicator Network (CSIN), which provides over 450 indicator practitioners with monthly opportunities to discuss the theory and practice of sustainability indicator development and use. Could you give us an overview of the main idea behind this network?*

CSIN came into being when a group of sustainability indicator practitioners working in Canada realized they no longer wanted to work in isolation. These were practitioners working in different settings and at different scales, including not-for-profit, government and community organizations. From the beginning, the network has aimed to be more than a virtual network by incorporating elements of a community of practice. This means that the network goes beyond information sharing by discussing theories and practical applications in real time. One of the most popular features of CSIN is our periodic learning event, where people dial in on their phones to a conference call and log in to the internet to watch visual presentations live. Presenters are often colleagues sharing their experiences and knowledge. We sometimes also invite

guests from organizations such as the Stockholm Environment Institute and the OECD to share leading edges in sustainability indicators. Another popular feature is our listserv which keeps our growing membership informed of latest reports, journal articles and upcoming events. So, the main idea behind CSIN is to provide a platform that enables people to explore the growing edges of their work in sustainability indicators with others. This is particularly meaningful when people who don't normally interact, such as those working in community and in federal government, have an opportunity to provide feedback to one another and engage in conversation in a comfortable setting.

4. *Which are the principal aspects – difficulties, surprises, potentialities – you would highlight about organizing and maintaining the CSIN?*

One of the most encouraging aspects is that people from all over the world are increasingly asking to receive our listserv announcements or participate in our learning events. Knowing that CSIN is a unique network worldwide motivates the CSIN advisory committee, a voluntary committee of members, to continue to deliberate

over sustainability of the network. Financial sustainability is challenging, largely because networks are generally difficult to fund. Recent research at IISD has shown that many networks like CSIN or larger, continue to receive core funding from government or foundation sources. Many also charge membership fees, though the income from these fees accounts for a very small percentage of overall income. One of the reasons that networks are difficult to fund is that benefits of networks, such as providing adaptive capacity, resilience, and connectivity are perceived as less 'tangible'. At the same time, there is evidence that people are turning to the power of networks more and more in business, in government, and in society. So the potential for collaborative projects among CSIN members is definitely on the rise. One of the potentialities that we see on the horizon is an increase in short workshops both virtually and in person that are collaboratively designed to focus on issues specific to a region or an area. Because CSIN has such broad membership, working with pockets of membership could be very energizing for the network. We have received interest from international organizations also interested in

creating partnerships; this is partly due to the positive synergies resulting from the network being housed at IISD, within the program area of measurement and assessment.

5. What is the potential to apply this experience for other countries? How could IISD encourage and push similar processes in other regions, especially in the context of Latin America and Caribbean Region?

There is great potential to apply the CSIN experience in other countries. At present we are helping to establish a Practitioner Network for National Sustainable Development Strategies in the Asia and Asia-Pacific region. While not focusing specifically on sustainability indicators, this network will use virtual learning events to share innovative practices in strategic and coordinated action for sustainable development, including visioning, integrated planning and budgeting, monitoring of indicators and continuous improvement and adaptation. An important aspect of this network will be sharing experiences on the use of indicators to help guide national planning

efforts. We are also about to conduct a needs assessment for the Latin America region for a similar practitioners network. Regional networks are now either underway or in the planning stages in Europe, Africa and Asia. An Americas network would help facilitate sharing of innovative practices from all corners of the world, greatly enhancing the ability of governments to be strategic and coordinated in the pursuit of sustainable development at national, regional and global levels.

6. Do you know similar experiences in other countries?

The Community Indicators Consortium in the United States is an example of an indicators network that is growing in membership and support. While the focus of that network is on community level initiatives, which are particularly widespread in Canada and the US, the network attracts people working with indicators at all levels of government and community. Yearly in person meetings are key to the network's success; they also offer award programs and will be offering virtual

opportunities for members to share knowledge.

7. Have you thought about expanding CSIN out of Canada, bringing practitioners from other countries?

CSIN continues to attract members from Europe, Australia, US and Asia among others, largely due to our website and word of mouth. From beginning, IISD has had an international outlook on the indicator practitioner community. The Compendium of Sustainability Indicator Initiatives, for example, lists over 800 indicator initiatives from all continents. While CSIN continues to be a Canada-based organization, all are welcome to participate in our learning events and contribute to the listserv. There would be at least two considerations to forming an international network, the first is that one already exists with the International Sustainability Indicators Network, and the second is that because CSIN is already quite broad in scale, geography and topic, having some cohesion of context is necessary. Truly international networks can and do exist often around specific indicator topics that tie people