

### ECOSOC



General view of ECOSOC 2013.  
UN photo/Jean-Marc Ferré

## UNECE's contribution to the global effort to harness science, technology and innovation for promoting sustainable development

At the High-level Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) held in Geneva on 1 July, Rashid Meredov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan, explained how UNECE contributes to the global effort to harness science, technology and innovation for promoting the post-2015 development agenda.

Mr. Meredov stated that, as a major source of new technologies and other types of innovation, the UNECE region is uniquely placed to help transfer knowledge and experience to developing and transition economies. Knowledge sharing on innovation requires appropriate monitoring and assessment mechanisms that can provide a good foundation for policy design. Existing studies – including UNECE's Innovation Performance Reviews – show that there are vast differences in the capacity of countries to generate, absorb and disseminate innovation, thus creating a significant scope for policy learning.

The work of UNECE on promoting knowledge-based economic development is based precisely on: organizing a process of transnational learning and exchanges of experiences; identifying and disseminating international good practices; and, on this basis, building national capacity and providing policy advice to governments.

Innovation acquires heightened importance in the face of the current economic and financial crisis as a way to improve productivity and competitiveness, and as a way to do more with less at a time of limited budgets. A good example is how intelligent transport systems increase the carrying capacity of existing transport infrastructures and therefore reduce the need for investment in expanding networks. UNECE is at the forefront of innovation in transport, where the global standards promulgated by UNECE contribute to smarter transportation networks, smarter traffic management, and thereby lower emissions, less congestion, and a more sustainable and competitive economy. Some traditional sectors, like forestry, can also renew themselves through innovative solutions and lead the way towards the green economy. Working with other regional commissions and ECOSOC, UNECE is ready to share its policy experiences, platforms and tools to promote innovation as a way to meet economic, environmental and social challenges. □

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## ECOSOC Roundtable Breakfast "Making a difference: impact investment and the financing of innovation"

UNECE and the Swiss Government hosted this Ministerial Roundtable Breakfast on 3 July in Geneva as part of the high-level segment of ECOSOC. The Roundtable provided an opportunity to discuss in an informal setting an issue that is closely related to the topic of the 2013 Annual Ministerial Review of the Council: "Science, technology and innovation and the potential of culture for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals".

The roundtable was co-chaired by Andrey Vasilyev, UNECE Deputy Executive Secretary and Jürg Burri, Head of Directorate Research and Innovation, Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation. The aim was to have an open and frank discussion between senior policymakers, the financial community and other civil society representatives on how finance can be mobilized to foster innovation and address social and environmental challenges.

Public resources are not sufficient to address existing social and environmental challenges and, therefore, it is necessary to mobilise private financing to tackle these pressing problems. The ultimate policy goal is the creation of appropriate conditions to encourage private investors to channel resources to areas that are of public interest. It was agreed that close collaboration between the public and the private sector is critical to achieve this aim.

Impact investments have great potential to increase the effectiveness and scope of overseas development assistance (ODA). Impact investments are defined as investments made with the intention to generate measurable social and environmental impact alongside a financial return. They are emerging as a new asset class that is attracting the attention of a range of investors. Some governments are already experimenting with new financing models. Participants

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acknowledged that there is a political concern that a focus on impact investments (where a financial return is expected) and the mobilization of private financing for development goals could imply a reduced commitment to ODA. However, this should not be the case: the point is not to substitute existing ODA but to leverage public funding to bring much larger private funding. There are already examples of such projects that have worked well (for example, the Global Alliance for Vaccines) and these can provide guidance for designing suitable funding models.

International cooperation can play a role on the framework conditions for private sector development; it can also help strengthen financial infrastructure as well as promote innovative financing of public-private partnerships. □

## Water

## Water in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

On 3 July 2013 in Geneva, at a panel discussion on "Water in the post-2015 development agenda: How to achieve an aspirational water SDG?" participants stressed the crucial importance of water for sustainable development and discussed the elements for the future sustainable development goal (SDG) on water. The panel discussion, organized by UNECE and UN-Water with support from the Government of Switzerland, was a side event held in the margins of the sixth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health under the Protocol on Water and Health to the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (Water Convention).

Ambassador Edi Yusup of Indonesia introduced the key messages of the recently released report, "A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development", authored by the High-level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The report outlines a universal agenda to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030, including by achieving universal access to water and sanitation as one of the 12 illustrative goals for the post-2015 agenda.

Zsuzsanna Steindl-Kerekes (Hungary) described the major outcomes of the discussion on water at the Open Working Group on SDGs established by the United Nations General Assembly. She emphasized the comprehensive character of discussions in the Group, which addressed the need to attain universal access to safe drinking water, sanitation and hygiene, as well as to improve governance frameworks, infrastructure, water efficiency and transboundary water management.

Graham Alabaster of the World Health Organization emphasized the importance of being able to monitor the targets that would be crucial for the implementation of the post-2015 water goals, and also the need to identify marginalized groups that would require specific attention in achieving universal access to water and sanitation.

Ana Drapa (Romania) highlighted the lessons learned in the implementation of the Protocol on Water and Health. In ensuring the supply of safe drinking water and adequate sanitation the Protocol placed an emphasis on improving policy and governance frameworks to support infrastructural interventions. It applied a flexible approach to the setting of targets, taking into account national priorities and capacities that could serve as a model for future SDGs.

Manuel Thurnhofer (Switzerland) called for a stand-alone SDG on water in the post-2015 development agenda and presented an outline of a future global water goal, with a proposal of three sub-goals in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene; water resources management; and wastewater management and water quality.

Massimo Cozzone (Italy), Chair of the Meeting of the Parties of the UNECE Water Convention, stressed that the very nature of water as a shared resource called for cooperation on transboundary water management to be part of the future SDG. The opening of the UNECE Water Convention to all United Nations Member States and the upcoming entry into force of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Non-navigational Uses of International Watercourses provided the global legal frameworks for such transboundary cooperation.

G rard Payen of Aquafed, the International Federation of Private Water Operators, stressed that, globally, some 80 per cent of wastewater from human settlements and industrial sources were discharged into the environment without any treatment, with detrimental effects on the environment and human health. The future water SDG needed to address wastewater management and water quality.

The ensuing discussion among participants revealed concerns about financing to achieve the ambitious targets. The need for international solidarity was emphasized, together with the importance of equity and reaching out to marginalized groups. The challenges to effective monitoring of implementation were also discussed. □

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