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Project: Sustainability and Policy-making: Reconciling Short and Long-term Policy Needs in Democratic Governance

Workshop: June 30 – July 1, 2010, East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii

The United Nations University's Institute for Sustainability and Peace (UNU-ISP) and the East-West Center (EWC) invite abstracts for a project "Sustainability and Policy-making: Reconciling Short and Long-Term Needs in Democratic Governance". The project focuses an emerging concern for democratic governance – how the concept of sustainability can inform policymaking that addresses pressing challenges without compromising the long-term needs of future generations.

Background

Political decision-making within a democratic structure tends to be inherently short-sighted, as the pursuit of electoral office and the immediate demands of constituents are of central concern to elected officials and bureaucrats ("short-termism"). But policies designed to meet these short-term needs can often fail to address, or even actively work against, the needs of future generations. Similarly, managers in business are often encouraged – implicitly or explicitly – to concentrate on short-term profit over approaches which would bring more sustainable long-term success. In developing countries with weak democratic institutions and in-egalitarian social and economic structures, the formulation and implementation of sustainable policies is an enormous challenge. The implementation and impact of policies are affected by four groups of independent variables: environmental conditions (including physical, socioeconomic, political structures); inter-organizational relationships (such as coordination and linkages); organizational resources for implementation (such as financial, political and technical); and implementing agencies' characteristics (such as skills, attitude). In more advanced democracies too policy sustainability continues to be a challenge. For example, structural incentives for short-term returns on investments were a strong causative factor in the current financial crisis.

This project seeks to reveal factors that influence formation of sustainable or unsustainable policies in the public and private sectors: Which policy-making processes and approaches can address both short-term and long-term needs? How do internal and external factors involved in the policy-making process influence sustainable outcomes - including time pressures, conflicting values, imprecise or contested data, and structural complexities? What can induce governments to look beyond their short-term re-election agenda, and be able to address issues that require long-term vision (such as health, climate change, renewable energy, oil shortage, population growth, and food security)? What are the optimal structures within the government to ensure the formulation of sustainable policies? What can the public and private sectors learn from each other?

Submission Guidelines

Abstracts are invited for concept papers or case studies on topics dealing with one or more of the above questions including, but not limited to, climate change, education and health, human development, natural resource management, population growth, food security, peace-building, and the financial crisis.

Selected participants will be invited to present a short (3-5 page) abstract at a workshop in Honolulu on 30 June – 1 July 2010. Deadline for the submission of abstracts is March 15, 2010. A Brief on Policy Sustainability based on discussions in the workshop will be prepared for distribution among policy-makers and scholars. After peer reviews, selected papers will be published in a book by United Nations University Press.