

A New Generation of a *Global Think Tank*

Concept Note

“...momentum for transformation is required in the form of a new dialogue and partnerships between the top of the academia, governments, businesses and civil societies; partnerships which should help to turn negative environmental narratives into positive ones, and perceived global change-related threats into plausible development paths full of innovation and business opportunities...”

(IIASA’s 40th Anniversary Conference, Vienna, October 2012)

Introduction

Urgent and concerted set of steps is required to help human beings, societies and their economies, and the environment itself on which we depend, to shift to a sustainable development path.

For successful completion of this transformation, today’s business-as-usual scenario is no longer an option. Moreover, transformative action is needed simultaneously at the global, regional, and national levels and in every sector, including food, water, energy, climate, biodiversity, human health, education, economic development, equity, and social inclusion.

Although the extraordinary scientific and technological knowledge acquired in the course of industrialization can assist in tackling these challenges, it cannot alone return Earth’s deeply interconnected physical, biological and socioeconomic systems to their former beneficial rhythms and equilibrium. Momentum for transformation is required in the form of new dialogues and partnerships between the top science, governments, businesses and civil societies, and in the form of policies that are informed, powerful, implementable, and communicable—policies that would be based on focused and collaborative scientific research with clear and productive aims and outcomes.

Think Tank: Structure and Presentation

To drive this momentum, the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), supported by extensive international network of its institutional members and collaborators, and in close collaboration with the European Forum Alpbach, is suggesting to establish a new generation of a global think tank that includes some of the best minds in the world today: people who, independent of national and financial interests, are willing to place their collective knowledge, expertise, experience, and reputation at the service of the world community at this pivotal point in Earth’s development.

The composition of the think tank will be a true reflection of a need for new dialogue and partnerships between the top of the world academia, governments, businesses and civil society. The think tank members will become—both individually and collectively—ambassadors of this partnership and of a new paradigm for sustainable transitions grounded in positive environmental and development narratives.

The members of the think tank will be drawn from Nobel Prize winning academics, former heads of state and government ministers, from private- sector CEOs from commerce, industry and finance, and



from civil society and intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations leaders. The membership will be based on an individual's potential contribution and not connected to governments or international business concerns. The think tank would therefore, be fully independent in IIASA's own tradition. The Chairmanship and co-chairmanship of the think tank, and its patronage will be sought at highest international levels.

Ideally numbering 16 members engaged for a 3-year term, the think tank would set an international agenda for the issues needing to be most urgently addressed as part of the upcoming global transformation, and take on an ambassadorial role in communicating these to policymakers and the public. It would meet once or twice a year at IIASA in Laxenburg and at the European Forum Alpbach for roughly 1.5 days in an informal, yet productive "fireside" setting.

All deliberations of the think tank will be fully supported by IIASA and its network of more than 350 international academic and research partners. IIASA, in collaboration with the European Forum Alpbach, will provide full coordination and managerial support.

Topics for Think Tank Deliberations

The basic goal underlying activities and deliberations of the think tank will be to support global transformations towards sustainability by creating and communicating positive narratives for sustainable development and business opportunities, grounded in cutting edge international system-science.

The transformation to sustainability covers much ground, including energy transitions, climate change, atmospheric pollution, world population, food and water, poverty and equity, social justice, world financial and monetary structures, and strategies around the future of the key geopolitical hotspots.

As mentioned above, all qualitative and quantitative research required by think tank members would be placed at their disposal by IIASA and its global research network.

Communication

It is of high importance that the conclusions of the think tank should be transparent to political decision makers and to the public. Thus special emphasis is placed on communication.

After each think tank session, a public statement is envisaged (e.g. "Laxenburg and Alpbach Declaration") that would be published in a highly regarded international public journal. Press conferences would be held in connection with the meetings, and think tank members will be offered opportunity to held public lectures in Vienna/Laxenburg and at Alpbach.

All scientific and thematic assessment reports which will be produced by IIASA and its partners to support think deliberations will be published in a special series and released at the time of think tank sessions.

The IIASA and European Forum Alpbach Partnership

Since its establishment in 1972 IIASA has been a natural convener of international science to policy dialog and collaboration, due to its research emphasis on integrated systems analysis to address human and environmental concerns. It is therefore well placed to host a new generation of think tank that is not only dedicated to finding the most effective means to manage global transition to sustainable development, but also capable, enhanced by recently established close collaboration with



the European Forum Alpbach, of effectively communicating these to policymakers and to the public at large.

IIASA has several major advantages. It is governed by its National Member Organizations (NMOs), which are 20 in number and from developing and developed countries alike. As well as providing support to the Institute, this brings IIASA senior scientists into daily contact with high-level scientists and policymakers from many countries and organizations.

In the course of its scientific research, the Institute has established a network of over 350 partners from the international community, academia, business, and policy. This network is growing across the world as IIASA attracts new scholars and young scientists to use expert systems analysis to view persistent human and environmental problems from different and fresh perspectives.

Every year since 1945, the “European Forum Alpbach” has been held in the Tyrolian mountain village of Alpbach. For almost three weeks Alpbach becomes the village of thinkers or, as Otto Molden, the founder of the Forum, called it, the “other magic mountain”. Speakers and participants from all parts of the world, from science, economics and politics, experienced experts and students, come together in Alpbach to discuss current issues and to formulate interdisciplinary solutions. The open character of the events promotes a climate of tolerance for different opinions and contributes to the overcoming of national, ideological and disciplinary boundaries in a harmonious way. Every year, more than 4,000 people from over 60 countries take up the invitation to participate in the European Forum Alpbach, among them around the new generation of 600 young scholarship holders from all over Europe and beyond.

IIASA’s systems approaches, and its scientific excellence and the Forum’s unique and historically proven power to convene meetings with leading political, economic and industrial players thus provides an extraordinary platform for interdisciplinary dialogue. The European Forum Alpbach and IIASA are both uniquely poised at the nexus of international and interdisciplinary research to seek solutions to major global challenges – such as energy, climate, food and water, poverty and equity, and their related issues on the economic and political governance. The hosting of a new think tank to support solutions of persistent world problems is entirely in line with the internal aims and policy of both organizations.