

## **OECD-Global Science Forum (GSF) work on science advice**

### **Background/context**

The OECD Global Science Forum (GSF) has a specific focus on the under-pinning science base and works with representatives and experts from OECD countries and Key Partners to analyse key science policy issues.

Increasingly the scientific community is being called upon to provide scientific evidence and advice to government policy-makers across a range of issues, from climate change to public health emergencies. A large variety of different structures and processes – involving a range of actors - have been established at different scales (local to national to global) to provide science advice to policy makers. However, the sharing of experiences and practices across these structures has, to date, been limited.

Whatever the specifics of any particular situation, effective science-for-policy processes are at some stage dependent on the participation of reputable scientific experts. In 2011, the prosecution and condemnation of scientists in Italy because of their role in providing contested scientific advice in the run up to the L'Aquila earthquake led to widespread consternation in the academic world. It raised serious questions about the roles, responsibilities and legal liabilities of scientists involved in providing scientific advice.

The L'Aquila case was the specific stimulus for a GSF project on science advice. However, there was consensus from the outset that work on legal responsibilities and liabilities should be embedded in a broader analysis of mechanisms for providing scientific advice and key issues related to the interface between science and policy.

### **Current GSF project and report**

The current GSF project began in 2013 with the collection of data, including interviews with key individuals, on existing rules and practices in 22 countries and international organisations. This provided the basis for discussions at an international workshop in Tokyo in October, 2013. A second workshop was then held in Berlin in February 2014 that brought together legal experts, scientists and policy makers to explore liability issues. Complementary interviews were then conducted by a consultant to gather additional information on international scientific advisory mechanisms and scientific advice in crisis situations.

The outcome of these workshops and summary and analysis of collected information is currently being compiled in a single report by a GSF expert Group, which has been steering the project. The report will include:

- 1 An overview of the current landscape for science advice including a typology for the main components of national science advisory structures and key features of international mechanisms
2. An analysis of the different phases of the 'generic' science advisory process (i Framing the questions, ii Selecting the advisors, iii Producing the advice, iv Delivery and implementation)
3. An initial analysis of the key issues and specificities related to providing science advice in major emergency/unexpected crisis situations (e.g. the Deepwater Horizon oil spill and Icelandic Eijafjallajökull Volcano eruption in 2010 or the enterohaemorrhagic E.Coli outbreak in Europe and the Tohoko earthquake and tsunami events in 2011).
4. An analysis of the responsibility and potential liabilities of advisory bodies and experts, including consideration of the L'Aquila case. Whilst it is clear that legal liability varies according to the specific national legal system, scientists in different advisory structures have different potential liabilities and they are not normally aware of these. Responsible communication is a particular area for attention.
5. Emerging issues -a preliminary analysis of 2 important 'emerging areas' that will require increased attention in the future:

-The international dimension of scientific advice in in the context of global/multi-factorial issues: Sustainable development issues, such as disaster risk, climate change, food security, energy etc., all need to be addressed at different scales (from global to local) requiring coordinated policy actions and scientific inputs.

- the growing involvement of civil society in scientific advice, including a preliminary analysis of the lessons learned from recent controversies around the science advice-policy action-civil society nexus.

The international aspects of scientific advice are a particular focus of this work and the need for better coordination of national science advisory structures in different situations is being addressed. In this context, the establishment of an ongoing forum and/or network of senior national science advisors is likely to be recommended.