

SDSN Germany: What do we want to achieve in the next two years?

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1. A decent life for all within the limits of our planetary ecosystem: 2015, the year of decision

For 2015, the world's governments have undertaken to agree universally applicable Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs¹), conclude a new climate-change agreement² and mobilise financial resources for global sustainable development, all as part of the post-2015 process³. However, if there are to be some meaningful and credible outcomes to the negotiations, then all parties will need to step up their efforts considerably. Implementing these results in a timely manner in every country around the world will be an even bigger challenge. Nevertheless, society, business and policy-makers still have a responsibility to act even if the negotiations themselves fail to deliver. At the same time, many innovative social and technological approaches and initiatives around the world are showing that it is possible to be forward-thinking in our actions.

With universally applicable SDGs, the world will be entering uncharted territory. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs⁴), which remain in force until 2015, focused on reducing poverty and were concerned primarily with developing countries. The SDGs are designed to go further, covering all dimensions of sustainable development and all the world's countries. They are aimed at securing an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for current generations and the ones to come. As such, they require all countries to fundamentally realign their development pathways from 2015; there can be no more "business as usual". Germany will also have to find new solutions for its future development, making it a developing country as well, so to speak. The necessity of such a paradigm shift within the context of a global partnership has not yet filtered through fully to policy-makers, business and society, and sustainability has not yet become an everyday reality or developed into a broad movement within society as a whole.

Nevertheless, over the last two decades, Germany has taken a number of steps forward on the road to sustainable development and is considered by many to be leading the way on this issue at international level. Since 2002, the country has had a National Sustainable Development Strategy in place, along with structures and processes for its implementation and advancement that are pooled within the State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development. Germany

¹ The SDGs are expected to be approved by heads of state and government at a United Nations summit in September 2015.

² The new-climate change agreement is due to be approved at the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Paris in December 2015.

³ The Third International Conference on Financing for Development is set to take place in Addis Ababa in July 2015.

⁴ The MDGs were approved by heads of state and government at a United Nations summit in September 2000.

is highly regarded the world over for its national energy transition project, which combines ambitious CO2 reduction targets with a commitment to phasing out nuclear energy. At the same time, the nation is still a long way off achieving its own targets for implementing sustainable development in key areas such as the economical and efficient use of energy and raw materials, the real estate sector, environmentally-friendly mobility, sustainable land management, the conservation and protection of biodiversity and natural habitats, and international responsibility (for instance, when it comes to financially supporting sustainable development work around the world).⁵ There are also a range of potential SDGs and corresponding implementation instruments that are not (yet) mapped in Germany's sustainability strategy. Looking at the big picture, the National Sustainable Development Strategy and its associated structures and processes lack political centrality and influence, as well as recognition and support from mainstream society. Even the results and recommendations of the Enquete Commission in its paper "Growth, Prosperity and Quality of Life"⁶ are not being given anywhere near the attention they deserve in political and social debate.

Many of the major challenges can only be resolved through a process of commercial and technological transformation. German businesses have become more aware of the need for sustainable development over the last few years, increasingly committing themselves to its promotion. Germany is renowned for developing environmentally-friendly technology and a growing number of companies are making sustainability an integral part of their growth and innovation strategies. However, the instruments and general conditions needed to roll out successful individual initiatives more widely, make them accessible to the public and clear innovation backlogs at microeconomic and sector level are lacking. It is taking far too long for us to wake up to the fact that the role of business is changing. Policy-makers, society and the business community need to work together as partners to bring about a transformation in terms of sustainable development. As a nation famed for its technology and solutions, Germany can and must play a special role in this regard at international level.

As current holder of the G7 Presidency and with its National Sustainable Development Strategy due to be updated, the country has a major opportunity to meet the challenge of contributing to ambitious global goals and developing effective structures and processes for their implementation globally, within its own borders and as part of Germany's external actions.

2. Knowledge and action for sustainable development in Germany: SDSN Germany

SDSN Germany⁷ pools the knowledge, experience and capacity of German organisations from the worlds of academia, business and civil-society in order to foster sustainable development in Germany and strengthen German efforts to promote sustainable development globally. To this end, SDSN Germany encourages academic, social and political discussion of sustainable development in the country, and also supports specific initiatives for sustainable development in Germany and around the world.

⁵ Cf. the Federal Statistical Office's 2014 Indicator Report on Sustainable Development in Germany.

⁶ Cf. final report on "Growth, Prosperity and Quality of Life – Paths to economic sustainability and social progress in the social market economy" dated 3 May 2013 (BT-Drs. 17/13300, German only).

⁷ SDSN Germany was set up on 14 April 2014 to serve as a network for German knowledge institutions that are members of the global Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN). SDSN Germany welcomes other organisations and individuals to partner with its network. Cf. also footnote 8.

The work of SDSN Germany is undergirded by a comprehensive concept of sustainability that gives equal consideration to economic, social, environmental, political, cultural and gender-related dimensions of societal transformation processes. In this context, SDSN Germany gives particular support to political, institutional and technological sustainability strategies that are backed up and legitimised by academic research findings and social discussion processes. Making the shift to sustainable development is a challenge that must be met by all actors from the realms of policy-making, business and society within their own spheres of responsibility and, wherever necessary, as part of alliances. As such, SDSN Germany will be involved not only in the processes and structures of the political sphere, but also in those of business and society, dealing at the same time with the issue of drivers and blockers of change. Knowledge institutions also need to help ensure that policy-makers, businesses and social actors can better process academic findings and recommendations.

The global SDSN (Sustainable Development Solutions Network)⁸ has contributed to the international discussion on SDGs in a number of ways, not least through its June 2013 report to the United Nations Secretary General entitled "An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development" (which proposed 10 SDGs) and its May 2014 report on "Indicators for Sustainable Development Goals". As part of its Deep Decarbonization Pathways Project (DDPP), the SDSN is working with a range of German and international partners to support climate-change negotiations. The first report ("Pathways to Deep Decarbonization")⁹ was presented at the UN Climate Summit on 23 September 2014.

3. What do we want to achieve in the next two years?

Over the next two years, SDSN Germany intends to make a tangible contribution to turning sustainable development and future SDGs into the central point of reference for policy-makers, businesses and society in Germany and Europe as well. For each individual actor and for the general public, systematically combining their own social development efforts with global principles and goals will require a fresh awareness of the issues and a new way of thinking.

We intend to play our part in enabling the German Government to make a major contribution through its G7 Presidency and as a European Union member state to drafting ambitious sustainability and climate-change goals, obtaining voluntary commitments from the G7 countries to implement these goals, and ensuring that all relevant actors deliver on their existing international financing commitments.

We want to work with interested partners to develop potential pathways for implementing the German SDGs by examining the future global SDGs, fleshing them out and taking them in ambitious directions. We plan to organise these activities in such a way that they aid the forthcoming work on updating, revising and advancing the National Sustainable Development Strategy, which should become the central instrument used by Germany to implement the SDGs within its own borders and beyond.

We intend to develop proposals for how Germany, a cosmopolitan nation that is highly intertwined with the international community, can turn the global SDGs into the guiding

⁸ The global SDSN, which was established in the summer of 2012 under the auspices of the UN Secretary General, mobilises academic and technical expertise for sustainable development from the worlds of research, business and civil society (cf. www.unsdsn.org).

⁹ <http://unsdsn.org/what-we-do/deep-decarbonization-pathways/>

principles for its dealings with other countries and its involvement in global-policy making (e.g. with regard to global trade structures). The national implementation of SDGs in Germany can make a direct positive contribution to a number of issues at global level, such as climate-change mitigation and the protection of biodiversity. Additionally, Germany needs to shape its European and international policies into proactive tools for global sustainable development and ensure the scope of its foreign relations is sufficiently broad to enable it to contribute to sustainable development in other countries and around the world. Our planet and its people must be at the heart of today's geopolitics.

Working together with the German Council for Sustainable Development, the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development and other actors, we seek to take the initiative in strengthening Germany's sustainability architecture so that it can effectively implement a new national sustainability strategy and support the achievement of the SDGs. The peer review of Germany's sustainability policy¹⁰ published in 2013, the future SDGs, the new climate-change agreement, and the revision of the country's National Sustainable Development Strategy by 2016 all provide key impetus and compelling arguments in this regard, while the citizens' dialogues on quality of life¹¹ organised by the German Government and the Charter for the Future 'ONE WORLD - Our responsibility' process¹² offer additional opportunities. Viewing the revision "as just another routine iteration" (peer review, p. 28) is not an option. The only credible way for Germany to ask and expect other nations to establish an implementation and review architecture is for it to first set up an effective one of its own. Parliaments will also have to play a greater role in this context.¹³ Building on this, we wish to assist Germany in submitting its revised sustainability strategy and other commitments to implementing national SDGs to the international review process due to be conducted by the United Nations High-level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF) from 2016.

The topic of SDGs and climate change is very broad, and so we intend to look in more detail at specific areas in which Germany needs to continue leading the way (e.g. in the "Energiewende"), has a lot of catching up to do (e.g. in sustainable consumption/recycling) or can play a key role in cooperation with other countries (e.g. in sustainability policy/international climate policy, technology and knowledge transfer, and sustainability architecture).

Working with actors from the world of business, we plan to identify ways of developing and connecting the sustainability strategies of companies at systemic level and linking them to the SDGs and to national sustainability strategies, involving the financial sector in the process as well. We also intend to pool business and academic expertise to develop and disseminate specific solutions to pressing challenges in sustainable development, for example, with regard to supply chains and resource efficiency.

4. How will we be guided?

SDGs are designed for global application, but their legitimacy must be proved in regional and local contexts. The values and requirements associated with the future SDGs must be intensively

¹⁰ Sustainability – Made in Germany: The Second Review by a Group of International Peers, commissioned by the German Federal Chancellery, September 2013

¹¹ www.dialog-ueber-deutschland.de/EN/10-Dialog/_node.html

¹² www.zukunftscharta.de

¹³ Cf. Sustainability and Parliaments: Survey and Perspectives RIO +20: TAB-report no. 155, Berlin 2012

discussed at all levels, with a focus on implementation. Ensuring the sustainable development of our global society/societies requires us to work together in implementing the SDGs. This will only be possible as part of a process of transcultural communication. Two guiding principles must form the framework for SDGs and their implementation: human rights and human security on the one hand, and planetary as well as local environmental boundaries on the other.

The pursuit of global goals will keep raising questions of justice, which need to be constantly reinterpreted on a dynamic basis within societies, between societies and in relation to future generations. In the interests of equal participation, all societies need to pay particular attention to their weakest members and to the left-behind and excluded, as they are the ones that are hit hardest by the effects of non-sustainable development.

Unless inequality is reduced and the burden of effort and risk are shared fairly, along with the benefits, then it will be almost impossible to act in the interests of social and environmental sustainability and democratic processes. Global goals bring with them global responsibilities, with the different actors (nations, sectors, organisations and individuals) each being responsible for specific areas. In all societies, the economic, political and cultural elite have a special role to play, as they have a major influence on patterns of production and consumption by the example they set. It will only be possible to give a proper answer to the social and the economic question if the two are linked together and sustainability is culturally anchored. And unless the public and private finance sectors are put on a sustainable footing at national and international level, then successful efforts in other areas could be quickly undone.

Universality must become the hallmark of a new global agenda for sustainable development. On the one hand, universality means that all states commit to pursuing global (collective) goals as well as common goals for all societies. On the other hand, the concept of universality also requires each individual country to formulate its own development ambitions in a way that is compatible with this concept. As such, universality has nothing to do with homogeneity or uniformity. Universality requires actors to recognise uniqueness, and to view and develop it within a universal context. In low-income countries (LICs¹⁴), the focus will be on overcoming hunger and absolute poverty, while middle-income countries (MICs¹⁵) will also be concerned with undergoing transformation into inclusive and sustainable knowledge societies. High-income countries (HICs¹⁶) must correct erroneous developments, redefine, redistribute and safeguard prosperity within the bounds of our planetary ecosystem, and also devise sustainable shrinkage processes. At the same time, universality extends beyond the realm of states and politics, requiring actors from all sectors of society and business to share in the responsibility.¹⁷

Just like the goals for financing sustainable development, the goals for global sustainable development and, more specifically, climate-change mitigation to be agreed in 2015 must be both ambitious and realistic as well as to a high degree binding in nature. All three areas are closely interlinked and must be viewed together, precisely because it is impossible to settle everything everywhere. The interplay between the three negotiating tracks must not turn into a downward spiral, but rather must be harnessed to create positive momentum for a strong final outcome. In order to avoid dramatic consequences of climate change, the 2° global-warming

¹⁴ Countries with an annual gross national product (GNP) per capita of less than USD 1,035 in 2013

¹⁵ Countries with an annual GNP per capita of up to USD 12,615 in 2013; up to USD 3,975 for lower-middle-income countries

¹⁶ Countries with an annual GNP per capita of over USD 12,615 in 2013

¹⁷ Cf. for example the "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights" (UNGPs; OHCHR, 2011)

limit should become the categorical maxim for action. A multi-dimensional low-carbon development concept should be anchored within SDGs rather than a climate-change agreement. Delivering swiftly on existing promises, particular those relating to sustainable-development financing, could generate more positive momentum than any number of new, non-binding arbitrarinesses.

5. How do we intend to achieve our goals?

SDSN Germany intends to place the search for and the creation of new solutions at the heart of its network activities and to work closely with the social debate and with existing processes in politics and business. We want to ask questions and join with others to develop answers.

As a dialogue platform, the network will provide individuals from the realms of academia, business, society and policy-making with an opportunity to engage in discussion and develop new initiatives and solutions outside of traditional milieus and silos. These initiatives and solutions can then be pursued further in discussions with high-profile decision-makers. We intend to use larger public events and partner with major nation-wide media outlets to raise awareness among policy-makers and within society of the need for significant course corrections for global sustainable development and to strengthen the resolve of the relevant actors to make these corrections.

Through focused research and consultation processes with SDSN members and partners, we want to create the initial impetus for new social and technological solutions and to drive their implementation with orientation papers and as part of consultation processes (e.g. in the implementation of SDGs and climate goals in Germany and Europe, and as part of Germany's external actions).

The network and its members will also actively participate in other existing dialogue and cooperation platforms in Germany and Europe, and will contribute German experience and solutions to the global SDSN as well as to the global discussion about and implementation of a future universal agenda for sustainable development.

After the end of 2015, SDSN Germany will submit a report on what it has experienced and achieved, along with proposals for the next steps.