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The nexus perspective

For the integrated realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals

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For the integrated realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals

Bonn / Chapel Hill, 16 April 2018. If we wish to achieve global sustainable development, then we need to guide our economic activities in a more targeted manner. On the one hand, the ecological limits of the planet need to be respected. On the other, no-one should be left behind and inequality both within and between countries should be minimised. This complex vision of a common future was jointly resolved by the member states of the United Nations in 2015 in the form of the 2030 Agenda, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since that time the UN member states have met in New York each July to discuss the status of these 17 goals within the scope of the High-level Political Forum (HLPF). However, two weeks of cross-national reporting is a short time window within which to satisfy the complex content of this vision. In particular, there is a lack of interlinked consideration of the ecological, economic and social sustainability goals. The nexus perspective enables us to both determine the systemic cohesiveness of the SDGs and at the same time focus systematically on conflicts of goals.

The process relating to the HLPF is growing increasingly in significance. For example, numerous meetings of experts are held in advance of the HLPF. In addition, scientific special supplements, shadow reports and conference declarations from civil society, academia and the private sector are increasingly flowing into the process as a whole, adding neglected issues and examples of success to the reporting process. These processes aim to promote concordance prior to the HLPF as well as learning between the countries and various stakeholder groups.

All of this is important. However, the reporting on the respective goals, thus far conducted separately, fails to take adequate account of the interactions between the ecological, economic and social goals. In contrast, a nexus perspective promotes systemic understanding and examines cross-sectoral governance approaches. For example, the debate regarding the water-energy-food nexus addresses the question of how competing demands for the natural resources water (SDG 6), soil and biodiversity (SDG 15) can be harmonised with the efforts to achieve water (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7) and food security (SDG 2) as well as protection of the climate (SDG 13). In an analysis conducted by the German Development Institute (DIE) and the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) all of the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted in the scope of the

Paris Climate Agreement are allocated to the 17 SDGs and visualised in an online tool. One outcome of the investigation was that synergies are fixed components of policy documents, but that conflicts of goals are not addressed. However, this could result in the climate goals to be achieved, on the expenses to retain biodiversity or ensure water or food security.

In advance of this year's HLPF, this week will see the Nexus Conference initiated by the Water Institute take place in Chapel Hill, North Carolina for the second time. This stakeholder meeting brings together actors from the fields of science, civil society and politics to address cross-sectoral approaches for the integrated realisation of the 2030 Agenda. The first Nexus Conference in 2014 contributed significantly to recognising the connectivity of the 17 sustainability goals.

What can we expect from the second Nexus Conference, this year?

As a platform for promoting dialogue between the various stakeholders, it enables the exchange of knowledge between scientific findings and policy creation. In addition, the focus on urbanisation this year highlights the cross-sectoral character of the SDGs. The competing demand for natural resources and the challenge of achieving social goals have a drastic effect in fast-growing urban spaces. To achieve the integrated implementation of all SDGs in the urban space and adjoining rural spaces it makes sense to discuss cross-sectoral approaches for critical conflicts of goals, in order to address interdependencies within the 2030 Agenda in good time.

This year's Nexus Conference can play a pioneering role here, by addressing critical conflicts of goals within the selected thematic spectrum, with the Outcome document of the Nexus Conference emphasising key factors for the integrated implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The conference represents a suitable platform on which to reflect critically on how conflicts of goals are handled. This includes procedural questions of how to deal with conflicts of goals, questions of legitimacy, namely who may make decisions with regard to conflicts of goals and possibly ethical and practical questions, such as who is entitled to compensation. Discussions of possible solution approaches can in turn be incorporated into national implementation processes and political agendas prior to the HLPF, in the form of thematic reviews.