

Work Programme 2010-2013

Preliminary remarks

The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) periodically outlines its Work Programme for medium-term tasks. After being newly constituted in June, the Council's first session of its legislative period was held on 8 and 9 September 2010. The Work Programme was discussed and a variety of initial work steps agreed on.

Below is an editorial summary of the content of the Council's approaches and targets as summarised by the head office.

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1. Political points of reference for the work of the German Council for Sustainable Development, 2010-2013

The social dialogue on sustainable development issues and processes should be intensified. This is also the wish of the Federal Government. The Council's time-tested work with interesting combinations of dialogue partners is to be continued and the flow of information between departments and the Council intensified.

The Council will also continue to actively contribute to updating the National Sustainability Strategy. For 2010/2011, the Federal Government planned two consultation phases on the Progress Report. The Council will be involved in both phases. In addition, fundamental questions relating to how sustainability can be institutionalised in society, politics and the economy, especially the "soft" links, e.g. between the sustainability strategies at the federal and state levels, will need to be addressed further.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development scheduled for 2012 (UNCSD 2012) is a vital point of reference for the work of the German Council for Sustainable Development. At the heart of the matter are the principles for a green economy (UN) and the question as to what institutional structures are suited for linking national action and the international dimension.

2. Overarching issues relevant to the Council's work

The social dialogue on sustainability cannot restrict itself to discussing targets and indicators or initiating projects. It must likewise focus on discussing and shaping opinions on several, in part very fundamental, issues.

Being able to map out visions for a sustainable future requires having an understanding within society of values such as progress, rationality, culture and growth, but also of how to deal with knowledge, responsibility and the notion of sustainability in general. This includes attitudes within society toward technology and large-scale engineering projects or even the long-term prospects of undesirable developments in, for example, investments or the building stock.

Developing visions for the future is coupled with issues concerning the role of knowledge, science and responsibility in our society. How does connective and orientational knowledge arise? In what ways does such knowledge gain practical relevance in action? How does something like a state of social assuredness (certainty and trust) of a need to act and of our ability to do so emerge from particularistic knowledge? How is "complexity" and process thinking dealt with? What role do institutions, the media and politics play in sustainability policy? To prevent the term

‘sustainability’ from being used arbitrarily, the question for the Council is how the term ‘sustainability’ can be given more substance in practice while still allowing for it to play a key role in facilitating a comprehensive dialogue.

To ensure that decisions on policy guidelines are recognised and accepted as such, the Council sees itself in the role of helping to shape social dialogue to improve and promote the quality of long-term decisions.

3. Individual priority issues for the German Council for Sustainable Development

The project: "Vision 2050. DialogeZukunft"

Based on the findings of the Peer Review of German sustainable development policy in 2009, the RNE seeks to tackle the lack of both an overarching vision of sustainability and a debate on guiding principles. Given the anticipated global population growth, technological leaps and scientific innovations are required, which present us with new and also ethical challenges. One concrete contribution to the development of a ‘Grand Design’ by 2050 is the “Vision 2050. DialogeZukunft” project. Including a broad range of social players in a multi-stage dialogue project intends to give a new and more far-reaching impetus to achieve goals and reach agreements as well as establish social alliances and conventions. In its approach and content, the dialogue is geared toward encouraging young people who have a vision and an understanding of the subject matter to discuss among themselves, with members of the Council and with a wide variety of social players.

"Germany – a resource country"?

Despite having an organised and effective raw materials and recycling economy, we cannot deny the fact that consumption in Germany remains an expanding and yet untapped raw-materials repository. As yet, there is no closed-loop recycling management for strategic raw materials. The adoption of a “made in Germany” approach to urban mining, i.e. the recovery of raw materials from the recycling bin, could reverse this trend. The Council wants to take up this issue and flesh out approaches toward a sustainable raw materials policy. In addition to bulk raw materials, this should also include so-called strategic raw materials. Encouraging responsible structures in resource-producing countries is a task of essential importance, given the rise in demand for resources and the related burdens on the environment and climate in resource-rich countries.

Green economy, consumption and lifestyles

The issue of a green economy tops the German and international agendas and continues to gain significance. The German Council for Sustainable Development can build on its established role and play a more influential part in shaping the regulatory framework of a sustainable economy. In doing so, RNE strives to work on green economy issues in close conjunction with consumption and lifestyle issues. The questions to be asked relate to the future of economic management in general as well as to concrete sub-steps such as the future of product information and safeguarding the

credibility of sustainability seals. The essence of the Council's recommendations with regard to "Consumption and Sustainability" should be pursued further. The health and lifestyle aspects should be expanded upon as a strategic element of consumption policy. In this context, a focus should be placed, among other things, on communicating what sustainability is about. The "Sustainable Shopping Basket" project should be continued.

The topic of green economy should be addressed in regard to its basic principles and in a global perspective (Peer Review, UNEP/OECD). What are the principles of a green economy (principles of the Charter for Sustainable Economic Activity (G20), UNEP, OECD, EU)? What specific contributions does Germany make? How can the business and political communities be brought together – a must in order to outline the roadmaps for sustainable development? Do "green jobs" necessarily equate to "good jobs"?

Other issues of specific interest include:

- Proposals on measuring sustainability in national economic development
- Drafting a "German Sustainability Code"
- Recognising what companies achieve in terms of sustainable development

Sustainable city / lord mayors for sustainability

The RNE is in talks with lord mayors who are beacons of commitment to the idea of sustainability and have demonstrated this commitment in special ways in advancing sustainability in their cities. They collectively develop common sustainable urban development principles and formulate policy demands based on the needs of municipalities. The aim is to present a policy paper to the general public. How to further proceed in the future is a matter of discussion with the lord mayors. The Council acts as an initiator and facilitator in this process.

Fiscal sustainability strategies

Over the past few years, the fiscal dimension of sustainability has increasingly become a focal point of the discussion. This has been caused by highly volatile and risky investment decisions that have been made at increasingly shorter intervals and have destabilised the financial markets. This underlines that the flow of money has not been a means to an end in order to meet the funding needs of the producing economy. Rather, the flow of money has become an end in itself, developing a logic of its own that is both alien and counter-productive to long-term investment decisions. However, many sustainability solutions require exactly such long-term investment strategies.

Demographic development, health, services of general interest

The demographic trend in Germany will have a multitude of consequences for people's lives, which are not restricted to the pension problem or labour market developments alone. We can expect healthcare strategies, preventive strategies to protect public health, strategies to ensure the provision of public services as well as urban development strategies to also play a crucial role overall.

Whilst urban development issues, the pension debate, and the feared shortage of skilled labour have already been referenced in numerous contexts, a similar broad-ranging discussion on these other issues has yet to materialise. The German Council for Sustainable Development could trigger such a discussion by offering conceptual proposals. Such proposals would also be valuable input for the Zukunftsvision 2050 project (see above).

Energy, climate, water, mobility

The German Council for Sustainable Development has already issued statements on matters relating to climate and energy policy (most recently in November 2008). The current discussions on the future energy mix and international climate policy testify to the need for the Council to continue to devote its attention to climate and energy policy issues. Mobility policy poses similar challenges for the Council with regard to its interconnectedness with infrastructure, technology policy, urban development and lifestyles as well as the provision of public services in view of demographic change.

The RNE strives to highlight the significance of the other environmental factors as well and that of water in particular. Although efficient water use is just as important as the efficient use of energy, its significance is currently usually overlooked. In some world regions, water shortage and water abundance are influenced by human activity and significantly limit quality of life and development potential. It can already be witnessed today that national food supply strategies often lead to conflicts over water resources.

Land resources in Germany

Land use is a crosscutting issue. It affects the debates on demographic development, quantitative growth and lifestyles. In regard to land use, issues of regulatory law and sustainability (voluntariness, responsibility, government regulations) as well as vertical coordination in federalism also come into play. The German Council for Sustainable Development – through its work in the past and the “Goal-30-ha” recommendation – has played a central role in this discussion, which should continue to be replete with new initiatives. In addition to the land-use indicator, the indicator on the share of organically farmed land will also play a key role.

"Education for sustainable development", integration, cultural diversity

Universities and colleges face the challenge of empowering students, resolving the complex problems of modern society, and of making sustainability the guiding principle at all levels. To ensure that "sustainability and academia" are afforded more substance and recognition in the education sector as a whole, a dialogue could address the current state of affairs (German Rectors' Conference, UN Decade) in order to raise public awareness.

Civic involvement, culture of recognition

The RNE intends to support civic involvement and a culture of recognition. For instance, it would be interesting to explore how German foundations adopt and incorporate visions of a sustainable society into their own activities.

Parliament and sustainability

The German Council for Sustainable Development strives to work in close cooperation with the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Sustainable Development. To the extent that it is meaningful and necessary, this includes the preparation of contributions to "Rio plus 20" and sustainability audit methods and procedures.

Statements on the political processes of the Sustainability Strategy

The Council will be issuing statements on the following matters:

- On quality assurance instruments employed with regard to specific sustainability measures, such as the sustainability audit
- Political position papers on and contributions to the Federal Government's (planned) activities in the run-up to UN CSD2012 (2012 UN Conference)
- The recommendation to strengthen sustainability issues in international cooperation

Annual conferences & other communications activities

In terms of its communications work, the annual conferences should remain the Council's flagship in future. To extend its reach, it is conceivable that the RNE Newsletter and website be upgraded and a sustainability presence established in the social media.

Werkstatt N

Given the success of the Mission Sustainability communications project (2007–2009), a competition honouring civic involvement will be launched as part of the follow-up project, "Werkstatt N".