

Steering global sustainability away from a dead end

The RNE's recommendations to the German federal government for enhancing multilateralism for the 2030 Agenda

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1. Starting points: global political concerns and advice from the 2018 peer review of the German Sustainable Development Strategy

The involvement of the UN member states in reviewing the 2030 Agenda is greater than ever. Many countries present their national strategies and there is broad stakeholder involvement. The 2030 Agenda should nonetheless not be taken for granted. Its success is in jeopardy. This is one of the two starting points for our statement.

The 2030 Agenda is currently the only global political approach that offers an alternative to the nationalistic termination of cooperation. The universality of the 2030 Agenda is a major advancement. It calls on us to jointly assume responsibility. It focuses on international rules, reliability, peace and partnerships. But its political approach is too weak. The United Nations is not currently in a sufficiently strong condition either generally or with respect to the more narrow field of sustainability policy.

The German federal government, everyone who supports the 2030 Agenda in politics, civil society, business, science, the federal states and local authorities – we must all significantly improve the mutual benefit of multilateral cooperation within the UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), otherwise the 2030 Agenda will run out of steam in the face of procrastination and nationalistic egomania. It is at risk of suffering the same fate as we have painfully seen with many international processes related to sustainable development: a sensible resolution is recognised all round, only for many years to follow in which the silos representing the appropriate authorities, scientists and NGOs offer mutual assurance in hundreds of conferences of the importance of the issues being discussed and that dialogue must be maintained. But in reality, little to nothing actually happens. This idling becomes an industrious mode of operation until the government heads draw up a new fundamental resolution ten or 20 years down the line. With regard to the 2030 Agenda, this means that if nothing happens now, achievement of the SDGs will fade away into the distance. The HLPF may also suffer the same fate as the former UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UN CSD), which was characterised in the end by growing participant numbers at the meetings in New York, but also by practical irrelevance at the national level.

The political momentum of the SDGs will seemingly not be automatically maintained through to 2030. The pace of real change is increasing, while that of targeted transformation is slowing. For many people around the world, their relative living conditions are not improving even though extreme poverty is diminishing, and the prosperity gap is widening. The inequalities within and between countries are causing waves of migration and are presenting the policymakers with new challenges outside the scope of the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at an ever greater pace. In many countries, climate change is affecting food security more quickly than the measures implemented to combat it can take effect. Moreover, the political agenda is determined (not just for today) by new developments in business, technology and culture, for example in particular digitalisation and artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, finance flows and investment strategies. These represent new challenges with respect to achievement of the SDGs and comprise both setbacks and opportunities.

The second starting point is the peer review of the German Sustainable Development Strategy, which was presented in June 2018 by a group of international experts under the leadership of

Helen Clark.¹The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) is taking up one of this group's recommendations that Germany should continue to actively advocate at the United Nations level on behalf of realisation of the principles and goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The peer review's message is unequivocal: what Germany does for sustainable development is of global significance. Unfortunately, its doing nothing would be too.

The German Council for Sustainable Development believes it is crucial that the multilateral level of joint responsibility for the 2030 Agenda and mutual support of its implementation at the national level be strengthened. This is the responsibility not only of the federal government, but also of "all of us" within the meaning outlined above. We need to get past the usual mechanisms of indignantly remonstrating goal achievement and levying accusations against policymakers, corporations and other interested parties. This may be justified in individual instances, but there is more at stake here. Adjustments need to be made to the governance of multilateral sustainability policy.

More resolutely campaigning for multilateral solutions and linking them closely with what's done at the national level are the political order of the day. The time to take decisive action is now.

2. 2019 sustainability summit of the United Nations

When Germany accepted the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the federal government also approved the new duties of the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), which has been in existence since 2012. This forum monitors whether and how the Sustainable Development Goals are achieved. This was the task assigned to the annual HLPF under the auspices of the UN's ECOSOC by the United Nations. It is the central venue for monitoring and reviewing the transformation goals. But from the outset, it was considered only as an initial step, as it was based on a minimal consensus. No decision was taken in 2015 to add a transformational Council for Sustainable Development or regulatory instruments to the UN Charter. The HLPF was established as an institutional counter-concept to the former UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UN CSD), albeit only as a "forum" without more far-reaching resolution rights.

The United Nations established the format and function of the HLPF in two resolutions, in 2013 and 2016.² It is held for eight days every year, including a three-day ministerial segment, and for two days every four years at the level of heads of state and government. The HLPF's political cycle is influenced by the reports of the UN Secretary-General and the Statistical Commission and by the scientific four-year progress report (Global Sustainable Development Report, GSDR), the report of the Forum on Financing for Development, the regional forums, the thematic reviews and the voluntary national reviews (VNRs).

A review of the experience so far is scheduled for 2019. A "normal" HLPF is scheduled for 2019 as well as an HLPF as part of the UN General Assembly and at the level of the heads of state dedicated

¹"Change – Opportunity – Urgency: The Benefit of Acting Sustainably. The 2018 Peer Review on the German Sustainability Strategy; Report by the International Peer Group chaired by Helen Clark Berlin", May 2018, cf. https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/2018_Peer_Review_of_German_Sustainability_Strategy_BITV.pdf

²"Format and organizational aspects of the high-level political forum on sustainable development", Resolution 67/290 dated 9 July 2013 and "Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level", Resolution 70/299 dated 29 July 2016.

to reviewing what has stood the test of time and drawing conclusions regarding further development of the HLPF. We are calling it the 2019 sustainability summit. There are also plans to reform the ECOSOC by 2020. As far as we know, no decision has currently been reached as to whether reform resolutions can/are to be adopted in 2019 or whether this must wait until 2020 when the ECOSOC is to be reformed.

The UN system in general and the development system in particular are currently undergoing a reform process to bring them both into line with the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda.

3. High-Level Political Forum (HLPF): interim assessment with breadth and depth

Based on its prior history, the HLPF can be considered a success. It is increasingly becoming the institutional home of the SDGs. This was one of the hopes when it was established, but it was by no means presumed to be a sure-fire success. Back then, the G77, Russia and China vehemently opposed any commitments regarding the monitoring of measures and verification of the progress made at the national level in realising the SDGs, while the EU and Germany advocated such commitments.

The result of these complicated negotiations was the weakest of all possible options: simple reporting rather than verification and individual voluntary reporting rather than a common mechanism. Considering this start, the positive dynamic demonstrated by the HLPF reviews is a clear indication of success. The national reviews database comprised 150 submissions in July 2018.³ The session time allocated to presenting the reviews regularly proves to be insufficient. Some countries have already given three reviews, while Russia and the USA have yet to report at all. The acceptance of these voluntary reviews and the high number of registered ministers confirm the HLPF as the network hub for the representatives of governments and other interest groups. The approach of doggedly following up factual progress in work processes has stood the test of time. It must also be noted, however, that there is not always critical commentary from civil society on the voluntary national reviews presented (for example in the form of “shadow reporting”) or that this commentary is not always adequately considered.⁴

In spite of this generally positive interim assessment, the HLPF must now be made more effective internally and more attractive externally with renewed vigour in order to decisively advance the realisation of the 2030 Agenda and not suffer a loss of credibility. As far as possible, the federal government and all interested circles should play an active part in the interim assessment of the HLPF.

We hope to inspire the necessary debate with the following recommendations:

3.1. Reforming the institutions of the United Nations

Investment in the UN system and its reform is urgently needed in order to reduce poverty and inequality, promote climate and environmental protection and establish and maintain peace. Na-

³ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/vnrs/>

⁴ Jens Martens (2018): "Das Hochrangige Politische Forum für Nachhaltige Entwicklung 2018. Drittes globales Treffen zur Umsetzung der Agenda 2030 und der SDGs", GPF briefing 2018, https://www.2030agenda.de/sites/default/files/GPF-Briefing_0818_HLPF.pdf

tional action and bilateral or regional cooperation alone are not enough. There is a great deal of experience in the area of development and crisis policy regarding how to build up institutions and scopes of responsibility while taking into account and further developing the political culture of the country in question. This experience must also be applied to further developing the UN institutions in order to promote the 2030 Agenda. It is a mystery as to why this has barely been the case until now and why what has been done in this respect has barely been traceable. One (!) important aspect which is nevertheless overlooked is the disincentives within the United Nations' HR management that result in and shape structurally conservative conduct. As long as the reform debates continue to revolve exclusively around institutional responsibilities, budgets and decision-making structures – all of which are rightfully important issues – the UN organisations and the member states will have too much scope in their interactions to ultimately refuse change.

3.2. Initiating debate about the benchmark for success

The positive dynamic of the voluntary reviews alone is no benchmark for the success of the HLPF. The success of the HLPF should ultimately be gauged not on the number of reviews or participants, but solely on whether it clearly contributes to realisation of the 2030 Agenda. There are some doubts in this respect. The national reviews vary greatly in quality and are not as informative as the 2030 Agenda would like, in spite of there being guidelines, informal minimum requirements and learning groups. Interrelations are expounded only superficially, if at all, meaning no conclusions can be drawn even though everyone involved sees this as a shortcoming. The thematic reviews are still fragmented (their development is dominated by silo structures and specialist communities) and do not (yet) adequately take into account the factor of interrelated impact within the SDGs. The HLPF does not currently meet expectations regarding constructive feedback on the voluntary national reviews and regarding a critical review of the status quo of the SDGs. An overall view of realisation of the 2030 Agenda is lacking. The HLPF processes have not been incorporated into the other UN processes for realising the 2030 Agenda, as is necessary. The timing of work processes has not been scheduled such that discussion of the reviews can lead to new conclusions and to overcoming limited boundaries of responsibility. For example, in the review of SDG 6, the water experts tend to only interact with one another. The interdependencies of the SDGs are only touched upon as a plea for action, if at all, and they are not adequately turned into concrete work processes.

3.3. Getting the HLPF into the media

To date, there has been next to no media response in Germany to the HLPF negotiations. The HLPF is not newsworthy, at least not in the sense of the usual media habits. And seen from the opposite perspective, it even appears that those responsible within the HLPF wish to avoid a greater public response. The question is really therefore whether the HLPF is actually adequately leveraged and perceived as a learning moment and productive exchange. The crucial issues are

whether relevant conclusions are drawn at the respective national level from the experiences of others and from the exchange, and

whether non-governmental stakeholders can be enabled to take informed action.

This would also be the starting point for a motivational communication strategy.

3.4. Improvements within UN institutions as well

All 193 countries are members of the HLPF, while the ECOSOC, to which the HLPF reports, comprises just 54 member states with rotating composition. The opportunities for non-state actors to participate vary greatly and are on the whole inadequate. As all of the UN member states interact within and contribute to the HLPF, it has greater political legitimacy than the ECOSOC with its only 54 rotating members. This greater political legitimacy as a mere “forum” is therefore at least partly at odds with the ECOSOC’s right to pass resolutions and spend budgetary funds. This is not an option open to the HLPF. The idea of affording the HLPF and the ECOSOC the same institutional status suggests itself, but would appear not to be prudent in the coming years. An institutional intervention of this nature would require a change in the UN Charter. Considering the geopolitical situation, it can safely be assumed that the losses relating to this would outweigh the gains. This is therefore not an option. But even without a fundamental institutional reform, there is considerable scope for the necessary improvement of coordination between the ECOSOC and the HLPF.

3.5. Not shying away from fundamental questions

The HLPF operates in line with an unspoken basic assumption based on circumstances that the HLPF cannot address, let alone influence. The basic assumption: that major transformations can largely be achieved solely by setting targets and establishing data management for the public reporting of target attainment, and that reporting serves as the foundations of social discourse. This approach has its roots in corporate management. However, there, it is never the only instrument and is always accompanied by the very tough corporate governance instruments which operate in various ways with incentives and their opposite. This target management can only be a success in a heavily regulated environment because it then mobilises the necessary forces against the “business as usual” mainstream. Major enterprises in particular have been observed to guide their operations to sustainability via the setting of demanding and at first seemingly unattainable goals, insofar as these goals impact on the other areas of corporate management. This regulatory aspect is overlooked when SDG governance is essentially reduced to the self-efficacy of the goals. In fact, the government actually has a far more abundant set of rules and instruments that could be put to use for the benefit of the SDGs. These remains largely unused, however. Parliaments should lead the debate within society regarding how the SDGs can be translated into appropriate local goals and assigned instruments, and how goal conflicts can be resolved. And from a German perspective in particular, it would be expedient to use the success of the energy transition as an example of a major transformation in order to draw conclusions regarding other necessary transformations without shying away from the difficulties.

4. Our recommendations regarding multilateral cooperation

Germany should be even more invested in and committed to preparing for the 2019 sustainability summit and further developing the HLPF above and beyond the good level already achieved, as it did in the not too distant past for example with the support of the reform proposals of Klaus Töpfer and Juan Somavia.⁵ We welcome the federal government's commitment thus far, as expressed among other things through its active involvement of the German Sustainable Development Strategy. As a new member of the UN Security Council, Germany in particular must send out a clear political signal that promotes multilateral cooperation. Germany should also use its upcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the imminent EU agreement regarding refugees to this end.

Compared with the geopolitical discord regarding tariffs, atom bombs, armament and the causes of migration, politicians and the media do not rate the 2030 Agenda and in particular the UN's governance relating to the HLPF as very significant at all. We consider this to be a wholly incorrect assessment – quite the opposite should be true.

4.1. Introduction of a national HLPF conference

The Council recommends that the federal government prepare for and follow up the HLPF meetings in important cases together with national, state and non-state actors, for example when interim assessments are discussed and when Germany presents its own review. The content and the learning processes of such HLPF meetings should be reported both to the cabinet and to the non-state actors.

Greater intertwining of the HLPF and each specific national political cycle is recommended in order to boost the HLPF's effectiveness and relevance. National reviews tend to make a more effective contribution to sustainable development if they are based on an inclusive preparation process involving interested circles from all areas of politics, business and society. This would forge stronger links between the German Sustainable Development Strategy and the international process. The debates and learning processes within HLPF meetings at which a country does not itself give a review should likewise be reported both to the cabinet and to the parliament and non-state actors, if possible involving a listing of concrete recommendations, as is the case with the UN Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The German initiatives and projects that serve to support the HLPF should also be reported on.

The parliament should also be more heavily involved in preparing the review and in the follow-up reporting.

A number of countries have already begun to consider the HLPF at the national level on an annual basis. For example, the Netherlands introduced an annual parliamentary debate ahead of the HLPF with its first report in 2017. Togo, which has already submitted three reviews to the HLPF, has steadily expanded the process of reporting back at the national level over the years. Following a

⁵ Klaus Töpfer and Juan Somavia (2016): "The Future We Want - The United Nations We Need", report of the Independent Team of Advisors (ITA), 16 June 2016; <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/sites/www.un.org.ecosoc/files/files/en/qcpr/ita-findings-and-conclusions-16-jun-2016.pdf>

change in government, Spain has used its upcoming HLPF review to realign itself with the 2030 Agenda.

4.2. Introducing stakeholder-based peer reviews as an instrument and strengthening stakeholder rights

The reviews and debates at the annual HLPF are essential to perpetuating national and global implementation. They are an important part of mobilisation, mutual exchange and mutual learning. However, the handful of annual HLPF meeting days are not enough. They need to be supplemented by decentralised processes. Germany broke new ground here with the peer review process conducted for the third time in 2018 and should share this positive experience.

The federal government should promote the peer review instrument as seen in the German model in the multilateral arena. Peer reviews in this sense are stakeholder-based, open review procedures in which international experts from the fields of business, the environment, society and science are commissioned by the national government in question (mandate) and are supported by an independent national institution as the facilitator. It is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure that the review is of high quality, establish a good information basis and involve the national stakeholders.

The external view of international experts represents the multi-stakeholder approach. It offers expert discourse on the national sustainability strategy and makes suggestions for its continued development. It encourages self-reflection among the various players. By using stakeholder-based peer reviews, the existing minimum standards and guiding principles for the national reviews can be "fine-tuned". In this way, essentially meaningless reviews could be avoided and comparative analysis could be facilitated.⁶

The stakeholder groups' procedural rights should be expanded. The preparation of VNRs should draw on the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) method, which has been successfully used within the United Nations Human Rights Council since 2006.⁷ Here, contributions from non-state actors, national specialist institutes and other human rights UN bodies are given the same standing as the official national review, together serving as the basis for interactive discussion of the national re-

⁶ The following elements are meant: 1) incorporation of the 2030 Agenda into national frameworks and policies; 2) governance structures for implementation of the 2030 Agenda including a whole-of-society approach; 3) presentation of the baseline (gap analysis); 4) policy coherence; 5) leave-no-one-behind principle; 6) communication measures; 7) involvement of non-state actors in the determining of national priorities and follow-up and review processes; 8) 2030 Agenda implementation activities, in particular governance and institutional measures; 9) partnerships to realise the SDGs; 10) measurement and reporting.

Taken from Canadian Council for International Co-operation (ed.) (2018): "Progressing national SDGs implementation: An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum"; (joint report by Action for Sustainable Development, Bond, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, the International Forum of National NGO Platforms, Together 2030 and WWF-UK); downloadable from <https://action4sd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/ProgressingSDGImplementation.pdf>

⁷ Thanks go to Marianne Beisheim, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, for this piece of information. Cf. also Marianne Beisheim: Reviewing the Post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals and Partnerships, SWP-Research Paper 2015/RP 01, Januar 2015. See also: Marianne Beisheim: UN Reforms for the 2030 Agenda. Working Methods and Practices „fit for purpose"? SWP Research Paper, 2018, forthcoming.

view and usually resulting in comprehensive and very concrete recommendations for the government. The government must then comment on its rejection, acceptance and, if possible, realisation of these recommendations at the latest in its next review.

Reporting should be made more interactive in order to create space for discussions; one can't learn merely by listening, but rather by subsequently actively engaging with the subject. This could be achieved by means of regionally mixed parallel meetings. The Human Rights Council's UPR mentioned above allocates 3.5 hours of discussion time to each country reviewed. A group of countries selected by lot summarises the presented findings and recommendations, which are then discussed and accepted by the Human Rights Council together with non-state actors following the reviewed country's statement. Implementation of the recommendations adopted is then part of the subsequent review cycle.⁸

Participation opportunities for the major groups, non-governmental organisations and civil society should be increased. There is a conflict between the participation rights stipulated in Resolution 67/290 and the more restrictive rules of the ECOSOC, to which the HLPF is now administratively subordinated. To strengthen the original spirit of the HLPF, it would make sense to afford the HLPF its own administrative office and its own decision-making leeway.

4.3. Interdisciplinarity and coherence within UN procedures

As part of its commitment to properly preparing for the 2019 HLPF, the federal government must also urgently push for the improvement of the HLPF's internal work processes. These must be made more coherent. They must intensify the debate regarding the interdependency between the SDGs. The basis for and input into the discussions must be made available much earlier than is currently the case. This must be enshrined in the workflows. This requirement equally applies to the parallel (sub-)processes of the Forum on Financing for Development, the Paris Agreement and other multilateral agreements, including human rights agreements. These parallel processes should also be encouraged to play a part in realising the 2030 Agenda, rather than ignoring it. This includes Germany aligning its support of the UN organisations more strongly with the agreed goals, thereby contributing to the coherence of the UN system.

The reform steps of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres need the resolute support of the federal government.

The Council recommends that the federal government push for the thematic reviews to look systematically at the horizontal interdependency of the SDGs and their targets. They do not currently do this enough. Rather, they focus on individual SDGs, but overlook the interdependency of the goals and/or the effectiveness of cooperation. The review presented by Global Soil Week on the interdisciplinary topic of soils demonstrates how this can be done differently.⁹ To prove their efficiency, the thematic reviews should generally reflect the material and political interdependencies of the SDGs.

We recommend that the federal government push for the national reviews to also state what multilateral support they believe is necessary and desirable, and what connections they see with the

⁸ For details of the Universal Periodic Review in relation to the UN Human Rights Council, please see the following fact sheet: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/UPR/Pages/UPRMain.aspx>

⁹ <https://globalsoilweek.org>

thematic reviews, among other things The reviews could then help improve realisation of the 2030 Agenda and promote reform aspects of the UN development system.

4.4. Elevating multilateral cooperation

From a political perspective, it may appear expedient to invest development funds primarily in bilateral projects because the taxpayer can then be clearly shown what their money is being spent on. However, this is too short-sighted and is no longer an appropriate means in an age of SDGs.

We recommend that the federal government cease to prioritise bilateral projects and drastically increase its funding of multilateral projects. Major challenges such as combating tuberculosis, Aids and malaria and also the reduction of food losses and waste in accordance with SDG 12.3 call for the government to abandon the piecemeal process of bilateral agreements and to think bigger. What's more, the administrations of the recipient countries are already overextended in trying to meet the various donors' different technical requirements regarding application and reporting all at the same time. In view of the overarching challenges, it would be much wiser to consolidate co-operation.

Germany should invite the UN Secretary-General to give a keynote speech in the German Bundestag.

Many of the goals of the 2030 Agenda call for political groundwork to be laid in the partner countries. This means instruments must be used that allow for appropriate political dialogue with the partner countries, as should financial instruments that then build on this. This requires fundamental changes to be made to global structures and underlying conditions, rules and standards as well as the policies of the developed countries. In relation to multilateral development institutions, this means the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) should strengthen its role in the area of global commons and move away from almost exclusively country-based funding, and the income of the World Bank should henceforth also be used for the realisation of global commons. In the case of, for example, climate protection, the countries' national climate programmes should be built upon. These programmes could be given a results-oriented structure.

4.5. Mobilisation of domestic funds in developing countries

The mobilisation of the developing countries' domestic funds is key to financing the SDGs. This calls for the development of the countries' own taxation systems and the combating and prevention of corruption, for example with initiatives such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. At the same time, the profit shifting of transnational companies must be combated and tax payment transparency must be improved. The automatic exchange of financial data between countries' taxation authorities should also include the developing countries in order to prevent tax evasion. After all, it must be ensured that the developing countries do not have funds withdrawn from them that they urgently need in order to realise the Sustainable Development Goals.

4.6. Enhancing the HLPF through impact leadership initiatives

We recommend that the federal government factually enhance the standing of the HLPF, perhaps together with other like-minded governments, without waiting for the reform process. It could

achieve this by using the HLPF as a platform for announcing its own new initiatives. This is necessary in order to accelerate realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

Leadership partnerships could be initiated between countries regarding specific SDGs that are of interest both in the north and the south. For example, “coalitions of the fastest” could be used to achieve initially five to ten of the 169 targets of the 2030 Agenda long before 2030. This could run as an “impact 2026 leadership initiative”.

The federal government could strategically enhance and broaden the measures running within its initial approaches. In our eyes, these include the promotion of stakeholder processes within the 2030 Agenda Transformation Fund¹⁰ set up by Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and SDG cooperation with countries such as Mexico, Vietnam, Cameroon and Namibia. The relevant contacts with the Eastern Partnership and with the countries of south-eastern Europe should also be used.

In addition, capital flight and tax evasion should continue to be combated and there should be endeavours to establish budget financing and programme-based financing. This approach likewise provides new opportunities for the mainstreaming of sustainable financing that pair wonderfully with the urgent need to bring the entire finance sector into line with the SDGs.

The HLPF should be made the “political home” of the 2030 Agenda, with all the consequences and potential for conflict that would be inherent to this “home”. In view of the geopolitical tests of resilience, the exchange of knowledge among those responsible is of value in itself. The HLPF is indispensable here. However, its function must be expanded in order for it not to fade away entirely.

4.7. The “makers panel” – the momentum of managing change, 2018–2020

Even if there were to be a high standard of administrative and diplomatic preparation for the 2019 HLPF, we do not consider this alone to be enough. A political wake-up call is required in order to give the 2030 Agenda new momentum or even just maintain its current momentum. To do so, we propose that the federal government encourage the United Nations to make use of an innovative “makers panel”. We expect two things of such a panel:

It should highlight the fact that the 2030 goals make clear transformations and bold measures urgently necessary right now (!).

It should embolden the stakeholders by raising awareness of the many good local approaches and the commitment of people who are already (!) active as change makers.

Both of these expectations are dependent on one another and require the makers panel to be put together credibly and creatively. We recommend that the federal government fully support the United Nations in this process. Preliminary considerations at the work level should be built upon. The panel should clearly set itself apart from the usual formats of the commissions and panels at the UN level in which experts or leading political figures are brought together. Such panels do have their legitimacy, but the issue is different here. The panel should be characterised by

¹⁰ German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) (2018): The 2030 Agenda Transformation Fund; <https://www.2030transformationfund.com>

authentically embodying support and expertise on behalf of implementation of the 2030 Agenda;

the panellists currently (!) being of an age which means they can and must realise the SDGs over the course of their working lives or political commitments up to 2030. They are active in stakeholder forums and projects. They stand for a political culture that communicates and implements the SDGs at grassroots level;

featuring a handful of individuals with leadership experience who can provide political feedback and embedding, much like Helen Clark did with the peer review of the German Sustainable Development Strategy in 2018;

its members primarily being appointed from the countries that generated especially positive feedback with their HLPF presentations in 2016, 2017 and 2018;

having a balanced composition in terms of gender and global regions and featuring representatives of the major groups.

It is the panel's responsibility

to make suggestions regarding the political momentum of the 2030 Agenda and to contribute to the interim assessment of the HLPF;

to determine how the HLPF's political cycle can best be picked up on and stimulated by the national political cycles;

to outline the strengths of the realisation of the 2030 Agenda from the makers' perspective and to draw conclusions regarding the stakeholders' commitment and guaranteeing an informed debate, and how the fast pace of change in business and society can be built upon.

We encourage the federal government to make the funds needed for the panel available quickly in order that the UNSG can put the panel to use in autumn 2018.

We assume that turning the HLPF into a global sustainability council is currently not on the UN's agenda. Nonetheless, we recommend that this option not be completely abandoned. The creation of something like a Council for Sustainable Development as discussed at the sustainable development conference in Rio de Janeiro in 2012 remains important.

Questions about intensifying governance of the 2030 Agenda will be increasingly asked in a few years' time when it becomes apparent that a) reporting alone is not enough to maintain the momentum of the 2030 Agenda and b) the gap between actual developments and the SDGs is getting wider rather than diminishing, which the governments of the UN member states increasingly confirm. All considerations of HLPF reform should bear in mind the reform of the ECOSOC which is due in 2020.

4.8. The 2030 Agenda as a European project that has an impact all the way to Africa

We recommend that the federal government make the 2030 Agenda a European project. It should work towards the EU meeting the 2030 Agenda requirements early in Europe. It should place this at the heart of Germany's upcoming Presidency of the Council of the European Union. As a prereq-

quisite for a European 2030 Agenda project, the European Commission should be called upon to develop a European sustainable development strategy that interrelates its internal measures with those relating to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda by the EU's eastern and south-eastern partners and by the countries of North Africa.

The Council recommends that the federal government advocate for the European Commission and the member states of the European Union to adopt high EU standards for HLPF reviews which build on the quality criteria outlined above. The EU's reporting at the 2019 HLPF provides an opportunity for it to embrace its joint responsibility for realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

Realisation of the pledge to assign at least 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product to official development assistance (ODA) is necessary in order for the developed countries to maintain their credibility, even though remittances and market funds are significant in addition to ODA.

Europe must form a strategic axis together with Africa for realising the 2030 Agenda.

We suggest that the federal government promote within the EU the creation of a free trade zone in Africa as a contribution to the 2030 Agenda. The African Union is seeking to establish free trade between 53 African countries, explicitly ascribing this to the goal of achieving the 2030 Agenda (and the African Union's 2063 Agenda) and boosting domestic demand within Africa. Both of these are important goals for Europe too. An African free trade zone which is extensively supported by Europe is of the utmost importance in terms of foreign policy and would demonstrate Europe's independent global policy role in a very appropriate place.

The strengthening of domestic demand within developing economies becomes a core strategic tenet. Europe should support the African countries' development goals with its own foreign trade measures in order to transfer value added to Africa, promote private direct investment and make the African domestic market attractive for institutional investors in accordance with sustainability principles. The negotiations regarding a successor to the Cotonou Agreement are a great opportunity to support Africa's free trade initiative¹¹ and reach agreement on an approach to the 2030 Agenda which is based on partnership. Reference is made here to the RNE's statement regarding a new partnership with Africa and the opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee regarding a post-Cotonou agreement.¹² Here, too, we support the introduction of human rights due diligence obligations.

Even without the European political framing, we recommend that the federal government immediately welcome the African Union's intentions from a foreign policy and development policy perspective, as well as in terms of economic, social and environmental policy, and also organise assistance.

¹¹ Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA); cf. <https://au.int/en/ti/cfta/about>

¹² German Council for Sustainable Development (2017): "For a comprehensive G20 partnership with Africa to implement the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", cf. https://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/RNE_Recommendations_comprehensive_G20_partnership_with-Africa_to_implement_the_UN_2030_Agenda.pdf

European Economic and Social Committee (2017): "A Renewed Partnership with the African, Caribbean and Pacific Countries", cf. [REX/485 - EESC-2017-00788-00-00-AC-TRA](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/press-communications/press-communications-2017/17-0004)

4.9. The role of science-based intervention

The UN Secretary-General's SDG progress report and the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) to be produced by a group of scientists should serve as an objective basis for the political deliberations of the 2019 HLPF. The authors of the GSDR are currently calling on the wider scientific community to submit contributions.

We support the federal government's ongoing endeavours to provide scientific input for the GSDR from within Germany. We expect the new Science Platform Sustainability 2030 to likewise make such contributions and coordinate any results received from third parties.

The "interface" between politics and science is very interesting for many countries and they often ask in great detail how this is specifically handled in Germany. As such, it makes sense for this to be capitalised upon in an exemplary and understandable way. With regard to the GSDR, too, the scientific integration of new policy and advisory forms into the governance of sustainable development strategies would be of interest, in particular as demonstrated by the instrument of the stakeholder-based peer review, the 2030 Agenda Transformation Fund, the triple approach of the German Sustainable Development Strategy and the operationalisation of "distance to target".¹³

¹³ All Internet page views correct as at 10 August 2018.