



ESDN CONFERENCE 2016

CONFERENCE REPORT

Vertical integration in the
implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SD:
Addressing the role of sub-national and
local levels

Eric Mulholland

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Opening and Orientation Session	4
Session 1: Current status of 2030 Agenda and SDG activities at the UN level.....	5
Session 2: National activities for implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs – update, future plans and vertical integration efforts	7
Session 3: Role and activities of the sub-national levels in the 2030 Agenda and SDGs implementation	13
Session 4: Vertical integration and cooperation between different political levels	23
Session 5: Fostering vertical integration in the 2030 Agenda/SDGs implementation in different contexts	25
Conference Closure and Next Steps.....	27

AUTHOR: ERIC MULHOLLAND, ESDN OFFICE

CONTACT: ESDN OFFICE

Institute for Managing Sustainability

Vienna University of Economics and Business

Welthandelsplatz 1, A-1020 Vienna, Austria

esdn-office@sd-network.eu

+43-1-31336-4807

Introduction

This ESDN Conference Report provides information on the inputs, discussions and outcomes of the **ESDN Annual Conference 2016**, entitled “**Vertical integration in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SD**”, which took place in **Bern, Switzerland** on **10-11 November 2016** in cooperation with the Federal Office for Spatial Development (ARE).

In the context of the integration and adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the ESDN Annual Conference 2016 addressed the **role of the sub-national and local level in the integration of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 SDGs**. The conference was a 1.5-day event, and brought together policy-makers and experts from different stakeholder groups from all over Europe and beyond. A total of 82 participants from 21 countries took part in the conference. The conference provided a good opportunity to take stock of the current 2030 Agenda and SDG implementation experiences, in general, within the different European countries, as well as to discuss the role of, and activities at, the sub-national and local level. The conference was comprised of five sessions:

- Session 1: Current status of 2030 Agenda and SDGs activities at the UN;
- Session 2: National activities for implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs – update, future plans and vertical integration efforts;
- Session 3: Role and activities of the sub-national levels in the 2030 Agenda and SDGs implementation;
- Session 4: Vertical integration and cooperation between different political levels;
- Session 5: Recommendations for fostering vertical integration in the 2030 Agenda/SDGs implementation in different contexts.

To access the full documentation of the ESDN Conference 2016 please go to the [ESDN Website](#), where the following documents are available for download: (i) conference programme; (ii) conference discussion paper; (iii) PowerPoint slides of all keynote and other presentations; (v) conference report; (vi) participant list, and (vii) a photo documentation.



Opening and Orientation Session

The *first conference day* was kicked off by an opening and orientation session included several welcome addresses and a brief introduction to the topic of the conference: vertical integration at the sub-national and local level.

DANIEL DUBAS, (*Head of the Sustainable Development Section, Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE, Switzerland*) welcomed the participants to the ESDN Annual Conference 2016. Daniel began his speech by sharing how Switzerland has been involved in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from the very beginning, mentioning Switzerland's role in negotiating the 2030 Agenda. Daniel stated that not only is the sub-national level very crucial to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, but also key in being able to reach the targets set out within the Agenda. This notion is particularly important for Switzerland, because many of the decisions regarding the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are being made at the sub-national level. Since many of the decisions regarding the 2030 Agenda are being made at this level, the implementation of the Agenda and the SDGs is also happening there.

ELISABETH FREYTAG-RIGLER & WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG, (*ESDN Co-chairs, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Austria*) took to the stage next, welcoming participants to the Annual Conference on behalf of the ESDN Steering Group. Elisabeth began by speaking about the importance of vertical policy integration between all levels. Elisabeth quickly transitioned into discussing the upcoming Communication by the European Commission on the 2030 Agenda, because it will involve the Director Generals within the process of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Up until now, the EU has not proposed its own Sustainable Development Strategy following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The forthcoming Commission Communication, therefore, may shed some light on how the EU is going to tackle the Agenda and its implementation. However, many countries would like this to become a reality, in order to streamline goals and targets between the Member States. Elisabeth encouraged countries and their representatives to talk to their respective prime minister and convince them to tackle the SDGs at many levels: EU, national, and sub-national.

Wolfram Tertschnig spoke next and thanked Daniel for hosting the Conference, and mentioned that the ESDN is an important informal exchange network that not only includes EU Member States, but other European countries as well. The ESDN is genuinely interested in European approaches and mechanisms that support sustainable development policy-making. Wolfram reintroduced the topic of the forthcoming Communication by stating that he thought the European Commission may try for governance architecture for the coordination and implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and posed the question: How is this being coordinated between the National and EU level?

Wolfram then transitioned back to discussing the ESDN and reinforcing the network's purpose in fostering a mutual learning experience. Wolfram pointed out that the ESDN aims to have a more practical approach on debating and dealing with the issue of vertical integration. This approach would need to include the interlinkages within vertical integration between the different levels. Wolfram also briefly mentioned the European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW), because it also focuses on the SDGs and the role that local governments have in reaching out to people and developing events that raise the awareness of the SDGs. A mutual learning atmosphere is what can be offered by the ESDW, and the ESDN has also profited from that. Wolfram then highlighted the presidential election results in the United States, as that might have an impact on the EU and on the 2030 Agenda.

Session 1: Current status of 2030 Agenda and SDG activities at the UN level

Session 1 had one keynote speaker from the UN, who discussed about the High Level Political Forum 2016 and the stakeholders who were involved and how this relates to the UN as a whole.

THOMAS GASS, (*Assistant Secretary-General for Policy Coordination and Inter-Agency Affairs, UNDESA*), began his speech by saying how proud he is of what has been achieved over the last 8 years, mentioning that Australia had recently ratified the Paris Agreement, and that in July 2016 the UN held the HLPF on SD. The HLPF 2016 was a sort of a dashboard that accumulated knowledge, which should help everyone see if the world is heading in the right direction regarding the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Thomas mentioned what he found to be most inspiring about the HLPF was there were so many different stakeholders, and they took over the UN during this time. The 2030 Agenda is really their Agenda, and the UN was merely the convening space for it all to take place. The 2030 Agenda was born from these stakeholders, and needs to be mobilized and empowered, which may explain the comprehensiveness of the SDGs. Because the 2030 Agenda is so unique, it cannot be managed as a normal agenda would be managed: it demands a change of mind of stakeholders.

Thomas mentioned the need to break down silos that stop people and organizations from working across different sectors. Horizontal, as well as vertical, silos need to be broken down. There is a need to look more closely at the vertical integration of policy, the economy, the environment, etc. The challenges of the SDGs can hold everyone back and do not necessarily stop at country borders. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs need to be integrated at all levels, and focus on not leaving anyone behind, on peace and justice, and good governance as being the important cornerstones. If people are being left behind, then the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are not being implemented in a sustainable manner.

Thomas stated that at the UN level, the 2030 Agenda is bringing the entire organization together. Those working there are compelled to work with different offices within the UN. SDG advocates have also made a great outreach. The UN has also supported partnerships through the Global Compacts Platform for reaching the SDGs.

Thomas transitioned from discussing about the UN, and its relation to the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, to discussing what is happening at the regional level. The Regional Forums have set up forums on sustainability, which serves as a platform for countries to come together to determine what happens in their specific region. Thomas reiterated that because the 17 SDGs are interrelated, policies would need to take advantage of the synergies between the SDGs to efficiently address them. The success of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda will depend on National Governments. However, there needs to be a shift of accountability, by which Thomas meant a type of social contract between the State and its citizens, instead of an accountability that was typically seen with the MDGs, which was an accountability of the South to the North.

Thomas reinforced the notion that action at the regional level is critical for the overall success of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The EU is also an owner of the SDGs and can be a driving force for its members. Countries can bring new energy into the EU and show the world what can be done in implementation, and thereby serve as a beacon for the rest of the world. The EU can create such determination in achieving the SDGs. The EU can also support a framework for its Member States. Overall, the world is looking to the EU for leadership, because it can stimulate a new reflection on what it means to leave no one behind. The EU can champion stakeholder involvement in all decision-making processes, and the outcomes can be featured in future HLPFs alongside VNRs. People need to know that the SDGs are not just 17 abstract goals, but are

rather made up of 169 indicators that have very real impacts. The achievement of the SDGs is more than a contract, but a promise for the future.

Q&A

Thomas Gass' presentation was followed by a **Q&A session**, in which participants asked a myriad of questions. One participant asked, "The SDGs and the 2030 Agenda is a kind of multilevel policy. What is the debate like at the UN considering UN legitimacy? In how far is the UN addressing the habit of the SDGs, because a lot of SDG implementation is missing due to the weakness of the Agenda?"

Thomas' answer focused on the Agenda as being a strong framework, into which a lot of time was invested in its preparation, while, at the same time, acknowledging that the Agenda itself is being tested. It was known beforehand that it would not be a walk in the park, but the Agenda should, nevertheless, serve as a beacon. There is a strong desire for tackling climate change. We are tackling migration, which is also in the 2030 Agenda. Thomas reiterated the critical part that Member States play in reaching the SDGs and upholding the 2030 Agenda, because implementation of the Agenda rests within each country. Each country, therefore, must make policies that consider the Agenda. Thomas also mentioned the angle from which one sees the Agenda is important: The environmental side is happy, because of how extensive the Agenda is, but others think it is a distraction from other areas, such as urbanism.

There was another question and comment for Thomas about what policymakers can do to make connections to the SDGs, because there is political traction now. It is extremely meaningful that 193 leaders promised to the world that they would leave no one behind, starting with those who are most disadvantaged, because there is always tension between different interests. In addressing this question and comment, the participant asked, "Are we fulfilling policy coherence? Are we helping to shift 'upward outward' accountability to 'downward inward' accountability? That would be my challenge to us all."

Another comment/question was made that is closely related to the comment above about policy coherence. "Is the UN system ready to lead by example in the field in terms of the indicator systems? It seems that the overall vision was lost in the process of making the indicators."

Thomas answered this last question by stating that the UN was not perfect, and that indicators in different fields were needed. The divisions within the UN were created as silos, and, because of that, will take time to get out of that silo-system. They are looking at reengineering in New York, and are also looking for changes in approach and mind-set.

Thomas' answer was that there is a need to reflect on what the peer reviews are trying to do. If we use the peer reviews to put pressure on countries, then it would take away their 'safe spaces', in which they would be able to honestly share their progress. It is unrealistic to compare countries. However, at the regional level, this may be possible, because of the culture of information sharing.

Thomas then addressed the question about comparability, stating that they are building this data cube of 230 indicators with 193 countries over 15 years. It will be a challenge to fill in each data cell. Thomas believes that the SDSS index has advantages and there have been rankings. However, there are still disadvantages present, such as analyses being done that are based on reduced and incomplete sets of indicators, which simplifies the picture. One also disincentivizes countries to build up their data collection mechanisms and they can become complacent. The 2030 Agenda is a declaration of co-dependence. Externalities are internalized elsewhere, and, because of that, rankings do not show an accurate picture. SDGs are not only about what happens within individual countries, but what happens between them as well.

ANNIKA LINDBLOM (*Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, Finland*) was asked to say a few words about the cooperation between Colombia and Finland, because it is a real world example of two countries working together. Annika shared that Finland's partnership with Colombia is more about sharing experiences and peer learning. The partnership is planned to continue, and there are even some countries within Europe that have contacted Finland. Annika stated that in terms of accountability, it is more the national states and their citizens that are important, but the role and responsibilities between developed and developing countries should not be forgotten. Annika then asked Thomas how he sees accountability.

Thomas agreed with Annika about the importance of seeing accountability with the states, but also added local governments as sharing a portion of the accountability. Thomas mentioned that the burden of action is by those who pollute more and have the power and/or finances to make changes. This is a core part of the 2030 Agenda.

Thomas continued and addressed the comment about the status of the indicators, stating that the indicators were not formally adopted. This raises the question, "are the indicators legally binding?" Thomas cautioned the participants in this area about making the indicators legally binding, because sometimes one cannot make it legally binding and still hope to have countries agree and sign it. There could be something done that is more formal, but each time one does this, one would run the risk of someone vetoing it. Softer legal language, therefore, helps in getting more actors to sign.

The moderator, Peter Woodward, asked how the recent voting events in the UK (Brexit) and the USA (Trump winning the presidential election) would affect the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs?

Thomas answered that former President Bush was critical of the UN. Therefore, the UN is bracing for something similar with President-elect Trump. It is important for this community to hold together and keep going forward no matter what happens. There have been countries in the past that have had problems with the conventions. At the same time, however, one must not forget there are 193 countries. If some countries cannot overcome challenges, then there are other countries that can fill in the gaps.

Session 2: National activities for implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs – update, future plans and vertical integration efforts

Session 2 began to look at vertical integration beginning at the regional level down to the national and sub-national level. Session 2 was dedicated to determining what is happening regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at all of these levels. To that effect, there was one presenting speaker, **MONIKA LINN** (*Principal Adviser & Chief, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)*), who discussed the regional level. Monika's presentation was followed by **SIX PRESENTATIONS ABOUT THE NATIONAL AND SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL**, of which five were from countries that had participated in the High Level Political Forum 2016 (Finland, France, Germany, Montenegro and Switzerland). The last presentation was given by The Netherlands, because they will be presenting at the HLPF 2017. The juxtaposition between countries that have presented at the first HLPF since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and a country that is now preparing for the second HLPF served as a stark contrast, which helped to foster the experience sharing and learning process.

MONIKA LINN*¹ began her presentation by reinforcing the notion that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs needs to happen at all levels. The UN, therefore, wants to help and connect all levels. Monika's unit is responsible for the Europe region and is trying to align their activities with the activities of the states present in the region. Monika mentioned that it had been a year since they conducted a survey, with which they wanted to discover what their member states had done. They received feedback from 46 of the 50 states. The survey yielded the results that many of the states wanted to build on existing policy frameworks, such as national sustainable development strategies, and also review these strategies and policies in light of the SDGs. The survey also revealed that more inter-ministerial coordination structures and 'whole-of-government' approaches would be necessary. States were able to define their national priorities regarding the SDGs and adapt them to their national and local realities. States realise they need to do more to raise awareness and advocate for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The survey results also highlighted the keen need to involve stakeholders at all levels. Many states within this region expect advice from the UN in specific areas, such as policy recommendations, legal instruments, etc., because the UN sets the standards in so many ways.

Monika transitioned into discussing the challenges that surround data collection and statistical analysis for the countries in the region. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were challenging, and the SDGs and the Agenda 2030 are even more challenging in terms of data collection and analysis. Monika mentioned that an expert group would be meeting in Geneva a week after the ESDN Annual Conference. Monika also mentioned that the Conference of European Statisticians (CES) would be preparing a roadmap on statistics for the SDGs, which they expect to receive approval for in June 2017. The areas that the roadmap will be addressing are: (1) assessing the readiness of countries to report on SDG indicators; (2) identifying regional indicators; (3) providing guidance on national and subnational indicators; (4) clarifying the setup of reporting on SDGs; (5) building statistical capacities; and (6) communicating and disseminating SDG statistics.

Monika mentioned that the problem of 'silo thinking' was also present at the regional level, and that cooperation between the UN entities functioning in a certain region is also challenging. She stressed the fact that there needs to be coordination from above that makes its way down to the national level. Different UN bodies should not be asked about issues and strategies separately, but should be asked in conjunction and in cooperation with one another. Working in a more linked way is needed at the regional level.

Monika then touched upon a profound notion about the MDGs not having been appropriate for certain countries, because countries had to establish their own indicators, which raised issues when it came to comparing different countries within a region. Monika then stated it is sometimes difficult for countries to remain focused on the bigger picture when they are pursuing their own goals.

Monika revealed that the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, which will be held in Geneva on 25 April 2017, will hopefully become the platform for sharing experiences and coordination. The member states have agreed on having cross-sectoral policy debates in the region, focusing on peer learning in the region. The regionalization and nationalization of the SDGs will be focused on, and should include, the participation of stakeholders and civil society. In order to focus on the sub-regional level, data and monitoring will need to be addressed. In order to do this, it will be necessary to bring together policymakers and statisticians, in order to make the monitoring process as easy and efficient as possible at the sub-regional level.

Monika shared in her presentation that her UN Europe Region will be presenting at the HLPF. A total of 12 out of the 30 countries that will be presenting at the HLPF 2017 are from the Europe Region. Monika mentioned that her institution was in touch with NGOs, which are helping to bring civil society together, as it is important to reach out to CSOs. The UNECE wants to become the convenor of actors.

¹ For speakers with an asterisk (*), their PowerPoint presentations can be downloaded from the [ESDN website](#).

Q&A

After Monika presented, the floor was opened for a short **Q&A Session**. One participant asked if an SDG peer review could be done, and, if so, how it would be integrated into the existing mechanism using the same resources. Could we build a more comprehensive mechanism for comparison?

Monika answered that this type of review process would most likely take a lot of resources, in terms of financial and human resources, and would probably need to be built up over time, because we would have to learn from each of the processes. There is a need to have a continuous process, involving as many stakeholders as possible, that meets more than once a year, in order to learn and share from one another.

Monika transitioned to discussing about the US and Western Europe, focusing on the people there and how they feel marginalized and very angry. Monika stressed the need to start communicating in the language of the Agenda and not leave anyone behind, because that is not what is happening currently. The Agenda could be used as a way in which to address peoples' anger. Ordinary people need to be able to understand the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, meaning we need to communicate it in such a way that they can understand it.

One participant commented that 'Partners for Review' has started in Germany for sharing experiences at the HLPF.

Another participant question addressed how the UNECE deals with the relationship and the synergies between the UNECE and the EU, because half of the UNECE is part of the EU.

Monika stated that if they were to have peer learning, it would have to be with countries from the entire Region, even if the EU may have its own platforms in Brussels. The EU has already agreed to this forum design.

There was another question that was centred around the need for an exchange on governance, focusing on how it is institutionally set into motion.

Monika addressed the governance aspect, stating that it is a crosscutting issue and plays a role in everything: environmental issues will involve governance issues by default.

HLPF 2016 EXPERIENCE SHARING

VANESSA LORIOUX, (*Ministry for Ecology, Energy and the Sea, **France***) presented on France's experiences at the HLPF 2016. Vanessa mentioned that the French National Action Plan, which will be dictated by the government, should create a debate with stakeholders. In order to integrate more stakeholders, and circumvent the 'silo thinking', new frameworks need to be developed that take these aspects into account. It becomes paramount to promote these types of crosscutting approaches. Vanessa stated that France is not starting from scratch in these respects. More stakeholders need to be identified, involved, and integrated in the 2030 Agenda. Vanessa also mentioned there are local approaches in place that are obligatory, such as sustainability reports.

Vanessa then discussed France's Action Plan on the SDGs, stating that they have three main parts. Part one of the Action Plan focuses on organizing the government contribution to the SDGs through open governance, which consists of three topics: (1) assessing public policies, in which a participative review of public policies

will take place; (2) the setting in motion of action plans that focus on the interrelationships between government and stakeholders, in order to realize the SDGs, which would involve co-building and co-steering by the different stakeholders; and (3) organizing the way in which reporting is done, such as progress reports to the Parliament, and information is shared, such as indicators.

The second part of France's Action Plan is about information. They want to raise the awareness and understanding of all stakeholders. Pedagogy is important: simplified speech to communicate to civil society is important. Vanessa stated that the ministry wants to make incentives and encourage a relationship between civil society and the SDGs.

The third part of the Plan focuses on drafting an SDG platform for local authorities to enable the sharing of ideas and visions, as well as to stimulate local SDGs.

Vanessa also discussed how France prepared for the HLPF 2016, mentioning there was a broad consultation workshop that gathered around 180 representatives from a wide variety of French National Councils in the wake of the European Sustainable Development Week (ESDW). She also stated that there needs to be a shift in focus to the SDGs, in general, such as with the ESDW, which focuses exclusively on events that relate to the 17 SDGs all across Europe from May 30th to June 5th of every year.

ANNIKA LINDBLOM (*Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, Finland*) began her presentation about Finland's experience at the HLPF 2016 by sharing that the preparation for the HLPF was an important process for Finland in designing their National Sustainable Development Strategy.

Annika quickly transitioned to discussing what Finland has done since they presented at the HLPF 2016. Finland has had multiple political and stakeholder meetings, meetings with parliamentarians from all parties, even the opposition parties, because the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs should be a long-term goal that transcends political parties. Annika also shared that Finland will update its indicators for sustainable development by the end of May 2017.

Annika shared that Finland has conducted two road show events, in order to reach out and show how everyone in Finland can participate and relate to the SDGs. There has also been a workshop that was organized, in which it was discussed how to define major actions for government to take, in order to leapfrog in the implementation area of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Finland wants to become a leader, and because of this desire, Finland wanted to get civil society and stakeholders' opinions.

Annika shared with the conference that Finland would be discussing, in Parliament, the third draft of their NSDS on November 24, 2016.

Lastly, Annika stressed that the SDGs and the Agenda 2030 were social contracts between countries, meaning countries have a responsibility to their citizens to follow through and involve them in the SDGs. Finland is already doing this, and the implementation plan will use and interpret the SDGs and their indicators with stakeholders. This has been the message of the road shows: the SDGs can be tackled by anyone, and it is not just some decision that was made in New York and implemented in Finland. It is much more and very different from that. Anyone can do it, and that is the message that Finland wanted to convey.

JÖRG MAYER-RIES, (*Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany*) focused on vertical integration during his presentation, and reiterated that the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda are a new framework, but that we do not need to start from scratch. Jörg noted that we have an

increasing dependency on one another, but, at the same time, an increasing fragmentation: human rights link us all up, but we have fragmentation. Jörg then asked the question: “How do we deal with that at various levels?”

Jörg mentioned that in order to address these issues, there needs to be planetary boundaries of peace and the ideal of prosperity. The idea of participation needs to be conveyed from the local level to the UN level. Cities, the value chain, and the partnership idea also need to be taken into account. Dealing with this by vertical integration is necessary. Jörg postulated that we may need to turn back to what we did during the implementation process. The challenges are really the same as we have been dealing with over the last few months, whereby he gave COP22 as an example. Jörg underlined the problems that need to be dealt with in terms of the environment and sustainable consumption.

Jörg then narrowed his presentation to Germany and what they are currently doing. Germany is finalizing their NSDS, where one of the major challenges they would like to deal with is vertical integration. The NSDS should not deal only with economics, but also with German foreign policy, national policies, and, more importantly, how Germany is influencing other countries.

Jörg mentioned that Germany has had many strategies since 2002 at the local and sub-national level. However, Germany needs to translate the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda to the sub-national level. Germany expects the sub-national level to honour and implement the strategy. To ensure that that occurs, Jörg mentioned that many meetings have taken place. Jörg also stated that Germany has developed a platform of ministries for the sustainable development of cities. Germany is also cooperating with ICLEI and wants to develop a platform, like in France, to discuss with local authorities.

ALESSANDRO GALLI*, (*Ministry for Sustainable Development and Tourism, Montenegro*) began his presentation by stating that the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of Montenegro revolves around the SDGs, which was the result of a cross-ministerial effort. The NSSD uses 6 thematic topics as indicators, and 36 organizations were consulted with to produce the statistics. The Ministry wanted to better understand the monitoring capacity of Montenegro regarding the SDGs, and determine how they will evolve until 2018. 26 of the 36 organizations have information that relates to the SDGs, and, by 2018, they will be able to track 41% of the SDG indicators. Alessandro mentioned that it is hoped that this coverage could reach 75% by 2024. For Montenegro, 20 indicators are not relevant.

The main goals of the NSSD in relation to the SDGs was: (1) to ensure that the SDG indicators are transferred into the national policy context of the NSSD, thus allowing the reflection of the global Agenda 2030 in national development plans, strategies and policies; (2) ensure issues of priority-relevance for Montenegro that are not tracked by the SDGs are included and monitored in the NSSD through National Indicators; and (3) Ensure easy monitoring and communication of Montenegro's overall progresses in each thematic area of the NSSD via Composite Indicators.

Montenegro's next steps include: (1) continuous monitoring of the global SDG process (2020; 2025); (2) UNEP/MAP simplified peer-review project, which has a link to the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development (MSSD); (3) setting up and testing an NSSD database and information reporting system for cooperation and coordination; (4) revising the statistical legislation system; (5) monitoring of improvements in national indicator development; (6) piloting of Composite Indicators and their introduction within the statistics system of Montenegro; (7) communication efforts and awareness raising with civil society and stakeholders about the SDGs; (8) sub-national transposition of the NSSD (7 out of 23 regional plans); and (9) adequate financing and budget reallocation.

TILL BERGER*, (*Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE, Switzerland*) started off his presentation by stating that Switzerland's presentation at the HLPF 2016 was a plan for what Switzerland will be doing over the next 1.5 years, and essentially served as a stocktaking measure for the country. Till shared that Switzerland has begun taking into account the SDG indicators, and have, therefore, expanded their own indicator measuring system, MONET, to incorporate these new SDG indicators.

Till informed participants that Switzerland will be working on assessing the implementation of the SDGs by identifying areas where action is needed and providing recommendations on closing those gaps. The allocation of responsibilities within the Federal Administration needs to be better defined. Further expansion of the MONET sustainable monitoring system will need to happen, in order to ensure adequate monitoring and reporting of, and on, SDG indicators. Modalities will need to be clarified when it comes to stakeholder participation in consultation and implementation partnerships. Till also mentioned that Switzerland will be preparing its first substantive report to the HLPF on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in 2018.

As many of the other speakers have already stated for their countries, Till also touched upon the need to involve stakeholders in plan definition, and to also translate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into a language that is easily accessible and easily understood by businesses, stakeholders, and civil society. Switzerland will also be working intensively with the sub-national level, focusing on reaching out to stakeholders in Cantons and Communes.

HERMAN BAVINCK, (*Ministry of Infrastructure and the Environment, The Netherlands*) shared that he is enthusiastic to be working on the SDGs, because The Netherlands has an SDG Charter. There are 80 organizations that have pledged to honour the SDGs, and they have received a subsidy from the government.

Herman shared how The Netherlands sees the SDGs and what is important for them. They have a second initiative called the Sustainable Development Investment Initiative, which deals with banks and investment firms. They want to develop better frameworks that take the SDGs into account. They are due to develop a framework in December 2016.

Herman also stated that The Netherlands will not be starting from scratch regarding the SDGs. The Netherlands is planning to publish a report that outlines what is happening, with respect to the SDGs, within The Netherlands, serving as a stocktaking mechanism regarding data collection. Herman thinks The Netherlands already has information on 30% of the SDG indicators, and, with a little more work, they would be able to raise that percentage by another 30%. However, Herman confessed that the last 40% of indicators would be difficult to cover.

Herman discussed the clear gaps within The Netherlands: (1) they are low in the ranking regarding Co₂ emissions per capita; (2) they are low in the ranking when it comes to using renewable energy; (3) there is still a wage gap between male and female income equality when compared to other EU countries; and (4) the life expectancy for women is not as good as it is in other EU countries.

The Netherlands plans to publish a report in March 2017, which will provide a better picture about projected policies. Herman thought that it would be important and relevant for the externalities and the external footprint of The Netherlands to be incorporated into this report.

The next steps for The Netherlands would be to come up with a strategy, not only from the central government, and not only from the top down, but from all parties. Because the SDGs are being concentrated

at the sub-national level and in cities, in terms of the implementation of the SDGs, the central government needs to come up with an answer on how it will facilitate the implementation process at these levels.

In order to leave no one behind, it is important to connect everyone within the country to the SDGs. The entire concept of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs needs to be presented in such a way that people can understand them and be able to contribute to them. Herman also brought attention to what happens outside a county's borders, because many countries are not doing as well as The Netherlands.

Sharing experiences on national planning for 2030 Agenda/SDGs in European countries

Following the presentations on the HLPF 2016, there was an interactive exchange among the conference participants, in which participants shared their own country specific experiences in planning for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The results of this activity can be found on the ESDN website under [Session 2 \(Day 1\)](#).



Session 3: Role and activities of the sub-national levels in the 2030 Agenda and SDGs implementation

Session 3 began with a keynote presentation by **WOLFGANG TEUBNER***, (*Director of ICLEI Europe*), who discussed the role of the sub-regional level in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. His presentation was followed by the ConverStations activity. During the ConverStations activity, participants had to 'pick the ticket' to hear 3 out of 8 presentations dealing with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in different regional contexts. Participants could choose between: (1) North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany); (2) Catalonia (Spain); (3) Gironde (France); (4) Welsh Government (United Kingdom); (5) ICLEI; (6) Wallonia (Belgium); (7) Basque Country (Spain); and (8) Regional Hubs in Germany. The descriptions of each ConverStation will be provided below with an exception being made for the ICLEI ConverStation given by Wolfgang Teubner, due to the last-minute change to this activity. Wolfgang's presentation was very similar to his introductory presentation for this session, and allowed participants to ask more in-depth questions.

WOLFGANG TEUBNER* started his presentation about ICLEI and how it began with Local Agenda 21, which presently has thousands of action plans in place. Wolfgang posed two questions regarding how much progress has been made in terms of the 1992 targets. Wolfgang mentioned there were some issues with Local Agenda 21, because it was not legally binding.

Wolfgang quickly transitioned to the SDGs and stated that one could not talk about the SDGs without talking about the Paris Climate Deal (COP21). Wolfgang further stressed the fact that the limits of the planet are known, but everyone still talks about growth in almost everything, and all proposals have growth mentioned somewhere in them, meaning everyone is always in competition with one another. It has reached a point that if one city, for example, becomes better; it usually means another city probably has become worse off. Wolfgang stated that transformation would be drastic if the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement is adhered to.

Wolfgang also brought up the topic of societal cohesion, which he explained as society wanting things from the system, but not wanting to give anything back to the system, as no one wants to have responsibility. Wolfgang then asked the question: How do we localize this? What can we do to localize 169 indicators?

Wolfgang also brought attention to the many sustainability reference frameworks in existence, which, because of their sheer number, makes all the plans very confusing.

Wolfgang closed his presentation by driving home the importance of society and of society having a clear societal goal on where we collectively want to go. Benchmarking would become a requirement, in order to mark and track progress towards reaching these societal goals. Wolfgang also introduced a key aspect for change, stating that transformation only works at the speed of trust. In order to increase trust, we need to ask ourselves: are we creating the space for ideas, initiatives, etc., from the bottom up? Oftentimes the ceilings are being hit, because of pre-existing laws, communications, regulations and financial means.

ConverStations



North Rhine-Westphalia

MARC-OLIVER PAHL, (*Unit VIII-4 Sustainable Development, Ministry for Climate Protection, Environment, Agriculture, Nature Conservation and Consumer Protection of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany*) began this ConverStation presentation with facts about North Rhine-Westphalia (NR-W). It has a population of 17.6 million and has a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of EUR 624.7 billion, making it the largest German state in

terms of population and GDP. The overall economic situation in NR-W is that 71.2% is made up of services, 28.4% is industry, and the remaining .4% is agriculture. NR-W ranks number 18 in the world in terms of its GDP.

Marc-Oliver then transitioned to discussing about the Sustainable Development Strategy for NR-W. The SDS for NR-W covers many topic areas: (1) climate protection and energy transition; (2) sustainable economy; (3) protection of natural resources; (4) demographic change and neighbourhoods for all ages; (5) social cohesion; (6) decent and fair work; (7) integration (of migrants); (8) sustainable financial policy; (9) sustainable urban development; (10) sustainable mobility; (11) sustainable consumption/sustainable lifestyles; (12) land cultivation; and (13) health. The SDS for NR-W began with a public consultation on the discussion paper from September to November of 2014. Then in September 2015 there was a Cabinet decision on the Draft SDS. Public consultations followed from October to November 2015. In June 2016, the Cabinet made a final decision on the SDS for NR-W. In autumn of 2016, the Strategy will be discussed in the Regional Parliament. Regular reporting on the indicators will happen every two years, as well as progress reports that will be conducted every four years.

Marc-Oliver also shared some key messages and lessons learned, stressing the need for political will, not only at the beginning, but also throughout the entire process. Common political ground, or the political narrative, also needs to be present, as well as the coordination between governmental ministries (horizontal integration). There also needs to be a participatory process that involves the regional economy. Just as horizontal integration plays an important role, so too does the role of vertical integration and the need to understand the many viewpoints from the local, sub-national, national, regional, European, and international contexts. Marc-Oliver also brought into the discussion the need for concrete goals and timeframes that have clear implementation mechanisms that include the human and financial resources required. Establishing reporting and evaluation mechanisms for data collection and measuring progress are also important. Lastly, Marc-Oliver stressed the need to adapt processes to the specific political, economic and social circumstances that may be found at the different levels.

Catalonia

ARNAU QUERALT-BASSA, (*Director of the Advisory Council for the Sustainable Development of Catalonia, Spain*) discussed Catalonia's newly approved and comprehensive National Plan to implement the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs, and the SDG indicators in Catalonia. Aiming to contribute to the Catalan government's commitment to the 2030 Agenda, the Advisory Council for Sustainable Development of Catalonia (CADS) has issued a report identifying the strategic challenges that Catalonia should address to successfully achieve the 2030 Agenda's SDGs and targets. The report, '2030 Agenda: transforming Catalonia, improving the world', was approved at the CADS plenary session on 27th September 2016, coinciding with the 1st anniversary of the 2030 Agenda.

Arnau elaborated on the structure of this comprehensive report, stating that it is based on each of the SDGs, whereby an in-depth analysis is conducted of each individual SDG. The analysis begins with a preliminary international and European diagnosis that leads to a deeper analysis of every associated target within Catalonia. Each of the SDG indicators is translated to fit into the Catalonian context. After this concrete diagnosis, sets of priority-challenges are identified for each target. At the end of every SDG, and its related target analysis, there is a selection of the most important challenges that CADS proposes to be achieved by the Catalan Government, in order to reach the targets set out by the 2030 Agenda.

Arnau stated that the report is expected to be the basis of Catalonia's National Plan for the 2030 Agenda implementation. In parallel to the elaboration of the report, the Ministry for Territory and Sustainable Development in the Catalan Government has developed a pilot for the 'Planet' SDGs, in close collaboration with CADS. In this pilot, the challenges identified in the council's report have been linked with concrete political and programmatic actions, which will be used as a model for the elaboration of the whole National Plan.

Discussions with experts, stakeholders and government representatives during the elaboration of this report are intended to contribute to the following aims: (1) catalyse 2030 Agenda implementation in Catalonia, by adapting and translating the global SDGs and targets into the national context through preliminary expert assessment (more than 60 experts and institutions have participated in the elaboration of the report); (2) contribute to greater political and public awareness about the global SDGs and the main challenges that Catalonia faces in terms of sustainability; (3) identify the keystones and main cross-cutting goals, targets and associated challenges for the 2030 Agenda implementation, in order to promote an inter-ministerial and multi-stakeholder dialogue and action; and (4) boost transformative, long-term, holistic and coherent public policies based on the double approach 'think globally, act locally; think locally, act globally'.

Gironde

BÉNÉDICTE PACHOD, (*Ministry for Ecology, Energy and the Sea, France*) The French department of Gironde has worked at making every stakeholder aware of the Sustainable Development Goals as a first step in collectively designing its own contribution to the SDGs.

Gironde is located in the Southwest area of France along the coast. Gironde has around 1.5 million inhabitants, and has been engaged in a voluntary sustainable development processes since 1999. Gironde's involvement in sustainable development is based on a participative and crosscutting process, including, for instance, an evaluation of its practices through a process of social responsibility of its organization. Gironde works with several elected officials, services and partners at developing a joint, coordinated local action, in which every partner participates towards sustainable development. In this matter, a sustainable development club for elected officials has been created, and a network of local authorities and partners engaged in Local Agenda 21s gather.

In its action towards sustainable development, Gironde is trying to address both local and international challenges. Accountability is very important for Gironde following the adoption of the SDGs in 2015. Since everyone has a part to play in the attainment of the SDGs, the Gironde department also had to ask itself what it could do to further the SDGs. Gironde started by raising everyone's awareness about the SDGs, which was the first step in being able to prepare a contribution to the SDGs by the Gironde department and its partners.

In France, the annual report towards sustainable development is mandatory for local authorities with more than 50,000 inhabitants. Based on this report, every local authority must discuss, in their elected council, how their public policies include a sustainable development approach before voting on the annual budget. Gironde has made the most out of this mandatory exercise, for both the administration and the elected officials, to become more aware of the SDGs through an iterative construction of the report.

On the first part of the review, the elected vice-presidencies explain how their political priorities and their corresponding policies contribute to sustainable development, which is based on the National Framework. Recommendations, coming from the evaluation of the process of social responsibility of the organization, have also been included.

For the first year, every elected vice-president was asked to gauge how many SDGs were directly related to the policies made during their vice-presidency. As an example, the vice-presidency in charge of housing and social development considered their actions as primarily addressing SDG 1 and SDG 11. This perception underlines both the ambition of the vice-presidency to adapt policies to local challenges in order to facilitate the empowerment of all inhabitants, and its level of action. As a local authority, the department largely contributes to building fair and sustainable territories. The vice-presidency in charge of social and educational policy, as well as middle schools, also made the choice to underline their major contribution to two SDGs; SDG 4 and SDG 2. This perception indicates the priority of the vice-presidency to launch more responsible and local catering in middle schools by increasing the volume of organic products in food catering.

In drawing up the departmental review of Gironde's progress towards sustainable development, Sébastien Keiff, the deputy head of the agenda 21 mission in Gironde, has been amazed to see how easy the SDGs were to appropriate and adapt to Gironde's context. Once applied to existing projects, which are led by elected vice-presidents and the administration, the SDGs were easy to understand and to work with.

Gironde has led an extensive process at raising, not just a few, but every elected official's awareness about SDGs. For Gironde, however, this process is only considered as a first step in establishing a new way of taking into account the contributions of local authorities in policy-making that reflects the SDGs.

In going further with the SDGs, Bénédicte asked a series of questions for discussion. The questions asked were: How can the SDGs become leverage for the transformation of public action, and will they even become leverage? How do we gauge the contribution of local actors in answering global challenges, but, at the same time, also the precise objectives of the SDGs? How do we make the SDGs operational at the local level, for every stakeholder, including those already engaged in sustainable development?

Welsh Government

MATTHEW QUINN, (*Environment and Sustainable Development, Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs of Wales, United Kingdom*) began his presentation by putting the Welsh context into perspective. The devolved administration in Wales, which has a population of 3.3 million, has been in place since 1999 as part of the devolution of powers across the UK following the 1997 referenda. Its founding legislation, the Government of Wales Act 1998, was intended to establish a progressive form of governance, which included a specific duty to produce a scheme, or plan, after every general election that would set out how the Government would promote sustainable development in the carrying out of its functions. The government would then formally review its impact each cycle before remaking the scheme. This gave the Government three cycles of producing such plans, culminating in a commitment in the 2009 plan, "One Wales One Planet", to make sustainable development the central organising principle for governance in Wales.

Successive updates to the legislative framework increased the powers of the Welsh Assembly, with full primary legislative powers conveyed following a further referendum in 2011. The Welsh Government took the opportunity following the 2011 elections to refresh its existing sustainable development duty, making a commitment to legislate to replace the existing duty in order to formalise the commitment to making sustainable development the central organising principle and to put the role of Sustainable Development Commissioner on a statutory basis. This commitment was based on the learning from the previous schemes that suggested that the scheme had failed to take root in the decision-making processes. This was at least in part due to the weight of legal duties and obligations and structures that pulled in other directions.

The Act had a long process of development between 2011 and 2015, with a particular focus on public engagement under the banner of “The Wales We Want”, a national conversation led by the non-statutory Sustainable Development Commissioner. This culminated in a report with contributions from nearly 7,000 people through a range of community events.

The eventual 7 statutory goals themselves were closely fought out in the passage of the Bill. While they can be mapped on to the final SDGs, their precise wording was the product of the political scrutiny process. The final Act consists of the following main elements and is explained more fully in the accompanying guide: <http://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/150623-guide-to-the-fg-act-en.pdf>

The aim has been to create a comprehensive system that reflects the original aim of making sustainable development the central organising principle. All of the main initial activities under the Act have now been implemented, with the publication of the Welsh Government’s well-being statement taking place on 4 November 2016.

The Act, and its new systems of governance, sit alongside the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. This Act is intended to modernise the purpose and systems of environmental regulation in Wales and translate relevant requirements of the Convention on Biological Diversity, international Climate Change agreements and the circular economy into Welsh Law. Inter alia, the Act sets increasing the resilience of ecosystems as the objective of environmental action and gives duties to the recently established single body Natural Resources Wales (NRW), which has responsibility for environmental regulation, flood protection, nature and forestry. The Act places a requirement on NRW to publish a report on the resilience of ecological systems, which must be reflected in a statutory National Natural Resources Plan published by the Welsh Government. The Plan informs new statutory area statements prepared by NRW about the opportunities and issues locally, which must be taken into account by Public Service Boards in preparing their well-being plans. NRW is a statutory member of all Public Service Boards. NRW published its assessment of ecosystem resilience (State of Natural Resources Report) in October 2016 and consultation on the National Natural Resources Plan starts in November 2016.

Wallonia

MICHEL AMAND, (*Director of the Sustainable Development Strategies Unit of Wallonia, Belgium*) discussed the second Walloon Sustainable Development Strategy. The 2nd WSDS aims at better meeting the needs of present generations without compromising the prospects of future generations to satisfy their own needs. It focuses therefore on the necessary change of our consumption and production patterns to make Wallonia more resilient, create local jobs, reduce the negative impacts on the environment and generate a better shared prosperity. This change is in particular addressed in three areas through the strategy: food, energy and resources. The strategy is fully in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Participation is at the heart of sustainable development, and has, therefore, been largely mainstreamed in the elaboration process of the 2nd WSDS. The draft strategy, adopted in December 2015, was submitted to 3 advisory councils. A public consultation on the draft document was also undertaken between February and May 2016. A total of 51 organizations and 199 citizens took part in this consultation. Their opinions were analysed and taken into account in the final version of the strategy.

The vision of the 2nd WSDS focusses around three main themes, which underlines the role of the citizens, organizations and governments at the local and regional level in the transition of Wallonia towards sustainable development:

- **Here – Living in Wallonia in 2050:** this dimension deals with the ability of the Walloon citizens to meet their needs and to enjoy a certain quality of life. This dimension addresses aspects such as health, food, housing, education, employment, income, goods and services, inequalities.
- **Elsewhere – Living in the world in 2050:** this dimension focuses on the interdependencies between the Walloon development and the development of the rest of the world. It broaches aspects such as a greater autonomy in energy, food and resources, the fight against poverty worldwide or the diminution of greenhouse gases.
- **Later – Living after 2050:** this dimension addresses the ability of future citizens to meet their needs and improve their quality of life. Investments in education, health or infrastructure as well as the preservation of biodiversity and natural resources are covered among others under this dimension.

Given the recent multilateral agenda, the sustainable development goals (SDGs) of the 2030 ASD constitute the intermediary objectives. The 17 SDGs and the 121 targets that have been established by Wallonia are listed and arbitrarily grouped under five categories, the 5 Ps, which are the communication elements of the agenda: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership.

Under every target, is indicated:

- the competency level involved (Wallonia, Federation Wallonia-Brussels, German community and Federal authority);
- the fact that the issue addressed by the target is tackled in the political declarations of the Governments of Wallonia and the Federation Wallonia-Brussels;
- a quantitative target at the Walloon level, if it exists.

The WSDS will be monitored at least every two years. The broad public will be informed of the modalities and results of this monitoring. A synthetic report will be given to the Parliament within the month of the monitoring.

Basque Country

LEYRE MADARIAGA (*Basque Government, Spain*) began her ConverStation presentation by sharing basic information about the Basque Country. Basque Country has slightly over 2 million inhabitants and covers a 7,235 km² area. Basque Country utilizes four sustainable development strategies and focuses on a myriad of areas, such as awareness raising, transparency, participation, comparing and aligning existing plans with the SDGs, capacity strengthening, horizontal coordination, vertical coordination, financing mechanisms, monitoring, measuring, following-up indicators, developing their own indicators, network participation, regional cooperation, avoiding risks, and adapting to challenges as they arise.

Leyre outlined the first steps that the Basque Country has taken in dealing with the SDGs. They have already begun to raise awareness about SDGs, as well as to build up the capacity of stakeholders to understand and relate to the SDGs. They have also focused on producing bilingual material, as the languages spoken are Basque and Spanish. They have also done a sub-state Government's report in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Leyre also mentioned four lines that can help facilitate the arrival of the SDGs at the non-state level: (1) public opinion and awareness raising; (2) bringing not only NGOs, but other representatives from different sectors of society, such as companies, education, health, etc., into the debate; (3) harmonisation of public policies with the SDGs; and (4) roadmap with effective compliance commitments and effective and solid mechanisms for their assessment.

Leyre, in her ConverStation, displayed a breakdown of how the Basque Country is faring in reaching the SDGs. Each of the goals has a corresponding percentage of completion, clearly showing where the Basque Country needs to improve, such as SDG 2, 9, 10, 11, 14, and 17, which all have scores of 50% or lower.

Regional Hubs in Germany

SABINE GERHARDT, (*German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE), Germany*) began her ConverStation presentation by explaining how the Regional Hubs in Germany came into being. The German Bundestag is making 10 million euros available over a period of five years to establish four Regional Hubs for Sustainability Strategies (RENN). The German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) is advancing the establishment of the RENN.

Networking civil society action on the sub-national and regional level adds a new governance feature to Germany's institutional architecture for sustainable development. It is part of the transformative governance agenda, and improves the debate on sustainability strategies on all levels.

The aim of the regional hubs is, according to the National Sustainable Development Strategy (draft of May 2016), to "link up the sustainability initiatives at federal, *Länder*, and municipal level supra-regionally" and thus drive vertical integration. A further intended aim of the network is to establish new forms and forums for sustainable development actors, civil society, academia, business, local authorities, etc., to work hand in hand.

Sabine then discussed how these regional hubs were selected. The German Council for Sustainable Development has selected suitable organisations and institutions and, to this end, implemented both the suggestions put forward by the *Länder* and a formal application process. This approach guaranteed the involvement of existing civil society and non-profit organisations with experience in sustainable development projects. RNE has put forward four concepts suitable for funding, which will be conducted by DLR, the responsible project institution, at the instigation of the Federal Chancellery.

The four RENNs currently resort to a network comprising of 18 partners from 15 German *Länder*. The RENN coordination centre at RNE perceives its role as a "supra-regional hub" and service provider. It furthers the nationwide impact of the project and evaluates, at the request of the grant provider, how the work at the four RENNs is progressing.

Sabine then discussed what the RENN is doing. The RENNs form a regionally organised information and action platform for sustainable development. They (1) connect actors horizontally and vertically, (2) assist in the sharing and exchange of ideas, innovation, strategies and projects, (3) provide impetus for social transformation and (4) promote the flow of information between sustainable development actors at municipal, *Länder* and federal level. Each individual RENN sets its own thematic focal points.

Sabine also shared that the RENNs will commence their operative work in 2017, and their joint website will be going live in January.

After the ConverStation presentations, the conference participants were asked to share on their tables insights from the presentations during this session and identify, per table, 2 insights about the 2030 Agenda implementation at the sub-national level. The results can be found on the ESDN website under [Session 3 \(day 1\)](#).

Panel Discussion: reflections on activities to implement the 2030 Agenda for SD

LUTZ RIBBE, (*Vice-President of the EESC's Sustainable Development Observatory*), **ANNA BOMBONATO**, (*Ministry of the Environment and Protection of Land and Sea, Italy & ESDN Steering Group*), and **MONIKA LINN**, (*Principal Adviser & Chief, Sustainable Development and Gender Unit, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)*) formed the panel that closed the first day of the ESDN Conference 2016. The panel discussion was a “sounding board” of the day and the ConverStation format, commenting on the insights identified by the conference participants. Panellists reflected about what they heard during the day and the interactive ConverStations.



Lutz Ribbe began the panel discussion, stating that being around the tables provides a lot of energy! Lutz then quickly launched into his reflections on the activities that are occurring in implementing the 2030 Agenda, and shared that we can already see huge engagement, in part by the government, as well as civil society. However, Lutz asked if the 2030 Agenda was in the mainstream? Lutz's impression was that the 2030 Agenda, and its implementation, were not on the agenda of the EU, because by looking at the work program of the European Commission, one can see that the 2030 Agenda is not being focused upon. If the financial and political frameworks do not fit, then it does not work. Lutz mentioned that it seems difficult to get even the small things done, let alone bigger issues, such as feeding the world. Lutz thought that forming a coalition of people and leaders, who are willing to do the big things, would be needed. Therefore, frameworks should be set up that reflect the interests of the people, as well as other actors, to allow them to become more active in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

ANNA BOMBONATO was the next panel speaker and began by drawing attention to the fact that policymakers are aware that focus is on cooperation at all levels. Anna continued, however, by saying it is important to share these transformative steps with stakeholders. There also needs to be mutual exchange between the central-level down to the civil society level, because many inputs come from civil society. Therefore, finding the bridge between these levels becomes paramount to success. Anna also mentioned capacity building as a priority, in order to enhance the experience sharing process, because it can build a stronger base with civil society and other actors going into the future. As policymakers, we need to be building our capacities for data collection, reporting, and monitoring, and reviewing, so that we can disseminate more information and move forward and start to transform.

MONIKA LINN brought in the perspective of the UN level, and thought that there is a lot of encouragement in the implementation of the 2030. Monika also mentioned that it is not so easy to know what is going on at the ground level when one is working at the UN. Monika shared that she, personally, has learned that there are so many efforts and initiatives going on at the ground level, and they are all good signs. However, much more

still needs to be done, because implementation needs to be at all levels, and not just coming from the local level. It has to also come from the government. Monika shared that she has heard that not all ministries want to participate. Accountability, therefore, plays a huge role in the implementation efforts of the 2030 Agenda: There needs to be a certain pressure, in order to have a real transformation.

After the three panel members gave their brief impressions and reflections about efforts in implementing the 2030 Agenda, participants were able to ask the panel questions.

One participant asked if piecemeal initiatives are really making a difference and helping in transformation. Lutz commented on this question, stating that major changes come from the bottom up: there is so much potential at the bottom. Monika then added the differing framework structures also play a part, and reinforced the idea of using and working with what we already have, but trying to also work within one coherent framework. As an example, Monika took Local Agenda 21, because it was useful, despite having its ups and downs. Exchange is needed, in order to bring people together and multiply and scale up. Anna also agreed that a framework was needed, but that it should be adapted from what already exists. Financial instruments would need to be adapted and national and regional instruments should be aligned with the 2030 Agenda. Lutz brought this particular discussion to a close by stating that if the framework does not exist, then the entire thing does not work.

Another topic that was brought forth for the panel was the danger present in not measuring progress, but, at the same time, there is the worry about over-measuring and nothing happening. Monika began answering this statement, sharing that one cannot implement that which one cannot measure, because at the end, one needs to have some way of finding out if progress was made over time. Anna furthered this line of reasoning, stating that if one can monitor, one can subsequently report on things being monitored, meaning it is an opportunity to showcase successes, as well as make improvements. It is difficult to make improvements to something that is not being measured. Measuring also allows one to prove progress towards commitments, and serves as a useful and necessary tool for progress.

Participants also brought up the topic of an EU framework for sustainable development. Monika answered that they are looking for some leaders on this issue, and shared that she thought the EU would be a natural leader. Monika also shared that a lot of other countries are looking to the EU and expect them to come up with a framework. Lutz argued that Commission President Juncker failed to establish such a framework, claiming that Juncker would have a lot of budget to do this, but that the EU concentrates more on economic growth.

Another concern that participants had was regarding the fact that there is no one governance model for implementing the 2030 Agenda. At the sub-national level, the capacity for sustainable development is lower with respect to being able to make laws. Therefore, there is a huge variety at this level, as well as a huge variety of solutions. Another participant added that great things are being done, but only at the elite level. Monika addressed these concerns, and thought that it is a positive thing thus far, but at the same time a challenge, because there is a desperate need for us to be able to reach ordinary people and get them more actively involved: Communication is very important. Lutz raised an issue regarding the possibility of being able to check what is going on at the local level, as well as what society is doing. It is very difficult to reach those levels. Anna thought taking into account the decisions of the local level is something that should be done.

The last issue that was brought into the panel discussion was about making the 2030 Agenda an agenda of possibilities and opportunities instead of obligations. Anna agreed with this sentiment, claiming that stakeholders should be made aware that their contributions could be translated into a reality that goes beyond consultations. Stakeholders need to be given the opportunity to act in reality. Monika added that networking among stakeholders is important, because it leads to better communication and a multiplication of efforts and

ideas. Lutz acknowledged the fact that stakeholders are motivated, but underscored the fact that policymakers need to help them, because as of now, the activities at the bottom cannot be integrated at the EU level, because there is nothing at the EU level that is being done. Activities will, therefore, need to come from the bottom-up. Therefore, the encouragement and support of these activities is very important.

The *second conference day* was comprised of two sessions (Session 4 and Session 5). Speakers and participants continued to share practical experiences, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Session 4: Vertical integration and cooperation between different political levels

In session 4, two presentations were given on vertical integration and cooperation between different political levels. The first presentation was the Austrian case of The Green Events Austria Network, and the second presentation was about sustainable procurement in Germany.

WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG*, (*ESDN Co-chair, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Austria*) began his presentation by sharing facts about the events management sector in Europe. There is a substantial economic value in this sector, so it needs to be done sustainably, because events have considerable social, environmental and economic impacts. Regional and national certifications for sustainably managed events have been developed to address the issue of this sector being managed in a more sustainable fashion.

Wolfram then explained that Green Events consider sustainability using many criteria. Some of the criterion are mobility and the carbon footprint of events, the events location and accommodation, waste management and supply, the social domain, meaning diversity, gender, level of integration, etc., information and communication.

Wolfram focused on The Green Events Austria Network, which deals with sustainable event management. Wolfram gave a brief overview of how the Network evolved over time, which can be viewed under his presentation on the [ESDN website](#). The Network provides a myriad of services and activities, such as arranging provincial and national meetings twice a year, inviting key public and private sector stakeholders to bi-annual conferences, as well as an internet platform and monitoring, valuation and self-assessment tools for events.

Wolfram highlighted the tools the Network makes use of, which consist of labelling and certification schemes, such as a national eco-label, subsidy schemes at the federal and regional level for event organizers, and an online self-assessment tool addressing target groups. The Network affects many levels with its outreach efforts in eco-labelling, as well as international standardization, such as GRI and ISO 20121.

Q & A

After Wolfram's presentation, a participant asked a question regarding the subsidies the Network provides. Wolfram answered that some provinces in Austria receive 100-150,000 Euros per year.

ILSE BENEKE*, (*Federal Ministry for Internal Affairs, Germany*) gave the second presentation of this session. Ilse began her presentation stating the target group for sustainable procurement being everyone who is working for state authorities, meaning people who do not know that much about sustainability.

Similar to what Wolfram mentioned about the events management sector, procurement also has a large impact on the market. In Germany, there are 30,000 authorities that are buying things each year. Within Germany, there are three levels of regulation: EU, National and Provincial.

Ilse shared that there are many state authorities and NGOs working on the topic of procurement, meaning there is a lot of knowledge within the country, but it is spread out.

Ilse highlighted the perspective of people who do not work with sustainability, may not know what it is, or may have completely differing interpretations as to what constitutes being sustainable. Because of this problem, people need something they can trust in when dealing with sustainability.

Ilse leads the Competence Centre for Sustainable Procurement, where they support, promote, and stimulate sustainable procurement at all institutional levels. The target groups are requisitioners and buyers at the federation, the states, and the municipal level. Ilse also mentioned the history of the Centre, which can also be found on the [ESDN website](#). The Centre works to foster sustainable procurement using both horizontal and vertical integration.

Ilse further elaborated on what the Centre does. They offer trainings to make and foster change, because one needs to go out and talk to people. After a few trainings, one gains insights into peoples' thought processes, what is important to them, what they are thinking, etc. The Centre also offers an important tool on their website, which helps them to share the knowledge they have accumulated.

Ilse shared some examples of sustainable procurement, focusing on sustainable IT-procurement in terms of sustainable hardware, because no one really knew how to approach this, or what it meant. They talked to BITKOM, German hardware people, because they wanted to see how far they could go in procuring socially sustainable hardware.

Ilse then transitioned to discussing her experiences working at the municipal and provincial level, stating that she had no power at all to affect change. However, Ilse mentioned she is able to talk to them, try to convince them, and motivate them. To integrate your vision at all levels, you have to be able to talk to people and take into account their context, and respect different wills, mentalities, etc. One needs to sort out the problems that everyone has, because it makes the work more effective. Knowing what you can deal with is important in being effective: knowing who are lost causes and will not listen to you no matter what, is important, because you do not want to be wasting your time. Ilse also gave advice about being clear about responsibilities when dealing with others. Things run smoother if everyone knows what their responsibilities and jobs are. It is all about communication! You need to listen to a person's problems first, not go out there and just tell, tell, tell. Listen first, then try to help people with their problems.

Q & A

During the Q & A after Ilse's presentation, a participant mentioned there were no overall statistics for Germany on procurement. They asked, then, if it would be feasible to develop them. Ilse answered that it would be possible.

Another question was asked about the different paces of area development and how the Centre stays ahead. Ilse answered by stating that the Centre tries to find out where the hotspots are and who is working in them, because the Centre wants to find new approaches, to which these people may be able to provide information.

One participant focused on EU law and public procurement, because they often hear that it is not possible due to EU law. They asked how one could get to the edge of what is actually possible while still being within EU law.

Ilse responded that she hears exactly this on a daily basis. Some of the trainings the Centre does are on how we go through EU law. There are ways, but it is hard to know how. You need a competence centre to provide you with the ways. In emerging topics, there are no laws really, because it is new.

Session 5: Fostering vertical integration in the 2030 Agenda/SDGs implementation in different contexts

Developing practical insights and “recipes” for successful vertical integration was the topic of the last interactive participant exchange, as well as the beginning of Session 5. During this activity, participants as table groups were asked to develop recipes and offer insights for successful vertical integration. The results of this activity were presented at the conference by table representatives and can be found on the ESDN website under [Session 5 \(day 2\)](#).



This activity was directly followed by a panel discussion with **ERNESTO SORIA MORALES**, (*Policy Coherence for SD Unit, OECD*), **MICHAEL GERBER**, (*Special Envoy for global SD, Switzerland*), and **WOLFGANG TEUBNER**, (*Director of ICLEI Europe*). The panel discussed about the “recipes” for successful vertical policy integration that were developed by the conference participants at the beginning of this session.



Michael Gerber began the panel discussion by claiming there is need for an overarching agenda at all levels. That does not mean, however, that we need to take the 2030 Agenda and implement all of the indicators right away. This overarching framework is needed; we need an EU wide framework, which is even legally binding. This framework would help in the translation of the 2030 Agenda through the different levels. There also needs to be local initiatives that support the bottom up approach.

Michael then focused on implementation at the local level, stating there has to be some kind of mechanism to make sure we do not end up with 'cherry picking', in which only certain aspects are adopted into a framework according to an area's preferences. Instead, a real and integrated framework that takes all of the targets into account must be established. In terms of reporting, there is a need to focus on gaps, in order to avoid reporting on only what has actually been happening. Reporting on gaps can be just as important as reporting on areas that have progressed.

Michael's last point focused on the need for vertical and horizontal integration to be seen alongside one another, instead of being seen as isolated concepts. The challenge with a new framework would be to work inter-sectorally. One must also always be conscious of the fact that there is no one size fits all when it comes to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

Ernesto Soria Morales was the next panel speaker to address these issues. He began by stating that policymakers want to implement this policy in a vertically coherent manner. We understand that a successful measure of the SDGs would be the aggregation of the indicators from all levels, because what you do at each level is different. Targets may also be aimed at a specific level, such as the local level. The local level has a key role in SDG implementation.

Ernesto then addressed vertical integration by stating that it does not happen automatically. One needs different actors in the framework setting process, the local level needs to be involved more, and not just consulted with by the national level. The local level needs to be involved in the decision and planning processes. Partnerships are also necessary. The local level should be given funding. There needs to be specific mechanisms in place to deal with differing opinions and ideas.

Wolfgang Teubner also commented and agreed with most of what his two colleagues had said. Wolfgang reinforced the two-way process as being necessary to success. We need more clarity on the goals and the benchmarks at the local level, because the goals are clear at the national level. We need to reach a point in which the goals are safe, so not changing when governments potentially change. We need to be firm about the goals. The what, and the how needs to come from the bottom. We need people, we need social innovation, etc. We need to create the space to make it happen. We need to be responsive as a system.

Ernesto spoke again and shared with participants that political leadership is needed at every level. High level horizontal integration is vital, because you need the support: everything cannot be done from the bottom up. Michael added to this point, stating that capacity was an important aspect to take into consideration, because if there is a lack of capacity, then things also do not happen. Therefore, more resources need to be given to building up the capacities of each level.

Q & A

One participant began the Q&A session by asking how the 2030 Agenda could be integrated due to it being so cross-sectoral.

One answer given by one of the panel members was to focus on one goal, which does not mean ignoring the rest. When focussing on one goal, one can reach success more quickly. Part of the success is how many people can be reached.

The moderator, Peter Woodward, asked the panel what we can expect given what has transpired in the world with Brexit and Trump winning the US presidential election.

Ernesto answered Peter's question, stating one does not really feel the seismic events yet. Ernesto said he remains optimistic that we can make it happen, especially when one considers how we came to agree upon the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Michael also shared Ernesto's optimistic perspective, and focused on the small, but significant changes that have already been seen. When one sees signals that meetings, like the G-20, are trying to do things with the SDGs, it is an encouraging thing.

Wolfgang commented that the Paris Climate Deal has a defined boundary, whereas some SDGs have hidden boundaries. Wolfgang posed a question about honesty to the population regarding these hidden boundaries within the some of the SDGs. We still see multinational companies that are not paying taxes and there are still unbalanced trade structures in place within the world. We need to think in a more integrated way.

Conference Closure and Next Steps

DANIEL DUBAS, (*Head of the Sustainable Development Section, Federal Office for Spatial Development ARE, Switzerland*) congratulated everyone on an intense day and half! The conference discussions about the sub-national level and the challenges they face were all very important and insightful. He thanked all speakers and participants for attending the conference and for sharing their experiences.



ELISABETH FREYTAG-RIGLER & WOLFRAM TERTSCHNIG, (*ESDN Co-chair, Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management, Austria*) also gave their thanks to participants for joining the conference. Elisabeth drew attention to the fact that many things are happening at the sub-national level regarding the 2030 Agenda implementation, and that she personally needs to be less disappointed about what happens at the EU level, because a lot is happening in general.

Wolfram gave the conference some food for thought, mentioning the dilemma of our group of policy-makers being too optimistic, given the seismic changes that have been occurring, meaning Trump winning the US election and the UK leaving the EU. Wolfram also noted that the HLPF is becoming more important, especially when one considers that people feel as if they are being left behind, and that the system is being perceived as leaving them behind. If the system is not apt to develop, then people will always perceive it as being problematic. Wolfram then quoted Einstein, who said, "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it." Wolfram also mentioned the need to deliver something outside of our bubble. The ideas and concepts we learn from each other need to be shared and spread far beyond our network of dedicated change-makers.



Participants of the ESDN Conference 2016