

Work programme of the German Council for Sustainable Development, 2017 to 2019, pursuant to Section 1 (3) of the Rules of Procedure (GO)

Berlin, 7 February 2017

Policy framework

The 2030 Agenda, its Sustainable Development Goals, and the 2016 German Sustainable Development Strategy provide the central framework for the activities of the German Council for Sustainable Development. They also serve and are required by the Council as a key point of reference for many non-governmental activities. The Council will continue to comment regularly on drafts and updates of the strategy and propose projects accordingly. In this respect, the mandate period will contain significant momenta:

- International level
 - There will be a meeting of heads of government at the UN High-Level Political Forum in 2019 to take stock of progress with SDG implementation. Government reports will be issued by other states (Germany reported in 2016 and will do so again in 2021) in preparation for this. The first national and thematic peer reviews will have been published. The United Nations hosts annual review conferences on Financing for Development as a means of implementing the SDGs.
 - Effective multi-stakeholder platforms, partnerships, and research input will become more important for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Multilateral learning spaces, such as the German Government's Partners for Review programme, the UN Sustainable Development Transition Forum (SDTF) and the SDG Action Campaign will become increasingly relevant.
 - The German Council for Sustainable Development is building on the success of the Open SDGclub.Berlin and the positive feedback it has received. The Council wants to help make sustainable development councils and similar stakeholders more effective in their role and duties and to assist them in expanding their work. In accordance with its capacities, the Council is open to cooperation with similar institutions abroad.
 - The German G20 Presidency is bringing with it a large number of events and work processes. The Council must decide whether and how it will contribute here. It is not formally involved in these processes in a government or civil society context. Key G20 processes address the 2030 Agenda and green financing. The G20 Africa

summit and the longer-term relevance of cooperation with Africa are particularly important.

- European level

- The communication on "Next steps for a sustainable future", issued by the European Commission on 22 November 2016, underscored the Commission's willingness to play its part in actively shaping European sustainability policy. Of particular interest to the Council are the announcement of a European forum on sustainable development and the creation of a European Sustainability Prize.
- The EU's post-2020 financial planning process will be reviewed and re-negotiated from 2017 onwards. The Common Agricultural Policy, the strengthening of the EU's social dimension through minimum social rights, and the greater consideration of regional markets in economic development measures are key topics against the backdrop of the Eurozone's development into an Economic and Monetary Union and the next financial framework for the European Union. The German Council for Sustainable Development will place particular emphasis on European policy options for recycling and for maintaining an ambitious organic farming programme.
- March 2017 will mark the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Rome. It is also the month in which the UK Government is expected to trigger the Brexit negotiations. The German Council for Sustainable Development will continue to call for the reintroduction of an ambitious EU sustainable development strategy.

- National level

- The German Government's 2016 National Sustainable Development Strategy provides the framework for sustainable development policy in Germany. The Council has supported the creation and implementation of this strategy on an ongoing basis and will issue regular communications on it. The Council will provide intensive oversight for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy. The National Sustainable Development Strategy also formulates a range of requests to the Council.
- The formation of a new government following the 2017 German Bundestag election is one area of focus for the work of the Council.
- Sustainable development strategies at all levels of the federal structure, in companies, and in public and civil society institutions are a key point of reference for the Council in its activities.
- The Council will also constructively support the work of the four Regional Sustainability Networks (RENNs).
- The Council will encourage effective dialogue between policy-makers and the private sector, society and the research community.
- It intends to promote the sustainable development culture in an effective manner.
- A soft date of interest to the Council is the thirtieth anniversary of the issuing of the Brundtland Report and thus the birth of the modern definition of sustainability.

Priority advisory services

The priority tasks of the German Council for Sustainable Development relate to the National Sustainable Development Strategy. The German Government is requesting the following advisory services as part of the development of the Sustainable Development Strategy:

- Statement on the National Sustainable Development Strategy (first quarter) and involvement in its further development immediately following a decision (2018);
- Written preparations for the meeting between the State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development (StA), the German Council for Sustainable Development, and the German Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development (PBnE) in the first half of the year;
- Review of the management rules by October 2017 (including the governance structure implicit in the rules and with specialist public discourse and the involvement of young people);
- Conducting of an international peer review beginning in 2018;
- Recommendation on indicators identified in the Sustainable Development Strategy as requiring further development and on other indicator gaps in 2018;
- Preparation and follow-up of the StA meetings in connection with a discussion group for associations to be set up by the German Federal Chancellery from 2018 onwards; to this end (as previously), recommendation of topics to be addressed by the StA for the 2018 and 2019 period;
- Systematic preparation of the German Government's regular dialogue format (Forum for Sustainable Development) through the preceding annual conference.

The Sustainable Development Strategy contains implicit further expectations concerning the Council.

The Council's work follows several annually recurring formats. These comprise the four meetings and the annual conference, as well as the following events, participation in which is optional: Political (autumn) forum, symposium, and the Sustainability Prize Award. Special events: The second conference of the Open SDGclub.Berlin has been announced for 2018.

Working methods of the Council

The Council makes use of all the working arrangements set out in the rules of procedure. The type and scope of these arrangements depend on (primarily temporal) capacities and resources.

In particular, instruments include:

- Working groups of Council members and staff from the office on fundamental issues¹ and ad hoc working groups on specific work assignments;

¹ In 2016, these were the working groups for the SDGs, business and consumption.

- Provision of support for the work of the office by individual Council members (rapporteurs);
- Council events (conferences, workshops);
- Statements and recommendations by the Council, reports commissioned by the Council, presentations, and other publications by the Council (see list on website);
- Office of the Sustainability Code at the Council office;
- RENN coordination centre;
- In particular, projects such as #tatenfuermorgen, German Sustainability Action Week and European Sustainable Development Week, Sustainable City dialogue for mayors;
- Processes of dialogue with societal actors (e.g. Chemie³);
- Support for sustainability initiatives of German Government ministries (currently: German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), German Federal Environment Ministry (BMUB));
- Participation in European and international networks of sustainable development councils and similar institutions².

Council members receive support from the office's staff. The office implements the work programme. The office actively approaches Council members and involves them where requested and possible.

Strengthening the concept of sustainability at structural level

The German Council for Sustainable Development also works to strengthen the legal policy side of sustainability as a concept. The Council therefore recommends incorporating the principle of sustainability into Germany's Basic Law. It is necessary to upgrade the political dimension of sustainability in order to address the deficits in implementation.

The Council is striving to establish a permanent and legally binding form which would underscore the mandate and work assignments, and better highlight the continuity in the sustainability concept. This would not affect the appointment of Council members by the German Government or the Council's mandate.

The interdependencies between the SDGs arise at all levels and in all connections. Conflicts also arise in some cases between legitimate objectives. There is a need for greater transparency concerning such conflicting political objectives. Dialogue between the responsible actors in all areas and at all levels must be improved and stepped up. The discourse needs to be democratically constituted, built on facts, and credibly geared to quantified, long-term objectives. There is also a need for metaphors and 'stomachable' visions of the future which have a positive emotional impact. The Council will step up its efforts to formulate the interpretive grid for sustainability in such a way so as to facilitate a broad understanding within society and avoid leaving it accessible to expert

² Currently these are: European Environmental and Sustainable Development Advisory Councils network (EEAC), European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN), UN Sustainable Development Transition Forum (South Korea).

insiders only. It is important in this context to make reference to the absolute boundaries, which arise from the need to conserve the natural environment at global level, and to a life of dignity for all. Both aspects belong together.

The Council will examine options for improving the institutionalisation of sustainable development policy in the spheres of policy-making and civil society. Calls for third parties to take on responsibility must be more strongly linked to the voluntary assumption of ownership in order to achieve common goals with regard to public services. At the same time, it is necessary to address approaches and options for increasing commitment to the SDGs.

The Council intends to use its expertise and practical experience to help bring sustainable development policy into the German Government's bilateral and multilateral relations. (State) reporting instruments and peer reviews involving stakeholders will play a greater role in the future than they have done in the past. This situation requires new processes and procedures into which the Council can input its experience from two peer reviews and from the successful initiation of the Open SDGclub.Berlin.

On a general level, actors seeking to implement the SDGs at national level in any part of the world face the challenge of incorporating them into the political culture and working practices of their national institutions. Where possible, the German Council for Sustainable Development will take part in mutual learning activities in an international context.

The Council intends to drive implementation of the SDGs in the economic sphere (private sector, companies operating at national, federal state, and municipal level, and social enterprises) along supply chains, in industry forums and regional clusters, and, in particular, in contact with stakeholders.

The indicator, monitoring and reporting instruments of Agenda 2030 need to be used to a greater extent in mutual learning contexts. The Council intends to support this process using the peer review instrument. The peers for this review must be drawn from wider society and, in particular, the private sector and local contexts. The Council advocates the creative use of review strategies and is offering its experience from the two peer review processes in 2009 and 2013 respectively.

It will develop the Open SDGclub.Berlin on an ongoing basis. Those participating in the Open SDGclub.Berlin have announced a whole range of activities in their home countries and respective contexts. The Council has announced an invitation for 2018. The Open SDGclub.Berlin is an impressive testament to the value of ambitious dialogue on sustainable development.

Political priorities

The German Council for Sustainable Development focuses its work on topics of special interest which require consideration of economic, environmental, and social issues, in each case taking both a current and longer-term perspective. In the interests of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, the Council ensures that the global and national dimensions are present and integrated.

The Council considers the following issues (not listed in order of importance) to be particularly pressing for the substantive profile of German sustainable development policy, each one linked to the global 2030 Agenda: :

- Gender equality, justice, and inequality between and within countries;
- International development within Agenda 2030, future of development cooperation;
- Agricultural and forestry policy, soil conservation and water pollution control, land usage, biodiversity and Natura 2000;
- Sustainable City, urban-rural relationship;
- Sustainable fiscal strategies (green finance), sustainable business activity and consumption, sustainable public procurement, Sustainability Code;
- Energy transformation and decarbonisation, closed cycle management, including recycling, product responsibility and design;
- Culture of sustainability, lifestyles;
- Health and good living with a substantial reduction in energy and resource consumption;
- Transformative governance for Sustainable Development Strategy, strategies for sustainability knowledge transfer, sustainable development as a principle in research and technology policy;
- Education for sustainable development;
- Digitisation and sustainability.

These are the topics that the Council is devoting attention to in connection with the SDGs. More specifically, the Council is focusing on the cross-linkages between the topics and on their connection to the means of implementation for sustainable development. This ensures that topics not highlighted on the list, such as health care, are also addressed.

As a result, priority areas of work should emerge, thus avoiding fragmentation and clearly illustrating the principle of sustainability. This also concerns the creation of a culture of sustainability, ownership and third-party responsibility, and efforts to strengthen sustainable patterns of behaviour and standards.

The Council continues to conduct its work on the Sustainability Code, the Regional Sustainability Networks, the German Action Days for Sustainability, the European Sustainable Development Week, the Sustainable City dialogue for mayors, and Projekt Nachhaltigkeit ('Sustainability Project', formerly Werkstatt N) in dialogue with the industry initiative Chemie³ and other industry initiatives and economic forums on sustainable development.

The German Council for Sustainable Development also continues to seek dialogue with key actors, striving to network them and overcome the silo mentality. Existing good approaches and dialogue platforms are set to be deepened and expanded, while support is to be provided for new ones dealing with topics such as sustainable procurement.

The definition of sustainability based on the Brundtland Report has stood the test of time. Nonetheless, it needs to be fleshed out further in each case in line with the SDGs in 2030 Agenda, as new research findings have emerged on environmental pollution since 1987 and decisive gains are being made in our knowledge of societal sustainability processes. This also includes knowledge about conflicting objectives in holistic strategies.

Communication tasks

The Council has achieved a high standard of quality in its communications work, which is why it needs to increase the reach of this work. The Council's communication tasks are focused on the following target groups: Political decision-makers and their staff, staff of German Government ministries, sustainability experts in the research community and within institutes, associations and companies, as well as journalists, bloggers, and, finally, interested and committed citizens.

The Council's website is being modernised on an ongoing basis. Its newsletter compiles the latest information from the website and focuses on its own news. The Council also has a Twitter account, which is updated by the media officer and the Secretary General. Videos of events and Council projects are made available on the Council's YouTube channel. The Council does not plan to expand its social media presence to other platforms. Rather, it intends to provide greater impetus in terms of political education.

In all its events, the German Council for Sustainable Development seeks to 'walk the talk' and is committed to managing events in accordance with sustainability criteria.

The Council is further developing its annual conference in order to facilitate more in-depth discussion of the procedures and institutional responsibilities of the German Sustainable Development Strategy.