



---

## Discussion paper by the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development on the draft of the German National Sustainable Development strategy – 2016 revised version

---

The Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development welcomes the Federal Government's decision to implement Agenda 2030 – adopted with the 17 new worldwide Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015 – in the framework of the German National Sustainable Development Strategy, as called for *inter alia* by the Parliamentary Advisory Council. The inclusion of all 17 goals creates the basis for comprehensive implementation in Germany, by Germany and across the world with Germany's support.

The Advisory Council also welcomes the Federal Government's call for its involvement in drafting the new National Sustainable Development Strategy. The participation of the largest number of stakeholders possible is vital for the successful implementation of sustainability policy. This is in line with the statement in the draft National Sustainable Development Strategy that "the goals to be measured by the indicators should not be limited to those achievable through measures taken by the Federal Government alone, or indeed by policymakers alone", which directly transfers some of the responsibility for the successful implementation of the Strategy to other stakeholders.

As the draft correctly points out, the amendments in this round of updating and revising the Strategy are particularly far reaching. Against this background, the Advisory Council would have preferred a longer consultation phase. Furthermore, Parliament is not in a position to comment on a decisive aspect of this updating and revision of the Strategy: linking of the indicators to concrete targets is only scheduled to take place at the final drafting stage. It is thus currently unclear what level of ambition will be sought in implementation.

The Advisory Council welcomes the fact that sustainability postulates and indicators are planned for all SDGs. The inclusion of two indicators on sustainable production and consumption habits, which has long been called for, is positive. Special mention should also be made of the modified indicators on the protection of biodiversity and on organic farming (bearing in mind agriculture's role as the basis for food security), along with the new indicators on marine conservation and water, and inequality and poverty. In the case of the latter, an agreement on possible indicators, or at least on a "sustainability postulate", would have been desirable. The draft's stronger focus on Germany's global responsibility, through the inclusion of more internationally-oriented indicators, is also to be welcomed. The Advisory Council would, however, have preferred a more comprehensive approach, particularly regarding the goal of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth. In its discussion paper "Managing the Economy Sustainably: Securing Life Chances for all!", the Advisory Council had already noted that sustainable development, which makes it possible to bring about social improvements and achieve economic progress within our world's planetary limits, thus securing life chances for both the current and future generations, will mean decoupling



prosperity and quality of life from the consumption of environmental resources, and reducing levels of consumption in absolute terms.

In addition, the Advisory Council would have liked to see greater emphasis in the Strategy on the commitment made at the G7 summit in Elmau to achieving a carbon-neutral global economy during this century.

The Federal Government correctly recognises in the draft that improving policy coherence, including at institutional level, is one of the central requirements for Agenda 2030. Reforms to the institutional framework of the sustainability architecture are therefore desirable – yet they are not so far clearly visible in the draft. For example, the draft only mentions in vague terms the further development of the State Secretaries' Committee and possible further developments at working level. The stronger focus on specific measures is to be welcomed, but more concrete details are still needed in some individual areas.

The Advisory Council proposes that all these reforms be geared towards achieving the following goals:

#### National and global responsibility

The Federal Government promotes sustainable development in the context of its global responsibility, both within Germany and through international cooperation. It evaluates the global impacts of measures taken at national level.

#### Cooperation

The Federal Government departments share the responsibility for implementing the National Sustainable Development Strategy. In order to achieve the SDGs, they work together at inter-departmental level and coordinate their plans with the *Länder* and local authorities.

#### Transparency

The departments make competition between the different SDGs transparent, also indicating the progress which is to be expected.

#### Coherence and impact assessments

The departments make clear the consequences of political measures through sustainability impact assessments. They clearly present alternative courses of action for achieving an SDG and evaluate whether projects are coherent with other projects within the same department, as well as with measures taken by other departments.



### Streamlining

The departments regularly check existing projects against the goals of the National Sustainable Development Strategy and examine whether the SDGs can also be achieved through the adaptation or the conclusion of such projects.

In addition, the Advisory Council proposes the following:

#### **Sustainability impact assessments:**

The instrument of sustainability impact assessments should be retained. The Advisory Council also notes partial improvements in the implementation of impact assessments within the departments. So far, however, there is no mechanism to indicate conflicts between different dimensions and ideas of sustainability, which would allow the potentially very different impacts of proposed legislation on sustainable development in its varying dimensions and fields to be weighed up. The Advisory Council also advocates the expansion of its remit to include presenting to Parliament a comprehensive and balanced assessment, compiled through tried-and-tested all-party cooperation, of the potential different impacts on sustainable development of central political projects, thus promoting in intense political discussion on these projects.

Following several hearings, the Advisory Council recommends an in-depth discussion on the ideas and proposals for anchoring the principle of sustainability in the constitution.

#### **Monitoring:**

Implementing the National Sustainable Development Strategy as a cross-cutting task also requires stronger parliamentary involvement. This is one of the Advisory Council's core tasks. Nevertheless, the Advisory Council advocates further-reaching involvement of Parliament and calls for annual deliberations at the German Bundestag on progress in implementing the SDGs.

#### **Institutions:**

Sustainability must be given high priority within departments. Amongst other things, the Advisory Council advocates establishing the position of "sustainability officer" at director-general or director level in all departments. In this context, care must be taken to ensure that these officers are able to work mainly on enhancing coordination. The Advisory Council continues to support efforts to strengthen the implementation structures within the Federal Government for the National Sustainable Development Strategy and Agenda 2030 – especially the processes of indicator development and measurement – including through the availability of greater staff resources. A "business as usual" approach will not suffice for ambitious implementation of Agenda 2030. This must also be reflected in capacities and structures.