



MULTI-LEVEL GOVERNANCE AND VERTICAL POLICY INTEGRATION

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development at all
levels of government

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Introduction

This ESDN Quarterly Report will focus on multi-level governance and vertical policy integration in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels of government. However, before arriving at the main theme, this Report will broadly discuss governance for sustainable development, as multi-level governance and vertical policy integration, while of vital importance in themselves, are pieces of the entire concept of governance for sustainable development. The Report will examine the literature available, in order to discern what governance for sustainable development, multi-level governance, and vertical policy integration are, and how they can be used in relation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Also of importance, to better understand the role of vertical policy integration in the implementation of Agenda 2030, is not only to grasp how to integrate policy across different levels of government (local, sub-national, national, and supranational), with sometimes conflicting objectives, but also to be aware of the potential pitfalls that contribute to vertical policy integration being ineffective.

After arriving at a clearer understanding of multi-level governance and vertical policy integration, this understanding will then be used as a lens to look at how these concepts are framed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and what is happening regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in different European countries. The goal is to determine if, and how, countries have been integrating the 2030 Agenda at all levels of government. Specific attention will be given to countries that participated at the UN High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2016 and submitted Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), since they have already prepared and presented, in-depth, about their efforts in implementing the 2030 Agenda. Since the HLPF 2016 took place in July 2016 many of the presenting European countries have integrated, or are working on integrating, the targets of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into their National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDS). This report will look into the NSDSs of various countries, in order to examine how they are dealing with the vertical integration of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the sub-national and local level.

Based on the outcomes of interactive group work with participants of the ESDN Conference 2016, the Report will, in a concluding section, list important ingredients for successful vertical policy integration for the 2030 Agenda implementation.

Chapter 1: Governance for Sustainable Development

Governance for sustainable development can be broadly defined, and, as such, is hardly useful for policy makers or practitioners, as the terms governance and sustainable development encompass many different themes and aspects, making them very vague terms (Jordan, 2008). However, when sustainable development becomes a policy objective, there are two characteristics by which it can be identified. The first important point in what sets governance for sustainable development apart, is it needs to be used to steer a process of deep social transformation, which requires actions to be taken across multiple sectors, multiple levels of government, as well as across time. The second characteristic is the steering logic itself in that it “exhibits a multi-dimensional character due to uncertain and ambivalent objectives (that might change over time)” (cf. eg. Baker, 2009; Meadowcroft 2007; cited by P. Lange et al., p. 406). **Governance for sustainable development, therefore, is a unique process that seeks to steer society towards a more sustainable way of developing.** However, these characteristics remain vague and a more concrete definition and components of governance for sustainable development remain elusive.

However, in the last 5 years, the topic of governance for sustainable development has flourished, and elements for governance for sustainable development have been clarified when it comes to the characteristics that define it. The important elements that are typical of governance for sustainable development were mentioned in the Rio 2012 Issues Brief: *Regional, national and local level governance for sustainable*, and include the following:

- The integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions across sectors and policy domains (horizontal integration);
- Coherence in policy design across domains with sometimes competing priorities (coherence);
- **Inter-connectedness between governance levels (vertical integration and coherence);**
- Effectiveness and efficiency of administration and public service delivery;
- Quality and inclusiveness of public policy and decision-making procedures;
- Engagement of all constituencies of civil society through different forms of participation;
- Transparency and accountability (Rio 2012 Issues Brief, p. 3).

The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) takes these points even further and develops and applies them in the context of sustainable development strategies, which countries employ as a way to steer public policy to achieve sustainable development. Table 1 below shows a list of seven governance for SD principles, which are considered necessary to have within all sustainable development strategies if the strategies are to stand any chance

at being effective in what they seek to accomplish. As the 2030 Agenda essentially requires countries to integrate the 17 SDGs into their national sustainable development strategies (NSDSs), it is highly beneficial for policymakers to address these principles when writing or changing their NSDSs to integrate the SDGs.

Table 1: Principles of governance for SD for National SD Strategies (NSDSs)

Principle	Governance challenges of sustainable development strategies
1. Common vision and strategic objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An sustainable development strategy should define a common long-term vision; • The vision for sustainable development should be operationalized with strategic objectives that are SMART, i.e.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific (ideally stating a quantified target); ○ Measurable (with sustainable development indicators); ○ Achievable (neither too easy nor too demanding); ○ Realistic (to be achieved with the given resources and political circumstances); ○ Time-bound (indicating a start date and target year).
2. High-level commitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sustainable development strategy should be backed by high-level political commitment (from the entire government, from influential lead institutions).
3. Horizontal integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The integration of economic, environmental and social issues should be taken into account in the sustainable development strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By highlighting links and trade-offs between the three dimensions of sustainable development; ○ In the governance of the sustainable development strategy by establishing inter-ministerial bodies that are responsible for the strategy’s implementation.
4. Vertical integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A sustainable development strategy should be in line with priorities and implementation activities at other levels of government (EU, national/federal, regional/sub-regional, and local).
5. Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different stakeholder groups should be involved in the development and implementation of a sustainable development strategy (participatory activities can be informational, consultative or decisional, and they can make use of different tools and mechanisms, such as permanent Councils for sustainable development, ad-hoc stakeholder dialogues, informative/consultative internet actions, etc.).

6. Implementation mechanisms and capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The objectives of a sustainable development strategy should be addressed with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provisions and mechanisms of implementation (budgeting, annual or bi-annual work/action plans) in which political responsibilities are clearly defined; ○ Adequate institutional and/or personal capacities or capacity building activities that are necessary to achieve the objectives.
7. Monitoring, evaluation, and strategy renewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The effectiveness of an SD strategy in achieving its objectives should be <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Monitored continuously with a set of SD indicators (mostly quantitatively); and ○ Reviewed/evaluated in regular intervals (mostly qualitatively); • Monitoring and reviewing results/reports should be considered in the continuous adjustment and the cyclical renewal of an SD strategy so that evidence-based policy learning takes place.

Source: ESDN Office

The first two characteristics of governance for sustainable development from the Rio 2012 Issues Brief and point three from the table above, focus on the coherence of trans-sectoral policies, meaning that when policy objectives are being decided upon, conflicting goals and targets should be avoided, or at least addressed. For example, providing cheaper energy alternatives, such as energy produced from burning coal, would meet the objective of cheaper energy, but because coal is a dirtier source of energy and contributes to climate change, it may work against environmental objectives. This would be counter to horizontal integration, as the two potential policy objectives, cheaper energy and improvements in the state of the environment were not aligned. These two policy objectives, while being important policy objectives on their own, need the coordination between the different sectors, which is a keystone of effective governance for sustainable development, in order to be coherent and harmonized. An example of better coherence would be if the cheaper energy came from wind or solar power, which is becoming cheaper and more competitive with fossil fuels, as the former are far less environmentally destructive. Horizontal integration of policy objectives, and their coherence across different sectors, also reduces the chances for duplication of efforts by actors in different sectors. Horizontal integration also plays an important role in vertical integration, because there needs to be both coherence across sectors as well as coherence between levels of government. It is, therefore, difficult to talk about one specific form of integration without mentioning the other, as they are highly interlinked and dependent on one another.

However, the focus of this Report will be on multi-level governance and vertical policy integration, which has been bolded in the above table, and will be addressed alongside the implementation mechanisms in the following chapter. In order for the 2030 Agenda to be successful, the individual characteristics that

define governance for sustainable development will need to be adhered to, especially when countries seek to integrate the Agenda into their NSDSs.

Chapter 2: Multi-level Governance and Vertical Policy Integration: Conceptual approaches

As the main focus of this Report is on multi-level governance and vertical policy integration, this section will contextualize it with respect to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at different levels of government. It is important for the vertical policy implementation to be successful at the lower levels of government, as these lower levels are overwhelmingly involved in implementation mechanisms, and, by extension, the attainment of the SDGs. Therefore, whatever is occurring at the sub-national and local level should be streamlined with national and supranational policy SD strategies. However, before delving into vertical policy integration, it will be important to look briefly at multi-level governance as an overarching concept of overall cohesion and integration between the different tiers of government, which factors into its core, horizontal and vertical policy integration.

2.1 Definition of multi-level governance and vertical policy integration

The Committee of the Regions (CoR) published a white paper on multi-level governance, as they recognized that almost 70% of their legislation was being implemented by the regional and local level (CoR White Paper, p. 3). Through that recognition, they wanted to underline the importance of multi-level governance and the role of the sub-national and local levels in being deeply involved in developing and implementing their strategies (CoR White Paper, p. 3). This can also be applied to the EU, in general, in that to truly exhibit effective multi-level governance, the sub-national and local levels need to be deeply involved in the formation and implementation of policies, especially given that the sub-national and local levels will bear much of the responsibility in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs.

The CoR considers **multi-level governance** to mean “coordinated action by the European Union, the Member States and local and regional authorities, based on partnership and aimed at drawing up and implementing EU policies. It leads to responsibility being shared between the different tiers of government concerned and is underpinned by all sources of democratic legitimacy and the representative nature of the different players involved. By means of an integrated approach, it entails the joint participation of the different tiers of government.” The CoR goes on to define multi-level governance as **consisting of both horizontal and vertical policy integration**, and, when done correctly, increases joint ownership and implementation and acts more as a blueprint rather than a legal instrument (CoR White Paper, p. 6). **Multi-level governance, therefore, is the linking mechanism between horizontal and vertical policy integration, and serves as an overarching mechanism to align these two concepts and processes.** Although this Report focuses on vertical policy integration, in particular, it is necessary to see the wider picture as well.

Another definition of multi-level governance, defined in the White Paper on European Governance by the European Commission, states that clear principles that identify how competence is shared between the EU level and the Member State level (MS) are key: each actor contributes, in line with his or her capabilities or knowledge, to the success of the overall exercise. **In a multi-level system, the challenge is establishing clear rules for how competence is shared – not separated** (European Governance White Paper, 2001, p. 38).

Vertical policy integration, on the other hand, is taken to mean the assignment for incorporating extrinsic policy objectives into multiple sectors' policies by a high-ranking governmental body to the respective lower levels. Compared to multi-level governance, which is mainly characterised by seeking coherence and competence sharing, vertical policy integration refers to a more hierarchical steering of policy objectives from higher levels of government down to the lower levels of government. The EU or EU Member States, for instance, would, in a strategic manner, instruct the relevant sub-national levels to include specific objectives into their strategies and/or policies. Implementation is then usually monitored through mandatory mechanisms for reporting. (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/273768751_Vertical_Policy_Integration).

2.2. Multi-level governance and vertical policy integration in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development process

2.2.1. Vertical Policy Integration before the 2030 Agenda

The *Rio 2012 Issues Brief* discusses many of the factors that contribute to successful policy integration for SD at the local level, ranging from political will and horizontal integration to vertical integration. As has already been stated, strong vertical integration consists of the alignment of policies between national, sub-national, and local governments, in order to enhance the implementation of policies, in general. However, the Rio 2012 Brief also stipulates the **need for adequate resources** to be attached to such vertical policy integration mechanisms. The Brief further emphasizes that local governments are oftentimes on the frontline when it comes to the implementation of policies (Rio 2012 Issues Brief, p. 3). Without the necessary resources, the burden on the local level is sometimes too great, and their capacities to deal with implementation are too low, resulting in very little to nothing being accomplished. For the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, this dilemma should be avoided and dealt with, so as not to fail.

The Brief goes further into detail about this particular success factor, and discusses the **role of decentralization and devolution of power** away from the central government to regional and local authorities. The Brief argues that because decentralization and devolution of functions and responsibilities to local governments from higher levels of government has sometimes occurred without the accompanying resources and legislative powers, local authorities, with sub-

regional and national spheres of government above them, can be especially prone to unfunded mandates (Rio 2012 Issues Brief, p. 4).

Although the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs were not conceptualized at this point, or only at the very beginning stages, the findings in the Rio 2012 Briefs are still highly relevant for the 2030 Agenda, because the issues surrounding vertical policy integration still remain. This is a huge challenge to all governments regarding the successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. One can hardly expect the UN to set targets, which must then be adopted and adapted into NSDSs, to be able to reach the sub-national level without adequate resources and funding for implementation measures and programs designed to reach the SDGs.

The Rio 2012 Issues Brief closes with a way forward section that strongly reinforces the importance of vertical policy integration and multi-level governance for sustainable development in the implementation of SD strategies at all levels of government. The Brief states **that renewed attention should be given to national and sub-national SD strategies as a key vehicle for integration and coherence in sustainable development policy design and implementation, if appropriately linked with resource mobilization** (Rio 2012 Issues Brief, p. 5).

Cooperation and integration also play an immensely important role in being able to realize the SDGs. **Cooperation and integration need to happen along the two axes – horizontal and vertical.** All governance levels from local through global need to be vertically interconnected, knitting together sometimes fragmented and overlapping governance arrangements (multi-level governance). The SD strategies and policies that are crafted at the sub-national level should be integrated into national plans and processes for sustainable development (Rio 2012 Issues Brief, p. 5). This inherently implies that policy goals, such as the SDGs, should not be made without first consulting and discussing with the sub-national level about their needs and capacities to meet implementation requirements that are set at higher levels of government. As the Rio Brief urges, supranational and national governments not only need to be receptive to sub-national governments, but also need to channel resources, in order for implementation to occur and sustainable development objectives to be met in a more efficient and effective manner. As the sub-national level is the level at which programmes targeting the SDGs will be mostly initiated, it is imperative that mandates that are issued by higher levels of government come with the necessary support mechanisms.

Effective vertical policy integration requires harmonization of goals and targets between all governmental levels, but perhaps what is required more is for resources to follow the path of decentralization and devolution, so that once policies are aligned, resources can efficiently flow to where they are needed, such as at the regional and local level.

2.2.2. Vertical Policy Integration in the Run-up to the Ratification of the 2030 Agenda

Before the UN adopted the 2030 Agenda in September 2015, a **UN Expert Group** held a meeting in January of 2015, in which they discussed policy integration in pursuit of the SDGs. They outlined many challenges that the 2030 Agenda (then called the *Post-2015 Development Agenda*) would face regarding vertical policy integration and multi-level governance. The key messages from the Expert Group were:

- The main challenge of policy integration stems from the fact that **it is not business as usual – not normal practice – for governments to integrate**. This will be particularly difficult given the complexities of sustainability and the post-2015 development agenda (what we now recognize as the 2030 Agenda);
- **Elaborating a dense set of linkages between sub-national, national, regional and global governance arrangements will be essential in promoting policy integration efforts;**
- **The political, economic, scientific and governance dimensions of policy integration are often downplayed** (as they often were during the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) period), yet will be critical to the success of policy integration as a target of the SDGs;
- **Knowledge networks and institutional mechanisms to support cross-boundary thinking and problem-solving** are critical supports for integrated policymaking;
- **Sectoral and inter-sectoral policymaking should support one another**. If integrated policymaking is to work, it should incorporate adequate understanding of the sectoral building blocks and sectoral incentives to participate. By its nature, the SDG framework is both sectoral and inter-sectoral (Policy integration, UN 2015, p. 3).

2.2.3. Allusions to Vertical Policy Integration in the 2030 Agenda

After having looked at the information from before the ratification of the 2030 Agenda, it is important to know what the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable development documents, “Transforming our world”*, itself states about multi-level governance and vertical policy integration, and how that fits into its effective implementation. The references to multi-level governance or multi-level implementation in the 2030 Agenda are included in Table 2 below. Please note that sections in bold were designated by the ESDN Office and do not appear as so in the 2030 Agenda.

Table 2: References to vertical policy integration in the 2030 Agenda outcome document, “Transforming our world”

45. We acknowledge also the essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments. **Governments and public institutions will also work closely on implementation with regional and local authorities, subregional institutions**, international institutions, academia, philanthropic organizations, volunteer groups and others (2030 Agenda, p.15).

55. **The Sustainable Development Goals and targets are integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable**, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. **Targets are defined as aspirational and global, with each Government setting its own national targets** guided by the global level of ambition but taking into account national circumstances. Each Government will also decide how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated into national planning processes, policies and strategies. It is important to recognize the link between sustainable development and other relevant on-going processes in the economic, social and environmental fields (p.16).

63. **Cohesive nationally owned sustainable development strategies, supported by integrated national financing frameworks, will be at the heart of our efforts.** We reiterate that each country has primary responsibility for its own economic and social development and that the role of national policies and development strategies cannot be overemphasized. We will respect each country’s policy space and leadership to implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development, while remaining consistent with relevant international rules and commitments. At the same time, national development efforts need to be supported by an enabling international economic environment, including coherent and mutually supporting world trade, monetary and financial systems, and strengthened and enhanced global economic governance. Processes to develop and facilitate the availability of appropriate knowledge and technologies globally, as well as capacity building, are also critical. **We commit to pursuing policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels** and by all actors, and to reinvigorating the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development (p. 33).

77. We commit to fully engage in conducting **regular and inclusive reviews of progress at**

The subnational, national, regional and global levels. We will draw as far as possible on the existing network of follow-up and review institutions and mechanisms. National reports will allow assessments of progress and identify challenges at the regional and global level. Along with regional dialogues and global reviews, they will inform recommendations for follow-up at various levels (p. 37).

78. **We encourage all Member States to develop as soon as practicable ambitious national responses to the overall implementation of this**

Agenda. These can support the transition to the Sustainable Development Goals and build on existing planning instruments, such as national development and sustainable development strategies, as appropriate (p.38).

79. We also encourage Member States to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels which are country-led and country driven. Such reviews should draw on contributions from indigenous peoples, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders, in line with national circumstances, policies and priorities. National parliaments as well as other institutions can also support these processes (p. 38).

Source: UN, “Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (2015)

While the 2030 Agenda alludes to multi-governance and vertical policy integration processes, this is not reflected very well in the SDGs themselves, for example in SDG 17, which is about integration of the 2030 Agenda. Despite vertical policy integration being an overarching, and arguably, highly relevant theme that links up all the other SDGs, it is not portrayed that way in the Agenda itself, which runs the risk of this highly relevant concept being ignored in favour of more measurable goals. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) raised this very same point in their 2015 report titled *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development*. The OECD report focuses specifically on SDG 17 and on the target 17.14, which they criticize because of its inherent vagueness, stating that there is no elaboration on any of these terms and what the implications of these terms could be for countries looking to follow it and be able to measure it. The report notes that there were some commentators who were concerned with the vague focus on policy coherence for sustainable development, which they thought would be side-lined due to its inability to be easily measured. The report also makes mention of the German Development Institute, which had stated that they believed policy coherence for sustainable development should not be included in SDG 17, but should be an organizing principle of the SDGs (OECD Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, p. 1).

The 2030 Agenda is not perfect when it comes to prescribing what needs to be done in terms of vertical policy integration. However, that does not mean that UN member countries cannot go above and beyond what the Agenda is asking for, and treat vertical policy integration as a unifying characteristic that should be employed for each and every SDG. Each SDG will need to be dealt with by all levels of government, from the supranational to the sub-national and down to the local level. The German Development Institute may have been correct in stating policy coherence should be an overarching theme rather than a goal that can be measured, as it is incredibly difficult to measure the amount of vertical policy integration that is needed by a country. Each country's context will be different, meaning some may need more integration to achieve results, while some would require much less. For that reason, it may be better to treat vertical policy integration and multi-level governance as vital for the overall success of the 2030 Agenda implementation instead of trying to measure it using inadequate tools.

Chapter 3: Multi-level governance and vertical policy integration in implementing the 2030 Agenda in Europe and beyond

This section of the Report looks into how European countries have been implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs so far by looking specifically at multi-level governance and vertical integration mechanisms applied. Many European countries volunteered to share their experiences and progress towards the 2030 Agenda implementation at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2016, which took place in New York in July 2016. The previous Quarterly Report ([QR 42](#)) looked in-depth at the Voluntary National Reports (VNRs) of the 7 European countries that had taken part in the HLPF 2016 (Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Montenegro, Norway and Switzerland). However, when it came to vertical policy integration, only three of these countries (Germany, Montenegro and Switzerland) made mention of the sub-national or local level. For the other countries, it was not clearly specified how multi-level governance and vertical policy integration was going to take place in practice, and which specific mechanisms were going to be applied. As a follow-up to the HLPF 2016 and the VNRs, some of these countries will be researched more closely with respect to their efforts in incorporating vertical policy integration into national, sub-national and local strategies for sustainable development. This chapter will also look into what is happening at the sub-national level by reflecting upon results of the ESDN Conference 2016, which brought together representatives from the national and sub-national level to share their experiences in integrating, and dealing with, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in their particular contexts.

3.1. Summarizing Vertical Policy Integration aspects discussed at the High Level Political Forum (HLPF) 2016

The President of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) gave a brief summary of the results of the HLPF 2016. For the purpose of this Report, only vertical policy integration aspects discussed at HLPF 2016 will be looked at. The President focused on the fact that **sub-national and local governments will be at the forefront of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs**. Because of this, the sub-national and local levels will be **critical to the success of the SDGs** (HLPF 2016 Draft Summary, p. 6).

However, it was noted that although the sub-national and local levels are at the centre of SDG implementation, they are **often not taken into account when policies are developed at the national level**, such as in National Sustainable Development Strategies (NSDSs). The lack of communication and joint action in developing NSDSs can lead to conflicts arising between national and local objectives and goals (HLPF 2016 Draft Summary, p. 7). It was argued, “A balance needs to be struck between the need for coordination and coherence

of local initiatives to achieve the SDGs and meaningful localization of the Agenda” (HLPF 2016 Draft Summary, p. 8).

One can see from the President’s remarks about vertical integration, based on those countries that presented their VNRs at the HLPF 2016, that many countries have not taken into account the sub-national and local levels in the policy development process enough. However, as almost a year has passed since countries began assembling their data to be used in their VNRs, much has happened in some countries regarding sustainable development and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Therefore, the rest of this chapter will be looking more closely at the European sub-national and local levels, in order to discern whether sustainable development strategies have been incorporating vertical integration, and whether the sub-national and local level policies align with those at the national level and supranational level.

3.2. Vertical Policy Integration of the 2030 Agenda in Europe: taking a closer look at what has happened since the HLPF

3.2.1. Germany

As of January 11 2017, **Germany** has published its **renewed National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS)**, which prominently incorporates the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. The NSDS is examined below, paying particular attention to the mechanisms that will be employed by the federal level to coordinate and integrate their strategy with the strategies of the sub-national and local level. Additionally, one province in Germany, North Rhine-Westphalia, had its own sustainable development strategy that incorporated the SDGs into its framework. It is the only German province, as of yet, to do so, and is thus of particular interest, as it represents the sub-national level.

The *Sustainable Development Strategy for Germany 2017* discusses actions that are being undertaken at the sub-national level, called *Länder* in German, in relation to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and how that relates to the national strategy. **The strategy acknowledges how important the sub-national and local levels are in reaching the SDGs**, because these levels are the closest to civil society, businesses, and sustainable development initiatives. Due to their close proximity to these different actors, the sub-national and local levels are in very good positions to support sustainable development (Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie für Deutschland, p. 46). Germany, therefore, recognizes the importance of including these levels in reaching the SDGs.

In 2015, before the ratification and acceptance of the 2030 Agenda, the national level emphasized the meaning of the SDGs to the sub-national level in a structured dialogue to promote a stronger sharing and learning process, in order to raise the compatibility between the two levels in terms of policy focus, as well as a coherence for the indicator system. These Dialogs have existed in one form or another since the last NSDS was developed. There is an established history

of the national level and the sub-national level participating in information and experience exchange. For the purpose of the 2030 Agenda, these Dialogs were used to intensify the exchange mechanisms between the national level and the sub-national level, in order to bring sustainability and sustainable development to the foreground and emphasize its importance. Both the national and the sub-national levels want to see themselves as not completely reliant on the other to determine policy and policy goals. The different German Federal States want to be able to determine their own priorities, which reflect their individual competencies, and set their own goals.

In an effort to further strengthen the dialogue possibilities between the national and sub-national level, Germany has established a format called “**National-Sub-national Experience Sharing for Sustainable Development**” (*Bund-Länder-Erfahrungsaustausch zu nachhaltiger Entwicklung* (BLE NHK)), which provides a space for the continuous exchange of information and experiences regarding sustainable development happening at the national and sub-national level. The BLE NHK, in the years 2015-2016, played a large role in negotiating the 2030 Agenda, and brought the focus to the national level. From that point, the national government suggested setting up a “National-Sub-national Committee for Sustainable Development” within the context of the Conference of the Chiefs of State and the Senate Chancellery of the different federal states (the sub-national level). From this, the national government commissions a yearly analysis on themes between the national and the sub-national level regarding sustainable development, which is held as a talk between the Head of the Federal Chancellery and the Heads of State (those at the head at the *Länder* level).

At the sub-national level, **11 out of the 16 Federal Germany States have, or are updating, sustainability strategies**, which include Brandenburg, Baden-Württemberg, Bayern, Hessen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Niedersachsen, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Saarland, Sachsen, Sachsen-Anhalt, and Thüringen. However, the ways in which each of these sub-national levels deals with their specific sustainable development processes are very different from one another. Given the interconnectedness of the 2030 Agenda, the joint implementation of it requires policy coherence. The national level, therefore, instructs the sub-national levels to develop a sustainable development strategy, if they do not already have one, and to **align these strategies even more strongly to the goals set out in the National Sustainable Development Strategy. At the same time, however, the Federal States can, and should, set their own focal points for sustainable development.**

The national level also recognizes the importance of the local level in achieving the SDGs, as it is at this level that the effective power to implement the 2030 Agenda will take place. The **national government, therefore, supports efforts at the local level to develop sustainable development strategies**, among other support functions being offered. Up until the present, the exchange regarding sustainable development from the local level went only up to the sub-

national level (*Länder*). In order to implement the goals for sustainable development and the National Sustainability Strategy, an **inter-ministerial work group "Sustainable Urban Development in National and International Perspectives" (IMA City)** was set up in March 2015, following the decision of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB).

At the **city level**, over 30 mayors from Germany's larger cities have been sharing experiences about their sustainability initiatives within the scope of the Council for Sustainable Development (*Rat für Nachhaltige Entwicklung*). They have published a report, translated from German, *Strategic Cornerstones for Sustainable Development in Communities (Strategische Eckpunkte für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung in Kommunen)*. The report stresses the need for coherence regarding sustainable development strategies at all levels, which takes into account sustainable development policies, the 2030 Agenda, the National Sustainable Development Strategy, and the sustainable development strategies of the particular German Federal States (sub-national level).

Additionally, there is a new project from the Council for Sustainable Development seeking to strengthen the connection between the national level, the sub-national level, and the local level. The program is called **RENN** and will run over the course of the next five years, in which the program will compile all the sustainability initiatives happening across the entire country to link up these initiatives, in order to foster new partnerships, actions and networks to be built up. A more detailed description of what the RENN project does can be found on the European Sustainable Development Network website under the Annual Conference 2016, which took place in Bern, Switzerland under "German Regional Hubs".

North Rhine-Westphalia (*Nordrhein-Westfalen*) has integrated elements of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into its sub-national **sustainable development strategy**, and is the first German region to do so. The Strategy touches upon each of the 17 SDGs. At the local level, however, the SDGs are not implemented into strategies. When communities in North Rhine-Westphalia were asked in 2015 to complete a survey as to whether they had strategies in place that dealt with sustainability, 135 out of 396 communities answered the survey, and from the 135, or 52.6%, answered they were involved with Local Agenda 21. However, 76.3% of the communities that did answer said they had strategies that addressed sustainable development in some way. Communities were also asked whether they had Agenda 21 or sustainability councils present, to which 51.1% stated they had something like that (NRW SDS, p. 62). Issues regarding sustainability and sustainable development are featured prominently at the local level in North Rhine-Westphalia. However, the integration of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs will most likely require more time and support mechanisms for strategy development.

At the [ESDN 2016 Annual Conference](#), there was a presentation given by a representative from North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) about which areas the sustainability strategy would focus upon. The SDS for NRW 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 NRW 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 NRW. 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.

Rhineland Palatinate (*Rheinland-Pfalz*), another German Federal State, is at the beginning stages of incorporating the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into their sub-national sustainable development strategy. At present, they are evaluating how they can incorporate and integrate the Agenda and the SDGs into their existing sustainable development strategy. The SDGs are mentioned multiple times throughout their strategy, which shows they will take the Agenda's integration into very serious consideration when updating their strategy.

3.2.2. Switzerland

Switzerland has already implemented and integrated the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs into its **current National Sustainable Development Strategy**, which goes from 2016 until 2019, and is based on a 9-point Action Plan. Like Germany, Switzerland also places a high importance on vertical policy integration between the national, sub-national and local levels. According to the Swiss National Sustainable Development Strategy, many Cantons (sub-national level) and communes (local level) are already making use of the national strategy to orient their own activities, which can include initiatives, Local Agenda 21, sustainable development strategies, etc.

Very similar to the RENN program in Germany, Switzerland also has a **sustainable development promotional program**, which seeks to strengthen the concept of sustainability, as well as serve as a database for current sustainability related projects in Switzerland. The program also organizes experience sharing and learning events.

Within the Swiss NSDS, it is mentioned that for this legislative period, 2016-2019, closer cooperation will be encouraged between the national level and the sub-national level's specialist sustainability units. These sub-national units then

serve as contact points for the local level, where it is hoped that the sub-national and local levels will adapt and integrate the National Sustainable Development Strategy, and, by extension, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, into their own strategies and initiatives.

Canton Basel City in Switzerland has also made mention of the 2030 Agenda, in particular SDG 11, which is centred on making cities more sustainable. The Canton has already been working with many different programs and making use of funds to reach the objectives of this SDG, such as with the planning of their housing strategies. They are also planning to evaluate which SDG indicators will be applicable for them, so that they can develop and measure them to provide a transparent picture of what is happening. The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs will then be incorporated and integrated over the next four years from 2017-2021 into the legislation plans. This legislative plan will then be brought down to the local level, so that the SDGs can be better achieved (<http://www.entwicklung.bs.ch/grundlagen/strategien/nachhaltigkeitsstrategie.html>).

The **Canton of Geneva**, while not officially stating their intentions regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, hosted a round table discussion from Agenda 21 on December 13 2016, in which allusions were made in a presentation to the 2030 Agenda and the need to deal with policy coherence and integration within the Canton. The Canton will not only attempt to integrate the 2030 Agenda into their existing policy strategies, but also harmonize with the Swiss Confederation's NSDS. Additionally, the Canton also seeks to support and collaborate with the local level. These consultations with the local level will occur between February and March of 2017. The Board of State should then adopt the *Concept cantonal du développement durable* in June of 2017 (http://ge.ch/agenda21/media/site_agenda21/files/imce/RencontresCommunes/conceptdd_rencontre_cnes_13_12_16.pdf).

3.3. Strategies and activities for 2030 Agenda implementation at the Sub-national Level: recap from the ESDN 2016 Annual Conference

One session at the ESDN Conference 2016 was dedicated to giving an overview of activities at the sub-national level that supports the 2030 Agenda implementation. We provide below a summary of 5 examples (others were from Germany which were mentioned in the chapter above and about the local level in general) of these sub-national activities.

3.3.1. Basque Country, Spain

The Basque Country has already begun to raise awareness about the 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. There are four main thoroughfares 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.

During the ESDN Conference a breakdown of how the Basque Country is faring in reaching the SDGs was presented. 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. The Basque Country has, therefore, been taking stock of their situation, and know better where they must put in more effort.

3.3.2 Catalonia, Spain

The structure of the new Catalan sustainability report was discussed in depth, 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 Catalan 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 The Advisory Council for Sustainable Development of Catalonia (CADS) proposes to be achieved by the Catalan Government, in order to reach the targets set out by the 2030 Agenda.

The report is expected to be the basis of Catalonia's National Plan for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. 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 the Catalan 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.

3.3.3. Gironde, France

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 has 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.

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.

3.3.4. Wales, United Kingdom

The Welsh Government spent many years creating and updating their sustainability strategy. 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 seven 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 (ESDN, p. 17).

3.3.5. Wallonia, Belgium

The second Walloon Sustainable Development Strategy (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.

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.

Chapter 4: Recipes for successful Vertical Policy Integration: Outcomes from the ESDN 2016 Annual Conference

This chapter covers the outcomes of group work activities of participants at the ESDN Conference 2016, which focused on developing recipes for successful vertical policy integration in the future. The results of these discussion groups will be analysed, in order to find common themes and characteristics of what allows, or what is needed, for vertical policy integration to be successful. It should be noted that these interpretations were made by the ESDN Office, and are not by any means completely comprehensive. Please find below a set of “**ingredients of the recipe**” for successful vertical policy integration in the 2030 Agenda implementation process.

1) Vertical Coordination

The **national level is important in setting legally binding, but general requirements.** The **sub-national level should then have the chance to adapt these general requirements to their specific circumstances.** This is important, because in the sub-national/local context, no one size can fit all. It is, therefore, better to have general requirements at the national level, allowing the local level more freedom in deciding how they can meet these requirements.

2) Align Policy Strategies

Participants thought about vertical policy integration as a reinforcing loop that sees the **local level not only receiving input on how to implement the 2030 Agenda, but also playing a role by participating in how the Agenda can be integrated.** Regarding vertical policy integration, **strategies at the national and sub-national level should be aligned,** which includes policies on the SDGs, as well as the financial tools to realize them. The 2030 Agenda should also be translatable into a **language that is understandable and applicable to sub-national actors,** in order to better align strategies and targets.

3) Respect Different Contexts

Participants brought up the point that successful vertical policy integration will depend on the **countries themselves, as**

they have different structures, cultures, histories, delegation mechanisms, forms of empowerment, capacity to enable and facilitate, civil society values and citizens may have different priorities than those from other countries, and modes and levels of trust. **Priorities should also be set** regarding the intended focus that each level wants to take in realizing the SDGs, which will be context specific. **More incentives** would also be a boon for successful vertical policy integration.

4) Address Conflicting Interests/Political Reality

Regarding the successful implementation of the SDGs, some participants looked at it from the angle of **what successful implementation should look like versus how reality** often plays out. The reality, as they describe it, is that the political realization of such a central role cannot happen, as there are **conflicting interests**. However, in an ideal setting the SDGs should be the central umbrella that holds every other process together. In order to **shape the current reality**, there needs to be understanding on how the SDGs relate to all processes, which would take the form of **high-level horizontal integration**. This would in theory reduce the competition between competing sectors, making vertical policy integration easier. Some participants thought that starting with one policy issue/sector, such as quality education or procurement, and dealing with integration along those lines might enhance chances for successful vertical integration, as it could reduce instances of conflicting interests across policy sectors.

5) Awareness Raising/Communication

Raising awareness for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs of politicians at the sub-national and national level, journalists, as well as having local politicians onboard will be vital for successful integration. Some of the tools that could prove useful for integration of the SDGs could be **social media outreach, campaigns, special**

events, recruiting local leaders, target specific groups, and provide data banks. SDG marketing tools and using known-people as **SDG ambassadors** would also have a profound effect on successful vertical policy integration and raising awareness for the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. When there are successes regarding the SDGs, those need to be communicated and used advantageously, in order to inspire other actors and motivate them to participate in realizing the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda. **Pilot projects should be developed and good practices shared.** It is also important that the **national level set a framework that has been translated from a supranational body to fit the national context,** and proceed to communicating that with subsequently lower levels of government. **Two-way communication between all the levels,** therefore, becomes extremely important in making vertical policy integration successful.

6) Stakeholder Inclusion

Participants thought including all stakeholders when trying to vertically integrate the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs was important. Vertical integration should not be restricted to administrative bodies, but that more actors and stakeholders need to take part, in order successfully integrate the 2030 Agenda. They also stressed that specific frameworks should be provided alongside stakeholder exchange platforms, in order to create ownership of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs from the bottom-up. The identification of key actors is also important in ensuring successful vertical policy integration.

7) New Narratives/Thinking Outside the Box

In order to attract as many and varied stakeholders as possible, **inspiring new narratives should be provided,** which invite and encourage people to act, as they are a real part of the entire 2030 Agenda implementation process. Successful vertical policy integration will not only

require thinking inside the box, but also **thinking outside the box** to find new solutions to the issue of vertical policy integration. The deficits of the more traditional Local Agenda 21 should be analyzed, in order to find ways to improve and learn from those experiences, so that they are not repeated in the implementation of the SDGs.

**8) Bottom-up
Activities/Local Spaces**

Bottom-up initiatives at the local level should be stimulated, and can entail a mix of informal and formal procedures. The stimulation of the local level could be brought through social innovation and social networks. These local networks should be fostered and supported. **Bottom-up approaches in creating spaces for local initiatives to take off** should also be developed and supported.

9) Monitoring/Indicators

Monitoring also becomes very important, as information gathered at the local level is fed up to the sub-national level, and from there to the national level and onwards. Actions should be measured to gauge their impacts and determine if progress was made on the 17 SDGs. Participants also proposed using **fewer indicators that should be clearer and more easily understood by everyone**. Benchmarking starting points and incremental progress should be followed, in order to better support the local level on the SDGs. **Mapping of how local processes relate to the SDGs and sub-processes** would also be needed, which would deliver a double dividend, as it would include the original process along with the 2030 Agenda, helping in establishing benchmarks and identifying gaps.

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