


Peer learning and capacity building for integrated implementation and reporting on regional and national sustainable development strategies



August 2024. On July 15, the Colombian think tank Cepei, the Science Platform Sustainability 2030 (wpn2030) and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Germany jointly organized an official side event to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York. The aim of the side event was to facilitate peer learning on the implementation and reporting of sustainability strategies in different national and regional contexts. The side event was thus in line with the cross-cutting SDG 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development) and built on the sixth transformative lever introduced in the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR 2023): Capacity Building. Currently, political instability, immediate crises and limited financial resources require more than ever strategic, integrated and forward-looking decisions to accelerate the

implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). At the same time, these factors pose considerable challenges for member states in many strategic contexts.

The side event aimed to promote peer learning between member states and to enrich the discussion on capacity building for integrated governance to implement the SDGs. This can be done, for example, through the participatory design of reporting processes using the Voluntary National Reviews (VNR), or through inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination on the so-called “entry points” (transformation areas in the German context) in the GSDR. The results from accompanying research and analysis of different approaches from the regional and country-specific strategy contexts were presented and discussed.

Improving capacity building as a lever for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: Key messages from the GSDR 2023

Sarah Löpelt, SDSN Germany / wpn2030

Sarah Löpelt highlighted key findings from the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2023, which emphasize the central role of capacity building in the implementation and reporting of sustainability strategies. Her contribution underlined the need to build different types of capacity depending on the SDG, phase of transformation and national or local context in order to support the transformative processes for SDG achievement. Löpelt outlined the three phases of transformation from the GSDR: emergence, acceleration and stabilization (refer to Fig. 1).

In the first phase, the focus is on innovation and the creation of sustainable alternatives while old systems are destabilized. This includes providing informal and protected spaces for innovation and dialog as well as for the exploration of new opportunities and spaces of possibility. Building consensus on strategic direction and foresight is crucial. This can be achieved through various measures. First and foremost, the joint development of long-term vi-

sions and strategies is important. The use of scenario analysis methods and a strengthening of the interfaces between science and politics can play an important role here.

In the second phase, transformations need to be scaled and accelerated through coordination between different stakeholder groups, while unsustainable systems need to be broken up. This phase includes the identification of successful practices and models that can then be scaled and replicated, the coordination of measures across sectors and the involvement of all stakeholders. The negotiation of conflicts and compromises is essential in this phase in order to drive acceptance for successful solutions. The capacity to shape such negotiation processes, political will and public awareness are important to build support for scaling transformative actions. At the same time, general barriers and system blockages to moving away from business-as-usual and unsustainable pathways need to be identified and overcome.

The final phase is about developing various forms of capacity building to stabilize the long-term success of new systems and discontinue old unsustainable systems. This phase includes securing financial and human resources to invest in legal reforms and building new institutions for implementation, regula-

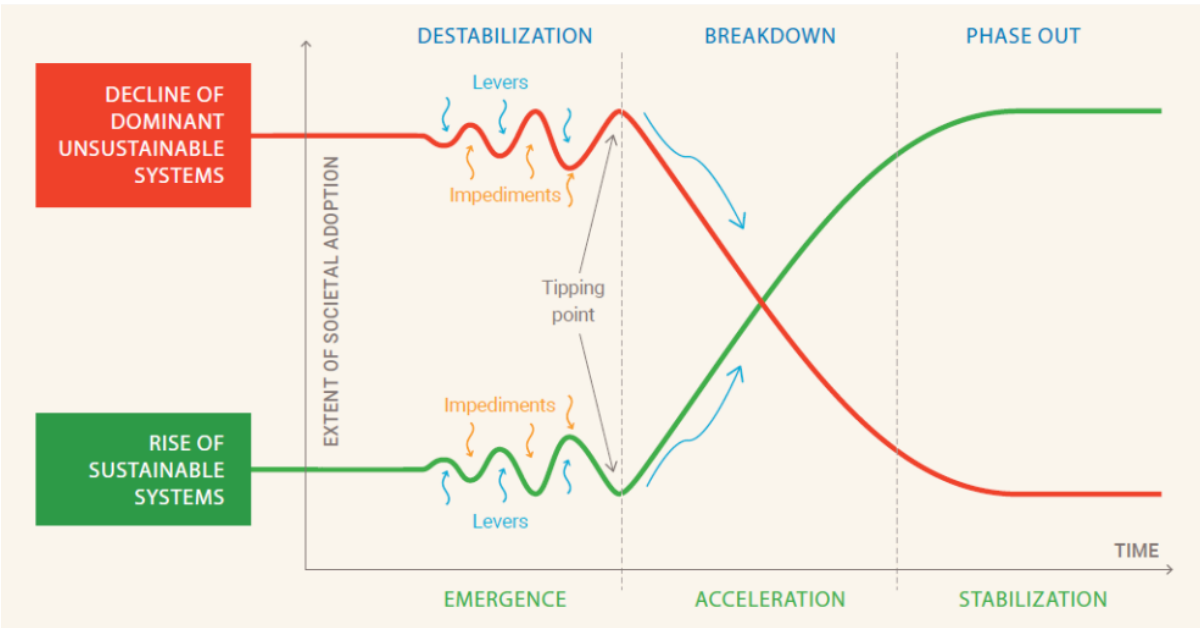


Figure 1: The three phases of transformation (GSDR 2023, p.65)

tion, enforcement and follow-up. Building resilient and adaptable institutions and policies is critical to ensure the long-term implementation of the transformative changes achieved in the earlier phases.

In summary, it is particularly important for integrated SDG reporting and implementation to build the following capacities: to work together across departments and governance levels with a common vision for long-term goals, to integrate different policy areas, to use synergies and minimize conflicts of objectives, to effectively involve social groups and negotiate, to resolve and mediate conflicts and (from the perspective of different stakeholders) to strategically and systematically drive and manage the transition to sustainability.

Barriers to successful implementation of the SDGs in Latin America/Caribbean and Colombia

Philipp Schönrock, Cepei

Philipp Schönrock, Director of the Cepei Think Tank, presented the challenges of implementing the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a focus on Colombia. In order to strengthen the work on SDG implementation in the region, a stronger political will is needed to measure national progress in a solution-oriented manner and in a global context. Accelerating the implementation of the SDGs will not be possible without improving the capacity of countries in the region to produce, manage and transmit data. Schönrock reports a loss of trust among citizens in institutions and even in democracy. In the eyes of citizens, governments are not fulfilling their concerns, especially in social, economic and environmental areas. He cites a lack of coordination between the relevant institutions and a lack of funding as the main problems. To overcome these challenges, Schönrock emphasized the need to strengthen political leadership and inter-institutional coordination, promote local participation, involve the private sector and civil society more and strengthen the institutional capacities of all actors.

With regard to monitoring the SDGs, Schönrock believes it is important to strengthen the capacities of the national statistical offices and secure their funding. In addition, coordination between private and public institutions must be improved in order to

increase the availability and quality of data regarding SDG implementation in the region. Public-private partnerships play a decisive role here by promoting the exchange of data and better coordinating technical services among the stakeholder groups. According to Schönrock, the private sector can make an important contribution to data collection, the implementation of monitoring technologies, the creation of accountability reports, the formation of partnerships and technological innovations. However, data collection must be carried out according to ethical principles and be geared towards specific local contexts. Public-private data initiatives could reveal inequalities in access to basic services and in the distribution of resources, as well as violations of fundamental rights.

Success factors and barriers for the integrated governance of national sustainability strategies - The case of the German “transformation teams”

Julius Rathgens, wpn2030

The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2023 emphasizes the need to build and expand capacities to support the sustainability transformation. On the scientific side, these capacities include the production of socially robust scientific knowledge and the strengthening of the interface between science, politics and society. On the political side, the report emphasizes the need for inter-ministerial cooperation and coordination to achieve the SDGs (refer to Fig. 2).

The German Federal Government took a significant step towards implementing the recommendations of the Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) 2019 by setting up the so-called “transformation teams” in 2022. These teams were set up to work on the key entry points in six areas across ministries (see Figure 2). The teams are made up of representatives from the ministries involved in the transformation in the core areas of the strategy and are each co-led by 3-6 ministries. By the end of the pilot phase (mid-2024), all transformation teams will have prepared a so-called transformation report in which they outline the status quo of SDG implementation in the respective transformation areas and highlight existing transformation needs.

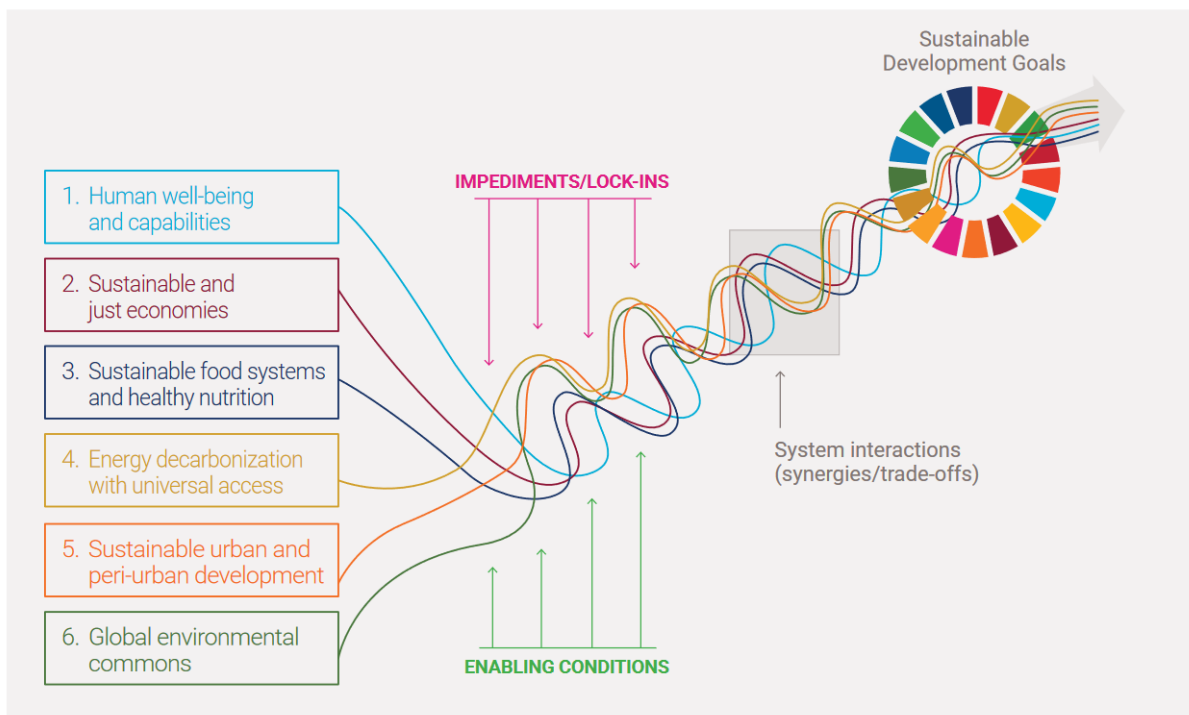


Figure 2: Entry points for accelerating the implementation of the SDGs (GSDR 2023, p. 69)

Rathgens explained that the wpn2030 is investigating the factors that have contributed to successful inter-ministerial cooperation in the transformation teams through accompanying research. The goal of this research endeavour is to identify which obstacles arose and how these were addressed and, where possible, overcome by the teams.

Rathgens emphasized that the initial results of the accompanying research showed that continuous learning and adaptation were necessary for the work of the TT. The pilot phase has created a strong desire for implementation to make the transition from knowledge to action and ensure that strategies remain relevant and effective in achieving the SDGs. In order to implement the lessons learned from this phase, Rathgens said it was now important to move into the second phase to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs.

The exchange during the side event helped to contextualize the results of the accompanying research on the transformation teams and generate initial findings on the transferability of this approach.

Insights into the integrated governance of national sustainability strategies in Brazil

Luciana Servo, IPEA

Luciana Servo, President of the Brazilian Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA), shared insights into Brazil's efforts and challenges in the governance of its national sustainability strategy. The presentation highlighted Brazil's progress and strategic priorities aligned with the GSDR. Notably, Brazil's first voluntary national review (VNR) was held in 2017 and represents a significant milestone in the country's SDG journey.

Under the term "Revitalizing the SDG Agenda in Brazil", it describes several key initiatives to improve governance and ensure a comprehensive assessment of progress. A central aspect of Brazil's SDG governance is the active participation of civil society. The re-establishment of a National Commission for the SDGs in September 2023 underlines the government's political will and commitment to implementing the agenda. The commission plays a crucial role in coordinating and integrating various stakeholders, including local governments, civil society organizations, the private sector and state-owned companies.

According to Servo, the implementation process in Brazil is based on the extensive participation of stakeholder groups and a rigorous analysis of the processes, instruments and results of the consultations. As an example, Servo provides an insight into the broad participation of expert and interest groups in SDG monitoring in Brazil.

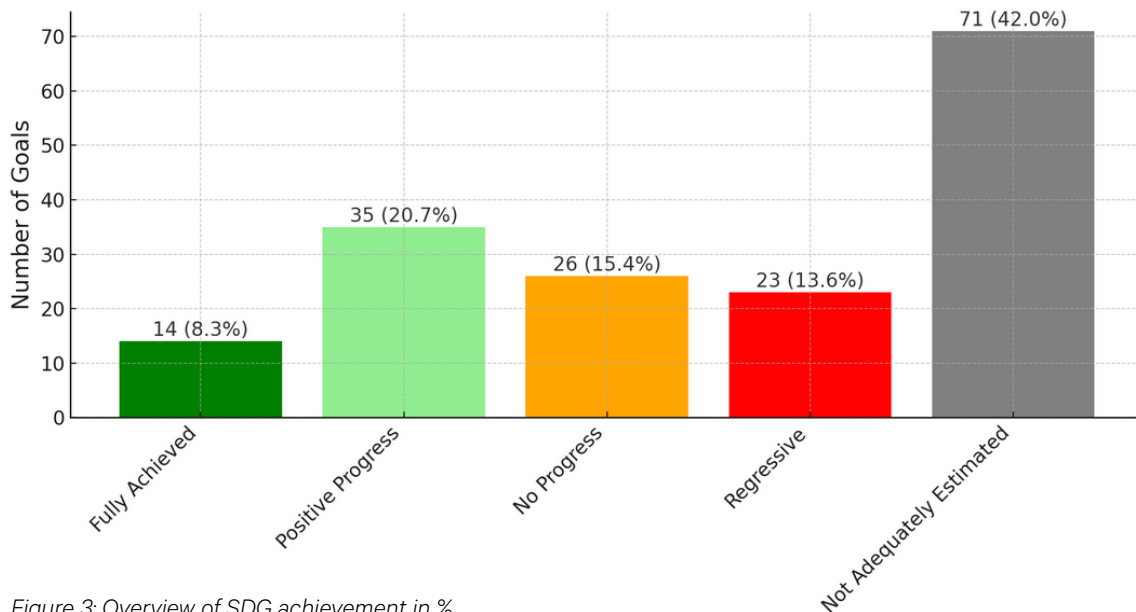


Figure 3: Overview of SDG achievement in %

The VNR was made accessible to a diverse audience, including 91 representatives of local governments, 152 from civil society organizations, 120 from the private sector and 44 from state-owned companies. Over 70 specialists from IPEA, IBGE and Fiocruz conducted an in-depth analysis of the 17 SDGs and assessed 127 global indicators, broken down by region, gender and ethnicity. The analysis of Brazil's progress in implementing the SDGs showed a mixed picture. Although some goals were fully achieved or showed positive progress, almost half of the goals could not be adequately assessed (refer to Fig. 3).

To align national efforts with global strategies, Brazil also participated in six T20 working groups (T-20 is a platform that supports the G20 process at the science-policy interface) and contributed to 375 policy briefs involving 175 think tanks and specialists from the G20 countries and the African Union. This collaboration was brought together in several key recommendations, including strengthening multilateral cooperation to fight hunger and poverty, applying progressive fiscal policies to reduce inequalities and support climate justice, as well as using affordable climate finance for just energy transitions. It also calls for the strengthening of capacity building, as well as technology transfer, the financing of national transition plans and the reform of the IMF's debt relief framework and lending practices in order to expand the fiscal space for inclusive development. The establishment of a multi-stakeholder platform for global data management, the improvement of digital public infrastructures and the strengthening of cooperation between countries on artificial intelligence (AI) are also recommended. In addition, the WTO should be strengthened to facilitate trade and

investment negotiations. This could help to better address health disparities and ensure that the G20 commitments on gender and ethnic justice are translated into concrete action.

Capacity building through peer learning

An essential part of the side event was the exchange with the participants. A large number of different stakeholder groups were therefore present at the side event, representing both private and public institutions from different countries. The transferability to other contexts was discussed in question-led peer learning dialogs. Based on the shared experiences from different strategy contexts, common transformation needs for capacity building were identified. Discussions focused primarily on frameworks, such as the financing of transformation measures and cooperation between private and public institutions. It was also pointed out that comparative case study analyses should be used to identify specific success factors and highlight their transferability to different contexts. Interactive, digital platforms in particular can support this and enable systematic exchange on the basis of documentation, reports and data.

References

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