



2nd European Resources Forum, Berlin

Minutes from the European Resources Forum 2014

Minutes by:

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Parallel Session C: Sustainable Development Goals and post 2015 process

- Csaba Kőrösi, Co-chair of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, Permanent Representative Permanent Mission of Hungary to the United Nations
- Karsten Sach, Deputy Director General, European and international Policy, Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany
- Timo Makela, Director, European Commission, DG Environment, Unit International Affairs, LIFE and Eco-innovation
- Leida Rijnhout, Director of Global Policies and Sustainability, European Environmental Bureau, Belgium
- Moderator: Bas de Leeuw, Managing Director, World Resources Forum Association, Switzerland

Csaba Kőrösi, presented insights on the Working Group's challenges and current results. During 14 months of evidence collecting the group produced 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets. To give an example Goal 1 demands to "End poverty in all its forms everywhere." with target 1.1 "by 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day".¹ The SDGs are the framework that UN member states will base their national implementation plans and projects on. The SDG Open Working Group's discussions were much influenced by past concepts and conflicts of power: What will be the role of individual countries? Who will be the leader in 2030? How will the SDGs shape future markets? Developing countries see the burden of transformation rather than the potential competitive advantage. Their main focus is on economic growth, supporting the flow of assets and technological innovation. Only the affected countries stress environmental protection. Planetary boundaries are perceived as a threat and an argument of developed countries to "keep them small". On the other side, industrialized countries recognize planetary boundaries and the need to shift to a sustainable production and consumption. The differing interests and arguments showed that a paradigm change is necessary – "a win-win situation, not a zero-sum game". Csaba Kőrösi speaks of a need to decrease inequality and growth. How markets are to be reshaped (rearranging or expanding?) and if we need less capitalism and more

¹ Open Working Group (2014) SDG: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/focussdgs.html>

research & development is an ongoing discussion. The Open Working Group is basing their decisions on evidence but in the end is often meeting at a political compromise. Their definition of SDGs and targets is an ongoing process that is aiming for transparency and openness. However for many the UN seems “far away” and participation is a challenge.

Karsten Sachs, spoke from a national perspective. He assessed that goal 1.- 4. are covered in Germany ((1) End poverty and (2) hunger, achieving food security and improved nutrition, promote sustainable agriculture, (3) ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages as well as (4) inclusive and equitable quality education, promote lifelong learning opportunities for all). Germany follows a framework on Sustainable Consumption and Production² and its Council for Sustainable Development³ is responsible for implementing the National Sustainability Strategy. Furthermore Germany is aiming at a doubling of resource efficiency with its national program ProgRess⁴. Karsten Sachs points out that internationally it is of high importance to agree on smart-indicators and tools e.g. lifecycle analysis (LCA). Germany encourages goal setting and is in a dialogue on this with 80 partner countries. The EU should be leading by example in implementing the SDGs. Austria, France and Germany are even aiming at a sustainable development strategy on EU level. Germany plans an updated sustainable development strategy by 2016 including decoupling strategies and eradication of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies. This should set standards and be a leading example.

Timo Mäkelä, pointed out the challenge of the SDG not being on the national or supranational political agenda. He sees the need to focus more on the opportunities of SDGs than on their constraints and requests universality so all countries can play their part. Just as Karsten Sachs he demands good indicators especially with a shift from qualitative to quantitative. For the implementation on EU level he suggests measures of eco-design and circular economy promotion, ceasing non-environmentally friendly subsidies and shifting from labor to sustainability tax. He further suggests green public procurement and resource efficiency to create green incentives, jobs and increased competitiveness. “Policy matter” said Timo Mäkelä – setting goals and targets is of high importance and will influence European environmental and labor policy.

Leida Rijnhout, represented the NGO perspective as one of the “major groups” in the SDG definition process. From her perspective the discussion is on more than the SDGs, “it is about global social and environmental justice”. Major changes are necessary in the north (with the rebound effect in mind!). While the global north is actively discussing SDGs, the south is still busy with their poverty eradication plans. Are the SDGs just an upgrade of the MDGs? While the MDGs see the environment as a luxury, in the SDGs it is the basis for well-being. The global south is locked-in by debts and under the impression of much talk in the north but no action. The EU 2020 strategy are “illusions” and “dreams” – instead we should recognize the limits and work with what is available, concentrate on social innovations and coherence. Governments need to strengthen civil society and institutionalize sustainable development in government structures. For this, among others, clear indicators and targets, monitoring systems and accountability mechanisms are needed. Leida Rijnhout has the impression that the environmental dimension is weakened in the SDGs under all the political compromise.

² UN: The ten year Framework of programmes on sustainable consumption and production patterns: http://www.un.org/esa/dsd/dsd_aofw_ni/ni_pdfs/NationalReports/germany/scp.pdf

³ German Council for Sustainable Development: <http://www.nachhaltigkeitsrat.de/en/home/>

⁴ German Resource Efficiency Programme (ProgRess) (2012): http://www.bmub.bund.de/fileadmin/bmu-import/files/pdfs/allgemein/application/pdf/progress_en_bf.pdf

Bas de Leeuw concluded with lessons learnt of: thinking in systems, not playing a zero-sum game (where one wins and the other loses) and that social contracts matter. “Be a leader in standard setting!” Unfortunately there was no time for further discussion with the audience.
