

Involving all Partners in Implementation and Review Perspectives from Parliament and Civil Society (Germany)

Side-Event at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, 19 July 2016, 6:15 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Input: Marie-Luise Abshagen, Forum Umwelt und Entwicklung

Dear honorable guests, representatives of member states and the German government, UN agencies and civil society organizations, ladies and gentlemen,

I have been at the HLPF since last Wednesday, listening to the official statements of governments, joining side events and talking to civil society colleagues and friends from all over the world. And while we are all coming from different backgrounds, I feel that there is one thing that connects us all: the great motivation that with the 2030 agenda we have a tool to actually change the world for the better, as well as the increasingly uneasy feeling that we really need to get on with it.

Therefore I would like to thank the German government for the opportunity to speak here at this side event and for their true and heartfelt openness to include all kinds of stakeholders in this conversation on the implementation of the SDGs.

I think we cannot stress enough the urgency to include civil society in political discussions and measures in the face of this complex world where decisions of political actors tend to not always be solely lead by interest for the society, the generations to come or the protection of nature's wonders, but by preservation of their own power and status, economic domination or populist self-interest.

We see this troublesome tendency all over the world with increasingly shrinking space for civil society, and many activists fighting for justice, human rights and the protection of the environment facing persecution, imprisonment or worse.

We therefore truly appreciate that the German government has recognized the importance of bringing society and NGOs into the discussion on the implementation of the SDG, and valuing the benefits that come out of this exchange of conflicting views and interests, as they even state in the invitation to this side event.

Now I would like to take this literally and present to you what from our perspective needs to be done to make the SDGs and the vision behind them reality and what policy changes on the side of the German government are crucial to realize this.

Lately, we have been seeing quite a lot of rankings on who is apparently already doing quite well on the SDG implementation. And Germany is always far up the top. While this might be true for some policy areas, what troubles us is that this in no way reflects that many political decisions actually slow down progress in terms of achieving sustainability, and policies continue to go in the wrong direction.

This leads to the fact that the ecological footprint of Germany is enormous. We would need three planets if everyone would consume resources such as land, water or raw materials the way we do.

And this is not a trival fact. Not only does this lead to degradation and overuse of soil, air and water and the loss of biodiversity. But all those resources actually come from somewhere, and if we use them, someone else can't. Therefore 75 % of the world population derives no benefit of our exploitation of natural resources, while all along suffering most of the consequences.

And what we need to face is that this state of the world is not God given, but is a result of concrete political decisions and actions along with our continuous belief in the irrevocable and inevitable need for economic growth.

Why else does the transport sector in Germany remain detached from environmental and climate policy criteria, despite its contributing to climate change on a large scale.

Why else does the German agricultural sector still insist on greater and greater concentration and orientation towards global markets, while it already uses more than 2 million hectares of agricultural land abroad in order to produce its enormous feedstuff imports. Germany would need an area more than 2 times its size to satisfy its demand for resources and land.

Even our star project, the energy transition – the Energiewende – has been continuously slowed down, more or less answering calls of big industry instead of still supporting its original brilliant idea of making this a decentralized project of small-scale investors. And while we are on the topic, Germany still runs coal plants and has been very reluctant to actually go along with an ambitious, timely decarbonization strategy.

Germany is therefore not yet a pioneer for sustainability but on the contrary still has a long way to go. We need a complete U-turn in the way we think. In the way we make political decision. In our economical structures. In the way we include and enable all people regardless of their income, age, gender, disability, place of residence, nationality or migration status in the spirit to leave no one behind. In the way we all believe we deserve to live and consume, while others suffer because of us. And we need to start implementing new policies – now!

Giving civil society a seat at the table is one important first step to achieve sustainability and a world, in which a live in dignity is not determined by the random place you were born but is an undoubted reality for all people now and in the future.

Thank you.