Implementing the SDGs at the Local and Urban Level

Introduction

The European Sustainable Development Network (ESDN) is an informal network of national policy-makers working on sustainable development policies and strategies and other sustainable development experts. The ESDN's main aim is to advance sustainable development at the European, national and sub-national level by bringing together government representatives and expert stakeholders. The ESDN is the largest policy network on sustainable development in Europe, facilitating the exchange of good practices and experiences on sustainable development across Europe by publishing Quarterly Reports, organizing flagship Annual Conferences, Workshops, and Peer Learning Platforms, which cover topics in sustainable development, of which the Sustainable Development Goals are the recent driving force.

15th ESDN Workshop

The 15th ESDN Workshop took place in Berlin, Germany on October 16 – 17, 2017 and **focused on experiences and examples of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the local and urban level**. Its main aim was to reflect on impulses and support from existing local and urban networks in the implementation of the SDGs; showcase practical examples of SDG implementation at the local and urban level; and develop recommendations for the effective implementation of the SDGs at the local and urban level.

This experience of sharing and learning was done through a mixture of keynote speakers, who delivered presentations of practical examples about the implementation of the SDGs at the local and urban level, through interactive group sessions with 55 participants from 15 countries, and through a panel discussion involving support networks that cater towards the local and urban levels.

The following **policy recommendations** for the implementation of the SDGs at the local and urban level were largely generated by participants during the interactive sessions of the ESDN Workshop. The "Examples in Action" were exclusively taken from keynote speeches during the Workshop. The recommendations are not presented in a ranked order, but rather presented by thematic area. Each discussed theme offers steps that governments and policy-makers could use in their implementation of the SDGs.

Policy Recommendations

Participation & Engagement

- **Motivate and engage local actors** to become a part of deciding how the SDGs will be implemented;
- **Increase the capacities of local actors** so they become more motivated, engaged, and actively participate in dialogues and platforms for exchange on SDG implementation;
- **Create a space for dialogue** or an **exchange platform** between politicians, public administrations, stakeholders, and civil society to openly discuss and reflect upon local/urban needs and necessary implementation steps;

> ### Example in Action:
> ### *Ludwigsburg, Germany*
>
> Sustainability is approached in a way that is based on stakeholder participation, which includes members from the government administration, the City Council and citizens, who gather together every three years at events called "Future Conferences" to discuss ideas for the city's "City Development Concept". Future Conference 2015 saw 300 participants.

- **Incorporate local knowledge** in order to learn about, and focus on, what the local level needs and what they are capable of contributing to the realization of the SDGs.

Partnerships & Coordination

- **Avoid parallel structures and duplication of efforts** by encouraging enhanced cooperation and partnerships between stakeholders, organizations, governments, and government administrative departments;
- **Priority setting** by taking into account all stakeholder ideas and local knowledge to address relevant SDGs, but select those that are either "low hanging fruits" or potentially achieve the most enthusiasm to create some buy-in;
- **Foster inter-city and inter-municipal experience exchanges** and dialogue platforms to learn from each other and coordinate activities;

> ### Example in Action:
> ### *Germany's Interministerial Taskforce for Sustainable Urban Development (IMA Stadt)*
>
> Based on a wide and active base of participation across 4 working groups, in which ministerial departments, umbrella organizations, German provinces, municipalities and academia meet to discuss sustainable urban development.

- **Build up capacities of all stakeholders across all levels of government** to be able to adequately articulate needs and capabilities regarding SDG implementation.

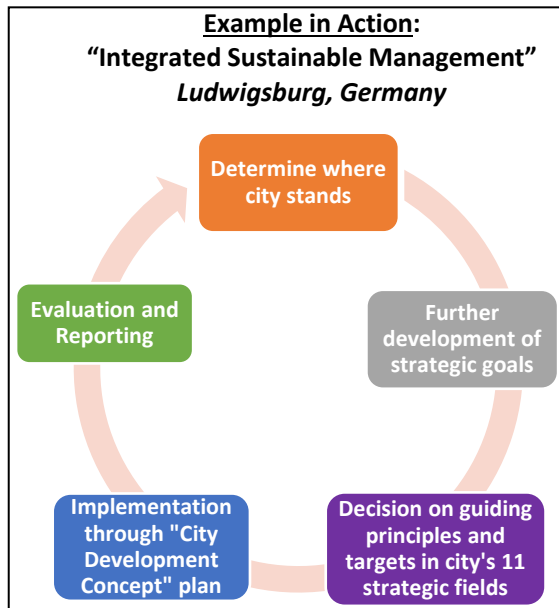## *Political Commitment & Leadership for Change*

- **EU level commitment and leadership** on developing a holistic and comprehensive sustainable development strategy that incorporates the SDGs as a guideline and reference document for the national and sub-national level;
- **Comprehensive policy strategies** in which the SDGs serve as integrative guidelines until 2030 and for which the responsible policy units are held accountable;
- **Encouraging change leaders** at all levels of government to ambitiously address SDG implementation.

> ### Example in Action:
> ### *'SDG Voices', Belgium*
>
> The Federal Institute for Sustainable Development wanted to spread the SDGs to all levels of society and be able to attract more support than just the support from the "usual suspects", who always support sustainable development initiatives. The idea was to nominate 8 "SDG Voices" and provide them each with 20,000 Euros to help them fund their communication actions relating to the SDGs. The first "SDG Voices" were chosen in 2016, in which the city of Ghent was chosen to become one of them. The Federal Institute for Sustainable Development plans to add more "SDG Voices", where the old ones can keep their title of SDG Voice, in doing so they can keep spreading the news.

Indicators & Monitoring

- **Establish relevant SDG indicators** that take local and urban level contexts into account;
- **Develop monitoring capabilities** and establish more **sophisticated evaluation processes** that use cycles of adaptive change.

<div style="border:1px solid">

Example in Action:
"Integrated Sustainable Management"
Ludwigsburg, Germany

- Determine where city stands
- Further development of strategic goals
- Decision on guiding principles and targets in city's 11 strategic fields
- Implementation through "City Development Concept" plan
- Evaluation and Reporting

</div>

Communication & Awareness Raising

- **Sharing and exchanging good practice examples** from all levels of SDG implementation;
- **Convince and incentivize** the local and urban levels the merit in "buying into" and aligning their sustainable development plans with the SDGs;
- **Link the SDGs to local and urban activities already happening** and that are familiar (e.g. energy efficiency, CO_2 emissions, climate change, poverty reduction, etc.), so as not to reinvent the wheel.

Local Example in Action:
Ghent, Belgium

Ghent developed a plan of communication for actions on the SDGs they had to focus on in the SDG Voices project, where they made a clever media-campaign with movies and a website to appeal to citizens. In order to make this happen, the city knew they needed partners, both inside and outside of the city. Ghent then began to challenge other ambitious cities in Belgium to competitions, such as whose citizens rode their bikes more, or which city had the higher amount of vegetarians, etc. Fostering competition between cities was a great way to reach more people, as many people like to compete and do not like to lose or make their city look bad.

Education for the SDGs

- **Educate starting as early as possible** about sustainable development and the SDGs (e.g. at the primary and secondary school levels with targeted programs), businesses can also be a valuable resource in education for sustainable development;

Local Example in Action:
Ghent, Belgium

Ghent encouraged businesses to open their doors to children and teachers and have them see and learn how businesses are linking their activities to the SDGs. Initiatives like this were able to reach 1,000 students, and soon everyone was talking about the SDGs. The city was able to reach a lot of people, who are usually not reachable, with the SDGs. The city then received a lot of questions from citizens about how they could participate or how they could set up their own initiatives.

- **Inform local/urban politicians and policymakers** about the benefits and opportunities pursuing sustainable development and the SDGs (e.g. quality of life, well-being, the environment, economy, etc.) and **how this is linked to their current political agenda**.

Budget & Finance

- **Provide national funds** to municipalities to undertake SDG implementation, capacity building, education, etc.;
- **EU and national level support** for experimental projects in which positive outcomes are not necessarily guaranteed – taking a risk, but being potentially rewarded with something unique;
- **Align budgets and finance along sustainable development and the SDGs** at the national and sub-national level.

**Local Example in Action:
*Hannover, Germany***

The implementation of the "My Hannover 2030" strategy and its goals is currently being done in over 40 work programs that send reports to the mayor and is linked to the budget. Strategies are developed for stronger participation in the city's districts. There will be revisions to the government administration's development program. The strategy will be evaluated every three years. There will be an expansion of communication actions and of founding partnerships and collaborating with other stakeholders.

**Local Example in Action:
*Malmö, Sweden***

A new organization will take shape during the year under the municipal government in order to lead the city's sustainability and innovation work in cooperation with external actors, as well as other committees and administrations in the city. SDG implementation, therefore, has been written into the budget for 2017, showing that there is strong political will to follow through with addressing and implementing the SDGs.

**Local Example in Action:
*"Global Sustainable Municipalities in North Rhine-Westphalia", Germany***

The main aim of the project is to develop comprehensive sustainability strategies that contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the local level. This is done by:
1. Developing a target system with strategic and operational targets, as well as monitoring system;
2. Integrating existing sectoral strategies and initiatives
3. Adapting to national and regional strategies
4. Defining precise targets , target values and time frame;
5. Establish indicators for regular monitoring and progress reporting;
6. Political legitimization and wide participation of different actor groups

- **Build on and improve** processes that already exist when attempting SDG implementation (e.g. multi-stakeholder dialogues, platforms, development strategies, etc.).

New Activities, New Ideas

- **Create greater sense and atmosphere of ownership** for the SDGs at the local and urban level by organizing interesting events, collaborating with change agents, artists, schools, etc.;
- **Support local and urban level** by financing innovative projects and ideas that municipalities decide are worthwhile in their specific context;
- **Foster friendly SDG-related competitions** between municipalities, cities, and regions (e.g. which city recycles more, which city can mobilize citizens to ride bikes instead of vehicles, etc.).

Structural Policy Alignment

- **Perform mapping exercises** to aid in **gap analyses** and identifying areas of success and areas where improvements are needed;

**Local Example in Action:
*Podgorica, Montenegro***

The process in formulating the Local Action Plan for Podgorica was based on two steps with multiple sub-steps. The first step in the process was to analyze the National Sustainable Development Strategy and identify in which areas the local level should be in charge or involved. From there, an analysis had to be carried out on the existing strategic documents from the local level, in order to identify matches between local strategy documents and the National Sustainable Development Strategy, strengthen these connections, ensure implementation, and avoid duplication. If the local strategies already identified relevant actions, then their alignment with the National Sustainable Development Strategy was tested. If local strategic documents do not identify relevant actions, then these are defined and suggested.