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**SDSN Germany and wpn2030 at the HLPF  
2024: Exchange and international peer  
learning on the 2030 Agenda through  
science, civil society and youth engagement**

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Fall 2024. Written by Sarah Löpelt (SDSN Germany/wpn2030), Tabea Waltenberg and Lea Hüffermann (SDSN Germany).

The United Nations (UN) High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is the central UN platform for reviewing the implementation progress of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The HLPF met in New York from July 8 to 17, 2024, under the theme *'Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and Eradicating Poverty in Times of Multiple Crises: the effective delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions'*. In this context, the HLPF focused on the following SDGs: SDG 1 (Poverty), 2 (Hunger), 13 (Climate), 16 (Peace) and 17 (Global partnerships). In addition, 38 countries presented their national SDG implementation in the form of voluntary national reviews (VNRs).

conducted a survey among SDSN Germany members and partners regarding potential network activities at the HLPF.

### Events and activities of SDSN Germany and wpn2030

The aim of the survey conducted by the SDSN Germany Office was to provide a clearer overview of the planned activities to be carried out by the network's member- and partner organizations. Among other aspects, the survey dealt with questions such as who considers the HLPF a relevant event, how the SDSN Germany Office can provide support and represent the network at the HLPF, and where short-term cooperation opportunities might arise. The HLPF officially started on July 8, 2024, with the opening ceremony at the UN General Assembly, which delivered



The SDSN Germany Office team and representatives of wpn2030 meet with other members of the German delegation for a debriefing at the UN headquarters in New York: Dr. Axel Berger (3<sup>rd</sup> from right, SDSN Germany/wpn2030), Tabea Waltenberg (4<sup>th</sup> from left, SDSN Germany), Sarah Löpelt (3<sup>rd</sup> from left, SDSN Germany/wpn2030), Dr. Julius Rathgens (6<sup>th</sup> from left, wpn2030). ©BMUV

Along with representatives from the Science Platform Sustainability 2030 (wpn2030), the SDSN Germany Office participated, as part of the German delegation, in various events over the entire term of the conference. They also organized their own activities, including a joint side event, an online briefing (SDSN Germany), and an expert discussion (SDSN Germany). Moreover, the SDSN Germany Office

an important message: *"Achieving the SDGs is only possible through collaboration, bold actions, and innovative solutions!"* In the evening, the Head Office of SDSN Germany then hosted a networking dinner for the German delegation, including governmental and non-governmental representatives. The delegation was diverse in its composition, consisting of numerous representatives from civil society, the

German Youth Delegates for Sustainable Development and municipalities.

Furthermore, together with the Global Policy Forum, the German NGO Forum on Environment and Development, and the United Nations Association of Germany (DGVN), SDSN Germany organized the online briefing *Global Sustainability Diplomacy in Times of Crisis* on July 15, 2024. Those participating reported (primarily) live from New York on the present stage of discussions at the HLPF. Tabea Waltenberg (SDSN Germany) highlighted, in particular, promising SDG acceleration approaches, such as integrated political approaches that take SDG interlinkages into

governance of national sustainable development strategies (NSDS), based on the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR). Examples from Germany, Brazil and Latin America/Caribbean highlighted both the conditions for and hindrances to effective SDG governance. Sarah Löpelt (SDSN Germany/wpn2030) emphasized the importance of capacity building for cross-sectoral coordination, the integration of diverse political areas, and inclusion of various stakeholder groups. Philipp Schönrock (Cepei) pointed out challenges in Latin America and the Caribbean, particularly in Colombia, including a lack of political leadership, a low level of willingness for cross-sectoral cooperation, and misinformation.



Informal networking meeting over dinner with the German delegation in New York. ©SDSN Germany

account, multi-stakeholder approaches, comprehensive capacity building for transformation purposes, and efforts to reduce inequalities. Tabea Waltenberg also emphasized the importance of the HLPF as a platform for global peer learning for implementing the SDGs at both national and local levels.

The side event *Peer Learning and Capacity Building for Integrated NSDS Implementation and Reporting*, organized by SDSN Germany, wpn2030, and the Colombian think tank Cepei, was held on July 15, 2024 at the New York office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The event aimed to discuss peer learning and capacity building for an integrated

He stressed that transparency, accountability, decentralization, as well as the provision of disaggregated data are crucial for a successful integrated NSDS implementation and reporting.

In Germany, the example of “Transformation Teams” showed that inter-ministerial collaboration was able to strengthen trust between the various ministries. However, limited resources and high coordination efforts continue to be challenging, as Julius Rathgens (wpn2030) highlighted. With respect to Brazil, Luciana Servo (Ipea) emphasized the importance of capacity building for civil society and local governments within the VNR process. She also noted that

the National SDG Commission for the SDGs, including over 80 representatives from different stakeholder groups, ensured an inclusive VNR development process and that trust in science and civil society was central to Brazil's efforts to align national strategies with the G20 and T20 agendas. Overall, it became clear that peer learning and digital platforms can support the identification of best practices and their adaptation to other contexts. You can find the detailed report on the side event [[here](#)].

facilitate substantive discussions regarding the interconnections, synergies, conflicting objectives and comprehensive solutions for accelerated implementation of the commitments.

## Reflection on the HLPF: Key Insights and Highlights

Following the first Science Day at the HLPF 2023, this year's HLPF hosted the Science Day on July 9,



Sarah Löpelt presents the most important findings from the GSDR 2023 on the transformation lever 'capacity building' in a keynote speech at the side event organized by Cepei, wpn2030 and SDSN Germany. ©SDSN Germany

Additionally, the SDSN Germany Office hosted an expert discussion on July 12, 2024, focusing on linking the 2030 Agenda and the HLPF with international negotiation processes and forums. The discussion highlighted the vital role the HLPF plays as the only international forum for reviewing the 2030 Agenda implementation and as a room for exchange and mutual learning. With a view to the remaining time left for SDG implementation, in particular, but also beyond 2030, increased synergies between the 2030 Agenda and other multilateral sustainability-oriented processes (e.g., the Paris Climate Agreement, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the G20) represented great potential. As a consequence, common spaces should be provided to

2024 titled 'Harnessing the power of science for the SDGs: Evidence-based implementation successes worldwide'<sup>1</sup>. The event was organized by the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), UN Development Programme (UNDP), International Science Council (ISC), UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UN SDSN), and the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), bringing together experts from science, policymaking, and civil society, among others. Key insights on the role of science in accelerating the SDG implementation were discussed. The following insights from the presentations, discussions, and case studies were central for SDSN Germany and the Science Platform:

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the first Science Day at the HLPF 2023, see Wissenschaftsplattform Nachhaltigkeit 2030 (Ed.). (2023). „HLPF 2023: Ein Reisebericht von Sarah Löpelt. Ernüchternde Zwischenbilanz zur

Agenda 2030: Stärkere wissenschaftsbasierte und inklusive Umsetzung der SDGs sind gefragt.“ <https://www.wpn2030.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/HLPF-2023-Reisebericht-final.pdf>

- Science can significantly contribute to accelerating the SDGs. In times of growing inequalities and challenged multilateralism, science can be a unifying force within the international community. It is crucial for foresight and building resilience, and therefore plays a key role in this year's Summit of the Future.
- There is a variety of actors who represent and contribute different bodies of knowledge, such as local or indigenous knowledge, citizen science, and practical knowledge.
- Collaboration within and across disciplines is crucial to address the complex challenges such as climate change, pollution, and hunger.
- Science must become more transdisciplinary and inclusive, meaning it should collaborate with actors from practice, society (Citizen Science), and young people, and connect to the knowledge and needs of local communities (co-design and co-creation of knowledge).
- Science, policymakers, and society must work hand in hand: scientific findings should be action-oriented and help in solving real-world problems. To be effective, a science-policy interface requires targeted communication, clear implementation guidelines, time and human resources, capacity building (e.g., systems thinking, critical thinking, foresight), and deeper understanding regarding the benefits of scientific knowledge for political decisions.
- Democratization of science: Fair and open access to scientific knowledge must be guaranteed

Click [here](#) for the recording of the event.

On 10 July 2024, the SDSN Germany team and wpn2030 team members participated in an online side event organized by the SDGs Division of the UN DESA/DSDG (in cooperation with the UN Development Coordination Office and UNDP). Titled “SDGs in Practice: Driving the national transformations we need: lessons from the Global Sustainable Report”, the event dealt with the insights gained from the GSDR 2023 and respective practical application. The event provided a platform for exchange between political decision-makers, UN representatives, scientists and civil society actors. It focused on the

challenges and solutions associated with the systemic changes needed to achieve the SDGs.

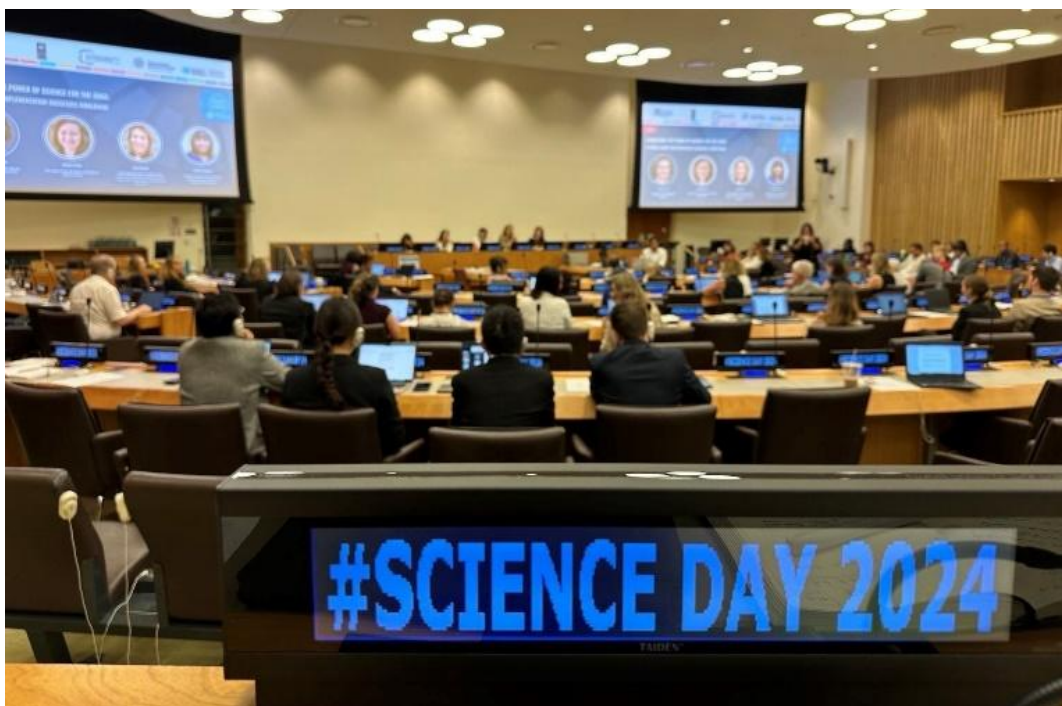
Key findings:

- **Challenges and New Capacities:** The need to promote systemic thinking and key transformations requires building new capacities for governments worldwide, as well as for the UN system and other partners. *“The skills we will need in the future depend on the future we want,”* said one webinar participant. The transformation curve (“S-curve”) and the actions for accelerating SDG implementation proposed by the GSDR provide a strategic framework to address national and local priorities.
- **Implementation of Systemic Approaches:** Some countries and organizations have started integrating the systemic approaches called for in the GSDR into their strategic planning. This includes adapting governance structures or institutional arrangements (e.g., vertical or horizontal/cross-sectoral integration for policy coherence) or embedding the SDGs into national policies, development plans, or scientific agendas. An example of this is the translation of the six entry points from the GSDR 2019 into Finland's sustainable development strategy. In 2022, visions for these areas were developed for the year 2030. Also, a current implementation plan for the strategy is being prepared which addresses governance structures, capacities for sustainable development, and values as drivers for systemic transformations.
- **Knowledge transfer and learning platforms:** The importance of a systemic approach has been conveyed through various initiatives, including online learning courses and networks aimed at promoting knowledge sharing and peer learning. Cameroon, for example, has a particular focus on education and capacity building for sustainable development, including for ministry staff and youth.

Overall, the event provided valuable insights and fostered knowledge exchange to further advance the systemic implementation of the SDGs at the global, national, and local levels. Watch the recording of the event [here](#).

One day later, a side event on the use of cross-country peer reviews in preparing VNRs took place. The side event, organized by the Global Forum for National SDG Advisory Bodies, the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development, and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), focused on the question of why it is beneficial to undergo a joint review process with another country when preparing the VNR. Interesting practical examples were presented (e.g., a peer exchange on [Austria's VNR](#) with Bhutan and Switzerland), discussing the advantages and challenges for the parties involved, as well as opportunities for more intensive use of such mutual learning opportunities in VNR processes. The event addressed key aspects

The HLPF concluded on July 17, 2024, with the adoption of the ministerial declaration, which had been negotiated in advance and primarily reaffirms the final declaration of the 2023 SDG Summit. Shortly before, two amendments were voted on: A group of states led by Nicaragua called for the inclusion of a paragraph urging countries to refrain from unilateral economic sanctions. The proposal was adopted with 105 votes, 46 abstentions, and 11 dissenting votes. The EU [disassociated](#) itself from the adopted amendment while Israel required the deletion of a paragraph on peace and security already included verbatim in the 2030 Agenda. The paragraph concerned called for doubling the efforts to end conflicts in order to remove the barriers hindering the full re-



2<sup>nd</sup> Science Day on July 9, 2024 as part of the HLPF 2024 ©SDSN Germany

of using country-to-country peer reviews in the development of VNRs. In addition to contributions from Finland, Jamaica, and other countries that have already gone through this process or are planning to do so, the regional UN Commission [ESCAP](#) also shared its perspective on supporting VNR peer reviews in the Asia-Pacific region (so-called "Twinning").

In addition, informal briefings were held by the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) during the forum, which SDSN Germany also attended. Civil society access was severely restricted, both in terms of access to the UN premises and participation in certain sessions. Furthermore, the opportunities to speak were limited.

alization of the right to self-determination for peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation that continue to impact adversely on their economic and social development and on the environment. Israel's proposal was rejected with 122 votes, 39 abstentions, and 2 dissenting votes. Germany abstained in both votes.

Although the declaration primarily reaffirms what has already been decided, it once again underscores the commitment for and dedication to the accelerated implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The fact that UN member states have adopted a joint declaration is already considered a success for multilateral cooperation in these times of conflict and crisis.

## Summary

During the HLPF, the SDSN Germany Office worked intensively on representing the interests of the network in New York while informing sustainability stakeholders in Germany about developments and discussions on site. Although civil society access was restricted, especially on the UN premises and at certain sessions, the HLPF remains one of the most inclusive international forums for exchange and peer learning. Likewise, the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration and thus the commitment of the UN member states to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda can be considered a success in these times of crisis and conflict. It is crucial to promote a differentiated debate by and involvement of representatives of civil society, youth and academia (including from the UN NGO Major Group, Major Group for Children and Youth and Scientific and Technological Community Major Group) in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including access to multilateral forums. There is still a need for improvement concerning the interactive design of side events. In this regard, SDSN Germany and wpn2030 set a positive example with the co-organized peer-learning side event on the integrated implementation of sustainability strategies. It will also be important in the future to connect further international forums and agendas with the HLPF and the 2030 Agenda in order to create synergies and strengthen global collaboration. The inclusivity of the German delegation at the HLPF is highly appreciated. It enabled the team to establish beneficial connections with various stakeholders on site. It is particularly pleasing that SDSN Germany and wpn2030 with their initiatives in New York were able to help promote networking within the delegation.

The contributions of SDSN Germany and wpn2030 to the dialogue process on the German Sustainable Development Strategy (Deutsche Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie, DNS)<sup>2</sup>, which took place at the same time as the HLPF, also emphasize that the Network and the Science Platform are committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda in, with, and through Germany.

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<sup>2</sup> For further information, see the statements from [SDSN Germany](#) and [wpn2030](#) on the further development of the DNS.