



What is the SDG monitoring?

To achieve the SDGs, Germany must substantially increase its efforts. The areas in which there is a particular need for action can only be determined with a thorough data-based review. However, the current SDG monitoring in Germany shows considerable shortcomings, which jeopardise a successful implementation of the SDGs in, by and with Germany.

What are the SDGs?

In September 2015, the member states of the United Nations adopted a resolution known as the 2030 Agenda. The centerpiece of this agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which are to be achieved by 2030. The SDGs cover a wide range of issues and call for far-reaching changes, such as the eradication of hunger, poverty and inequalities worldwide and the protection of our planet. In doing so, they take equal account of the three dimensions of sustainable development: environmental, economic and social sustainability. The 2030 Agenda applies to all states - its implementation is thus the common task and responsibility of the world. The guiding principle to be taken into account in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is "Leave no one behind". This means that no group may be excluded from development.

Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in New York, a UN body that coordinates global sustainability policy. Prior to the meeting, which lasts several days, member states have the opportunity to submit a Voluntary National Review (VNR) on their national implementation status which they then present at the HLPF. In addition, there is the possibility to ask other countries questions about their implementation status and to give feedback.

**35
of
72**

Although the GSDS is Germany's official SDG monitoring tool, only 35 of the 72 indicators in the GSDS correspond to international SDG indicators. More than half of the indicators are self-defined national indicators and thus have no direct link to the SDGs.

What is the SDG monitoring?

The 2030 Agenda stipulates that all states should conduct "regular and inclusive reviews of progress at the national and subnational levels". This review of the implementation status of the SDGs is called SDG monitoring. It is the central instrument to oversee sustainability policies and keep track of the progress on the SDGs. In order to be able to measure the comprehensive sustainability goals, the international community of states has agreed on a total of 169 sub-goals and negotiated 231 international SDG indicators. The structure of a national SDG monitoring, however, is left up to each country itself. This means that each country can choose freely the indicators it wants to use for the monitoring of an SDG. The collection of relevant data is also the responsibility of each state. For this reason, a variety of different monitoring approaches can be found around the world.

To ensure that countries regularly inform each other about their progress and exchange best practices, the United Nations annually invite them to the High-

How is SDG implementation measured in Germany?

In Germany, the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda is carried out on the basis of the German Sustainable Development Strategy (GSDS). It is the central instrument for tracking and reviewing national sustainability policy. A National Sustainability Strategy was adopted by the Federal Government for the first time in 2002. The introduction of national sustainability strategies was an important component of Agenda 21, which was adopted at the World Summit in Rio in 1992. Since 2004, the National Sustainability Strategy has been updated every four years. Following the adoption of the SDGs, it was revised and transformed into the German Sustainable Development Strategy in 2016, which has since been oriented along the SDGs. The GSDS requires that indicator reports on the progress of the SDGs be submitted every four years.



GSDS-indicators are going in the wrong direction

The lack of congruence between the indicators makes the GSDS in its current form an unsuitable SDG monitoring tool. In addition, the small number of indicators in the GSDS does not allow a comprehensive picture of the implementation status to be drawn. This means that important topics are not addressed and a distorted picture of the implementation status is given.

But the selection of inadequate indicators is not the only flaw of the GSDS. The target setting for many indicators is also not ambitious enough to bring about real change and achieve the goals of the Agenda 2030.

EXAMPLE SDG 2 INDICATORS

An example of insufficient targets is the indicator "nitrogen surplus in agriculture" from SDG 2 "No hunger". Excess nitrogen introduced into the environment that cannot be absorbed by plants leads to the contamination of our groundwater, nutrient oversaturation in water bodies and, as a result, to a decline in biodiversity as well as to a general strain on our ecosystems.

The GSDS sets a target of 70 kilograms per hectare for the reduction of the nitrogen load. However, this level is significantly too high to quickly and effectively counteract the serious effects that excess nitrogen has on climate, biodiversity, landscape quality and water supply. Various environmental organisations, such as NABU, have long been calling for the limit value to be reduced to at least 50 kilograms per hectare.

The fact that Germany must do more in this area was also established by the European Court of Justice in an action brought against Germany by the EU Commission in June 2018. Nevertheless, Germany continues to adhere to its target value of 70 kilograms per hectare. However, the harmful effects of nitrogen on the environment and health cannot be sufficiently reduced in this way.

The Indicator Report 2021 shows that with regard to more than one third of the 72 indicators of the GSDS, Germany is either moving too slowly or even contrary the desired direction. These are so-called "off-track indicators" - indicators for which the set targets will probably not be achieved. With respect to these indicators, particularly fast and effective action is required in order to curb the undesirable developments. The mere statement by the federal government in the GSDS that it is closely monitoring the development of these indicators is not enough to put the development on the right track.

EXAMPLE SDG 10 INDICATORS

SDG 10 "Reduce inequalities" aims to reduce inequalities within and between countries. The United Nations proposes 14 indicators to measure progress on this goal. These shall comprehensively measure, inter alia, income equality, equal opportunities and discrimination within a population. In addition, indicators to measure the voice of developing countries in international organisations, the ODA quota and international migration policy are proposed to measure inequalities between countries.

The GSDS does not use any of the international indicators to measure SDG 10, but only two national indicators to measure distributive and educational justice in Germany. In this way, however, many important topics addressed in SDG 10, such as migration policy or the German contribution to development cooperation, remain unconsidered.



2030Watch - Civil-society SDG monitoring

With a view to complement the official German SDG monitoring, civil society actors have developed their own comprehensive monitoring concept: 2030Watch. It compares the data of Germany's official SDG monitoring (the GSDS) with its own indicators and data, some of which have been newly developed and collected. The comparison of the results shows how differently the implementation status of the SDGs can be assessed, depending on the selection of indicators and corresponding data.

This becomes particularly evident looking at SDG 1 ("No poverty"). Measured with the indicators provided by the GSDS ("material deprivation" and "severe material deprivation"), Germany seems to be well on its way to achieving the goal. Material deprivation is understood as the lack of certain consumer goods and the involuntary renunciation of consumption for financial reasons. Based on the government's target value, 2030Watch has calculated that Germany has achieved the target by more than one hundred percent.

However, if poverty is not considered as material deprivation only but is measured more comprehensively, e.g. by also including the risk of poverty or social exclusion as indicators, Germany scores significantly worse in the achievement of SDG 1.

EXAMPLE SDG 1 INDICATORS

37,14 %

*Progress calculations
with indicators from
2030Watch*

(2019)

195,61%

*Official progress calculation
(2019)*

Meaningful indicators are crucial

It becomes clear that the selection of indicators has a decisive influence on how the implementation status of the SDGs is perceived. From this follows that, depending on the perceived level of implementation, different measures are derived. For our example, this means: If one assumes on the basis of official monitoring that poverty in Germany has already been largely eliminated, no further measures to combat poverty are likely to be undertaken. Yet civil society monitoring shows that there is a considerable need for action.

The way in which the GSDS monitoring has been designed so far has considerable shortcomings - the indicators are largely not congruent with the international SDG indicators, various sub-goals are not covered by the small number of indicators and the target values are in many cases set too low. The fact that in 2021 more than one third of the indicators were "off-track" is evidence of the low level of ambition of the German government in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

In its current form, Germany's official SDG monitoring is not sufficient to adequately reflect the implementation status of the SDGs and thus paints a distorted picture. As a result, undesirable developments and acute need for action are not recognised in various areas, important countermeasures are not taken and thus the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is in jeopardy. This will have devastating consequences for people, the environment and the climate. Transparent monitoring with a sufficient number of indicators that fully cover the goals and with ambitious target values is therefore absolutely necessary for Germany and the world to achieve the goals of the 2030 Agenda.

PUBLISHER AND CONTACT

*German NGO Forum on Environment
and Development*

Marienstr. 19–20 | 10117 Berlin

*info@forumue.de | www.forumue.de
+49(0)30 678 17 75 75*

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The German NGO Forum on Environment and Development coordinates the activities of German NGOs in international policy processes on sustainable development. The legal entity is the German League for Nature Conservation (Deutscher Naturschutzring), umbrella organisation of the German associations for nature, animal and environmental protection (DNR).



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