

The 2030 Agenda must become the guiding principle of German policy

Statement on the occasion of the Voluntary National Review 2021

Nearly six years ago, the international community adopted the 2030 Agenda. The countries involved declared their intention to change the world for the better by 2030 by jointly tackling hunger and poverty, climate change and resource consumption worldwide and leaving no one behind. Germany, too, committed itself to this historic undertaking. The German government is now presenting its progress to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2021 in the Voluntary National Review (VNR). We welcome the fact that VENRO has the opportunity to make a statement on this too – both in the present document, which will be published in an annex to the VNR, and through an input together with other German stakeholders during the official VNR presentation at the HLPF.

The worldwide track record in implementing the 2030 Agenda is disastrous

The current track record of implementing the 2030 Agenda is abysmal. Inequality within and among countries is increasing. The corona pandemic has exacerbated the trend. It particularly severely affects population groups that are already marginalized and vulnerable. According to the United Nations, up to 124 million people have been pushed into extreme poverty in 2020 alone. The number of people suffering from chronic hunger also increased by 83 to 132 million in 2020. Many health systems are severely under-resourced, and more than half of the world's population has no access to social security systems. At the same time, environmental degradation and climate change are advancing to an alarming extent. Floods, droughts and cyclones are causing great damage worldwide. Especially poorer countries are increasingly struggling to mitigate the consequences of the multiple crises. The number of states that are insolvent or have unsustainable debts threatens to reach a new peak.

The German government has taken important steps in recent years to promote sustainable policies and raise awareness of the subject of sustainability. The German National Review provides good insights into this. However, the efforts made do not do justice to the dimensions of the global challenges. Above all, the activities lack political coherence and a comprehensive global orientation. Too often the negative external effects (spillover effects) of Germany's actions on globally sustainable development are not taken into account. It is high time to fight global economic and social inequality more vigorously and to finally make the 2030 Agenda the guiding principle of German policy, as in this regard Germany is falling far short of what would be necessary and also possible. Specifically, the task is now to act in solidarity also at a global level in times of crisis while at the same time systematically addressing the structural and systemic causes of the multiple crises.

Policies must reflect solidarity with the people in the global South

The corona pandemic makes it abundantly clear that global crises cannot be tackled at the level of the individual state. One pressing challenge is the just distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines. The consequences of the pandemic must also be mitigated in solidarity. This requires targeted measures at the international level on gender equality and support for vulnerable groups such as children, the elderly or people with disabilities. Appreciable debt relief is necessary in order for poorer countries to be able to afford expenditures on food, health and social security that are essential for survival. Germany must strongly support this and must spend significantly larger amounts in future than is currently planned to end poverty and

hunger. With the immediate action programme on corona, the German government has made additional funds available for partner countries in the global South in the short term. This was an important step in the right direction. We also need reliable financing for official development cooperation, which should not fall below the level of the federal budget for 2021.

The climate crisis demands a more ambitious climate policy

Germany must do more to live up to its responsibility for its part in causing the climate crisis. We welcome that the German government wants to step up its climate protection plans and is now aiming to reach greenhouse gas neutrality by 2045. But the measures and financial resources deployed so far are by far insufficient to reach this goal. Germany must make much more rapid progress on emission reduction, energy transition and climate-friendly agriculture. We will not be able to put a stop to the climate crisis without higher commitments on international climate financing. We therefore call on policymakers in Germany to increase the funds for climate protection and adaptation in poorer countries to eight billion euros annually.

We need a more sustainable economic model

Our economic system is currently based mainly on growth and on the exploitation of humans and nature. The lifestyle in Germany and other industrialized nations contributes significantly to the perpetuation of inequality. If we want to enable all people and generations to live in dignity within the planetary boundaries, we cannot rely solely on innovative technologies and increases in efficiency. We must also change our conceptions of growth and wealth and make our lifestyle socially and ecologically sustainable.

In particular, this change must also be promoted politically. We need binding regulations at the national and international level, for example in the area of business and human rights. Passing a supply chain law at the national level is an important first step, even though there are still gaps in the law's provisions. Policymakers must now expedite the implementation and support binding European regulations.

We must also use the huge investment in economic recovery after the corona crisis for systematically promoting a social and ecological transformation of the economy and society. In order to mobilize additional public funds for this, we also need fairer taxation of transnational corporations, financial transactions and large capital assets, as well as efficient measures against corruption and tax avoidance. Germany must take a more active role in this area in future and must advance internationally coordinated initiatives.

The German government must turn the National Sustainable Development Strategy into an effective instrument of global socio-ecological change

In Germany, the National Sustainable Development Strategy is the essential framework for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. We welcome its revision, which was completed this year. However, the orientation of the German Sustainable Development Strategy is still not sufficient to globally promote the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. It still has overly large gaps in this regard. Moreover, the Sustainable Development Strategy does not carry the weight in political decision-making that would be necessary in order to tackle the manifold crises and systematically work towards a transition to a globally sustainable lifestyle and economic system. Turning it into an effective instrument of change will require the joint actions of all ministries to be oriented towards it in a binding and coherent manner. An obligatory and effective impact assessment should be required for all federal laws. The role of parliament must also be strengthened considerably. For instance, the government should upgrade the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Sustainable Development to a committee and present an annual coherence report for parliament to debate.