

**ESDN Blog:**

## **The 2030 Agenda paves the way to the “new normal”**

**By Annika Lindblom, President of the ESDN Association**

We are in the middle of a peculiar period. The Covid-19 pandemic has questioned business-as-usual approaches and caused upheavals all around the world, including Europe.

Finland has been one of the few countries that has overcome the situation relatively well, for now. There are casualties in the country, but the health care system has been able to treat all in need. Business life has suffered big time, but society has not been closed-down completely. However, the medium- and longer-term implications for people in Finland, the economy and the environment remain to be seen.

One of the most evident lessons learned has certainly been that the basis of the entire decision-making system in Finland has changed: Instead of engaging in interest group politics and stalled behavioural patterns, the decision-makers have eagerly applied evidence-based information, value-based management, parliamentary cooperation, and the exchange of good practices between countries.

However, what happens when we move from the crises to the ‘new normal’? Do we allow the old patterns to return, or are we bold enough to change the basis of decision-making towards more sustainable development permanently? The pertinent question in many countries is whether we see the 2030 Agenda and sustainable development as a solution for sustainable, inclusive, safe and resilient societies, or whether we return to the silo politics, in which only one truth or paradigm matters at a time, be it economic growth, climate change, or migration?

The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), published in 2019 at the SDG Summit, argues that understanding the interconnections between the individual SDGs and the concrete systems that define society today will be essential to devise policies that manage difficult trade-offs. An independent group of scientists, who prepared this report, identified four critical challenges to sustainable development globally: increasing inequality, climate change, biodiversity loss, and the waste crisis.

I believe that a better understanding of interlinkages is crucial, also in tackling global crises like Covid-19. While the focus now is understandably on mitigating the on-going crisis, it also makes economic and social sense to address the root causes of current epidemics – i.e. the destruction of natural habitats and wildlife trade – in order to avoid future pandemics, human misery, and economic collapses.

Europe and the entire world would need a recovery strategy that builds on and strengthens the call for accelerated and transformative action towards more sustainable development. We need to strive for societies that are resilient to today’s crises, but that are also able to tackle the challenges of tomorrow.

The new ESDN Association was faced with the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic right after its founding, but we did not freeze or back down. The mission and tasks of the ESDN have not disappeared. We are carrying out our work programme almost as planned for this year. Some physical meetings have changed to virtual ones, like the 18<sup>th</sup> ESDN Workshop on June 24, 2020, which is hosted by our most recent Regular Member country, Romania. The theme of the Workshop is very topical: ‘Achieving the SDGs through a Sustainable and Just Transition: Challenges and responses to Covid-19’.

The Covid-19 crisis is at the centre of sustainable development. That is why it must be tackled in a comprehensive way. The 2030 Agenda provides global goals and targets for sustainable development, but the implementation requires that all actors of society work together for a common good instead of prioritizing and optimizing their own needs.

The ESDN aims to contribute to the 'new normal' by using the greatest strengths of the European family: sharing willingly our good and bad experiences and providing peer support. The old proverb, a friend in need is a friend indeed, is now more relevant than ever.

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