Policy coherence and cooperation for the 2030 Agenda and SDGs implementation

Umberto Pisano & Gerald Berger
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Introduction

This ESDN Peer Learning Platform Report provides information on the inputs, discussions and outcomes of the 1st ESDN Peer Learning Platform, entitled “Policy coherence and cooperation for the 2030 Agenda and SDGs implementation”, which took place in Brussels on 13 October 2016, in cooperation with the Belgian Federal Institute for Sustainable Development.

This first ESDN Peer Learning Platform was intended to offer policy-makers, from all European countries, experts and selected stakeholders the chance to exchange experiences and learn from implementation practice on how to realize the 2030 Agenda and SDGs in their respective national environments.

The key objectives of the platform were:

- To provide the opportunity to exchange and discuss the needs of national policy-making regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SD;
- To share experiences and perspectives on how to design policies and processes, and how to link them to national sustainable development strategies;
- To test the ESDN peer learning approach for future fine-tuning of this new mechanism for peer learning.

In total, 35 participants from 16 countries took part in the Platform that was moderated by Gerald Berger (ESDN Office). The Platform was kicked-off by a Welcome and Orientation Session, followed by four main sessions:

- **Space for Exchange 1**: Experiences and lessons learned from the 2016 HLPF National Voluntary Reviews;
- **Space for Exchange 2**: Policy coherence – How to overcome ‘silos’ thinking when implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs;
- **Space for Exchange 3**: How to design good cooperation between the different policy levels (EU, Member States, sub-national levels);
- **Space for Exchange 4**: How to bring these ideas back home?
Welcome and orientation session

The opening and orientation session included several welcome addresses and provided an overview of the workshop objectives.

Firstly, the main objectives and approach of ESDN Peer Learning Platform, which was primarily built upon the outcomes of 14th ESDN Workshop held in Berlin in June 2016 were outlined. Then, the concept of ‘peer learning’ as learning from each other was introduced. Since the SDGs need to be implemented at all levels, not only at the national and European level, the new ESDN mechanism of Peer Learning (PL) Platforms was introduced which is intended to foster not only learning from one another, but also encouraging one another.

With the intention to increase openness and discussion, the Platform was based on the ‘Chatham House Rule’.

It was underlined that an increasing number of EU Member States were beginning to implement the 2030 Agenda. Because of this, there was a clear need to overcome challenges by sharing experiences and approaches. It was pointed out that the ESDN PL Platform was reserved to policymakers responsible for SD policies and strategies only in order to share experiences among this peer group on strategic policy implementation efforts for the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

The participants also discussed in this session the preparation of the European Commission Communication on the SDGs, which is expected to be published on 22 November 2016. This communication is intended as a mapping exercise for future EU policy, but also as a way to create opportunities for implementation, follow-up, and monitoring regarding the 2030 Agenda and SDGs.

In the following discussion, some important topics were mentioned: The issue of coordination at the EU level of the 2030 Agenda/SDGs implementation was touched upon, and the roles of SecGen, DG Environment and several Commissioners were discussed, as well as their cooperation. The SDG on climate was discussed as the main responsibility of DG CLIMATE, especially after COP21. A few questions were raised on the Directive on Plastic, on the Circular Economy, and on the EESC proposal on the creation of a stakeholder forum.

Space for Exchange 1: Experiences and lessons learned from the 2016 HLPF National Voluntary Reviews

In the first part of Space for Exchange 1, a panel discussion was held, in which representatives of five European countries (Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, and Switzerland) presented their experiences with the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) they prepared for the 2016 High-level Political Forum (HLPF) in New York.

Panellists shared their views and reported difficulties in terms of timing and process in the preparation of the VNRs. A tight schedule, and the requirement to deliver the summary
before the whole report, were felt as challenging issues. Although with different levels of ambition, the main motivations behind their participation in the VNRs were (a) the will to share their experiences with other countries, (b) the opportunity to speed up or kick-off the implementation within their own countries, and (c) the chance to raise awareness in other national ministries and engage stakeholders. Countries also used the preparation of their reports to produce a gap analysis and a mapping of SDGs and national policies. In general, consultations with stakeholders were activated and pre-existing mechanisms of collaboration among ministries were used.

In the following Q&A session, participants particularly engaged in issues about lessons learned from the process, especially considering those countries that will participate in the 2017 HLPF. Several interesting points were raised, and suggestions on the process were given: (i) to start the work on the report as soon as possible; (ii) to include the subnational and local level; (iii) to use the political momentum and attention in the national context; (iv) to plan and coordinate with all ministries as much as possible; (v) to use the same symbols of the SDGs; and (vi) to involve stakeholders.

**Space for Exchange 2: Policy coherence – How to overcome ‘silos’ thinking when implementing the 2030 Agenda and SDGs?**

With the aim to stimulate interactive dialogue among participants on the theme ‘Practical examples, opportunities and challenges to improve policy coherence in European countries’ (i.e. assigning responsibilities at the national level; cooperation between ministries and cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms; and moving from policy coherence for development to policy coherence for SD), participants were split into 5 working groups. Participants were then asked to find critical challenges of horizontal policy integration in their own country/region and explain and share with the group. Then, participants were required to select, as a group, the 2-3 most critical challenges by using practical examples for each one. The results can be found in the following pictures taken at the platform.
Critical Challenges

1. Political leadership: Ensure ownership by the whole government

2. Coherence & cooperation between S.D. community and development/commercial/developmental and foreign policy

3. Ensure that ministries are integrating 2030 A into their sectoral policies, building ownership, inspiring, convincing, showing added value

Address/Solve Critical Challenges

1. Government decision on implementation process
2. Clear roles & responsibilities
3. Government accountability, reporting to parliament
4. Joint meetings, committees, working & steering groups
5. S.D. Advisory Council's roles (policy coherence)
6. Coordination in political centre (where possible)
7. Business lunches & "beer learning"
8. Common platforms & communicate on results elsewhere (e.g. HLPF)
9. Visibility of sectoral policies contributing

Critical Challenges

1. Focus on our aims of admin. unit (silos-thinking)

2. Stakeholder are lobbying for their own aims in silos followed by pressure on policy

3. No central organization/unit with enough power to integrate all policy areas

Address/Solve Critical Challenges

1. Create inter-min. UC to identify & solve common aim (implementation)
2. With a mandate for the members consequently apply 3D impact assessment for regulation (ex-auto)
3. Use the SDGs as argument for bringing stakeholders together with a focus on a common vision (long-term)
4. Confront & stakeholder administrations with front-runners (ECON)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Challenges</th>
<th>Address/Solve Critical Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Political approach needs to be holistic and aware of coordination mechanisms.</td>
<td>&quot;They&quot; (Governments) have to take mechanisms etc serious!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We need a narrative + communicate to citizens + not only through governments.</td>
<td>ministries, organisations, business etc need their own narrative / statement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Policy coherence! Esp ministries of finance have to accept the holistic approach.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Challenges</th>
<th>Address/Solve Critical Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>LACK OF PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td>- using existing knowhow, innovative projects, etc, and feeding experience back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>LACK OF POLITICAL COMMITMENT &amp; OWNERSHIP</strong> (not on top political agenda)</td>
<td>- commitment as some of many on the profile of the agenda.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>MAKE VISIBLE THE ADVANTAGES / POLITICAL SOCIETAL WINS</strong> (show synergies &amp; trade-offs)</td>
<td>- so work on local level to build momentum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not losing cartwheels, formulate positive examples, create supporting networks.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>making SD tangible, the lack of the politically relevant / hot issues: demonstrate Impact on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Critical Challenges

1. Political level:
   - Ownership - Top of Agenda
   - Whole of Gov
   - All levels - Social - Local - Regional - International

2. Administrative level
   - Lack of necessary tools, e.g., data

3. Instrument level:
   - Indicators
     - Need to assess impact in other policies
     - Impact assessment tools, but lacks Support

Address/Solve Critical Challenges

- Involve CSO, business, political leaders

- Coordination by PT

- Public debate + report

- Inter-agency coordination, with mandate for the minister

- No new "SDG" silos

- Project lead from different ministries

- Ex. Charter of Contribution, Commitment of Society

- Tools to assess impacts, evaluation

- Choice of indicators to assess all dimensions
Space for Exchange 3: How to design good cooperation between the different policy levels (EU, Member States, sub-national levels?)

Space for Exchange 3 aimed to foster exchange and learning among participants on the theme ‘Necessary initiatives and institutional arrangements to foster cooperation between the EU, Member States, and sub-national levels,’ including the sharing of competencies between EU and MS level, using existing forums, mechanisms, and institutions at EU level to support the 2030 Agenda implementation, new cooperation mechanisms between EU and Member States, etc. Firstly, participants were asked to split into pairs, and then visit and discuss among themselves over five ‘stations’ represented by five questions that were previously prepared by the ESDN Office. The participants’ main task was to collect answers and inputs on moderation cards to each of the questions:

1. How can the EU facilitate 2030 Agenda implementation at the Member State level?
2. What is the best use of the HLPF 2016 outcomes?
3. What are the main challenges in the cooperation between the national and the sub-national level?
4. How can we best use sub-national activities for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda?
5. What is the best way to translate and coordinate the 17 SDGs at all levels?

After this first part, which was purposefully organised for collecting inputs on flipcharts, participants were divided into five working groups, where each group worked on one of the five questions. In this setting, each working group had the task to first cluster and rank the inputs found on the assigned question sheet, and then select 2-3 issues from the clusters and rank them as “main results”. Finally, each group was asked to define, for each of the three main results, some practical next steps to realize them, or to suggest good examples.

Results are shown in the following pictures.
Results of Question 1

How can the EU facilitate 2030 Agenda implementation at the Member State level?

- Engage Eurostat in SDG’s monitoring
- Support_Subsidious: which country (EU-level) is successful_
- EU-Strategy
- Revise the Europe 2020 as a platform for SDG’s implementation
- Develop ESDN by using the ESDN
- Foster exchange and networking
- Subsidious, which country (EU-level) is successful
- EU-Strategy
- Revise the Europe 2020 as a platform for SDG’s implementation
- Develop ESDN by using the ESDN
- Foster exchange and networking
- EU Act
- C of Regions
- Euro Parliament
- EU Court

Provide set of suggestions to design national frameworks: Directives, Taxation, Regulations...

Create a coordination mechanism at EU level upon the domestic EU action (e.g.,)

EU has to have a high level of ambition as a good example

EU strategy

General Council (EU-marathon etc.)

Revise the Europe 2020 as a platform for SDG’s implementation

Develop ESDN by using the ESDN

Foster exchange and networking

Support ESDN!
Main Results: Question 1

1. Consistent EU strategy (incl. monitoring) + good coop. with other EU-govts, EU-funds, CRT etc) + networking = helps lateral legacy; bit only soft dimension

2. Stakeholders missing; facilitate with stakeholder process on European level

3. Action could be: (incorporated in EU framework) Stakeholders forum or OECD or driven co-ordination of SD in EU -> strengthening inputs for EU (analog PISA)
Results of Question 2
What is the best use of the HLPF 2016 outcomes?
Main Results: Question 2

1. INTERESTING EXAMPLES
2. GOOD PRACTICES
3. COMMON CHALLENGES

Practical Steps/ Good Examples

2. POLITICAL COMMITMENT
3. PEER PRESSURE
4. BENCHMARKING
5. STAKEHOLDER PRESSURE

3. NETWORKING
4. STRONGER TEAM SPIRIT IN & ACROSS DELEGATIONS
5. NEW PARTNERSHIPS
Results of Question 3
What are the main challenges in the cooperation between the national and the sub-nation level?

Lack of involvement (negotiation vs implementation)

Networks at national and subnational level need to be linked. SDPs reach out to cities.

Evolving at national level as well as the need for helpful national support.

Bridging gaps in interaction between levels (learning).

Information problem: Can the national level collect all relevant input from sub-national level?

Communication: Explaining the means, relevance, and opportunities of AzBio.

Distributing competencies.

Translate: What do the SDGs mean for the subnational level?
Main Results: Question 3

1. Rise awareness of SDGs and create common understanding of national approach of implementation

2. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different actors on different levels.

3. Motivation and inspiration to take action (leverage)

Practical Steps/Good Examples

- Create platforms for exchange (meeting, online) and communication
- Contextualization, meaning of SDGs for local level
- Match and mold concrete action with SDGs
- Attribution of tasks: WHERE CAN PROGRESS BE BEST ACHIEVED?

Enabling by:
- Provide tools and partnerships for communities and municipalities, institutions
Results of Question 4
How can we best use sub-national activities for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

4: How can we best use subnational activities for the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

- Dissemination and rewarding good produce (use for communication)
- Common platform for subnational activities
- Co-operate with different sub-national institutions e.g. council of local/regional authorities
- Regional network as focal point to support networking
- Private good at local level
- ESDW as an example
- Tool communication

Drivers & source of inspiration
- CDI network
- UN network
- Monetize the impact of implementation of SDGs

STORY TELLING
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Results: Question 4</th>
<th>Practical Steps/ Good Examples</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Promote, reward &amp; disseminate good practices and use them as drivers and source of inspiration for society based solutions, at subnational and national level.</td>
<td>- Use of existing and new communication tools (e.g. ESDW, C40, sus. cities awards, ...).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Strengthen subnational activities through common platforms (existing and new ones) eg. regional networking cooperation (formal &amp; informal).</td>
<td>- Use existing mechanisms e.g. Council of local and regional authorities or create new platforms (e.g. focal points).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Support local by national means such as health and persistent pollution of joint monitoring of indicators.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Activities defined at local level.</td>
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Results of Question 5
What is the best way to translate and coordinate the 17 SDGs at all levels?

1. Start bottom-up, not top-down: “Hello level x, how could you refer to SDG y?”
2. Establish dialogue bottom to top so the lower level knows what a good translation would look like to tell the upper level.

- Not coordinating all SDG at all levels
- Political will translate into national reality e.g. by strategy
- Define integrated and inclusive priorities and have a mechanism for their revision
- Formulate Targets in the language of actors (communities, business)
- Show opportunities to different actors
- Linking conceptual framework with concrete action and examples that it works
- Smart approach to maximize the return of efforts
- Let us bloom, flowers bloom
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Main Results: Question 5</th>
<th>Practical Steps/ Good Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1</strong> BOTTOM UP INSTEAD OF TOP DOWN</td>
<td>GUIDELINES SPECIFIC TO ADOBE PROGRAMS LOCAL LEVEL, UNIVERSITIES CITIES, NGOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTNERSHIPS AMONG ALL ACTORS AT ALL LEVELS</td>
<td>DIALOGUE FORUMS - SHOW OPPORTUNITIES - DEMONSTRATE GOOD PRACTICE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3</strong> COMMUNICATION ADAPT THE MESSAGE TO THE ACTORS AUDIENCE</td>
<td>LET A THOUSAND FLOWERS BLOOM</td>
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In the concluding session of the workshop, the final Space for Exchange, ‘How to bring these ideas back home?’, was designed to collect suggestions on how to spur change in practice. Each participant was asked to write down 1-2 issues that they wanted to do as an immediate follow-up to this event. This was followed by an interactive exchange in groups of three, and concluded in plenary discussions. Several ideas on how to spur change in practice were shared among the participants in the plenary discussions:

- need to provide good narratives for the 2030 Agenda and SDGs;
- raise awareness for 2030 Agenda and SDGs (i.e. communication and media education could create stories out of the SDGs);
- appoint SDG ambassadors, e.g. national celebrities or other eminent persons who could raise awareness for the SDGs;
- necessity to engage with colleagues from other ministries, e.g. through more informal meetings (i.e. ‘beer learning’), but also with the local level;
- better coordination at the EU level, and between the EU and Member States level to develop a strategic implementation process;
- definition of clear roles and responsibilities in the planning and implementation of the 2030 Agenda/SDGs;
- increased engagement of the subnational level (i.e. find partners who can engage the subnational level);
- need of a format to better engage parliaments;
- exchange with other countries about their practical experiences and implementation mechanisms;
- link budgetary processes to SD processes in order to provide financial basis for the implementation process;
- involve stakeholders more actively and strategically;
- start working on the HLPF report for 2017 by contacting those countries who have already done HLPF VNRs reports.