



CIVIL SOCIETY AND CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT FOR THE 2030 AGENDA

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**6th ESDN Peer
Learning
Platform Report**

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Introduction

This Peer Learning Platform took place on August 30 - 31, 2021 in Mariehamn, Åland Islands. It was organised by the European Sustainable Development Network together with the Nordic Council of Ministers and the Government of Åland. The objectives of the Platform were to learn from one another on good practice examples from all over Europe on how governments are involving and engaging with civil society and citizens when it comes to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The ESDN has an established history with the Nordic Council of Ministers, having cooperated together to organize the 4th ESDN Peer Learning Platform in Copenhagen in 2019 on Budgeting for the SDGs. This cooperation has continued and the Nordic Council of Ministers brought a unique perspective, as they are in the midst of establishing a Nordic Civil Society Network with the purpose to make the voice of civil society increasingly involved and engaged in the Nordic cooperation for sustainable development. It is the hope that the experiences being made by the Nordic Council of Ministers and those of participating ESDN member countries that were shared during the Peer Learning Platform can serve as a way to share these good practice cases, learn from one another, and forward the sustainable development agenda in Europe.

The Government of Åland is celebrating its 100th year of autonomy and will be the host for many activities related to sustainable development and the 2030 Agenda. In collaboration with the Government of Åland, the youth movement ReGeneration 2030 was hosting the ReGeneration Week on 28 – 31 August 2021 in Mariehamn. This is a powerful platform for change that fosters and highlights leadership, strengthens and unites actors, builds excitement and engagement, demands change, and facilitates action. ReGeneration Week offered a high-level meeting place, where youth and decision-makers (including ESDN members) were able to discuss and propose solutions for a more sustainable future the day before the Peer Learning Platform. The ReGeneration Week is a meeting place and a platform for learning and knowledge sharing. ReGeneration Week aims to build a bridge between individual action-taking and political demands, corporate responsibility and system change. ReGeneration Week has been organized since 2018 and the theme for this Regeneration Week was “Rethinking the System”.

The ESDN took part on 30 August in the ReGeneration Week Dialogues to connect Youth with policymakers and to spur the discussions and debates for the Peer Learning Platform on 31 August on further citizen and civil society involvement and engagement in sustainable development. In addition to these two events being hosted by the Government of Åland, the Nordic Council of Ministers was also organizing a meeting of its Nordic Expert Group for Sustainable Development, which consists of members representing the ministries and youth organizations of the Nordic countries.

Welcome and Opening

Welcoming words

A representative of the ESDN Executive Committee welcomed all participants to the Peer Learning Platform, both online and in person in Mariehamn, Åland. They explained that it had been very exciting to engage with the young people from the Nordic and Baltic countries during the Dialogues with participants of ReGeneration Week, a youth organisation dedicated to sustainable development. They said they would take away many insights for their work back home.

The representative explained that this Peer Learning Platform was organised in cooperation with the Government of the Åland. As it was a peer learning event, everyone should feel free to share equally. As the presentations and discussion after the Opening would fall under the Chatham House Rule, everyone should feel comfortable sharing best, good, and not so good practices and provide peer support to colleagues who are struggling not only with challenges, but also with expectations.

Civil Society Involvement in the Nordic Cooperation

Representative of the Nordic Council of Ministers, Denmark

The Nordic Council of Ministers is a cooperation by the Prime Ministers of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland. The Prime Ministers meet one or two times per year, while the ministers for Nordic cooperation steer the work of the Nordic Council of Ministers. The Chairmanship rotates. The vision for **Nordic cooperation for 2030 is to become the 'most sustainable and integrated region in the world'**. There are three priority areas: **a green, a competitive, and a socially sustainable Nordic region**. The Nordic Council of Ministers has developed an Action Plan with 12 goals. All activities by the Council and by the member states should be in line with the vision. The biggest challenges currently lie within the green areas, and the Nordic Council is steering a lot of budget towards their green activities.

Goal 11 of the Action plan is to give civil society a bigger voice in the Nordic cooperation. There is already a long history of civil society involvement, but now it should be increased even more. There is a new **Nordic civil society network with 40 representatives**. Many CSOs are all working within one network, with the goal of advising the Nordic Council, but also to learn from each other. In addition, there are public consultations where everyone can comment, not just representatives of CSOs.

In addition, there are councils for individual stakeholder groups. For example the Council for Disability consists of eight civil society representatives. There is also a Committee for Children and Youth. They follow the activities of the network and share their perspectives on it. The plan is to mainstream the work of youth and there are many projects and grant programmes.

The Nordic council has also developed a [guideline for civil society involvement](#).

The Everyone Can Flourish Story of Åland

Representative from the Government of Åland

Åland has the goal to **be completely sustainable by the year 2051 at the latest**. The Agenda and the roadmap were created with a bottom-up approach and have won international recognition. The roadmap includes all areas of policy-making and is also represented in the budget, where it is **explained how each budget item relates to the Agenda**. The vision for Åland is that for **'the best Åland we can have'**. That means that **'Everyone can flourish in a viable society on the Islands of Peace'**. The vision

acts as a source of inspiration and a driver of change. The representative mentioned that they have participated in a lot of discussions with the participants of the [ReGeneration 2030](#) network. These were discussions about hopelessness and hope and powerlessness vs power.

The representative said that we live in bubbles and admitted that their own background has affected their own worldview. These **bubbles have created a polarised world and the skin of the bubbles is hard to penetrate**. We must be aware of the different bubbles and understand them, because when we strive for a change towards a sustainable society, **we have to strive for a society that is as inclusive as possible**.

The representative enjoyed the intergenerational dialogues of the ReGeneration Week of the day before. The fact that everyone entered the room together and sat in a circle allowed all participants to really focus on what other people had said.

This is a good start for the penetration of our bubbles and we need to learn from each other. It is important that the government of Åland and the Nordic Council of Ministers continue to support these kinds of dialogues. We have to make an effort to create the dialogues and also to include people that do not usually come to these kinds of formats.

The representative talked about empowerment. They argued that we cannot rely solely on political institutions to be the change makers. The Sustainable Development Agenda was developed through different working groups, which included different actors. These different groups work like different energy centres and engines for the transformation. They work for themselves as well as together. This way they can come up with their own initiatives. In addition, they are listened to more when they work together.

When the pandemic struck, the Sustainable Development Council was activated to counsel and support management of the crisis. That resulted in valuable input for how the government should proceed in the handling of the problems.

The representative then mentioned the importance of responsibility. **As a result of organisations and people becoming involved in the development of the SD agenda for Åland, there is a feeling of responsibility**. As the government is working on day-to-day issues and can become caught up in them, it is important that initiatives and opinions from the people come in to push the government in the right direction. The government has to be reminded to maintain their strategic outlook.

Session 1: Government Engagement and Involvement of Citizens and Civil Society

Finland: Civil Society Engagement

The National Commission for Sustainable Development is the backbone for activities regarding sustainable development in Finland. It has existed for almost 30 years and it has always been led by the Prime Minister. Its main aim was always to **provide a space for multi-stakeholder engagement**. The Commission currently consists of 60 members and 60 vice members, as varied as the church and the Finnish Olympic Committee. **Structural and systemic changes have to happen with everyone involved** and we need very specific tools to engage different kinds of stakeholders.

The well-known [Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development](#) is a platform where citizens and organisations can make a commitment to improve their individual sustainable footprint. Citizens can take part as an individual, a tiny day care centre, or a large retailer. Larger organisations can also make bigger commitments in the form of Green Deals, for example to reduce plastic packaging. In addition, there are also tests on the sustainability of individuals' lifestyles.

The government has also started a **Citizens' Panel for Sustainable Development**. This is an easily accessible online survey, where participants receive expert information and evaluate certain issues. The resulting graph helps to show the government how the citizens of Finland feel about certain issues and the government knows about citizens' worries. The government is still looking into making this tool better and using it more efficiently.

In answer to a question, the representative said that at the moment this it is a self-selecting panel. **It is a common problem in sustainable development that only specific people take part in such activities**. The government does try to advertise the panel in many different places.

Germany: Joint Action for Sustainable Development

A representative from the German Council for Sustainable Development (RNE) presented the Joint Action for Sustainable Development, a new initiative that is sponsored by the German Government. The goal is to **leave our bubbles and to broaden action in the whole of society**. The idea of the Joint Action was developed by the Chancellor and the prime ministers of the *Länder* (German Federal States). The idea is to **not only involve the typical actors from the political scene in sustainable development activities, but also civil society, academia, municipalities and the business sector**.

The youth perspective plays a role, even though that still needs to be developed. This year, a representative from the youth council is a member of the Council for Sustainable Development. Other projects to involve youth are being developed.

Joint Action

Only 1% of the German government's pioneering SD actions promote joint activities of different stakeholders. This action aims to **bring in new topics and actors, including those who are currently sceptical about sustainable development** and are blocking progress when it comes to climate change, circular economy, etc. The Joint Action is similar to, and was partially inspired by, Finland's *Society's Commitment*. It is important to include these actors. **For the green transformation, we need all citizens on board**, up to 80-90%.

The tool was developed together with the users and will be open access. One of the participants of the Peer Platform added that the code for the Finnish Society's Commitment is also openly available.

Sweden: Engaging Civil Society

The Swedish representative started their presentation by outlining that **an active, independent and open civil society is crucial to the transition to a sustainable society**. In December 2018, 82 Swedish civil society organisations signed a joint declaration of intent, setting out higher ambitions for implementing the 2030 Agenda.

The National Body for Dialogue and Consultation between the Government and Civil Society (NOD) consists of 17 umbrella organisations with over 670 member organisations. The individual organisations act within a number of roles, for example as innovators or educators. The concerted approach from different stakeholders provides a clear focus.

A series of dialogue meetings planned this autumn to facilitate the cooperation between the public sector and civil society, covering all policy areas. The national forum will conclude the dialogue series. **The dialogue meetings focus on the following topics: "Leave no one behind", "Children and young people", and "Build forward better- sustainable recovery after the pandemic".** The results of the dialogue will be included in a report to Parliament. After prolonged discussion, it was decided that these dialogues would be closed. There are ca. 20-25 organisations for each event and they happen under the Chatham House Rule. Thus, there will be a report for everyone else to see.

To allow the participants to prepare, two to three questions and a note are sent out before. This could, for example, be a one-pager about the concept of leaving no one behind, as well as links to the Statistics Sweden Report on this principle. **It is important to communicate that they do not have to read these reports before, in order to not scare away organisations that have not yet worked on the Agenda very much.**

The Swedish Government also supports civil society in its international cooperation efforts. **Around 39% of funds by the Swedish Agency for International Cooperation is channelled towards civil society.** Civil society actors are also invited to be part of the Swedish delegation to the HLPF each year. One seat is always reserved for young people. There are regular dialogue meetings with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The Swedish representative concluded that so far, the Swedish Government has focused its efforts on umbrella organisations and not so much on individuals and citizens.

The results of the dialogue will be reported to Parliament, and it will be included in a report next year on the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Sweden. The dialogue meetings are closed, which had itself been a topic of discussion. However, in the end, this was the decision.

The Dutch representative mentioned that SDG Nederland has also struggled with the question of how to engage the individual citizen. They have a campaign where they take an SDG bus into local municipalities and link up with local initiatives and this creates interest and some citizens become motivated to become local SDG ambassadors.

Romania: Coalition for Sustainable Development and Education Campaigns for the SDGs

The Romanian Government is using an inter-institutional framework to start the movement for the 2030 Agenda. The aim is to change behaviour and mentality. **Sustainability is another approach to life, not just a technical question. Without partners, it will fail.**

The Department of Sustainable Development was established in 2017 as part of the Prime Minister's Office for implementing the 2030 Agenda in Romania. It acts as a catalyst and to mobilize key actors: national and local public authorities, the private sector, research and universities, civil society, and common citizens.

The Department aims to **bring key stakeholders together to foster the sustainable transformation, to ensure policy coherence and to encourage multi-stakeholder engagement and civil society involvement** for the acceleration of the 2030 Agenda implementation in Romania.

In December 2020, the Department signed a Collaboration Agreement with the **Sustainable Romania Coalition**. It is formed out of representatives from civil society and the business sector and brings together about 50 entities and individuals. It also brings together several ministers from different departments.

The Coalition acts as an NGO, which advocates for the national SDGs. It is an important partner in the consultation of civil society in issues related to the sustainable development of Romania, which can become topics of analysis. These can then be exploited in the decision-making process (Ex. elaboration of Romania's Strategy for the Transition to a Circular Economy; other sectoral strategies that can contribute to the achievement of the national SDGs).

July 2021 saw the first meeting of **the Consultative Council for Sustainable Development**. It is formed of 34 members, who are representatives of academia, scientists, civil society and the business sector. Each of the members focuses on two SDGs related to their interest.

Its tasks include:

- To contribute to the elaboration of the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 with scientific and technical know-how;
- To validate the new set of national sustainable development indicators; and
- To give advice on the monitoring and reporting system, as well as on other issues related to sustainable development.

The **Worldwide Romanian Students Forum** took place in August 2021. It is a platform where students discuss the problems they are currently facing in five committees:

- Combatting school drop-out among young people;
- Transition from fossil fuels to energy from renewable sources;
- Convergence of regional economies: taxation, wages, social aid;
- Increasing the accessibility of medical services in rural areas; and
- Continued professionalization of diplomacy and the impact of young people in this process.

There are several **education campaigns for the SDGs**. One of them is '**Rowing for sustainable communities**'. It is a workshop for 15 high school children on how to build a canoe. During one week, the different construction stages and their connection with different school subjects were videotaped. Seven packages of open educational resources were made, highlighting the direct applicability of the notions learned in mathematics, physics, chemistry, geography, botany and history. These can later be used by teachers across the country in the classrooms to increase the attractiveness of school among students.

The **Education at Heights programme** aims to **familiarise students and teachers with the SDGs in a way that highlights Romania's resources and to create student-centred interactive lessons**. Eight

special lessons are being produced with the help of drones. Students were tuned into live sessions from their schools and an enthusiastic teacher answers their questions right from the spot.

In September 2021, there was a Gala of Sustainable Development, rewarding those who contributed to the promotion of education from schools, universities, NGOs, research institutes, companies and local authorities.

The Netherlands: Youth Engagement on Governmental Sustainable Development Policies

The presentation about activities in the Netherlands was shared by a representative from the Dutch government and a Dutch UN Youth Delegate.

The representative from the Dutch Government explained that the Government committed to strengthening youth involvement in 2020. This happened at the advice of the Youth Advisory Council.

There are many different types of issues, in which young people should have an input. First of all, there are **issues that immediately affect young people today. They have also been highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic**, e.g. housing and education. They have affected young people unequally.

The government has set up the **Socio-economic Advisory Council**, which is a **youth think tank** that pilots different practical ways to involve young people. **It is important to involve and care for young people, otherwise we risk creating a 'lost generation'**. In addition to the think-tank, ministries should involve young people in the issues that they are working on at a particular moment in time.

Next to the policies that affect young people directly, there are also those that will affect the young people of today in 2030-2050, e.g. pension system, cost of Covid-mitigation measures, climate change, etc. These issues affect the future opportunities for today's young people.

Another initiative that will be piloted is the generation test. **The SDG Agenda provides the strongest intergenerational compass to include the interests of future generations.**

Young people in the Netherlands are very involved in the SDG movement, for example they write their own chapter in the national SDG report each year. There is also an independent lab for future generations, which provides unsolicited, but very welcome advice to the Government. A recent example for this advice was to enshrine the right to water for future generations in the Constitution. This would also affect future generations that have not yet been born.

It is also important to consider the effects of policies on the opportunities of young people elsewhere. **Youth policy is also an important part of development policy.** This means to strengthen the voice of young people in developing countries and linking them with youth in the Netherlands. It is important to think through at which level that needs to be facilitated.

On society's participation in general, the Dutch representative explained that the government works very closely with the network movement [SDG-Nederland](#), which brings together more than 1,000 organizations, including all the large umbrella organizations representing local government, education organizations, businesses, banks, youth, NGO's and knowledge institutions. They also connect to other transition and social action movements for advocacy campaigns. Another interesting feature may be that the government writes the annual national SDG report together with all these actors: every sector of society writes their own chapter. Thirdly, the government will prepare the 2022 VNR through a

series of dialogues with stakeholders around 6 transition paths based on the SDGs (inspired by the 6 transitions proposed by the UN in the [Global Sustainable Development Report](#)).

The Dutch Youth representative explained that the problem with youth involvement at the UN level is that **by far not all Member States have youth representatives and the youth representatives are often not taken seriously by policymakers abroad**. In addition, trust in government and institutions is declining among young people. The youth representative argued that this can be combatted by regaining faith of the youth and by involving youth in governance and policy processes.

On the other hand, **young people are more active than ever, voter turnout has never been this high in that demographic in the Netherlands**. Young people do care, but democracy is not only about voting. **Wealth and power are not equally divided across generations and young people have little influence on policies**. Policies can only improve the lives of the future generations if these generations are included before and during negotiations. Usually, when young people arrive, everything has already been written and policymakers ask for their opinion to tick the box of youth involvement. The youth representative added that **often politicians and policymakers do not treat youth representatives with due respect**. They do not want fist bumps or high-fives, but rather to be considered an equal partner at the negotiation table.

The youth representative presented the Dutch UNGA initiative. The judicial basis for youth involvement is already there in **SDG 16.7; “Proportions of positions (by sex age, persons with disabilities and population groups) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions.”**

This means that they are not asking to change the judicial framework, because it is already there. The UN and EU should both lead in terms of ensuring that the SDGs are implemented also in this regard. This would mean to future-proof policies together with future and present generations.

The youth representative suggested to **shift the language from talking about ‘stakeholders’ to ‘shareowners’, because we all own the future**.

The Dutch UN Youth Delegate gave more information about the **Generational Test**. It was developed by the Dutch Social Economic Council Youth Platform (SER), which was founded in 2019. The national implementation will follow with the next government, once it is in office. **The Generational Test should happen before laws are passed, and even before they are officially evaluated**. There should be larger representation at the advisory stage, including a diverse group of young people, including vocational workers. Too often, **people with an academic background are overrepresented**.

The representative also called for preventing tokenism. As youth delegates, they are not only representing the youth in their countries, but also for the many young people around the world that do not have any representation at all. Similar legislation to enable more youth to participate needs to be adopted on the global and EU level.

The representative then invited participants of the Peer Learning Platform to join the initiative for a generational test at the international level and to implement it in their own countries for national level policies. The goals for the Dutch representatives at the 2021 76th UNGA would be to **underline the importance of generational equity when it comes to the position of youth in multilateral negotiations**, to present the Generational Test as an initiative to combat generational inequity, and to contribute to the understanding that the SDGs provide the perfect basis for the creation of such a Generational Test.

Session 2: Engaging with Citizens and Civil Society

European Economic and Social Committee

There is a lack of structured involvement of civil society, not only in EU Member States, but also at the European level and with European institutions. **At the moment, civil society engagement happens whenever the Commission deems it necessary, but we need a structural approach where civil society is constantly brought into decision-making.**

A **good example for structured exchange is the circular economy stakeholder platform.** The development for the action plan is driven together with the Commission.

For Youth, the EESC has proposed a round table with Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans, in order to bring their voice to the Commission in a meaningful way. There is a lot of talk about a **wellbeing economy**, but we do not know what a wellbeing economy would actually mean. This is **where civil society needs to get involved.** This could, for example, happen in the form of a think-tank.

The EESC has recently released opinions on comprehensive food policy for Europe. This was a multi-level process to make suggestions on the transition of the food system. Civil society should also organise around the climate pact, in order to make it more meaningful.

SDG Watch Austria

SDG Watch Austria is a cross-sectoral network of over 200 CSOs and NGOs. It was founded in 2017. The organisation aims at the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, as it is a common concern of civil society organisations in Austria. It **promotes an effective and ambitious implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in Austria through coordinated advocacy work and joint activities.**

SDG Watch Austria serves as the voice of civil society regarding the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in participation processes and in exchange with political representatives in Austria. It is a platform for the dissemination of information and knowledge regarding the implementation of the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs. It **coordinates joint actions and communication to create awareness around the 2030 Agenda and promotes exchange and cooperation between member organisations, as well as with European and international networks.**

SDG Watch Austria has developed key policy recommendations for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda:

- Clear political commitment on the highest level of government;
- A strategic approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda;
- Identifying priorities and ensuring policy coherence;
- Pushing for mechanisms that ensure laws and budgets are SDG compatible;
- Including all stakeholders in the implementation process, such as parliament, civil society, academia, local actors and the private sector; and
- Ensuring a transparent monitoring and evaluation process.

SDG Watch Austria cooperates with academia, mostly with [UniNetZ](#), a network of scientists and artists from 18 partner institutions (17 universities and a research centre) that have joined together to present options for the implementation of the SDGs.

The 'Optionenbericht' (Options report) **elaborates options that could serve as a means of communicating to the federal government which concrete options can be set by Austria in order to implement the 2030 Agenda.** It will be published in December 2021. The Perspectives Report (Perspektivenbericht) was done with UniNetZ, where each of the 17 universities had the lead for one of the SDGs. The idea is to write this report from a very scientific perspective. This report then served as a basis for the options report.

Voluntary National Review

SDG Watch Austria contributed to Austria's first VNR in 2020. It was a **participatory and transparent multi-stakeholder approach.** SDG Watch Austria joined several formal and informal meetings to discuss the VNR process and, as part of their editorial team, **contributed to the content of the VNR.** SDG Watch Austria was shown a first draft and were asked to contribute different things, for example examples of good implementation. SDG Watch Austria was not involved in writing the draft, but **could propose changes on the drafts.** These drafts then went back and forth several times. This close cooperation was an important basis for further work on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It will serve as a blueprint for other participatory processes.

From a CSO perspective, the following lessons were learned:

1. SDG Watch Austria developed red lines and criteria for participation, including an exit strategy if participation had failed;
2. SDG Watch Austria had direct participation in the process, it provided feedback and recommendations on the text;
3. Informal dialogue is very important; this includes calls, online meetings, constant contact and dialogue about process and outcomes;
4. Constant internal transparent communication with member organisations to be on the same page;
5. Many talks with other stakeholder, e.g. academia, court of auditors, private sector; and
6. The VNR is a starting point for the next steps, including the Parliament.

The external and unpredictable factors included the change of government, the fact that there is no one size fits all solution and the need to have the right people in the right places. Important internal factors were communication, trust, transparency and the personal dimension.

One key demand of SDG Watch Austria was to **strengthen national Parliament's role in the implementation process,** for example, by regular and transparent reporting to, or in, the Parliament by the Government. The VNR clearly states: 'The Federal Government will regularly inform Parliament about the progress being made in the implementation of the SDGs.' Parliament is the place of legislation and government control. SDGs should play a role in all of the committees and consultations. So far, there are SDG speakers in all parties, which is a positive development. For a long time there had been nothing, so SDG Watch Austria pushed for one person who would be in charge of the SDGs. After the VNR process, they found people that were willing to take over that role. Now, they are starting their own small initiatives in the Parliament. **It is important not to overwhelm parliamentarians, as some do not even know what the SDGs are.** Right now, it is about information sharing and building trust. This will be key to get the Parliament on board for the process.

However, the funding and a secretariat for SDGs depend on political will.

As next steps, SDG Watch Austria is planning to do an SDG check for laws and promote SDG budgeting. It also wants to be involved in the next VNR. However, it is unclear when the next VNR will be submitted

by Austria. In addition, SDG Watch Austria wants to **produce resources for civil society organisations and for the Government.**

One example of further collaboration between civil society and the Government in Austria would be the **SDG ‘Dialogforum’**, happening in September 2021 on ‘Building forward better’. Four innovation pools would address relevant issues for SDG target achievement, results feeding into further work on implementation. These innovation pools are digitalization; climate change and adaptation; women, youth and leaving no one behind; and Austria in the global context. There will be a particular focus on the challenges and opportunities in moving out of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Danish 92 Group

The Danish representative started their presentation by sharing an image from the presentation of the Danish VNR at the High Level Political Forum. The 92 Group was involved in the presentation, members asked questions and were ‘watching over’ the Government. This is also the aim of the group, to **engage civil society to monitor what the Government is doing.** The idea when founding the group was to bring together environmentalists and development practitioners. Often, these two groups work against each other, but it is important that they actually collaborate.

The Danish 92 Group works with different Civil Society Organisations, but also towards the political level. Therefore, they see themselves as a bridge. **There is an SDG working group for member organisations, where they do strategic planning as well as lots of activities and initiatives.** The Danish 92 Group provides an overview of all SDG work at the UN, EU, national and Nordic level. Based on this information, they strategically work together with member organisations.

The group also **writes a shadow report to the Government’s progress report** to highlight what the Government is doing from their member organisations’ perspective. So far, there has only been one progress report (even though the Government planned to release one every year. This is why they decided to do a **‘spotlight’ instead of a shadow report, as they did not want to wait for the Government to act**). Different member organisations write the chapters in the text, so the texts really represent the view of civil society organisations. This year’s **spotlight report was included in the VNR in an unedited form.**

The 92 Group has also made efforts to involve youth in their activities. They organised a virtual debate between youth in Denmark and in Greenland about different sustainability issues, for example veganism, second hand clothes, and whale beef.

Other activities include:

- Public meetings, e.g. with members of the EU Parliament; and
- Nordic exchange on SDGs and NAPs with support from the Nordic Council of Ministers, workshops in Bergen, Oslo and a dialogue meeting in Iceland.

Franco-German Forum for the Future: At the ‘green face’- The city of Marburg’s experience of engaging citizens in climate protection

The Franco-German Forum for the Future tries to **catalyse just ecological and social transitions through a bottom-up approach.** This includes:

1. Collaborative action research with local pioneers;

2. Peer Dialogues between French and German initiatives; and
3. bring the analysis, inspiration and lessons learned to the attention of national level experts and policymakers, such that they can formulate recommendations for national decision-makers.

Marburg has a long-standing tradition of citizen mobilisation for climate protection and ecological issues, and there are political majorities for climate protection. The City Council passed a climate emergency declaration in June 2019 and the mayor is very committed to climate issues.

In October and November of 2019, **there were two participatory workshops to get civil society's input for the climate action plan**, which was written up in 2020.

How does citizen engagement work in Marburg?

There is an active civil society (e.g. Fridays for Future, Scientists for Future, Marburg Zero). There are functioning informal channels of communication between the City and civil society. The Klima Bündnis (climate alliance) invites the city to attend their meetings. The city also has a Klima Beirat (climate advisory board). However, currently **civil society is disappointed with the Climate Action Plan and their own involvement in it**. This has led to a conflict between the city and civil society. In addition, the Klima Beirat is regarded as insufficient. So the question is why, despite the will of both sides, has citizen engagement been difficult and conflictual?

The two issues that were identified were the following:

1. The **structure of the administration and the positioning of the climate action plan were not ready for the invited participation**; and
2. Participation in the workshops for the climate action plan were not consistent, which led to high expectations that were then disappointed.

The lessons learned from this were as follows:

- **Transparency is key**, for example about the competencies of the City, but this needs resources;
- More **knowledge on facilitation of participatory and collaborative processes** is needed;
- It is necessary **to account for diversity within civil society**; and
- It is neither possible, nor desirable, to try to get civil society to speak with one voice.

In order to address these issues, the City of Marburg is discussing a new climate governance model that is situated just under the level of the mayor and both participatory with the 'Climate Citizen Council' and collaborative with thematic working groups. In addition, the City will participate in a workshop on hosting participatory processes.

Session 3: Breakout Groups: Strategies for broader civic engagement

The Peer Learning Platform participants were asked to discuss three questions in breakout groups. A summary of the answers they presented after the breakout session are presented below.

1. Why is it important for civil society and citizens to be involved and engaged in the government's work with SD and the SDGs?

The 2030 Agenda demands a whole-of-society approach and to engage all kinds of actors. This means to not only hear their demands, but to make the implementation of the Agenda a joint project. All policies and processes should be implemented at the civil society level, because without the involvement of civil society, it will not work out. The participants were wondering if involving workers' unions could help to engage more of civil society.

2. What are the challenges/barriers for civil society and citizens in getting involved and engaged with governments AND for government in involving and engaging civil society and citizens in the work with SD and the SDGs?

In some countries and/or contexts, there is no real tradition for stakeholder engagement. On the other hand, sometimes there are too many voices that want to be heard, so the challenge is to differentiate and channel all the voices out there.

Governments may be reluctant to involve civil society, because ideas are sometimes hard to implement, there is a mismatch between expectations by civil society and what is feasible.

Budgetary and time resources also need to be considered, as many layers of government, people and institutions would need to cooperate to implement the ideas, concerns and demands by civil society.

3. What concrete steps can be taken to increase broader civil society and citizen involvement and engagement with governments in the work with SD and the SDGs?

There need to be good processes to channel the voices that need to be heard. Civil society participation needs to be designed and planned well for it to work out. In addition, it is important to be honest about what is possible and what is not.

A gap analysis would be helpful, so to not only speak about what worked well, but also what did not work so well.

It is important to engage with all people, not only the organised ones. In addition, it will be more useful to make people feel inspired, rather than trying to convince people in a more common way. Many strategies were proposed to reach out to people that are not already organised for sustainable development:

- Schools: through the children you can also get the parents. SDGs should be added to the school books. There are probably many UN resources for teaching about sustainability;
- Cultural Sector, as it is predestined to inspire people;
- Media: in Luxembourg, there is a popular radio station that once talked about the SDGs and it was a big success. Even five minutes every week could remind people about the importance of sustainable development issues;
- Sports: in Romania, canoeing and basketball teams have worked on spreading the word about the SDGs. In Finland, footballers against racism are very popular. This could be a good way to reach many people;
- Private sector: peer to peer interaction has been very successful to start the electric car movement in Åland; and
- Labour unions: have a green movement within labour unions. Often, lower-paid workers feel left out of the movement, this could be a way to engage with them.

