
**Dialogue between Scientific Councils
2024 II:**

TRANSFORMATION IN, WITH AND THROUGH GERMANY

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Impulses for Germany's Voluntary
National Review (VNR) at the United
Nations High-Level Political Forum 2025

Brief Report
from the Dialogue between
Scientific Councils
on December 9th, 2024

Background

The [2023 SDG Progress Report](#) recommends a more comprehensive integration of science, especially to help identify integrated policies and measures that can accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda. The [second German Voluntary National Review \(VNR\)](#) identifies the need to better integrate the expertise of non-state actors into future reporting processes as one of the „lessons learned“. With this background, in December 2024, the Dialogue between Scientific Councils (Beirätedialog) was designed to contribute to the broader consultation process for the third German VNR¹.

Synthesis of Results

Three working groups discussed the following questions during the event:

1. Which best-practice examples for accelerated and integrated transformation should be included in the VNR and presented for international peer learning?
2. Which challenges, such as those in off-track areas of the German Sustainability Strategy, should be highlighted to seek partners and global cooperation?

Key points from the discussions are summarized in the following three main insights:

1) Accelerating Transformation with Digital Technologies

The [Pact for the Future](#), the [Global Digital Compact](#), and the 2024 UN resolution „[Seizing the opportunities of safe, secure and trustworthy artificial intelligence systems for sustainable development](#)“ (A/RES/78/265) all call on member states to make greater use of digital technologies and artificial intelligence to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) already discussed the potential and challenges of digitalization for sustainable development in its [2019 report „Our Common Digital Future“](#). The working groups at the Dialogue identified further current examples of successful and promising approaches through which Germany is already promoting sustainable development using digital solutions and innovations — and could further enhance this in the future.

For example, since early 2023, the electronic sick leave notice has replaced the previous two-step procedure for issuing a certificate of incapacity for work, relieving burdens on medical practices, employees, their relatives, employers, and health insurance providers. Other approaches, such as the digital product passport or resource-efficient precision technologies and more efficient plant breeding techniques in the agricultural and food sectors, are still being pioneered and have not yet been institutionalized in Germany, e.g., through mandatory standard datasets or central databases.

Germany should proactively engage with other EU Member states, particularly regarding forward-looking approaches and solutions, to leverage the potential of these technologies and digital solutions for transformation across different sectors from the outset. Eventually, the examples show that the potential of AI for sustainable development has not been sufficiently explored. In view of the rapid evolution of AI technologies globally, the German government must strategically position itself in this debate and foster alliances and agreement with EU member countries to pool resources and strengthen a unified European position.

2) Shaping Transformation Together

Following a „whole-of-society“ approach, the governance of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs requires the participation of stakeholders and citizens — both through co-determination and co-creation. Germany has extensive experience in negotiating integrative transformation policies and measures involving experts, citizens, and stakeholders. At the national level, these experiences range from establishing the first Enquete Commission in 1992 to the first [Citizens' Assembly of the German Bundestag](#), which addressed the topic „[Nutrition in Transition: Between Private Concerns and State Responsibilities](#)“. The assembly presented its recommendations as a citizens' report on February 20, 2024. Furthermore, Germany has previously introduced such an instrument for citizen and stakeholder participation in the development and implementation of integrative transformation policies at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). In a side event titled „[Just transition, but how?](#)“ jointly organized by Germany, Chile, and the ILO (International Labour Organization) during the HLPF 2019, Germany shared its experience with the [Coal Commission](#). The working groups at the Dialogue between Scientific Councils identified numerous other current examples of successful and promising participation of experts, citizens, and stakeholders in the development and implementation of integrative strategies, including:

¹ Note: The Dialogue between Scientific Councils follows the Chatham House Rule: Participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.

- The Protein Crop Strategy, e.g., through the „German Forum for More Sustainable Protein Feed (FONEI)“ and the „German Agricultural Research Alliance“
- The National Water Strategy
- The German Land Use Reduction Target
- The Program for Nature-based Climate Action

Building on the recommendation of the 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report for member states to strengthen their competencies and capacities to negotiate integrative transformation measures, the German government could revisit this issue and discuss how participation and co-determination formats can identify synergies and negotiate goal conflicts — for example, distribution issues or land use competition addressed by integrative funding programs and strategies. However, the government should also critically reflect on why some proposals for resolving trade-offs — such as a climate dividend — have not been implemented so far.

The effectiveness of participative formats should be assessed comparatively and based on scientific research. As integrative policies and measures for implementing the 2030 Agenda increasingly involve negotiating fundamental tenets and aspects of basic services (e.g., affordable housing, food, and energy), their effectiveness should not be taken for granted. The examples of participative formats gathered from the Dialogue could serve as a basis for exchange with government representatives and civil society actors.

3) Integrated Implementation Measures and Policies Require Integrated Data

The impacts of the pandemic on the 2030 Agenda's implementation have demonstrated that education and health data must be supplemented with additional data to enable integrative policies and measures, such as the Health in All Policies approach, for sustainable development in, with, and through Germany.

Scientific advice on integrative policies and measures for accelerating the 2030 Agenda / SDGs requires both integrative data collection (e.g., through long-term household monitoring) and the integration of existing data. Unlike many other countries, Germany already accesses extensive data. However, deficits remain in integrating this data. Germany should particularly address deficits around health and education data through peer learning and co-operation with other EU member states (e.g., via the German Data Forum).

Data comparability is crucial, as education data in Germany and other member states is often collected differently across regions and sectors. In the health sector, Germany made significant progress with the Health Data Use Act,

which came into force in spring 2024. However, as this and other laws promoting integrative data collection and use in Germany are still relatively new and the result of often controversial debates, the federal government is recommended to pursue further collaborations on their implementation. Cooperation with other UN member states such as the United Kingdom and Scandinavian countries is seen as particularly beneficial due to data comparability across countries.

Outlook: Transformation In, With, and Through Germany

Scientific consensus on the benefits of a more integrative approach does not replace the necessary democratic negotiation processes over related goal conflicts. However, integrated science-policy formats like the Dialogue between Scientific Councils can enhance the effectiveness and visibility of science's engagement with the 2030 Agenda and support political negotiation processes by providing scientifically robust insights.

The co-chairs of wpn2030 and SDSN Germany concluded the Dialogue 2024 II by highlighting the obstacles that must be overcome: Increasing populism and anti-science sentiments — particularly in the context of polarized election campaigns — make it difficult to gain broad „resonance“ for scientific advice. Science should seek to formulate more persuasive and concrete policy recommendations by harnessing co-creative, inter- and transdisciplinary processes to facilitate effective exchange between researchers and stakeholders – in particular policymakers and civil society. Accordingly, in 2025, the International Science Council is once again prioritizing the topic „Synthesizing and translating scientific knowledge to inform decision-making“.

We therefore recommend addressing the science-related aspect of this year's HLPF theme („science- and evidence-based solutions“) in the presentation of Germany's third VNR and incorporating experiences with integrative science-policy formats into peer-learning exchanges with other governments, advisory bodies, and scientific organizations.

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wissenschaftsplattform_ nachhaltigkeit 2030

Über den Beirätedialog

Die wissenschaftlichen Beiräte der Bundesregierung kommen zusammen, um sich über Stand und Umsetzung der Deutschen Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie zu beraten und somit die Kräfte wissenschaftlicher Politikberatung für Nachhaltigkeitspolitik zu bündeln und systematisch in den Dialog mit Politik und Regierung einzubringen. Der Beirätedialog wird seit 2018 von der Wissenschaftsplattform Nachhaltigkeit 2030 (wpn2030) gemeinsam mit dem Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Germany durchgeführt.

Zitation

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wissenschaftsplattform_ nachhaltigkeit 2030

Über die wpn2030

Die Wissenschaftsplattform Nachhaltigkeit 2030 (wpn2030) dient als Schnittstelle zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik, um Fragen der Nachhaltigkeitspolitik zu reflektieren und die Weiterentwicklung der Deutschen Nachhaltigkeitsstrategie (DNS) mit wissenschaftlicher Expertise zu unterstützen. Die Wissenschaftsplattform arbeitet unabhängig und ist systematisch eingebunden in den offiziellen politischen Steuerungs-, Dialog- und Umsetzungsprozess der Agenda 2030 in, mit und durch Deutschland.

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