

PROTECTING THE WORLD FROM CRISIS: NEW FIELDS OF ENGAGEMENT FOR A SUSTAINABLE FOREIGN POLICY

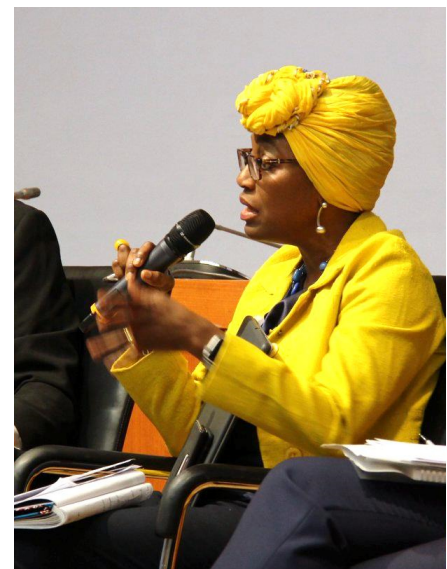
ADRIAN FOONG AND STELLA SCHALLER, MAY 2019

The implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development can prevent conflict and safeguard global stability – and, as a new study from adelphi shows, foreign policy has a critical role to play. The study was presented at a panel discussion which took place on 30 April 2019 at the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin.

As the world faces increasing threats of conflict and violence, often exacerbated by the impacts of climate change, there is a dire need to protect natural resources and to resolve pressing social issues. Sustainable development is not restricted to the self-interests of national governments; it is also relevant to the global community as a whole. **Foreign policy actors play a key role in this regard, and the 2030 Agenda provides them with the tools and guidance to drive and manage the transformative change ahead.**

To map new fields of engagement and explore what foreign policy can contribute to achieving sustainability, adelphi published a new study titled [“Driving transformative change: Foreign affairs and the 2030 Agenda”](#). The [launch event](#) of the study on 30 April 2019, which was co-organised by the **German Federal Foreign Office, adelphi** and **Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Germany**, involved experts in foreign and development policy, civil society and academia, including **Susanne Baumann, Fatima Denton, Oli Brown, David Steven, Verónica Tomei and Adolf Klocke-Lesch**.

“The SDGs are a transformative agenda with geopolitical relevance aiming to build resilience not just with regards to climate and natural resources,” said **Alexander Carius**, Managing Director of adelphi and moderator of the evening, to set the scene for the discussions. “The sustainable development agenda is core to foreign policy, which is why we came up with the new study.”



**Fatima Denton, Director of the UNU
Institute for Natural Resources in Africa**

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“We want to step up our efforts to achieve the agenda now”

Ambassador Susanne Baumann (Commissioner and Head of the Federal Foreign Office’s Directorate-General for International Order, the United Nations and Arms Control) opened the event by highlighting some of the ministry’s initiatives on climate security, including the establishment of the Group of Friends on Climate and Security, as well as Germany’s commitment to implementing and campaigning for the Paris Agreement. She also commented on how “the international community unfortunately is lagging behind its ambitious aims,” and that stepped-up efforts and more targeted actions were required, particularly with regards to gender equality and women empowerment. “It is not a given that we will achieve the SDGs in the 10 years that are left,” she said, adding that German foreign policy wanted to increase its efforts “to achieve the agenda now”.

“What is the formula of leaving nobody behind?”

Drawing on her research and policy development experiences, **Fatima Denton** (Director of the UNU Institute for Natural Resources in Africa) stressed in her keynote speech the need to “walk ourselves out of an unsustainable economic pattern dependent on fossil fuels,” citing Africa’s abundance in fossil fuels and mineral resources.

“How do you tell a country like South Africa that it cannot exploit or mine its coal? That their share of the carbon budget has been used up?” asked Denton. “This has a huge equity implication. And this equity implication has geopolitical, economic and social risks”. Denton pointed out how the SDGs can be used as a “reference point” to address these issues, and because of their geopolitical nature, how diplomacy plays a key role in this regard.

Denton highlighted the need for countries to share their experiences in progressing towards the 2030 Agenda, to learn from each other more, and eventually to uphold multilateralism. “Many problems that we would want to address are problems to be better solved by multilateralism. But it is also the same multilateralism that is under threat.”

She stressed how science needs to be used as a guide towards SDG implementation, which is currently not the case in the African context. “Much of the SDG implementation is basically not connecting to science,” said Denton, pointing out Africa’s limited research output as a problem (it only accounts for less than 1% of global research output).



Launch event at the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin, 30 April 2019

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“Foreign policy has an important role to articulate why we should take on the SDGs”

Oli Brown (Associate Fellow at Chatham House with the Energy, Environment and Resources Department) outlined five key challenges in implementing the SDGs, namely (1) the multitude of goals and targets, which make it difficult to prioritise what actions should be taken, (2) the lack of clarity on how to judge countries’ progress towards the SDGs, (3) the lack of data to track progress, (4) the change in the political landscape since the inception of the SDGs in 2015, and (5) the rise of nationalism and right-wing populism opposing international cooperation, which sustainable development depends upon.

Brown commented how foreign policy makers are well-positioned as experts in navigating a country’s efforts towards SDG implementation. “The role for foreign policy, first and foremost, is to articulate how this Agenda is in line with the national self-interest of every country around the world, because the goals of the SDGs, peace and prosperity for the planet that we live on, are exactly the same as the long-term goals of foreign policy.” Diplomats should frame the SDGs as in their countries’ own national interest, “as a form of planetary health insurance”, making the case for why each country has a real stake in them.

Brown also highlighted the important role of foreign policy actors in understanding the political economy of the SDGs. As entire economies will need to be reshaped, trade-offs will inevitably occur. The unavoidable political implications are to be navigated by foreign policy. In concrete terms, diplomats have a number of tools available in achieving the SDGs, ranging from trade agreements, aid agreements and mediation processes to international partnerships. With these, foreign policy can create incentives for countries to comply with the goals.



David Steven, Verónica Tomei, Oli Brown, Fatima Denton, Alexander Carius (from left to right) © Stella Schaller/adelphi

“We are on track to see an increase in violence by 2030”

Focusing on SDG16 on peace, justice and inclusive societies, and particularly on SDG16.1 which calls for a reduction of all forms of violence, **David Steven** (Senior Fellow and Associate Director, New York University’s Center on International Cooperation and Founder of the [Pathfinders Initiative](#)) highlighted the pervasive nature of violence and how it affects the targets in other SDGs. The Pathfinders Initiative suggests that SDG16 actually rests on 36 targets across the board, not just those currently subsumed under SDG16. He urged to “prevent injustice in a world where roughly 1.5 billion people have unsolved justice problems”, and for that purpose to change and transform institutions.

“We know that violence is a neglected dimension of inequality. It is a major reason why countries, communities and people are going to be left behind by the 2030 Agenda at current rates of progress,” Steven said. People were working in silos – those working on conflict, or violence, or violent extremism, or personal violence were not sufficiently connected. Synergies were not sufficiently tapped as different forms of violence were tackled separately. He added that “evidence shows that violence is preventable, that with the right policies, strategies and investments that draw on the evidence, we can prevent all forms of violence.”

In light of this, Steven drew attention to the many emerging movements across the globe that aim to end violence, such as [Alliance 8.7](#) and the [Spotlight Initiative](#), who may not be sufficiently communicating with each other. This is where foreign policy actors come in, and as Steven put it, “They can bring these different silos together. They can network expertise at home with expertise overseas. They have the ability to build political will.” Thus, foreign policy can help strengthen partnerships and promote investments for violence prevention.

“One of the noblest functions of diplomacy is trust-building”

Verónica Tomei (Project Manager, German Council for Sustainable Development) stressed the need to avoid differentiating between foreign and domestic policies, as they are both fundamentally intertwined. “The domestic and external dimensions are mutually reinforcing” she said.

With this in mind, Tomei described how [Germany’s National Sustainable Development Strategy](#) has been adapted and updated to meet the requirements of the 2030 Agenda, namely the manifold inter-linkages. In Germany, the Chancellery is the central coordinator to SDG implementation, in contrast to many other countries where the SDGs are the responsibilities of specific ministries such as those of the environment and of finances. This, as Tomei described, ensures that SDG implementation remains at the highest political level in the German government, with the Foreign Office being an integral part of the German sustainability architecture. The foreign ministry was leading on specific parts of the sustainability strategy, namely energy and climate issues, arms control, human rights in supply chains, and, mostly, on the conditions enabling SDG implementation such as peace and multilateralism.

She also introduced the importance of working with civil society – foreign policy needs to ensure that it protects the shrinking space of and draws on the powers of civil society.

Aligning international commitments to national development plans

During the panel discussions, **Fatima Denton** described the importance of aligning international and regional-level agendas with national development strategies, and the need to address potential trade-offs. As an example, she cited how the Paris Agreement's call for a shift away from fossil fuels may go against the national plans of some countries to increase oil production, and the need to make these differing policies go hand-in-hand. Also, the implementation of the African Agenda 2063 needs to be aligned with the SDGs, Sendai framework, and other international frameworks.

Denton reminded that not only Africa but also maturing economies need to take action. Many of them operate in African countries and are pushing for an expansion in oil production and mineral extraction, which would result in issues such as water pollution and thus undermine progress towards the 2030 Agenda and Paris Agreement. All countries need to be mindful of their policies at home.

“We also need to transform north-north cooperation”

As a final concluding outlook for the discussions, **Adolf Kloke-Lesch** (Executive Director, SDSN Germany) provided some input as to how the sustainable development agenda and foreign policy could be improved. Referring to SDSN's experience and membership base, Kloke-Lesch pointed out how the sustainability agenda needs to diversify and build more inter- and transdisciplinary relationships, as most of the think tanks and institutions involved are restricted to the climate, development and environmental fields.

He also described how it is insufficient to focus solely on north-south and south-south cooperation, and that the international community needs to rethink north-north cooperation as a means of implementing the SDGs. “Where is the operational toolbox and multilateral system to foster the transformative change in richer countries, that is critical to achieve the SDGs globally? Foreign affairs ministries should address these issues,” he suggested.

Kloke-Lesch concluded that foreign policy needs to take a more pro-active role in achieving the SDGs, by transforming bilateral relations. He also reiterated Denton's statement that the SDGs should be used as a key point of reference in foreign policy.

Conclusion

With the plethora of international-level agreements in place, including the 2030 Agenda, foreign policy has a key role to play in ensuring that these agreements are aligned with national development strategies. Foreign policy is well-positioned in doing so, as it can provide a platform to network various stakeholders together, drive the political will, and build the trust that is needed to push the Agenda forward.

About the study

The study was written by adelphi on behalf of the German Federal Foreign Office in cooperation with renowned international partner institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at New York University and CDP Worldwide. It is [available for download on adelphi's website](#).

Batmanglich, Sara; Pietro Bertazzi, Oli Brown, Clare Church, Alec Crawford, Rachel Locke, David Steven, Alexander Müller, Alexander Carius, Bibiana Garcia, Daria Ivleva, Benno Keppner, Benjamin Pohl, Lukas Rüttinger, Stella Schaller and Janani Vivekananda 2019: Driving Transformative Change: Foreign Affairs and the 2030 Agenda. Berlin: adelphi.



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