

Brief for GSDR 2015

Making a sustainable long term perspective and national reports the basis of the Global Sustainable Development Report GSDR

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Introduction

The Rio +20 outcome document, paragraph 85(k), calls for a Global Sustainable Development Report GSDR, in order to bring together dispersed information and existing assessments and to strengthen the science-policy interface at the High Level Political Forum on sustainable development (HLPF).

The United Nations Secretary-General tasked the Division for Sustainable Development of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs with elaborating a first prototype report.

A first prototype report has been published this year. It is a rich and open cluster of approaches and contents, with an open structure, inviting discussion and further elaboration about methods and content. "It focuses on global sustainable development in terms of issues, impacts, institutions and technology. It maps sustainable development assessments and related processes and highlights emerging issues identified by scientists; assesses sustainable development progress; tells the "Stories" of future pathways toward sustainable development based on the literature and discusses investment and technology needs; assesses various approaches to measuring sustainable development progress; identifies lessons learnt from national, regional and global case studies of the climate-land-energy-water-development nexus; presents illustrative science digests for decision-makers; and suggests a number of issues for consideration."

An enormous challenge

Thinking of the forthcoming SDGs, the starting

work of the HLPF, the UN-Conferences and Special Programmes on different subjects that are crucial for a global sustainable development as well as of the many national and international efforts to advance it, the usefulness of a GSDR seems quite evident. It would provide a worldwide overview about the state of the process, key issues, key players, best practices, special difficulties and long-term perspectives. So all persons and institutions involved would be in position to acquire useful information, the necessary orientation, and be able to determine more precisely where and how to concentrate their efforts and whom to collaborate with.

But as soon as one starts to discuss more precisely the structure, contents, range and methods of such a report, the enormous challenge of composing it becomes obvious: The more generally and globally the perspective chosen, the less it says about the specific situation or development in a determined region or subject. What political or geographical borders should structure the report? Should it be structured by them at all? What range of time should be covered – past, present and the future, and to what degree? How to determine key issues? - Should the seventeen SDG be taken as a basis of the report? Or should they be further reduced to its five roots of assuring basic human needs, basic human rights, good house-holding, good governance and political coherence? It seems to be by far easier to formulate difficult questions than to find good answers.

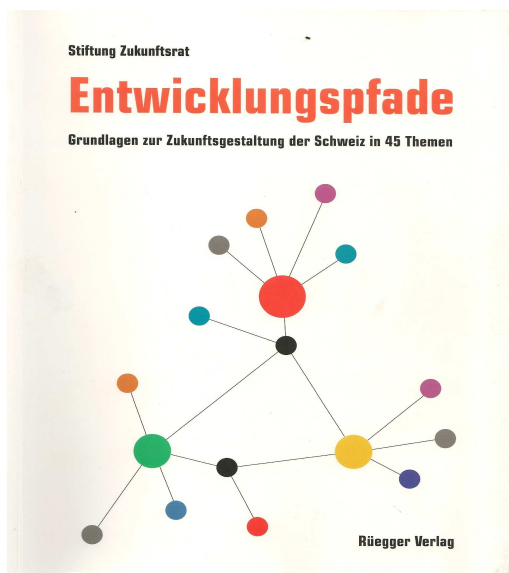
An Outline of a method

Since 1997, the Future Council Foundation has initiated and promoted the creation of future

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councils and at many occasions developed and explored the ways by which we can shape our future – in class-rooms, communities, cantons, conferences, on a national and international level.

In 2013, the Foundation presented a small book with the title “Pathways – a basis for shaping Switzerland's future along 45 themes”. Every theme is presented on two pages. Its development is described from 1950 until today, with a page of simple graphics, showing the dimensions of the development, and a text-page introducing the key actors and the factors shaping that development. At the end of the text-page, a box with some questions about which pathway to choose for the future invites the reader to form his own opinion. The themes chosen cover a wide range of natural, political, social, economic, environmental and cultural developments. So the hundred pages of the book give the reader a good insight into the development of the Swiss society as a whole, and it provides him with a solid basis for shaping ideas and goals for the future of the country.



Pathways of development - a basis for shaping Switzerland's future along 45 themes. This kind of book could be produced for every country, and those books together could provide the near to earth basis for the GSDR

The compilation of this kind a booklet fosters a common understanding of the land's situation among all persons, institutions and offices involved in this process. It makes this knowledge accessible to the whole population because it is easy to understand. It provides a solid common basis to discuss and formulate sustainable development goals for one's own country and set one's own priorities. The information is specific enough so that it allows a quite precise discussion about the who, what, when and where of the measures to take in order to approach the chosen development goals.

Quite a few countries don't yet dispose of the necessary data basis and institutions to compose this kind of booklet. So this would be a task for international support and cooperation and for the enhancement of capacity and institution building, often mentioned in the present formulation of the SDG.

For big countries it could be helpful to provide more than one book, one book for each region.

These pathway-books and the GSDR would be complementary. The GSDR could be more focused on general lines and global development pathways, issues and challenges. For more specific regional information, the national pathway-books could be consulted.

The principle of subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity says that those tasks of a society that can best be solved on a local level should be dealt with there, and only the common tasks that are better tackled on a larger level of society should be treated there. The principle fosters the commitment and sense of responsibility of every citizen, asks for his abilities and skills.

Within the present SDG proposal, the importance of the principle of subsidiarity is repeatedly stressed. For example in goal 17 (15): “Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement ... sustainable development.” Among the various factors that decide about the success of the

worldwide efforts for a sustainable development, the commitments and efforts on a local, regional and national level are of great importance. The task as a whole is such enormous and wide that it cannot be solved without this near to earth basis.

The complementary structure with national pathway-reports and agenda-setting and a GSDR complies fully with the principle of subsidiarity.

The principle of a sustainable long term perspective

Under this principle, applied to the development of a society as a whole, this development is described by its long-term pathways, whose long term sustainability is discussed, explored and judged upon. So the pathways of the past and the future possibilities of development become discernible, and arguable at all.

This principle opens a perspective quite different from the daily business as usual, newspaper headlines and general short-termism.

On the basis of the past pathways of development of our society, it becomes possible to discuss more precisely possible future pathways, to formulate the corresponding SDG and to bring them into an order of priority.

Once the sustainable long term pathways and SDGs to follow are formulated and chosen, they help strongly to keep the line against numerous difficulties and in time of diminishing faith and courage.

Next steps

We hope that the proposal to produce within every country a small book with its main pathways of development under the perspective of long term sustainability as described above, will soon find entrance into the UN-Offices responsible for GSDR, so that both kind of documents could soon be produced well-coordinated and in a complementary way.

During the next months, the Future Council Foundation will contact interested NGOs and interested governments' offices of the neighbour countries and try to initiate the production of pathway-of-development-books there. It is also in contact with the Swiss Federal Office for Cooperation and Development. Maybe pathway-books could also become an element within the cooperation with the Office's partner-countries.

We are convinced that the method is so basic and well understandable that pathway-books for every country would contribute effectively to a common, more precise and country-specific comprehension of what sustainable development means in country-specific contexts, and foster a well-founded discussion about which SDG to work on and with what priorities.

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