

PRESS RELEASE

## Long in words but short on action: UN sustainability goals are threatened to fail

**In 2015, the international community pledged to jointly contribute to better economic, ecological and social development by 2030. In September, the heads of state and government will meet again for the first time to review the situation. The current SDG report shows that while the global community talks a lot about sustainability goals, it does not invest enough in implementing them.**

Gütersloh/New York, 19 June 2019. What began as a historic summit could end up as mere lip service. In 2015, 193 states agreed to implement the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. The fight against poverty and hunger is just as important as the commitment to more climate protection or better educational opportunities. This year, the heads of state and government want to meet for the first time for an interim review in New York. The results should be sobering: The latest edition of the SDG Report shows that no country is currently on track to meet all targets by 2030. The industrialized countries play an ambivalent role in their implementation. On the one hand, they come closest to fulfilling the goals. On the other hand, they hinder global implementation by incurring environmental and economic costs for third countries due to high living standards and consumer preferences. These are the findings of the current Sustainable Development Report, based upon which the Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) have been analyzing the implementation of the UN goals since 2015.

Sweden, Denmark and Finland have achieved the highest rankings in the country comparison with around 83 points. In other words, these countries have already met three quarters of the requirements of the UN goals. Overall, the authors see the greatest need for catching up in the indicators relating to climate protection and sustainable consumption.

On the whole, all OECD countries scored the worst here. Another weak point is agriculture, which accounts for a quarter of the world's greenhouse gas emissions. On top of this is soil pollution: More than two-thirds (78 percent) of all countries surveyed are in the red for nitrate pollution caused by fertilizers and pesticides, and have thus scored poorly. The authors have criticized the disparity between malnutrition and an overproduction of food: One third of food worldwide ends up in garbage cans or is disposed of unused, even though more than 800 million people are malnourished, according to the authors.

### **Poor role models: The richest states do not do enough**

"There is not much left of the historic promises made four years ago. In climate action and sustainable consumption the OECD countries are far away from their leaders' commitments. We have to breathe life into the UN goals and transpose them into concrete measures. Poverty and unjust educational opportunities do not disappear by lip service, but only by action," says Aart De Geus, chairman and CEO of the Bertelsmann Stiftung.

On a structural level, the authors have above all criticized G20 states for being poor role models. Apart from the "No Poverty" and "Quality Education" goals, the G20 countries are responsible for around half of the implementation gaps in achieving the goals, according to the authors. Brazil, China, India, Indonesia and the US account for around two percent of this negative weight alone. "The G20 countries have a decisive role in making the UN goals a

success. This includes financial support, for example through development aid. However, out of the G20 club, only a few countries have given the 0.7 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) as required by the UN for development aid," according to Christian Kroll of the Bertelsmann Stiftung and co-author of the study.

### **Consumption preferences in G20 states cause costs abroad**

Further major grounds for criticism of the G20 is its role as a cost driver: "The living standards and consumer preferences in industrialized countries often incur costs in third countries," said Christian Kroll. Other examples of external costs include intense demand for palm oil in industrialized countries, fueling deforestation in the tropics, or support for tax havens and secret accounts that can also contribute to the misappropriation of public funds or development funds; money that is urgently needed in developing countries. At the top of the list of cost drivers are small, internationally networked industrialized countries such as Luxembourg, Singapore and Switzerland. In addition, there is a lack of budget commitments for the implementation of the UN goals. Sustainability targets are actually mentioned in the national budget plans of only 18 of the 43 G20 and emerging economies surveyed. Only Bangladesh and India have expressly provided funds to implement the goals.

#### Background

The SDG Report is the only global comparative study of developed and developing countries on the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The index was developed by the Bertelsmann Stiftung in collaboration with the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and UN Special Adviser Jeffrey Sachs. The study compared data from 193 countries. The SDG index allows all countries to be compared based on country profiles and a traffic light system. The UN Sustainable Development Goals are a collection of 17 global goals and 169 associated targets with a social, economic and environmental aspect. The indicators were designed and selected in collaboration with the SDSN, a consortium of research institutes to support the implementation of the UN development goals.

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