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Instrumente für kommunales Nachhaltigkeitsmanagement

Eine Einführung

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Abstract

Local Governments play an important role in implementing the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level. Cities, towns, counties and provinces everywhere – not just in Germany – are essential to breathing life into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). After all, the issues relevant to sustainable development are manifest on the ground – that is, in the local contexts in which people live. Municipalities across Germany are thus facing up to their duty to make a significant contribution to achieving the ambitious goals of the 2030 Agenda. They are meeting the high expectations that have been placed on them.

We see a growing number of local governments embedding sustainability objectives into their development strategies and mission statements. We should therefore also see an increase in the need for field-tested instruments to be used by local administration authorities in impact-oriented sustainability management. Those municipalities at the beginning of their path towards sustainability in particular need such instruments because they face – often for the first time – the task of adapting centralized tools such as sustainability strategies or reports to their specific needs. This publication describes how local authorities can get such processes underway without having to reinvent the wheel.

Sustainability begins at the local level and is ultimately realized on the ground – in communities, cities and counties. This raises the question of which methods and instruments lead to successful SDG implementation. How can we anchor impact-oriented sustainability management in local government, and what field-tested instruments are currently available? These are the questions addressed in this publication.

We begin by describing what an integrated, cyclical sustainability management process run by a local government involves. We then present the four following instruments, each of which are central to implementation, and illustrate with examples how they work:

- sustainability report
- sustainability strategy
- sustainability budget
- sustainability check

These four instruments are essential to a cyclical sustainability management system. They complement and build on each other and, together, mark the elements of an ongoing process of improvement:

Sustainability reports are based on an inventory of a municipality's sustainability activities. They present the relevant data and, where necessary, prepare it for use by specific target groups. These reports help local decision-makers set priorities and thus develop – together with stakeholders – a sustainability strategy with defined goals and measures. The strategy is then formally adopted by the local council. In many cases, the strategy is adopted together with the municipal budget. Step by step, the strategy is then implemented – through administrative efforts and leadership targeting specific aspects of the strategy but also, if necessary, by making changes to the organizational structure of an institution or by working with citizens through projects and measures. Finally, net outcomes are assessed: Achievements are evaluated and the sustainability report undergoes an update, which also marks the beginning of the next cycle of municipal sustainability management. New, more ambitious targets are then set, and measures are optimized and adapted accordingly.