SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SOLUTIONS NETWORK (SDSN) SWITZERLAND LAUNCH CONFERENCE: 15 FEBRUARY 2018

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Switzerland was launched in Bern, Switzerland, on 15 February 2018, as part of the global SDSN, a UN initiative. SDSN Switzerland aims to provide an environment to discuss challenges faced by Switzerland in the context of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, as well as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development.

The SDSN Switzerland Launch Conference brought together around 250 representatives and decisionmakers from science and research, think tanks, government, civil society, business and international organizations to discuss how to effectively implement these international sustainability agreements in Switzerland and beyond. SDSN Switzerland is the 25th SDSN, and is co-hosted by the Centre for Development and Environment of the University of Bern, and Biovision – Foundation for Ecological Development.

The Conference featured plenary sessions on various topics, including: SDSN as a tool to build bridges and create solutions; making Switzerland sustainable; and Switzerland’s opportunities and responsibilities for a sustainable world. Nine parallel breakout sessions were held in innovative formats, including “collective story harvesting,” to exchange experiences and ideas.

The meeting identified a wide range of practical ways in which SDSN Switzerland can serve as a catalyst for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Participants at the conference displayed a broad commitment to the transformation to sustainability and to the challenge of spreading relevant knowledge and stories to all sectors of society.

BRIEF HISTORY

SDSN: SDSN was launched in 2012 under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General. It mobilizes global scientific and technological expertise to promote practical problem solving for sustainable development, including the implementation of the SDGs and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change at local, national, and global scales. SDSN collaborates with UN agencies, multilateral financing institutions, the private sector and civil society. A Leadership Council of approximately 100 global leaders on sustainable development acts as the board of SDSN.

Spanning six continents, the SDSN Networks Programme currently draws upon the knowledge and educational capacity of over 700 member institutions, most of them universities, organized around 25 National and Regional Centers. National and Regional SDSNs develop long-term transformation pathways for sustainable development, promote education around the 2030 Agenda, and launch localized solution initiatives.

2030 Agenda: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity.” The Agenda, which was adopted on 25 September 2015 by Heads of State and Government at the UN Sustainable Development Summit, is a commitment by countries to achieve sustainable development worldwide by 2030, by eradicating poverty, fighting inequalities and tackling climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind. The Agenda, officially titled
“Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,” contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, as well as means of implementation and the Global Partnership, and a framework for follow-up and review of implementation.

The 2030 Agenda also calls on the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), under the auspices of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), to carry out voluntary, state-led national reviews to provide a platform for partnerships.

**HLPF:** The HLPF was called for by Rio+20 in 2012, in its outcome document, “The Future We Want.” This universal intergovernmental high-level political forum replaces the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. Since 2012, the HLPF has held five annual meetings. The fifth session, held in July 2017, addressed the theme of “Eradicating poverty and promoting prosperity in a changing world.” It carried out thematic reviews, reviewed the implementation of several SDGs, and also adopted a Ministerial Declaration.

**REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE**

**OPENING**

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Switzerland Launch Conference was held on Thursday, 15 February 2018. The Conference was facilitated by Katrin Muff, Business School Lausanne. She welcomed participants to the meeting, identifying the Conference as a unique gathering of 250 changemakers from various sectors, dedicated to making Switzerland part of a better world. Muff emphasized that SDSN Switzerland is not just another new initiative, but rather a network that will enable existing initiatives to scale and speed up, and make new connections.

Muff recalled how the 1992 book “Changing Course” sparked her interest in sustainability, and invited participants to recall when and how the “seed was planted” in their own minds.

Highlighting the meeting’s aim to stimulate “story harvesting,” she introduced several innovative interaction formats that promote input from and discussion among participants. She also invited participants to share ideas throughout the day through an online poll platform.

**SDSN: BUILDING BRIDGES AND CREATING SOLUTIONS**

Muff introduced SDSN Switzerland Co-Chairs Océane Dayer, Swiss Youth for Climate, and Urs Wiesmann, University of Bern. Highlighting the role of peace and justice in achieving “a healthy planet,” Dayer said meaningful sustainability is not a question of fixing issues one by one, but that a sustainable world demands interdisciplinary work and cooperation.

Wiesmann outlined the history of Switzerland’s sustainability agenda and commitment to the SDGs. He drew attention to the interrelationships among the SDGs, and identified the challenge of addressing them in concert, taking into account the social dimensions. He said sustainability cannot be achieved within country boundaries, but needs to be a global effort, and called for a move from sectoral sustainability policy to a broad-based movement for sustainability involving all actors, including government and civil society. He stressed the important role of promising initiatives that bring together different stakeholders and forms of knowledge.

Dayer said the conference aims to: bring together unlikely allies; foster transformative solutions; and advise decisionmakers.

Guido Schmidt-Traub, SDSN Global, introduced SDSN, noting serious sustainability challenges around the world. He highlighted that the network aims to promote sustainable development through knowledge and to propose solutions to nudge policy-makers. Welcoming SDSN Switzerland to the global network, which consists of over 700 member institutions, he encouraged the Swiss network to help the country better take on its international responsibility by improving education and training, and providing pathways for the sustainability transition, including practical solutions on data.

**MAKING SWITZERLAND SUSTAINABLE**

A keynote address was given by Bertrand Piccard, explorer and initiator of the Solar Impulse Foundation, which performed the first solar-powered flight around the world. Piccard said that upon completion of this flight, he realized that “the rest of the world lives in the past.” He identified a “tremendous gap” between the people fighting for environmental protection and those who focus on economy and profit.
Noting the need to speak the language of industry and politics, Piccard said solutions already exist that can help halve CO2 emissions from transport, construction and industry, and at the same time create jobs and make profits. He noted that the way forward is to create the biggest market for industry, namely by replacing outdated and inefficient technologies.

Piccard highlighted the strength of the technology pull, but felt that the current legal framework is “completely outdated.” He suggested fixing this at the government level, starting with information, including the fact that if all actual costs are included, sustainable electricity is already cheaper than conventional electricity. In conclusion, Piccard drew attention to “#1000solutions,” a Solar Impulse initiative that aims to identify 1000 solutions that protect the environment in a profitable way. He stated that “even for climate change deniers and people who have no compassion for the environment, there are only advantages in sustainability.”

Sibyl Anwander, Federal Office for the Environment, Switzerland, shared her experience in Haiti 30 years ago, noting that inefficient political systems can lead to bad education and poverty, which in turn cause serious environmental issues. Citing the example of the “Go for Impact” platform, she highlighted the need to use a holistic approach and promote innovations that address the global challenge.

Nicola Blum, ETH Zürich, outlined her research and entrepreneur experiences with regard to promoting sustainable development. She underscored the need for collaboration among different stakeholders in order to bring sustainability solutions to society.

In the ensuing panel discussion, Piccard said it is naïve to think that a group of people with good intentions can change the world, since “these are not the people who run the world.” He noted that the people who run the world are billionaires who own businesses and politicians who want to be re-elected. Blum responded that this underlines the importance of educating future world leaders.

Several participants in the audience shared their experiences of the gap between economic and sustainability thinking. They raised various challenges regarding the sustainability transition in Switzerland, including insufficient youth education, public resistance to change, limited access to decisionmakers, high carbon footprint of personal behaviors, and concerns over costs.

Peter Messerli, University of Bern, concluded the morning plenary, noting a density of initiatives contributing to the SDGs. He highlighted the urgent need to bring about transition in the current generation, connect different layers of the sustainability agenda through narratives, and create “experimental spaces” for people from all sectors to work together.

**STORIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORLD – SDSN SWITZERLAND AS CATALYST FOR IMPLEMENTING THE 2030 AGENDA**

This session was conducted in nine parallel breakout sessions, in which participants used two storytelling techniques: “collective story harvesting,” where participants shared stories from which general lessons could be learned; and “World Café,” in which participants brainstormed in small groups focusing on different subthemes. The overall aim of these sessions was to gather experiences and outline conditions that would allow collective work on meaningful solutions and actions. These sessions were then summarized in plenary in two-minute pitches.

**MOBILIZING SUSTAINABLE FINANCE FOR GLOBAL COMMONS:** This session featured Christian Kobler, Forma Futura, as “story giver” and Katharina Serafimova, social entrepreneur, as facilitator. The group concluded that transformation is indeed possible and that the status quo is not necessarily a given, but that moving forward requires detachment from existing beliefs and habits. Participants identified the need to: find new ways to accelerate transformation; adopt higher standards when it comes to peoples’ own finances, including investments; update the regulatory framework; and be more transparent in finance.

**DEFINING THE RESEARCH AGENDA FOR THE TRANSFORMATION TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY:** This session was facilitated by Kali Taylor, International Institute for Sustainable Development and SDG Lab Geneva, with story giver Janet Hering, Swiss Federal Institute of Aquatic Science and Technology. The group discussed: the role of transdisciplinarity in forcing breakthroughs and turning points; the potential roles of collective actions versus leadership; and the balance between
research push and pull. Participants suggested sending a positive message, for instance by talking about resilience rather than risk, and promoting the term “research agenda for a good life.”

Participants concluded that rather than being designed, a transformative research agenda is the outcome of a process of emergence, in which ideally all different social and technological developments come together. The group suggested that there should be dedicated institutions for knowledge brokering, for instance university spinoffs or a national sustainability committee, to work at the interface between science, policy and practitioners. They noted that this could be an important task for SDSN Switzerland.

ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: This session featured story giver Björn Müller, University of St. Gallen, and facilitator Erica Mazerolle, Impact Hub Geneva and Lausanne. The group emphasized the importance of mindset, noting a need for a fundamental mindset change, and stating that “it really starts with ourselves.” Participants identified three areas of solutions: education; incentives for sustainable consumer behaviors; and making use of lessons learned in marketing and campaigning on how to change mindsets on a larger scale.

WORKING ON THE NEXUS CLIMATE – WATER – ENERGY – LAND: The story giver in this session was Sonia Seneviratne, ETH Zürich, with facilitator Katja Breitenmoser, e7° Beratung | Bildung | Reisen. This group concluded that sustainability is about technology and inspiration, but also very much about communication and understanding the real meaning of sustainability as well as stakeholder interests. Participants called for transboundary communication and a focus on common values to bring sustainability forward.

RETHINKING URBAN DEVELOPMENT: Claudia Binder, EPF Lausanne, was the story giver at this session, which was facilitated by Severin von Hünerbein, euforia CH. The group underlined the potential role of indicators for sustainable urban development and the need to establish connections between different stakeholders. Participants concluded that this requires better regulatory frameworks. They suggested establishing “living laboratories” in neighborhoods, which may: feature temporary solutions to increase decision makers’ trust; show which approaches are successful; and thus pave the way for permanent solutions.

ADJUSTING GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: This session was facilitated by Florian Egli, foraus – Forum on Foreign Policy, with story giver Elisabeth Bürgi Bonanomi, University of Bern. The group examined the concrete example of palm oil trade agreements between Indonesia and Switzerland, highlighting difficulties in reconciling varying interests, expectations and motivations among different stakeholders. Acknowledging the complexity of this issue, participants noted that leadership, ownership, rules and goals are not always well defined.

They agreed on the need to: increase cooperation; understand factors that drive breakthroughs and turning points; identify common objectives; increase transparency in decision-making processes; and improve knowledge about situations in other parts of the world. Participants suggested establishing experimental platforms that facilitate activities that help different stakeholders understand one another’s perspectives and develop a common language. They said SDSN Switzerland could play a role in this.

EXPLOITING THE BENEFITS OF DIGITALIZATION: This session featured story giver Nick Beglinger, Cleantech21, and facilitators Stefanie Gfeller, Potenzialagentur, and Natalie Neumann, independent coach and facilitator. The group concluded that time is becoming a scarce resource, noting that the world should not wait for new technology developments but move forward with the potential that already exists. Regarding different aspects of digitalization, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, they concluded that these can only solve the

Facilitator Katrin Muff, Business School Lausanne; Klaus Leisinger, Global Value Alliance; Barbara Kux, Coaching4Vision; and Teresa Ribera, Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations, during the panel discussion on Switzerland’s opportunities and responsibilities for a sustainable world.
problem when used together, and that an improved regulatory framework is needed. They suggested using SDSN Switzerland to create interdisciplinary working groups to start action.

**TRANSITIONING TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY:** Bruno Oberle, EPF Lausanne, was the story giver at this session, which was facilitated by Daniel Sigrist, independent facilitator. The group concluded that there are opportunities for Switzerland to become a circular economy, noting that all the tools are available, but gaps exist in communication. Participants stressed the need to approach circularity in a way that makes business sense, since progress is not possible without the commitment of industry, and called for new business models that include circularity principles from the start. Participants suggested creating local dialogue platforms to create and exchange useful and reliable knowledge, identifying a role in this for SDSN Switzerland, and said transition should not just be quick and efficient, but also resilient.

**ACHIEVING SOCIAL EQUITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES:** Story giver at this session was Michèle Amacker, University of Bern, with facilitators Jelena Mair, infoclick.ch, and Nora Wilhelm, collaboratio helvetica. Participants noted that when approaching social equity issues, one should always ask oneself, “Who is not in the room?,” and aim to be fully inclusive. They underlined the importance of: transparency and a safe environment to talk freely; common language and a common understanding of the topic; and equitable access to knowledge in order to achieve a widespread change in attitudes and behavior. Participants said SDSN Switzerland could help facilitate these open dialogues.

**SWITZERLAND’S OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR A SUSTAINABLE WORLD**

In an afternoon panel discussion, Barbara Kux, Coaching4Vision, addressed the “3P” management principle of “people, planet, profit.” Noting that Switzerland has not yet fully explored green technology, she said sustainability can only be achieved with “a lot of enthusiasm.”

Teresa Ribera, Institute for Sustainable Development and International Relations, underscored that the SDGs represent the progressive, positive, and constructive side of globalization, as they push business communities to proactively make changes.

Klaus Leisinger, Global Value Alliance, highlighted the importance of media in raising public awareness of sustainability and calling businesses’ misbehaviors into question. He suggested that companies should more openly communicate the dilemmas they face.

In the ensuing discussion, the audience made several suggestions about how to advance SDG implementation, including: building linkages between the SDGs and other agendas; improving academic sustainability education; and starting daily behavioral changes. Kux expressed optimism regarding the fact that Master of Business Administration (MBA) education programmes place an increasing emphasis on sustainability. Ribera stressed that behavioral changes can start from everyone’s voting and consumption choices.

2017 Nobel Prize in Chemistry Laureate Jacques Dubochet, University of Lausanne, delivered a keynote address on the relationship between biology, knowledge and society. Asking, “We are very good at producing knowledge, but what are we doing with it?,” he stressed the need for scientists to “come out of their ivory towers.” Dubochet shared stories of his university’s attempts to move towards sustainability.

**CLOSING**

Summarizing the day’s activities and discussions, SDSN Switzerland Co-Chair Wiesmann praised participants’ interest in, and personal commitment to, sustainable development, noting that Switzerland as a whole remains very slow to react to sustainability challenges, both nationally and globally. He suggested that Switzerland use its reputation in diplomacy and its knowledge society to take a leadership role in promoting sustainable development. Wiesmann recommended four key directions for future actions: promoting science, improving inclusivity, being more experimental, and taking self-responsibility.

SDSN Switzerland Co-Chair Dayer encouraged participants to join SDSN Switzerland. She closed the launch conference at 5:32pm.

**UPCOMING MEETINGS**

**2018 Global Festival of Action for Sustainable Development:** The Global Festival of Action for Sustainable Development is “powered by the UN SDG Action Campaign” with the support of Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The Festival will focus on three core themes in 2018: innovation and disruptive change; citizen engagement; and communicating the SDGs. This second Festival will seek to recognize and celebrate “innovators, conveners and breakthrough actors” on the world’s intractable development
problems, and will showcase the latest innovations, tools and approaches to SDG implementation. dates: 21-23 March 2018 location: Bonn, Germany www: http://globalfestivalofaction.org; http://sdgactioncampaign.org

Launch of International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development (2018-2028): The UNGA will launch this International Decade on World Water Day, which is celebrated annually on 22 March. This event is one of three main events related to the implementation of the SDGs that the UNGA President is organizing in 2018. The other two focus on youth and education (mid-May) and SDG financing (in June). date: 22 March 2018 location: New York City, US contact: UNGA President’s Office www: https://www.un.org/pga/72/event-latest/launch-of-the-international-decade-of-water-for-sustainable-development-2018-2028/

Seventh Meeting of UN Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators (IAEG-SDGs 7): This meeting will be hosted by the UN Industrial Development Organization. The meeting’s objectives are to: review the tier classification of the indicators; discuss implementation of the guidelines on data flows/global data reporting; discuss developing a document on best practices in global data reporting; review proposals for additional indicators; discuss progress on data disaggregation; and share experiences in monitoring the SDGs. dates: 9-12 April 2018 location: Vienna, Wien, Austria contact: UNStats www: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-07/

SDSN Northern Europe Solutions Initiative Forum: This one-day event is organized by SDSN Northern Europe. It aims to promote available solutions from Nordic countries focusing on how to reach a more integrated and inclusive society. date: 14 May 2018 location: Stockholm, Sweden contact: SDSN Northern Europe www: https://www.unsdn-ne.org/

High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) 2018: HLPF 2018, convening under the auspices of ECOSOC, will take place from 9-18 July 2018. The three-day ministerial meeting of the Forum will take place from 16-18 July, as part of ECOSOC’s high-level segment. The theme of HLPF 2018 will be “Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.” The following SDGs will be reviewed: SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (affordable and clean energy), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), SDG 12 (responsible consumption and production), and SDG 15 (life on land). Goal 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development) is also considered each year. In addition, 48 countries are expected to present their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). dates: 9-18 July 2018 location: New York City, US www: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2018

GLOSSARY
ECOSOC United Nations Economic and Social Council
HLPF High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
SDG Sustainable Development Goal
SDSN Sustainable Development Solutions Network
UNGA United Nations General Assembly

L-R: Urs Wiesmann, Co-Chair of SDSN Switzerland; conference facilitator Katrin Muff, Business School Lausanne; Bertrand Piccard, Solar Impulse; 2017 Chemistry Nobel Prize Laureate Jacques Dubochet, University of Lausanne; Océane Dayer, Co-Chair of SDSN Switzerland; and organizer Michael Bergöö, Biovision