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Thursday, 16 April 2026

Briefing Note on the Eighth German HLPF Conference: Thursday, 16 April 2026

As resilience is a key tenant of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) constitute a valuable compass for guiding decision makers in challenging times. To keep track of global progress in implementing the SDGs and exchange lessons learned, UN Member States and stakeholders from all around the World will again meet for the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), which convenes in July 2026 at UN Headquarters in New York City. This year, the HLPF addresses the theme “transformative, equitable, innovative, and coordinated actions for the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs for a sustainable future for all” and focusses on SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), SDG 7 (clean and affordable energy), SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure), SDG 11 (sustainable cities), and SDG 17 (partnerships). The annual German HLPF Conference serves to connect local stakeholders and prepare key messages for the German delegation to deliver at the HLPF.

The event was co-hosted by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and organized by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH. Almost 140 stakeholders from subnational governments, the private sector, civil society, Youth, and academia participated in the day-long event.

Welcoming Remarks

Carsten Schneider, Federal Minister for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN), Germany, emphasized a continuous resolve to live up to the SDGs and ensure a sustainable life for all, not just in Germany, but all around the World. He highlighted the adoption of a new federal policy guideline on wetland restoration, noting its importance for climate change mitigation, biodiversity, and water cycle regulation. He also highlighted his government’s commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by 64% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels and underscored that the transformation of energy systems away from fossil fuels towards renewable energy will increase resilience and energy independence.



Carsten Schneider, Federal Minister for the Environment, Climate Action, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMUKN), Germany

Reem Alabali Radovan, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany, sent a video message from the Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, emphasizing the importance of promoting a strong multilateral system—now more than ever. She noted the objective to make German development cooperation more strategic, focused, and guided by partnerships around common interests and values. Acknowledging that much work remains to be done to achieve the SDGs, she said the 2030 Agenda should remain the guiding compass of multilateral action, and highlighted Germany’s commitment towards an ambitious post-2030 framework. She emphasized that stakeholder participation is key to shaping a sustainable future.

Table Talk “Resilience pays off”

Brigitte Knopf, Director, Zukunft KlimaSozial, noted the need to consider both “hard” resilience, which relates to infrastructure such as energy and transportation, and “soft” resilience, which aims at ensuring no one is left behind in the sustainability transformation and fostering democratic support. She also emphasized the importance of not only designing socially-just climate policy but also fostering climate resilience in areas such as the health care system. Going forward, she urged combining infrastructure development, socially tiered funding schemes, regulation,



Reem Alabali Radovan, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Germany, sends a video message to attendees.

and compensation measures, underscoring the importance of transparency regarding the use of revenue generated through carbon pricing.

Carolin Boßmeyer, Heidelberg Materials AG, described the magnitude of the challenge to decarbonize the cement industry, emphasizing that this requires decisive action by all decision makers. Underscoring challenging market conditions for a global industry, she especially highlighted the need for governments to adopt a supportive industry policy to reduce transition risks and foster lead markets for sustainable materials. She called for a reform of the European Emissions Trading System (ETS) to ensure reliable price signals and dedicated procurement standards. Acknowledging that it is tempting to avoid difficult decisions, she emphasized that courageous action by some pioneers can have positive ripple effects across the industry as well as neighboring industries.

Rita Schwarzelühr-Sutter, Parliamentary State Secretary, BMUKN, emphasized that enhanced resilience is not only an environmental necessity, but also makes economic sense. She highlighted the potential of circular economy approaches to reducing dependencies and lauded forward-looking urban planning, such as the design of sponge cities, to adapt to climate impacts. She said the SDGs are an important compass for action in times of crises and that developed countries have an obligation to further promote the 2030 Agenda and showcase that the transformation is possible.

On what is needed to speed up progress towards the SDGs, Knopf called for bolder policy making, including by adopting measures that may bear fruit only on longer time scales, and emphasized risks associated with policy rollback. Noting that transformation is possible, Boßmeyer underscored the need for clear policy signals, noting that industry actors have a long-term planning horizon and are dependent on one another. Stressing that financial resources are limited, Schwarzelühr-Sutter said it requires courage to embark on the transformation needed and that the rule of law is a key foundation for such courage. She emphasized the need to act at the EU-level, including regarding the ETS 2, a separate cap and trade system covering buildings, road transportation, and other sectors scheduled to start in 2027.

The ensuing discussion covered: rollbacks at EU-level; transparency about who influences political decision-making, including through lobby registries; fostering circularity in the agricultural sector; international repercussions of measures such as the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM); and the need to empower municipalities, which are suffering from increasing budget constraints.

What Works? Municipal Contributions to the 2030 Agenda

Andreas Humbert, Mayor of Lamspringe, Lower Saxony, delineated how his city of 6,500 inhabitants started addressing the 2030 Agenda, highlighting the support provided by the Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW) and the German Association of Towns and Municipalities. Among other measures that the city adopted, he described energy monitoring, municipal heat planning, support for the development of a biogas plant, and a partnership with a city in Uganda. Noting challenges related to increased right-wing populism, he emphasized that the city has become a model for the county and that its citizens show pride in their local success story.

Underscoring that transportation planning is a key challenge in rural areas, Hilde Neidhardt, Deputy District Administrator of the county of Enzkreis, Baden-Württemberg, described the redesign of the local public transport system using a combination of traditional buses with set schedules during the main hours and an on-demand car service in the evening and on Sundays. She explained this enables “last mile” service which is key for Youth and people with mobility impairments. She cautioned that such reforms require long planning horizons, in part due to complex procurement processes, and that the reliability of national measures is of central importance in such planning.



Brigitte Knopf, Zukunft KlimaSozial

Norbert Stamm, Director of the Sustainability Office, City of Augsburg, Bavaria, underscored the importance of business tax revenue to support municipal sustainability planning. He shared how the development of a local innovation park attracted research institutes and businesses focused on resource efficiency, lightweight construction, and secondary raw materials, that built partnerships with key players in other regions. He also pointed to the

development of a textile reuse and recycling system that builds on the city's textile manufacturing heritage and has fostered local job creation.

The ensuing Q&A highlighted: the role of pioneers in showcasing what works at municipal level; capacity constraints that limit municipalities' access to national funding schemes; the possibility for cities to leverage volunteer engagement and local sponsorships and donations to advance sustainability projects amid budgetary constraints; participation avenues for young people; and the value of co-op schemes to advance local energy transition.



Andreas Humbert, Mayor of Lamspringe

World Café on the SDGs in focus at HLPF 2026

After a gallery walk during which participants observed snapshot presentations on the SDGs that will be in focus at HLPF and the preparation of the [Global Sustainable Development Report](#), discussions continued in a World Café format.

SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation): Participants highlighted that the third UN Water Conference will take place in 2026, making it a crucial year to foster progress on water, which participants identified as “the strategic resource of the 21st century.” BMZ noted that water will become an even greater focus of German development cooperation, building on existing work, such as the [Urban Water Catalyst Initiative](#). The discussion touched upon interlinkages with other SDGs, such as SDG 2 (food security), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities), and SDG 15 (life on land). Some noted the need to better leverage existing data, for example through artificial intelligence (AI), while others cautioned against the extensive water needs associated with AI use. They highlighted challenges related to, among others, chemical pollution, lack of transparency on water usage, and privatization. Several participants also noted that hydroelectricity compromises biodiversity conservation and can exacerbate geopolitical tensions in transboundary river systems. BMUKN pointed to the ongoing [consultation process](#) aimed at informing the national water strategy, noting that Germany, too, is increasingly confronted with water scarcity.

SDG 7 (clean and affordable energy): Participants emphasized that the ongoing transition to renewable energy is a key success story for the 2030 Agenda, underscoring Germany's leadership in this regard. They highlighted that renewables are now the cheapest form of energy, making it attractive even in fiscally constrained contexts, such as countries suffering from high cost of capital. They stressed the need to develop grid and storage infrastructure, including in a decentralized manner, and address energy-heat interlinkages. Many underscored the development benefits of increased energy access as well as co-benefits of clean cooking and solar-powered water pumps for improved health and gender equality. Discussions emphasized that renewables contribute to resilience, with participants noting the need to address supply chain issues related to rare earths. Some suggested that Germany draw inspiration from other countries on simplifying approval processes for renewable energy development. Others underscored infrastructure development at the regional level, both within Europe and in partner countries in the Global South.

SDG 9 (industry, innovation, and infrastructure): Participants highlighted the crucial link with SDG 7 on energy and reflected on challenges and opportunities associated with industry decarbonization and enhanced circularity. They underscored the key role of political backing to support the needed transformation while maintaining competitiveness and employment opportunities. Participants urged minimizing first mover disadvantage and better synchronizing investment levers. Some noted the importance of education and skills training to support innovation and infrastructure development. Discussions highlighted Germany's role in supporting green industrialization in partner countries, with participants calling for strengthening such partnerships. They also considered the potential contribution of AI in enhancing efficiency in industry processes, cautioning against risks to digital sovereignty and control over critical infrastructure.

SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities): The discussion highlighted that all SDGs matter in urban contexts, which is challenging for cities, who often do not have the regulatory powers or financial resources necessary to implement the measures most



Ulf Jaeckel, BMUKN, and Evita Schmiege, BMZ, lead the discussion on SDG 11.

needed on the ground. In this regard, participants emphasized the need to enhance multi-level governance to provide cities with more leeway for action, including through public procurement. Regarding the German context, BMUKN pointed to support for municipal climate managers, noting constitutional limits to the extent the federal government can directly support local action. On international cooperation, the discussion highlighted that infrastructure development in informal settlements and data constraints remain key challenges. Participants also emphasized the importance of participation and including vulnerable groups, to enhance effectiveness and legitimacy. Many lauded the importance of peer learning at eye level through transnational city partnerships and informal discussions at events such as the HLPF. They also underscored the value of such partnerships to communicate with cities in countries where national support for sustainable development is waning.

Team Germany at HLPF 2026

Ilka Hirt, BMUKN, highlighted the participation of over 40 stakeholder representatives in the German delegation to the HLPF and pointed to engagement opportunities such as the official German side event, a Youth event, and many other side events taking place during the Forum.

Constanze Neher, BMZ, emphasized the value of the HLPF in fostering transnational stakeholder networking. With the HLPF taking place at UN Headquarters in New York City, she stressed the opportunity to connect with local actors that remain strongly engaged on sustainability issues.

Reflecting on discussions held during the World Café and key messages to carry to the Forum, they highlighted, among others:

- the success story of renewable energy expansion;
- better communicating opportunities associated with sustainable transformation, including to counter populist narratives;
- fostering progress on climate change, biodiversity, and desertification, noting all three Rio Conventions hold a Conference of the Parties in 2026;
- better leveraging AI in support of sustainable development;
- championing subnational engagement and transitional city partnerships; and
- showcasing Germany's and the EU's resolve to implement the 2030 Agenda in times of crises.

Concluding Remarks

Neher emphasized the need for whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to the development of sustainability strategies. She urged further progress towards the SDGs ahead of 2030, noting that substantive discussions on the post-2030 framework will begin in 2027.

Hirt said that multilateralism and sustainable development cooperation is more urgent than ever, noting it is key to show optimism and resolve and underscore that measures such as renewable energy deployment are not ideological but contribute to resilience and security.



Ilka Hirt, BMUKN



Constanze Neher, BMZ



Attendees at the Eighth German HLPF Conference in Berlin