

Achieving Sustainable Development

Published: 17.09.2015

In September, 193 nations will adopt the Sustainable Development Goals – an opportunity and a complex undertaking. Discussions about what this means for businesses were held at the Lifefair Forum.

Michael Gerber described it as an historic moment. Switzerland's Special Envoy for sustainable development has spent three years in discussions, talks, and negotiations, and will now see his work become part of one of the most important international agreements in recent history. At the end of September 2015, the 193 UN states will adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, with them, a catalog of 17 primary goals and numerous targets, which will serve as a central framework for sustainable economic, environmental, and social development worldwide.

"We have to look beyond development cooperation," explained Michael Gerber at the 20th Lifefair Forum (see box), where he gave the keynote speech. He remarked that it is no longer about the Global North countries supporting those of the Global South economically, but rather about the possible emergence of global cooperation that will enable the goals to be implemented. "We can only tackle global challenges on a global scale, and the idea of 'business as usual' will no longer work," said Gerber, establishing the link to the private sector. This sector could make its contribution through well-organized public-private partnerships, sensible investments, and an awareness of its corporate responsibility at various levels.

"Systems Can Change Quickly"

The Sustainable Development Goals succeed the Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs), which were adopted by the UN in 2000. Like the MDGs, the SDGs are valid for a period of 15 years, and should therefore be implemented by 2030. The differences between the SDGs and the MDGs include the more comprehensive and qualitative approach of the new goals. And, as Michael Gerber emphasized, the focus is no longer to be on developing countries but instead on global implementation of the goals in all countries.

An historic moment, therefore – whether it will also be followed by historic deeds was the subject of a panel discussion that followed Gerber's speech. Although there is broad agreement on the importance of new, expanded sustainability goals, "not everyone has got the message that 'business as usual' is no longer an option for the future," said Thomas Vellacott, CEO of WWF Switzerland. However, he also called the SDGs a "huge opportunity" and commented optimistically: "Systems can change very quickly." Also confident was Ian Roberts, Chief Technology Officer of the Bühler Group, which specializes in process engineering and focuses on the food industry in particular: "I'm an optimist," he said, "and I believe that private enterprise plays a very important role in this process. For us, there is not only an ethical argument but also a business rationale in conducting our operations sustainably."

Fifteen Years for Ambitious Goals

All those present believe that the idea of sustainability providing a commercial advantage is beginning to gain ground; however, the specific integration of the SDGs into various business models is likely to be complex. The goals range from ending poverty through gender equality to climate protection and are very ambitious but not legally binding. "We're talking about a relatively short space of time in which a lot is supposed to happen – in my opinion, there has not yet been sufficient investigation into how we can actually achieve these ambitious goals," said Dr. Jan Atteslander, head of international affairs at economiesuisse. Antoinette Hunziker-Ebnetter, CEO and founding partner of asset management company Forma Futura Invest AG, also added: "It's important that all parties take responsibility. We can't delegate responsibility, we can't merely define it in documents; we have to be active as consumers, shareholders, and citizens as well."

With the SDGs, the world is closer than ever before to a global agreement on how the future of humanity across all cultures and continents is to be shaped sustainably. Despite some reservations, the distinct optimism of the discussion participants is based partly on the significant achievements of the MDGs but partly on the social upheavals of recent years – from the increasing number of sustainable investment opportunities for pension funds and wealthy private individuals to the switch by the world's largest retailer, Walmart, to the sale of sustainable fish, which is of more than merely anecdotal interest. "A lot can happen in 15 years," said Michael Gerber in the final discussion. One thing is also clear: it has to.

Lifefair

Lifefair is a thought leadership platform for sustainability, combining the areas of business, environment, and social responsibility. The Lifefair Forum is a series of sustainability-focused events held in Zurich, for which Credit Suisse is presenting partner. On September 2, 2015, the 20th forum, entitled "Global Sustainability Goals & the Swiss Economy," took place in Zurich. The next event in the series will be held on December 14.

Discussion participants:

Dr. Jan Atteslander, Executive Board Member and head of international affairs at economiesuisse

Michael Gerber, Swiss Special Envoy for Sustainable Development, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

Antoinette Hunziker-Ebnetter, CEO and founding partner of Forma Futura Invest AG

Ian Roberts, Chief Technology Officer and Member of the Extended Executive Board at the Bühler Group

Thomas Vellacott, CEO of WWF Switzerland

Aiming for Impact – Credit Suisse and the Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the UN's Millennium Development Goals expire and will be replaced by the Sustainable Development Goals. Their implementation affects both countries and the economy. With its publication "Aiming for Impact: Credit Suisse and the Sustainable Development Goals," the bank is aiming to create a broad awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals and, using specific examples, to show how companies can contribute to the implementation of these goals with their expertise, products, and services.

[Credit Suisse's Sustainability Commitments](#)

The United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere
 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts (acknowledging that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the primary international, intergovernmental forum for negotiating the global response to climate change)
 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development
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