

# Levers to achieve Switzerland's sustainable future

Recommendations for policy makers

July 2018



## Switzerland's country report on the implementation of Agenda 2030

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development was adopted in September 2015 by all Member States of the United Nations. The focus of the Agenda is the set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that was adopted to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all over the next 15 years. Unlike the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Agenda 2030 applies to all countries – industrialized countries, emerging economies, and developing countries. Therefore, all countries are required to regularly report to the United Nations' High Level Political Forum (HLPF), via country reports, on the state of progress towards implementing the SDGs.

On 20 June 2018, the Federal Council adopted Switzerland's first country report on the implementation of Agenda 2030.<sup>1</sup> A few days later, the baseline assessment that served as the basis for the country report was published.<sup>2</sup> On 17 July 2018, Switzerland's country report was presented at the HLPF meeting.

The Federal Council had the opportunity to use the country report not only to review accomplishments and progress, but also to develop an outline of a long-term sustainability policy that responds to economic and social megatrends, including digitalization, decarbonization, and urbanization. However, the Federal Council did not take advantage of this opportunity. The country report fails to highlight the challenges that Switzerland faces in developing a long-term sustainability policy. Furthermore, it does not show the opportunities that Agenda 2030 offers to the private sector, the research community, and civil society.

The decision of the Federal Council to focus on the implementation of Agenda 2030 only within the existing policy framework and the fact that the Federal Council does not foresee the need for additional financial resources reflects a lack of ambition. Furthermore, the Federal Council has not yet made progress towards the institutional anchoring of sustainable development. Following the departure of the Federal Council's Special Envoy for Global Sustainable Development, Switzerland no longer has an office mandated with coordinating the implementation of Agenda 2030. Therefore, unlike the governments of peer countries, such as Germany, Sweden, and Finland, that have assigned clear responsibilities to specific units or people to oversee the implementation of Agenda 2030, it is unclear whether the Swiss government intends to pursue a long-term sustainability policy.

With a view on important upcoming policy documents, including the Legislature Plan for 2020-2023, which will contain a Sustainable Development Strategy, the Dispatch on the Promotion of Education, Research and Innovation 2021-2024, and the Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2021-2024, as well as the parliamentary elections in autumn 2019, SDSN Switzerland presents four levers and recommendations to policy makers to achieve Switzerland's sustainable future.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Federal Council adopts Switzerland's country report on implementation of the Agenda 2030, media release, 20.06.2018 <https://bit.ly/2JZVBZS>

<sup>2</sup> Switzerland implements the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, Baseline assessment of Switzerland serving as basis for the country report 2018 <https://bit.ly/2nekV4i>

<sup>3</sup> These recommendations are built on SDSN Switzerland's discussion paper „Switzerland and the Agenda 2030“ from August 2017. Available at <https://bit.ly/2GjwgbD>

## 1. Use Agenda 2030 as a frame of reference for domestic and foreign policies

**Policy documents that serve as levers** ↻ *Legislature Plan and Sustainable Development Strategy 2020-2023*

*Additional levers: Foreign policy strategy; Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation; free trade agreements; highly integrated sectoral policies such as the revision of the Old-age and survivors' insurance (OASI), the agricultural policy 2022+, and the revision of the Federal Act on the Reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions*

**Institutional anchoring:** A successful long term sustainability policy will require patience and a framework that supports coordination and cohesion. To ensure that policies at all government levels contribute to the achievement of Agenda 2030, cooperation and dialogue between government sectors and departments, as well as between government and non-government stakeholders, must be facilitated and enhanced. The interventions described in the country report such as the Sustainable Development Forum and the 2030 Dialogue for Sustainable Development, are not sufficient. Due to Switzerland's federal system and direct democracy, adopted policies and decisions have the benefit of widespread support. However, the challenge associated with this decentralized system is that coherent policy implementation is difficult. The OECD recommends that

the coordination of the implementation of Agenda 2030 should be positioned centrally within the government.

**Recommendation:** The Federal Council should establish an institutional sustainable development policy unit positioned above the sectoral federal offices to strengthen the collaboration between all institutional levels and ensure the coherent implementation of Agenda 2030. This unit should be supplied with the necessary resources to enable it to act as a central point of contact for business, civil society, science, cantons, and municipalities. This unit could be an independent office or a person mandated directly by the Federal Council with far-reaching authority. Alternatively, the unit could be part of the Federal Chancellery.<sup>4</sup>



Picture 1 – The 17 Sustainable Development Goals form the core of Agenda 2030.

<sup>4</sup> As suggestions: In Finland, the Prime Minister's Office is leading the planning and coordinating of the national implementation of the SDGs. In Germany, the SDG implementation strategy is being driven by a high-level State Secretaries' Committee for Sustainable Development that is headed by the Chancellery. In Sweden, all ministries are

responsible for SDG implementation in their respective fields but the Minister for Public Administration is coordinating the national implementation of the SDGs. Also see <https://bit.ly/2L8q77L>

**Synergies and conflicts of interest in implementation:** Agenda 2030 provides a guide for the changes required to achieve sustainable development. The 17 SDGs and the 169 targets are strongly interrelated. Therefore, progress in certain areas can create trade-offs in other areas. For example, expanding renewable energy will contribute to the implementation of Target 7.2 “renewable energy” but can also impact Target 6.5 “integrated water resources management” since the expansion of volatile renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, requires regulating energy, such as from hydro-power. Similarly, progress in one country can create negative spillover effects in other countries, thereby limiting these other countries’ abilities to implement the SDGs. Domestic policies that promote financial markets, business or agriculture in one country, often have negative effects on developing coun-

tries. Compared to other wealthy countries, Switzerland has the highest rate of negative spillover effects on other countries (see Diagram 1).

**Recommendation:** When developing long-term sustainability policies, the Federal Council and the Parliament should put the SDGs at the center of their decision-making. Through this focus on the SDGs, synergies and conflicts of interest between sectoral policies can be made transparent, transformative measures can be adjusted and accelerated, and priorities can be identified. This will support policy coherence. For example, with ex ante sustainability tests, the Federal Council and the Parliament can combine domestic and foreign policies in a way that will reduce the negative impacts for future generations and on other countries, and work towards achieving several SDGs at the same time. To do that, policy coherence for sustainable development needs to be improved

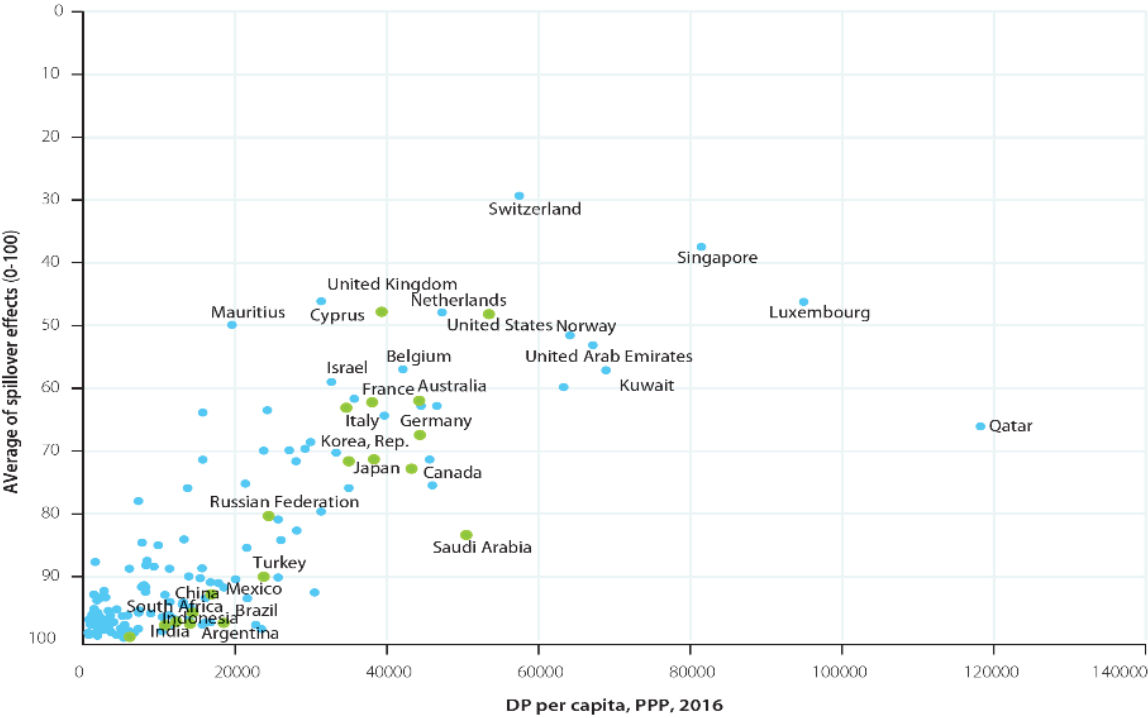


Diagram 1 – Average of spillover effects (y) measured against GDP per capita (x). The score includes: imported air pollution, loss of biodiversity, nitrogen pollution, but also rankings regarding exports of arms, tax havens or banking secret. Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung und SDSN “SDG Index & Dashboards Report” 2018.

## 2. Strengthen transformational knowledge of sustainable development

*Policy documents that serve as levers* ☞ *Dispatch on the Promotion of Education, Research and Innovation 2021-2024*

*Additional lever: Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2021-2024*

**Inter- and transdisciplinary research:** There is unanimous agreement that research and education are crucial for the successful implementation of Agenda 2030. In addition to research on the current state (system knowledge) and research to identify desired changes (target knowledge), research that analyzes the connection of effects and makes these connections understandable for policy makers and society is also necessary. One example is the living lab research concept, a new form of cooperation between science and society, where mutual learning in an experimental environment is a priority. This transformational knowledge is essential to bring about the necessary shifts towards sustainability in the economy and society. Currently, sustainability research is relegated to a niche position in Switzerland, focusing mostly on single-discipline and basic research.

Inter- and transdisciplinary research is afforded limited recognition. In addition, inter- and transdisciplinary research is often regarded by politicians and the government as divorced from reality and of little use in practice.

**Recommendation:** The Federal Council and Parliament should strengthen inter- and transdisciplinary research and education that favors transformation and sustainable development. Government funding for research should be allocated for this research. Federal Departments should allocate more funding to support transformational research and work in a coordinated manner to ensure that the research is aligned and contributes to the implementation of Agenda 2030.



Picture 2 – Urs Wiesmann, Co-Chair SDSN Switzerland; Dr Katrin Muff, Professor for Sustainability, Responsibility and Transformation; Bertrand Piccard, pioneer and initiator of Solar Impulse; Professor Jacques Dubochet, biophysicist and winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry; Océane Dayer, Co-Chair SDSN Switzerland; Michael Bergöö, Managing Director SDSN Switzerland (from l. to r.) during the SDSN Switzerland Launch Conference on 15 February 2018. Source: Peter Lüthi / Biovision

**Scientific advisory committee and policy advisory center:** Transformational processes often include negotiations that end in conflicts. Therefore, it is extremely important to create conditions in which the different stakeholders from politics, science, society, and economy can work together as partners in the implementation of the SDGs. For the scientific community, this provides an opportunity to be a partner and make critical knowledge available for the negotiation, learning, and decision-making processes. The current dialogue and advisory activities in Switzerland, including the Agenda

**Research cooperation with the Global South:** Global sustainable development can only be achieved in cooperation with developing and emerging nations. Unfortunately, these countries often lack the baseline data and information that is crucial to negotiating and managing development. Therefore, investments in these countries should be designed to increase research activities and improve their quality. There is evidence that investing in the development of research capacity creates a positive, cost-efficient leverage effect on

2030 Advisory Group and the 2030 Dialogue, do not prioritize the role of science in the implementation of the SDGs.

**Recommendation:** The Federal Council and the Parliament should follow the example of Germany and establish a scientific advisory committee. They should also consider establishing a research-based policy advisory center for sustainable development.

sustainable development in the Global South. Support from other countries is absolutely essential. Due to its many years of internationally recognized experience in transnational research partnerships with countries in the Global South, Switzerland is ideally placed for such capacity building.

**Recommendation:** The Federal Council and Parliament should provide financial support to partnerships between scientific institutions in Switzerland and scientific institutions in developing and emerging economies.

### 3. Support for global sustainable development

*Policy documents that serve as levers* ☞ *Dispatch on Switzerland's International Cooperation 2021-2024*

**Cooperation with developing countries:** Development cooperation has changed considerably over the past years. Cross-border issues, such as climate change and migration, are being increasingly addressed. The overall environment of development cooperation has become much more dynamic, with the expansion of instruments and modalities to mobilize private financial resources. With Agenda 2030 comes a need for development cooperation to be newly defined. The collaboration between governments and non-governmental organizations in the areas of climate change, migration, poverty reduction, and biodiversity

**Investments in global sustainable development:** Financing sustainable development goes beyond "classic development cooperation." The transformative nature of Agenda 2030 requires a change from development cooperation to an integrated problem solving approach that takes the "5

loss, is critically important to ensure the development and implementation of effective solutions. However, adopting new forms of cooperation is only possible if non-state actors from civil society, business and research are included.

**Recommendation:** The Federal Council and Parliament should align development cooperation with Agenda 2030. The programs should support technical, institutional, and social innovations that improve the livelihoods of the poorest people and build sustainable infrastructures that benefit society.

Ps" (people, planet, prosperity, peace, partnership) of Agenda 2030 into account. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation funding should provide support for innovations geared towards sustainability, such as risk guaranties and start-up financing.

**Recommendation:** To effectively implement Agenda 2030, the Federal Council and Parliament should raise official development assistance (ODA)

to 0.7% of Switzerland's Gross National Income (GNI), and also provide additional funds to support implementation efforts.

#### 4. Extend Agenda 2030 to the public

*Policy documents that serve as levers ☞ Parliamentary elections in autumn 2019 and Legislature Plan 2020-2023*

**Sensitizing the public:** Although it has been three years since its adoption, Agenda 2030 is not well known by the Swiss people. This makes its implementation much more difficult. Although the country report states that Agenda 2030 can be a means for developing political opinions on both domestic and international policies, this will not happen if the public is unaware of the issues. This challenge is shared globally. According to the United Nations, following the UN Conference on Environment and Development (also called the Earth Summit) in 1992, the concept of sustainability was taken up by experts and interested groups, but the public has hardly taken notice.

**Recommendation:** The Federal Council should intensify its communications strategy to sensitize the public to Agenda 2030 and should show how long term sustainability policies could bring benefits to the current and future generations. Suggested activities include: holding a national day on Agenda 2030, launching a major communications campaign, distributing an opinion survey for the next Sustainable Development Strategy 2020-2023. In addition, the Federal Council should regularly inform Parliament about the state of implementation.



Picture 3 – A sign in front of the town hall of Zermatt announces the popular vote of 17 May 2014.  
Source: Olivier Rügsegger

**Agenda 2030 and political parties:** Switzerland agreed to Agenda 2030 to achieve sustainable development. The SDGs are key elements for Switzerland's future and its role in the world. Reaching these goals is economically sensible, provides social fairness, and is ecologically responsible. All citizens should be included when we make our changes towards sustainability.

**Agenda 2030 and the Legislature Plan 2020-2023:** The Legislature Plan 2020-2023 will be a critical opportunity for the government to set Switzerland on the path towards sustainability. The decisions made in the Legislature Plan will impact upcoming important decisions, including those in the areas of international cooperation, education, research and innovation, as well as the Energy Strategy

**Recommendation:** All political parties and their candidates in the parliamentary elections of 2019 should view the SDGs as central to our national and international policies. They should also bring in innovative ideas to support the implementation of Agenda 2030 in and by Switzerland.

2050 and the agricultural policy. Furthermore, Switzerland will present its next country report on the implementation of Agenda 2030 in 2022.

**Recommendation:** The Federal Council and Parliament should align the Legislature Plan 2020-2023 with the goals of Agenda 2030.

*The levers that we introduced in this paper for a sustainable future of Switzerland require more discussions and preparations. Through innovative dialogues and by providing practical solutions and recommendations for action in selected political processes, SDSN Switzerland and its member organizations stand ready to continue work on these issues over the next months.*

### Sustainable Development Solutions Network Switzerland

SDSN Switzerland mobilizes universities, research centers, civil society organizations and business to co-create and implement transformative solutions to achieve the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change in Switzerland and beyond.

SDSN Switzerland pursues 3 objectives, each of which builds on the other:

- **Shape multi-stakeholder dialogue:** Accelerate the continuous exchange of ideas and experiences and create thinking spaces for the scientific community, government, business and civil society in order to foster system solutions, build commitment and mobilize action.
- **Foster transformative solutions:** Harness scientific and trans-disciplinary knowledge to generate new evidence-based solutions, integrated policies and systemic changes.
- **Advice decision-makers:** Offer evidence-based advice to decision-makers in politics, business and society in order to fill policy gaps and motivate normative change.

SDSN Switzerland was founded in April 2017 and officially launched on 15 February 2018. The network counts 30 member organizations (as of July 2018). SDSN Switzerland is co-hosted by the Centre for Development and Environment (CDE) at University of Bern and Biovision – Foundation for Ecological Development. SDSN Switzerland is member of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network which was launched in 2012 by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. Currently, SDSN counts more than 800 member institutions from over 110 countries, and 27 national and regional nodes.