

## WEC-Workshop

SDG Workshop Series Europe, # 1, September 22, 2017, Munich, Germany

### Practical Experiences of Global Companies working with the SDGs

WEC is a leading business platform for global collaboration on achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through an exchange of thoughts and practices of global companies WEC supports business to

- Evaluate the value of the SDGs for companies
- Share practices about how companies work with the SDGs
- Optimize companies' contribution to the SDGs
- Take responsibility for individual SDGs and collaborate with business, governments and civil society

#### Participants:

The workshop provided a highly interactive discussion of business experts from seven industries in four countries for an initial exchange of how the SDGs are strategically used, how progress is communicated and if companies find value in collaborating on this topic. Upcoming workshops will build on these results and are open to more companies.

**ABN AMRO:** Jan Raes

**ERM:** Shona King

**IBM:** Alexandra Rodriguez

**Merck Group:** Leonard Wahl

**Siemens:** Christina Lorenz

**Royal Dutch Shell:** Rupert Thomas

**Volkswagen:** Dr. Daniel-Sascha Roth

**World Environment Center:** Natalia Conejo

**World Environment Center:** Frank Werner (Host)

#### Major Points of Discussion

- (1) **The SDGs help companies to structure sustainability more concretely and thus make it easier to communicate** sustainability with internal decision-makers. For the same reason, they help to collaborate with external partners, e.g. on certain initiatives. However, company representatives share a common understanding that the SDGs are not changing the way how they think and act on sustainability nor how sustainability is integrating with the company strategy. Even without the SDG-framework the business relevance of sustainability is known.
- (2) **As many governments are moving ahead using the SDGs for their national development plans, business opportunities are becoming more obvious.** Some companies have begun to structure their bidding offers to governments in line with some of the SDGs and what matters to national goals, thereby generating competitive advantage. More strategic action comes from companies that e.g. take up a national target that corresponds with an SDG and develop an ambitious initiative for a practical solution in collaboration with other actors.
- (3) **Companies have also started to discuss risks** that may emerge from regulatory and divestment activity in the case of non-compliance with the spirit of the Agenda 2030. Several Goals, among them SDG 3 (Health) and SDG 13 (Climate) are suitable for imposing a sanction on companies that subtract on the Goal. This risk is being fed through a combination of the Goals being taken up by governments and increased transparency.
- (4) **Working with the SDGs can reveal unintended target conflicts**, i.e. when progress on a certain SDG may automatically create a negative impact on another Goal. Thus, they are an opportunity to identify such mismatch.
- (5) **While the SDGs are considered a good framework for every company to work with, they promise extra value for those whose businesses provide solutions for a positive impact.** Such companies map the level of their influence towards the 169 targets and identify those that are material for their business. They also translate the SDGs for individual company departments to spur a sense for new business opportunities.
- (6) **Communicating progress on the SDGs is still in an experimental phase.** Leading companies are giving a sense as to how reporting within the spirit of the Agenda 2030 (i.e. a contribution to solve global challenges) can be organized. These companies are highlighting their major impacts and strategic approaches to the SDGs in special sections of their websites. One company has even assessed country-specific challenges and how it can contribute systematically, prominently providing this information on its website. Reporting progress against impact in a robust way is still a challenge, though, especially since methodologies to measure are not readily available. Other ways that companies use to report on the SDGs include placing icons that show certain SDGs next to what they communicate in their GRI reports or showing an index that leads towards SDG-related information.