Practical Experiences of Companies Implementing the SDGs
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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

Business experts from six industries in four countries shared their advances on working with the SDGs, how they can be integrated into the business, which internal barriers delay progress, and how companies collaborate with pears and companies in their value chain.

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Dräxlmaier: Prof. Dr. Georg Stephan Barfuss
F. Hoffmann-La Roche: Dr. Heinke von Seggern
Merck KGaA: Judith Rahner
METRO: Michael Goebbels
Royal Dutch Shell: Rupert Thomas
SAP: Christine Susanne Müller
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Key Points

(1) While global trends are showing that most of the large corporations have prioritized the SDGs for their organization and find value in them, the purpose of the Goals –namely increasing companies' ambition on sustainable development– has not been met so far. Workshop discussions showed that this is partly due to the fact, that companies have been focusing on prioritizing the 17 Goals for themselves, when focusing on the 169 targets is more suitable to take additional action.

(2) Generally top management is supporting an engagement with the SDGs. However, the implications of doing so are mostly not fully understood. Too often the SDG-framework merely serves as a communication tool, when it can be even more powerful as input for strategy development. For that purpose, companies that use the SDGs strategically have broken them out for many different internal stakeholders and defined the company's business case. The SDGs define impacts that the organization is having on them – both positive and negative.

(3) Barriers to an internal engagement with the SDGs are often not due to lack of interest but rather due to complexity, according to participants: the great bandwidth of topics that global companies have to deal with, the difficulty of reaching the SDGs on time, the fear that hostile lawyers may take the opportunity if additional commitments cannot be met, as well as lack of awareness of the SDGs among some critical departments.

(4) Several companies have started programs that help the general staff to learn about sustainability impacts and the SDGs. Partnerships with universities that designate projects to every participant (to be presented to top management) and videos/interviews with staff that address the SDGs are two concrete actions for that purpose.

(5) To fully understand the impacts and business opportunities from the SDGs the chemical industry has partnered with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBSCD) to map the industries' current impact, explore opportunities, and identify concrete actions. Results are available in the Chemical Sector SDG Roadmap.

(6) Besides sector initiatives (above), other collaborative action is taking place when companies address SDG-related topics in their supply chains, work on site-specific projects with external stakeholders, or partner with social entrepreneurs on new opportunities. However, new forms of partnerships, such as strong collaborative action to meet one of the SDG or one of their targets globally or in a region, have not been identified. Companies are still concentrating on their individual businesses. The SDGs, however, are impacted by all actions. Investors have now started to evaluate the role of corporations regarding the SDGs, trying to find those that provide solutions.