
Practical Experiences of Companies Implementing the SDGs
WEC Europe Workshop Series, #3- Focus on Impact
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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 between 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 and find adequate means to measure impact
 - Take responsibility for specific SDGs and work with business, governments and civil society to achieve them.
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Participants

Business experts from five industries in Germany, Switzerland, and the USA shared their advances on working with the SDGs, i.e. how they identify and measure the impact of their contribution to the SDGs, how they prioritize their SDG-engagement, how they involve their most critical departments, and how they collaborate with peers to increase impact.

Arabesque Partners: Cornelia Nissen
Boehringer Ingelheim: Mathias Locher
Chemours: Kai-Volker Schubert
ERM: Hooper Taylor
Merck KGaA: Maria Schaad
SAP: Christine Susanne Müller
World Environment Center: Frank Werner (Host)
360impact: Sandra Wirth (Keynote speaker)

Key Learnings

- (1) **Companies find it difficult to measure the impact of their specific contribution to the SDGs.** The main reason is the absence of adequate tools to set a baseline as well as the challenge of finding common ground with other organizations to quantify what has been achieved (globally/locally). Several pilots to facilitate impact measurement have recently been released (notably the [SDG Action Manager](#) developed by the Global Compact and B Corporation as well as the [Impact Management Project](#) facilitated by the NGO Bridges Insights). Yet these approaches still need fine tuning to fully achieve their objective. Companies find them helpful to get a clearer view of how their operations, supply chains, and business models create positive impact, as well as identify risk areas for each SDG. However, these tools are not yet able to deliver sufficient significant data to underpin a potential positive corporate impact. While many companies have initiated their own pilot impact studies – with some joining Impact Valuation Groups such as e.g. the Value Balancing Alliance (which, however, is not yet focusing on the SDGs), the future evolution of quantitative impact measurement on the SDGs is still open.
- (2) **Urgency and leadership to measure corporate impact against the SDGs have been found lacking,** four years after their launch. Although financial institutions have started to integrate SDG action into their evaluation methodologies only one percent of major companies are reporting against the SDG-targets, according to a recent [PWC study \(2019\)](#). Thus, detailed impact evaluations on the SDGs (e.g. the 169 targets) are not yet being performed by the financial community. At the same time the Sustainable Development Goals are perceived as business language, and thus are hardly known by the general staff or even the public. In those cases where companies take up the SDGs, it's because those promise business opportunities – nothing that pressure groups or governments are able to further enforce. In order to accelerate the market forces towards SDG engagement in these early stages, leadership is required, but is unfortunately missing – with a few exceptions e.g. in the Netherlands and other countries. To date companies are not perceiving governments as active supporters of ambitious company-led partnerships for the SDGs.
- (3) **Companies generally prioritize their engagement with the SDGs according to their product portfolio.** Depending on where they can provide solutions, they focus their efforts. An interesting development has taken place as early movers, sensing opportunities, have set internal goals to develop products that specifically contribute to the SDGs.
- (4) The SDGs are of strategic importance to any company. Therefore, all major departments need to be involved. **To advance the SDG agenda throughout the organization,** SDG managers, with their CEO's support, have gathered people from key departments (who have their own challenges such as the purpose movement, the war for talents, developing new markets, etc.) to make connections. Companies report that some departments, which so far had not focused on sustainability, have found business relevance in the SDG framework. Such synergies enable sustainability managers to find allies to systematically integrate the SDGs and corporate sustainability in the business strategy.