



Dirk Messner,
Director of the German Development Institute (DIE), Vice-Chair of the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU)

How can global sustainability succeed?

Jun 12 ***A strategy for sustainable global development***

Global interdependence is greater than ever before. Therefore, Germany holds a great deal of potential to exert a transformative role in global sustainability policy. First of all, it has to answer fundamental questions: how can the international capabilities of all the ministries be mobilised and networked? Can collaboration within alliances of trailblazers (e.g. in sustainability policy) reinvigorate the multilateralism that is currently blocked in many areas? How can a culture of global cooperation be fostered successfully? Many reform initiatives already exist, but the effort to root them must be greatly increased.

Since the end of the Cold War, the following four mutually reinforcing waves of global transformation have created a new reality for the international system:

1. the networked global economy: accelerating economic globalisation, which creates manifold opportunities along with global vulnerabilities and risks;
2. diffuse architectures of power: tectonic shifts of power towards emerging economies, above all China, India, and Brazil, which are undermining the dominance of the West and bringing forth polycentric constellations and blockades of power;
3. the Anthropocene Era, the geological era of human dominance: the knowledge that human beings have become the driving force of the earth system and that over the course of this century a transformation of the planet is likely, with unforeseeable consequences for a human population that will soon total nine billion, if the global economy continues to pursue its established path of greenhouse gas-driven and resource-based growth;
4. communications infrastructure for global society: for the first time in human history, new communications technologies have made possible a real-time exchange of information, knowledge and news that spans the globe, opening up new, virtual cross-border spaces and possibilities of cooperation, while at

the same time creating previously unknown forms of data control and surveillance.

No political system has yet been found or founded which could, within this new reality of the international system of a highly interconnected world, ensure security, prosperity, and democracy for as many citizens of the world as possible.

The new reality of the international system

The dynamics of the 19th century engendered the industrial revolution, the modern nation-state, the gradual spread of Enlightenment-based ideas and the dominance of Western societies.

The 20th century was marked by two world wars with Europe at their centre, anarchy in the international system of nation-states, the attempt to invent an international security architecture around the United Nations, and the triumph of market economies, which made tremendous gains in prosperity possible for some one billion people.

The 21st century is taking shape under the influence of an emerging global society characterised by global interconnections; an unprecedented density of worldwide cultural, economic and political exchange. A global market economy is in the making, from which non-Western societies are also beginning to profit, but which also threatens to surpass the limits of our planetary ecosystem; further systemic global risks; and – at least in the early 21st century – a diffuse world political order without a clear centre, suspended between juridification (c.f. the establishment of the ICC), informal networks of coordination (such as the G7, G20 and BRICs), and regression into sometimes anachronistic-seeming power politics (as in the current Ukraine crisis).

We are living in an interim period between the era of the nation-state, in which the lives of most people essentially depended on dynamics within their own countries as long as "external peace" was ensured, and the era of a highly interconnected global society in which the lives of very many, if not most, people are significantly shaped by cross-border dynamics that take a course which nation-states can only influence to a limited extent.

At the same time, we are living in a transitional period that will determine whether or not humanity learns to assume responsibility for the stability of the planet and thereby to lay the foundations for the existence of many generations to come. Without a new quality of global cooperation, our societies will meander towards situations in which cross-border dynamics unleash increasing uncertainty, volatility and crises of the legitimacy of "politics", the ability of which to shape the outcomes of these challenges is limited.

The "old foreign policy" of the 19th and 20th centuries was especially closely intertwined with security policy in order to protect the internal sovereignty of states.

The "new foreign policy" must be interwoven with almost every other field of politics that is involved in the networks of interdependence. "Global domestic policy" and "global governance" are terms that seek to illustrate this new reality: reflections on them can be found as far back as the 1980 Brandt Report and the 1995 report of the Commission on Global Governance.

In these early phases of the discussion of global governance, however, the second, third and fourth waves of global transformation were not yet discernable. These concepts are not well-liked, as quick, simple progress cannot be expected. No blueprints for how the transformation of global cooperation would need to look in order to live up to the new realities have been elaborated.

Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely for this reason, the new reality of the international system must be the background before which the future of German and European foreign policy is to be discussed. The alternative would be to ignore global interdependencies – a model that the international community followed, for example, before the recent crisis of the global financial markets. Repression and denial of reality, however, are clearly not viable strategies for the future.

Germany as a shaping power

Germany is thriving economically right now. Its international partners expect it to make larger contributions to managing international crises and shaping global processes. This opens up room to manoeuvre, but it also implies a high level of demand placed on German policy.

Germany's situation is a bit like China's in that two decades ago Germany was (like China) still a minor figure on the foreign and global policy stage. Today the two countries must take a position on nearly all foreign and global policy issues. These external expectations are not easily met.

Doing so requires worldwide networks, agenda-setting abilities, priorities, financial and human resources, military capabilities, international and global expertise in nearly every ministry, and internationally well-positioned and networked research on global issues. All of these capacities can only be developed incrementally.

The placement of rapidly rising external expectations on those responsible for foreign and global policy in a country that used to play more in the second league can easily lead to a kitchen-sink approach: help shape things a bit everywhere, be a bit present everywhere, try not to disappoint anyone. Ad hoc-ism is, however, the opposite of strategic action.

This is, of course, a broad-brush observation, but it emphasizes challenges that I have discussed as intensely in China as in Berlin in the course of my research and advisory activities in recent years. Unlike China, however, Germany needs a strong EU and Eurozone as a framework and support for the use of the aforementioned instruments of a power exerting a formative influence.

The observations of three external observers of German foreign relations outline the challenges that Germany faces. Andrew Cooper, one of the leading researchers in the field of global governance, recently remarked that Germany is, after the US and China, the country with the greatest potential influence in world politics thanks to its economic prowess, its highly regarded model of society, and its pioneering role in climate and energy policy. Commenting on the foreign policy significance of the German transition to green energy,

Jennifer Morgan, Director of the Climate and Energy Programme at the World Resources Institute in Washington DC, said that if the US government had introduced such an epochal shift to sustainable energy, it would have sent hundreds of energy ambassadors out into the world to tout this policy in order to gain allies and shape the direction of global transformation as it did after the announcement of the Apollo programme and during the Marshall Plan; nothing comparable, however, is being seen in Germany.

A member of an OECD expert commission that evaluated German development policy in 2010 summed up his impressions as follows: "All of this doesn't feel like one of the most important bilateral donors, like a global player. Germany is punching below its weight."

Agenda-setting speeches toward a global sustainability policy

The agenda-setting speech by Federal President Gauck at the Munich Security Conference and similar statements by Foreign Minister Steinmeier and Defence Minister von der Leyen were important wake-up calls about Germany's increased responsibility in foreign policy and world politics.

These public statements have initially focused on security policy issues. A quick glance at world political events of the past few months shows that these fields remain pivotal and are, unfortunately, not becoming any less so. The authoritarian ruler of the Syrian regime can still feel relatively safe from military intervention after failed attempts by some in the West to induce regime change in order to enforce democracy from the outside. In Libya, a dictator was toppled with assistance from outside, but support for structural development remains limited and the state is in danger of failing.

Mali, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Afghanistan are among the roughly 30 countries that can be described as failed states, and from which regional or global security risks potentially emanate. Beyond this, the Ukraine crisis demonstrates that even in Europe, territorial conflicts that were long believed to have been overcome have not in fact been relegated to the past.

Security thus is and remains a pivotal field of foreign policy. Tectonic shifts in power and the attendant rivalries between "old" and emerging powers, as well as the relativisation of the role of the United States as the power dominating the world

order have created new security problems and are making these problems more difficult to handle. But problems of global interdependence extend beyond the field of security policy, as the outlines of the four waves of global transformation show.

Global sustainability policy is another vital field that must be dealt with through international cooperation. The catch phrases are familiar: in the dawning Anthropocene Era, human beings are becoming a force altering the planet's ecosystem; scientists have described runaway climate change and other planetary tipping points at great length.

Humanity is becoming the de facto architect of the planet's ecosystem, but has so far refused to face this role, which is arguably the greatest formative task of the 21st century. Many observers consider these challenges to be environmental policy issues ("soft politics", peripheral realms of international policy) that one might approach with more or less engagement and enthusiasm.

But what is actually at stake is a profound transformation of the global economy and the organisation of a prosperity, security and democracy in a nine-billion-person civilisation within the boundaries of our planet. The health of our planet is the greatest global common good that needs to be stabilised and preserved for future generations.

The issue of sustainability in the 21st century will be as pivotal for the future viability of the global market economy as the embedding of capitalist dynamics in democratic social welfare systems in Western industrial societies was after the Industrial Revolution.

An agenda-setting speech on Germany's role in global sustainability policy is due. The climate chancellor would be the perfect protagonist. The Federal President, the Foreign Minister, and the Development, Environment and Education and Research Ministers could play important roles here, too. They must make plain that a global shift to sustainability needs to take place within a narrow window of time, and that this task cannot be postponed even in the face of multifarious resurgent security problems.

A strategy for global development

A German strategy for sustainable global development could comprise four components:

1. Effective international energy policy should bring together countries that advance ambitious climate-compatible energy transformations. Significant shared investments in research, education and outreach; regulatory learning processes; and possibly trade policies would be oriented towards creating shared advantages. The Renewables Club founded by former Environment Minister Altmaier could be the starting point for such an initiative. The creation of a transformative green energy club would accelerate processes of transition to a climate-compatible global economy and would at the same time

incrementally improve the conditions for a successful multilateral climate regime.

2. The largest global middle class in the world economy will take shape in the next two decades in the emerging economies (especially in Asia). This trend is tied with the most extensive urbanisation trend in the history of humanity. Today 50% of the world's population lives in cities; by 2050, 80% will. Both of these trends must be decoupled from climate-damaging greenhouse gas emissions, resource exploitation and excessive strain on ecosystems in order to prevent turbulence within the earth system in the second half of this century. Germany is highly regarded – particularly in the emerging economies – as an economically and technologically strong sustainability pioneer. Concrete reciprocal partnerships with a select group of emerging economies (or regions in these countries) should be initiated in order to strengthen transformations to sustainability. Energy and mobility systems, urban infrastructures, and resource-efficient and climate-compatible innovations would be at the centre of these partnerships. Their starting points would be joint research and training efforts, ambitious standards (e.g. in energy efficiency of buildings, in electric vehicles), the interlinking of emissions trade systems (which would presuppose a reform of the European system), joint initiatives for sustainability in international organisations (such as the World Bank), and negotiation processes (such as climate negotiations). The stated goal would be to build up transformational alliances with companies, society and the state in emerging economies in order to strengthen the shift to a climate-compatible and resource-efficient world economy. Such a strategy would create markets for "green" innovation processes and would thus also be in the interest of German and European economic competitive strength.
3. In the 21st century, knowledge will stand alongside law, power and money as one of the most vital resources of international cooperation. Collaboration on knowledge establishes an accepted base of knowledge for future issues, and thereby adds legitimacy to joint action. International cooperation must place more weight on international science policy and knowledge collaboration in a broader sense. The World Bank has placed knowledge collaboration at the heart of its forward-looking strategy. In this field, too, Germany is highly regarded and has tremendous potential to become a major global node in the fields of knowledge that engage with worldwide sustainability issues.
4. Development policy can also make major contributions to a German strategy for sustainable global development. This is firstly a matter of combatting poverty, especially in the roughly 30 countries that are marked by violence and failing states. In this area, stabilisation of states and societies must be linked together with combatting poverty (in cooperation among the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Federal Foreign Office and Federal Ministry of Defence). Secondly, approaches should be taken which support transformations to sustainability and inclusive development in three groups of countries. In the resource-rich countries of Africa and Latin America, these initiatives should prevent the familiar "resource curse" dynamic in times of high raw materials prices and mobilise growing foreign exchange revenues

for sustainable development; in the rapidly growing newly industrialising countries, strategic partnerships can (as suggested above) create broadly effective sustainability pilot programmes (in this area, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development initiatives would need to be sensibly combined with other ministries' initiatives). Thirdly, the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development has a comparative advantage over other ministries in cooperation with the large group of "in between" societies that count among neither the poorest and most fragile states nor the ascending newly industrialised countries – Vietnam, Peru, and Caucasus countries are examples of these "in between" countries. Development policy is not only concerned with the quality of cooperation, strategic impetus for change to foster sustainability, and overcoming of paternalistic patterns of cooperation – but it is also about quantities and real investments. If Germany wants to re-align its role in the world and boost its international reputation, it should join the leading group of countries that make large investments in development cooperation.

Many of the elements that have been outlined in this paper already exist, but the effort to root them in international politics must be greatly increased - by, let's say, a factor of 2-5 by 2025.

"Factor 2-5" demands a broad range of efforts: scale matters, that is, the scale of investments in different areas must be increased; bundling the instruments and activities of different ministries and other players into effective packages is important; the priorities in this pooling must be clear; our presence and active shaping role in international organisations and networks needs to be expanded; cooperation between the political and academic realms should be developed further.

A fitting strategy must not only apply to the use of German instruments, but also be introduced correspondingly into EU foreign, development, energy and climate policy.

Steps of transformative pragmatism

A boost to the quality of international cooperation will not occur through a big bang, e.g. through swift and comprehensive reform of the United Nations or through a perfect climate regime as the outcome of the 2015 climate change negotiations in Paris.

An incremental "a little bit more everywhere, everything a bit better" approach, however, is not a viable alternative. What is needed, rather, is for Germany to take an ambitious approach to strengthening its international role, an approach that ties pragmatism together with a demand for transformative action.

Many of the elements needed to increase Germany's capacity to exert a formative influence are already present in some fields of foreign relations, and now they can be strengthened through pooling of individual initiatives, clear priorities, global agenda-setting and astute network-building, as well as through additional

investment.

The "new foreign relations" must be sustained by many ministries as well as exponentiated through interaction among them and with society and academia. Within this framework the Federal Foreign Office is gaining, alongside the "traditional tasks" of diplomacy and of foreign and security policy, a vital role as a "network manager" making it possible to bring together various contributions in joint corridors of action.

In doing so, the Federal Foreign Office is strongly dependent on other ministries contributing their own respective competencies. Increasing its impact by a factor of 2-5 would be an aspiration for Germany as a formative power on the way to 2025.

This path has both continuities and new challenges. Germany's role as a power that exerts a formative influence and works in close coordination with its European partners and with European foreign policy shows continuity. An orientation towards multilateral solutions and towards strengthening international law is another form of continuity, which is often put to tough tests in the context of power shifts and rivalries, flexible and polycentric architectures of power, and the weakness and resistance to reform of many international organisations, but which nonetheless must not be given up as a point of orientation.

A greater emphasis should be placed on building up alliances of trailblazers – clubs of the like-minded that can move projects forward more quickly and ambitiously than is possible within comprehensive multilateral processes which always have to take into account laggards and foot-draggers, i.e. an ambitious club of countries shifting to green energy.

Today's EU, Eurozone and WTO also got their start as smaller clubs, gained the shared advantages of a club, increased their attractiveness, and thereby created impetus for broader multilateralism. Ambitious clubs could move the politics of global sustainability across various tipping points towards a sustainable global economy. Germany could play an important role in this area.

A global culture for cooperation

The creation of a global culture of cooperation is a formidable challenge if we in the 21st century are to have a chance of giving shape to the increasingly dense network of global interdependencies, rein in global systemic risks and stabilise the situation of our global common goods (above all the earth system, but also the international financial markets) and use them on a basis of generally accepted criteria of fairness.

In his work for the "High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda", former Federal President Horst Köhler has often pointed to this major task. Power shifts, polycentric power structures, and the erosion of North-South and donor-recipient structures – the elements, that is, of the transition to a post-Western world order – demand great efforts to develop a viable and peaceful global structure of cooperation.

Various long-term dynamics are involved: opposing interests must be negotiated and shared interests generated. Dialogue must be conducted about divergent and shared norms and values as well as mechanisms of cooperation that accept cultural diversity without relativising fundamental human rights. Shared production of knowledge can help us work out common perspectives on international problems and shared approaches to solving them.

The most important mechanisms of developing and stabilising collaborative relationships are familiar from cooperative research: reciprocity, trust, dense networks of communication, positive reputations, fairness, instruments to support rule-abiding behaviour and to sanction free rider strategies, a sense of common identity, and shared narratives.

The chances of hemming in power plays within collaborative relations and the likelihood of implementing strategies of shared problem-solving against narrowly defined individual interests increase in spaces and constellations of players in which these mechanisms are especially pronounced. None of this is easy. Setbacks are inevitable, and every part of these processes takes time and patience.

It is clear that a global culture of cooperation equal to the challenges of the 21st century will not emerge of its own accord from the dynamics of global transformation. Rather, the work of building up this kind of new global culture of cooperation is one of the foremost tasks of the new foreign policy.

Translated from the original German