

Roundtable

A Global Sustainability Framework Until And Beyond 2030 - Mapping International Positions

Discussion Summary

27.4.2026

On 10 April 2026, the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) in cooperation with the Hamburg Sustainability Conference hosted a roundtable with leading experts from the Americas, Africa, Europe and Asia to explore options for a global sustainability framework until and beyond 2030. To accommodate participants across time zones, the roundtable was structured in two similarly designed segments. Held under Chatham House Rule, the roundtable enabled trust-based conversations about priorities, discuss positions of different actors and potential alliances which can shape discussions and priorities for the process leading up to the SDG Summit in 2027 and the following years. As part of the lead-up to the Hamburg Sustainability Conference (HSC) 2026, this dialogue connected perspectives to the beyond-2030 discussions of the HSC 2026. Below, the key aspects of the discussion are outlined.

Who is likely to support a global sustainability framework beyond 2030?

The conversation about a global sustainability framework beyond 2030 is still taking shape, with significant variation in engagement. So far, beyond-2030 conversations have mainly been initiated by European actors — primarily from the development cooperation and scientific community — alongside with countries like Japan, which has already launched a national consultative process. China has not yet engaged actively in a beyond-2030 conversation, but is expected to be supportive of a universal agenda beyond 2030 when the time comes. A considerable number of low- and middle-income countries are also expected to be supportive of a renewed global agenda — among them India, Indonesia and many Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and several African countries, such as South Africa. Many European governments and the European Commission, however, are reluctant to start thinking about the topic. The United States and Russia may actively work against such a framework, and the US position will carry significant weight beyond its own borders, likely shaping the stance of other countries such as Argentina. Domestic political dynamics within countries will also play a crucial role in determining national positions — and they are not static with elections in many countries coming up. Overall, the core question seems to be less about whether countries are for or against a global sustainability framework beyond 2030 altogether, but more about whether they would favour a stronger or a weaker framework.

What could a global sustainability framework beyond-2030 look like?

A central challenge in shaping the substance of a future agenda is striking the balance between political feasibility and the lessons learned from implementing the current framework. Many participants expressed the view that the focus should shift from the *what* — the goals and indicators themselves — to the *how*, meaning the mechanisms and structures needed for accountability and effective implementation. This includes strengthening domestic reliance and resources, establishing legally binding structures and institutions, and better measurement and evaluation. Regarding the latter, quantitative indicators remain necessary, but qualitative dimensions, as well as wellbeing indicators (such as in “beyond GDP”) and cultural elements may gain importance.

Structure and inclusivity of the negotiation process

There is broad agreement that the process should prioritise evidence-based learning and stocktaking of best practices in SDG implementation over strategizing before the drafting begins, such as in the former Open Working Group (OWG) format, and supplementing formal negotiations with informal parallel discussions and outreach activities to mobilise broader stakeholder communities. Also mentioned were separate (technical) discussions of indicators and means of implementation. However, opinions diverge on whether financial negotiations should be integrated with agenda negotiations or kept separate — as merging the two would make reaching a compromise more difficult. Views also differ on whether stakeholder participation should be institutionalised through structured consultation mechanisms or remain more informal and issue-based: while informal formats may create more flexible and open spaces for political exchange, structured mechanisms can strengthen accountability and make it easier to trace how stakeholder inputs are reflected in negotiated outcomes. Moreover, it remains unclear whether there is consensus for an inclusive negotiation format, similar to the OWG prior to 2015, which also depends on the approach of the next UN Secretary-General and key UN members states, such as the US, Russia and China. Finally, an additional and unresolved question is how to include younger generations in the beyond-2030 conversations.

Building alliances and crafting a compelling narrative

Building coalitions and networks beyond formal state-level conversations early on is essential. Conferences, regional fora, informal retreats, and direct outreach, especially towards the private sector, all represent opportunities to foster alignment and build momentum already ahead of the SDG Summit in September 2027.

Several thematic areas offer potential as rallying points for alliances: e.g. the digital, gig and AI economy; debt relief and finance reform, which enjoys broad support among low- and middle-income countries; climate adaptation, particularly supported by SIDS, but with potential to gain traction by embedding it within climate and security negotiations; sustainable food systems; the needs of the young generation, including improved governance, access to basic services, decent jobs, and equitable access to new technologies; affordable and clean energy; and sustainable and just economies. To foster the formation of alliances, it is important to identify potential losses and gains for specific parties from each aspect of a beyond-2030 agenda, and to acknowledge disproportionate benefits from supposedly mutual gains, while devising ways to turn these into equitable gains.

Broad support for a future global sustainability framework can only be gained by crafting a narrative for the new agenda that is widely embraced. This includes countering the narrative that the sustainability agenda is externally imposed on the Global South (in fact, the idea of a broader and integrated sustainability agenda has been initiated by Latin American governments enabling the adoption of the SDGs in 2015). Further, finding ways to connect sustainability with security and strategic economic concerns could help bring reluctant actors on board — for instance, by making sustainable economic success stories more visible, or by emphasizing e.g. that climate-health adaptation as related to both social wellbeing, climate and security. Many experts advocated also for a people-centred narrative rooted in human wellbeing. Proposals included frameworks built around more comprehensive conceptions of national wealth, or the concept of a "safe and just space" for humanity and for each individual that defines both a social foundation below which no individual should fall and environmental boundaries which humanity should not exceed.

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