

IMPLEMENTING AGENDA 2030: WELCOME TO THE UNSSC KNOWLEDGE CENTRE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

On 1 January 2016, the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and its 17 Goals (SDGs) come into effect. The same day, the UN System Staff College (UNSSC)¹ inaugurated the UNSSC Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development, which is tasked to support the UN system in implementing the new development Agenda through learning, training and knowledge management.



2016 is indeed a year of high expectations, as the new agenda promises to be a much more comprehensive endeavour than the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Whereas the MDGs' main pledge was to half global poverty, the Agenda 2030 has committed to the full achievement of economic, social and environmental development simultaneously and sustainably. It is expected to foster inter-sectoral coordination among all SDGs at the country level. The 2030 Agenda originated from joint discussions among Member States, UN institutions, regions, local institutions, business and industry organizations, the scientific and academic communities and civil society. The involvement of all relevant stakeholders has magnified the expectations held by the international community that a global commitment will lead to a successful implementation of the new Agenda. Indeed, Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon echoed these feelings during the UN Sustainable Development Summit by inviting Member States to endorse the Agenda 2030 as "a to-do list

for people and planet, and a blueprint for success.”

The Agenda has been set with, and will be evaluated against the highest standards. As a result, the UN system is deeply aware of the need to become Fit for Purpose and for this to happen, it is essential that its staff is well prepared to tackle today's challenges and in particular: conflicts, climate change, poverty and gender inequality.

There is an overall understanding among the UN personnel that the UN system must ensure its operations on the ground are relevant, innovative, agile, inclusive, coordinated and results-oriented; are guided by international norms; are responsive to the different needs of national governments; and are driven by key partnerships that foster expertise, capacity and resources. In addition, the elements of universality, equality, integration, human rights and data management need to be present at all times and shape the UN's quest to achieve sustainable development in all contexts.

The endorsement of the new Agenda has made a serious call on the UN to play a key role in the establishment and maintenance of a global partnership, where all relevant stakeholders stand ready to jointly and collaboratively localize all SDGs.

Given the aspirational nature of the Agenda 2030, there are still some important questions to be resolved: is the UN ready for a changed world and for the challenges ahead of the Agenda 2030? What can the UN do to ensure that global partnerships functions smoothly and consistently? How can the UN guarantee that all its operations on the ground are integrated and coordinated? Which practical approaches can the UN system take to avoid working in silos?

At the UNSSC, we believe the best way to address these concerns is by equipping the UN system with a clear roadmap to harness and transfer cutting-edge knowledge for sustainable development. With this in mind, and with the generous financial support of the Federal Republic of Germany, the UNSSC has inaugurated the Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development in Bonn, Germany.

The Knowledge Centre, in collaboration with relevant UN and non-UN institutions, supports the policy and operational framework of the UN through the development of learning tools, platforms for interaction and executive programmes around the environmental, social and economic dimensions of the new sustainable development Agenda. The Knowledge Centre provides spaces to foster active learning and knowledge sharing on the implementation of the new Agenda, thereby ensuring that its participants are well-equipped to respond to the emerging needs of the international community.

To effectively assist the UN system in the field of learning on sustainable development, the Knowledge Centre is organized around two interrelated learning streams: the UN Policy Coherence and Innovation stream, and the Learning and Training in support of Country Programming stream. For both directions the Knowledge Centre runs various activities ranging from e-learning courses; face-to-face training and knowledge events; development of system-wide learning management portals, case studies and practitioner tools; instructional design, training and advisory services; to launching a UN learning magazine UNovation for Sustainable Development; fostering public outreach and partnership building for learning; facilitating services on Sustainable Development; and offering multilingual programmes.

In essence, the UNSSC Knowledge Centre's courses and activities caters to the needs for One UN learning as well as fosters UN's involvement with all relevant stakeholders. By providing spaces for joint and interdisciplinary learning, the Knowledge Centre plays a key role in encouraging its participants to engage in inter-sectoral approaches when localizing the Agenda. Additionally, the Centre will organize annual events – such as the UN Reflection Series and the UN Summer Academy – for public outreach and reflection on issues of contemporary relevance.

Examples of courses that the Knowledge Centre offers are: foundational courses for each of the SDGs; courses focused on environmental sustainability, climate change and disaster risk reduction; trainings on how to build partnerships for development effectiveness in a post-2015 world; courses on communicating as

One; trainings for effective use of data for public policy; and courses on political economy analysis and risk management for UN programming.

At the inauguration of the UN Sustainable Development Summit, it was forcefully stressed that we cannot permit ourselves to postpone 'certain agendas' for the future. The 'future' is here and the Agenda 2030 prides itself in addressing the most urgent issues of today's world in an integrated, comprehensive and ambitious manner. Behind this conviction also stands the UNSSC and its Knowledge Centre for Sustainable Development. At the UNSSC, we firmly believe that the Knowledge Centre will serve as a strong facilitator for learning, contributing to the development of the UN staff's skills and competencies to take the Agenda 2030 forward.

The author

Daniela Cepeda Cuadrado is a Junior Research Fellow at the United Nations System Staff College. She is collaborating with the Development, Gender and Human Rights Team for a period of 10 months. She is currently studying a Master of Public Policy at the Hertie School of Governance (Berlin, Germany), and is at the College to complete her Professional Year – a programme that is part of her Master studies. Previous to that, she completed the Bachelor of Political, Economic and Social Sciences (Honours) at the University of Sydney in Australia.

Footnotes

1. Since 2002, the UNSSC has been the learning and training outfit for UN staff, benefiting on average 7,000 participants from all over the world each year. Through the development of courses and learning initiatives, the UNSSC has played a significant role in strengthening collaboration and operational effectiveness within the UN system; enhancing cooperation between the UN system and Member States, NGOs and civil society; and developing and maintaining a cohesive system-wide management culture.