

SUSTAINEDO 2030

Learning Sustainable Development from the Future



Dear Readers,

Today we understand sustainable development to be the great challenge of the 21st century. Member states of the United Nations and stakeholders globally are currently mobilizing to establish the Post-2015 Development Agenda. This includes developing a set of new global goals to succeed the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) once they expire at the end of 2015.

As a contribution to this post-2015 process, the Bertelsmann Stiftung, Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, the International Institute for Sustainable Development and Novel Futures invite you on a journey to the year 2030. Our guide Grace will lead you and five ministers from 2015 through *Sustaineo*, a fictional country established in 2015 which, by 2030, has begun to prosper from an impressive array of sustainable development-focused governance structures and policy instruments.

We present the *Sustaineo 2030* scenario in order to explore which governance structures could ensure the mainstreaming of sustainable development as a guiding principle in politics, business and society. *Sustaineo* is not a parallel universe in which technology and social systems have been invented entirely anew. On the contrary; it is based on actual experiences in real situations that have been examined as part of a global study and presented in the form of a narrative.

In contributing to the Winning Strategies for a Sustainable Future project, the Bertelsmann Stiftung worked with the International Institute for Sustainable Development to conduct research in 35 countries. The project sought out successful sustainability strategies and policy approaches and analyzed the reasons driving their success. Key evaluation criteria included the quality of strategies and policy approaches, their implementation potential, levels of participation and concrete achievements in policy delivery.

In a second phase of the project, five particularly successful case studies – Bhutan, Costa Rica, Finland, Ghana and Tasmania – were examined in greater detail. The results of this research were published in the Bertelsmann Stiftung publication *Winning Strategies for a Sustainable Future*. It is the fictional ministers from these four exemplary countries and one exemplary Australian state who will accompany you on your journey to *Sustaineo*. Their goal is to understand both the ways in which their own solutions have contributed to a better future and how the examples put forward by others can assist them in the present.

We are excited about the opportunities for success in sustainable development policymaking. It is our hope that the scenario presented by *Sustaineo 2030* will help us all make the post-2015 process a success.

SUSTAINEO 2030

Learning Sustainable Development from the Future

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INDEX

Arrival in Sustaineo, 2030	7
The Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council	10
Governance	10
Strategy	11
Goals and targets	13
Accountability	14
Stakeholder engagement and participation	15
The Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission	18
Evidence-based policymaking	20
Vertical alignment	21
Budgeting for outcomes	23
Communities of practice	24
Integrated policy analysis	25
The Sustaineo Sustainability Audit Office	27
Ombudsperson for future generations	27
Monitoring and reporting	28
Auditing	31
Promoting cross-cutting policy benefits	32
The End and the Beginning of the Journey	34
Notes and Index of Case Examples	35

Arrival in Sustaineo, 2030

"Welcome esteemed visitors!" I rehearsed aloud to myself. No, that's too formal, I thought. I should try to make them feel relaxed; they've had a long journey. Perhaps I should start with a joke. I paused for a quick breath. Why am I so nervous? I was certainly accustomed to meeting new people; after all, I am the Executive Director of the Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council. But I needed to remind myself that these visitors are different, very different.

History books tell us that three remarkable events occurred in 2015. First, government leaders from around the world gathered together to agree on a new set of global goals for humanity and the planet's future. These goals had sustainable development at their heart with the aim of eradicating poverty forever. Second, a new country was formed, Sustaineo – my home.

Then there was that third remarkable event marking 2015 as a special year. It was the year that time travel was discovered. As global environmental crises and social inequities continued to worsen in the lead up to 2015, world leaders decided to use the new technology to travel into the future and learn if and how the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals were being met, and to take back positive lessons for their design and implementation in the present day. A group of five influential experts were assembled to make the journey to the year 2030, to the young country of Sustaineo. It really was an honor to have been selected by my country to guide our visitors through their brief, yet intense tour. Though time tourists were now relatively common in Sustaineo, this was my first group. Time travel was physically and mentally exhausting for visitors, which is why such trips were restricted to just a few persons.

I was about to meet five people who were involved in the early framing of the United Nations Post-2015 Development Agenda. While the rhetoric of a holistic approach to sustainable development had been around for a while, 2015 marked a transformative moment in history because it was the first time world leaders actually created a global framework for action that saw social development, economic prosperity and environmental sustainability as interdependent objectives that could not be achieved by addressing each individually, in silos. Having read and studied so much about the countries these individuals came from and the challenges they faced in their time, it was going to be hard for me to conceal my awe. I reminded myself to be professional.

I glanced quickly at the time in my eyeglass viewer, and when I refocused again in front of me, they had arrived.

"Welcome esteemed visitors," I began abruptly. "It is good to see you all. This is Sustaineo and the year is 2030. Is this where and when you had planned to be?" I could tell by their confused looks that they had not completely come round yet. I had heard that it could take a good twenty minutes before visitors from the past become aware of where and when they are, and before they can function somewhat normally. And good thing this time lag was brief, the window for these visits was only open for about four hours due to the current technological limitations.

“It is my pleasure to receive this UN Special Delegation on Achieving the Post-2015 Development Agenda. My name is Grace Nustromi. But please, call me Grace. I have a quick joke for you to test your timelag. ‘Two atoms bump into each other during time travel. One says to the other, ‘I think I lost an electron.’ The other asks, ‘Are you sure?’ The first replies, ‘I’m positive.’” I scanned our guests for hints of laughter, but there was nothing. I assumed they were not yet in time. Or maybe it was just a bad joke.

When I was sure that all the visitors had come round, I made the decision to start the tour. “As we all know, we have only limited time together, and we have an excellent tour arranged, tailored to your request. Can you confirm that we have with us the ministers from Bhutan, Costa Rica, Finland, Ghana and Tasmania?” This was greeted with nods and smiles. “Now, from the information we were provided, you are from 2015, correct?” Smiles and nods again from the visitors. “And correct me if I am wrong, but you have been asked by the leaders of your time to visit the future in the hopes of learning about innovative governance processes and institutions to help achieve the Post-2015 Development Agenda?”

I knew they had come to the right place. Sustaineo had not only achieved its national SDG targets, we had also developed some of the most innovative governance processes and institutions in the world. Of course it certainly did help that we were a newly formed country at the time the Post-2015 Development Agenda was initiated – we were a blank canvas ready for the legislative artists to go to work. The UN negotiations leading to the Post-2015 Development Agenda from the Rio+20 Conference was the focus of my doctoral dissertation so it, and our visitors for that matter, were very dear to my heart.

The Ghanaian minister was among the first to fully regain his senses and elaborated for me. “Yes, Grace, you are correct. On behalf of my colleagues, it is nice to meet you, and I express our sincere appreciation for accommodating our visit. We have each been involved in our own countries in establishing innovative processes and institutions for strategy-making, planning and implementation for sustainable development, well-being and happiness, and are considered leaders in this regard. However, no country of our time has managed to bring all the pieces of the puzzle together, and frankly, there is consensus that we are running out of time. Globally, our environment, our societies and our economies are all unsustainable at the moment. Yet we have a most pressing and important agenda before us. Therefore, this momentous visit to Sustaineo is a unique and urgent opportunity to learn from the future, at least from a governance and institutional perspective.”

“And to elaborate further on our mission,” the Bhutanese minister added slowly as he shook free of his timelag, giving that satisfied look that one often has after a good nap, but still a little dazed. “We have been asked to report back to articulate a set of best practices which could set various countries and the international community on the path to achieving their commitments under the Post-2015 Development Agenda. We are certainly curious to see how things have gone here, in the future. Though we have limited experience with time travel, we are aware that there are an infinite number of plausible futures for any given point in time, and as such, any knowledge of the future cannot possibly guarantee realization of such a future given the complex interaction of so many variables.”

“Thank you, ministers. I can see that you are all fully over your timelag now. So let us begin as time is indeed still ticking.” I ushered our guests toward our first destination and quickly glanced through the itinerary in my eyeglass viewer. I knew we could accomplish at most three tour visits in our time window, and I was certain that each would provide a solid foundation through which to explain Sustaineo’s recent success in achieving our national SDG targets under the Post-2015 Development Agenda. The timing was perfect as the global review session had just recently concluded, and we were now in the process of initiating our national Post-2030 Development Agenda efforts.

The first stop would be the Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council to learn about our 30-year Strategic Development Outlook and associated processes – a fitting beginning. Then we would take the Maglev monorail across the capital city to the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission. I was sure they would be impressed by the Commission’s building, which was itself a symbol of horizontal and vertical integration, with our much-lauded Sustainability Decision Theater at its center. That still left one visit and I knew it was going to be tight. However, the folks at Sustaineo’s Sustainability Audit Office were inherently efficient, so I knew it should be ok. Then again, our new ombudsperson for future generations certainly liked to talk. And with that, we made haste to our first destination.

The Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council

The Maglev glided over and across a series of parks and playgrounds on its way to the Multistakeholder Council building, giving our visitors a window on Sustaineo daily life. The Council building itself blossomed under one of our ubiquitous green roofs, as it sneaked into view with little hint of the hustle and bustle behind its doors. On stopping, our passengers stepped off to enjoy a breath of fresh Sustaineo air, the scent of wildflowers from our greenbelt meadows to the east only slightly tainted by the strong whiff of compost from the “guerrilla gardens” – legal, of course – immediately to our left. There was never any question that the best place to talk would be the Council Chamber itself, designed perfectly for open conversation and the free exchange of ideas, so I ushered them on through the Council’s welcoming doors and along its bright and breezy corridors.

GOVERNANCE

We wanted the Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council to gain the greatest possible political traction, but not to lose sight of wider stakeholder expertise.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” I beamed. “The Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council sits alongside and is accountable to the democratically elected Sustaineo government at the highest level of governance and decision-making in the country. We drew on, for example, the observation that the **Republic of Korea’s 2006 National Strategy for Sustainable Development** owes much of its success to the fact that government ministers were included in the Presidential Commission for Sustainable Development and that performance reporting to the Prime Minister’s Office for Government Policy Coordination was obligatory.¹ We also learned from **Bhutan**, where the central positioning of the **Gross National Happiness Commission**, composed of all ministry secretaries gives it such driving force in developing and integrating your inspirational alternative to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a measure of prosperity,”² I smiled with a reciprocated nod to the minister for Bhutan. “On the other hand, there are many examples from your time where the preparation and monitoring of federal strategies for sustainable development are coordinated, to their detriment, at quite some distance from the executive’s office and a government’s finance department – **Canada’s Federal Sustainable Development Strategy** being one such example.³ We designed the Multistakeholder Council with all of these examples in mind. We wanted it to gain the greatest possible political traction, but not to lose sight of wider stakeholder expertise.” The visitors nodded in approval.

“Among others,” I continued, “we also used **Singapore’s Inter-Ministerial**

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Committee on Sustainable Development as a model, which is co-chaired by the minister for national development and minister for the environment and water resources, and delivers their sustainable development strategy straight to the prime minister.⁴ Another exemplar from your time is the **Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development**, chaired by the prime minister. Comprising a wider set of high-level ministers, government officials, business and industry representatives, and many more civil society stakeholders, this commission is a marker of just how high sustainable development sits on the country's political agenda. It features precisely the levels of seniority and inclusivity that Sustaineo knew would be crucial for both a government and a society to truly understand, accept and achieve sustainable development."⁵

"As a result, the Multistakeholder Council is chaired by Sustaineo's head of state and vice-chaired by the ministers for finance, social welfare, and environment. It is joined by high-level representatives from each government department and leaders from civil society, business and industry, trade unions, science and academia, local authorities and youth movements. You name it, it's represented."

"All very impressive," the Tasmanian minister responded, "But what do they do?"

STRATEGY

We asked eight global civil society organizations and private-sector experts to review progress on sustainable development in Sustaineo and make recommendations for strengthening our approach.

"Well," I addressed the group, "the Multistakeholder Council's purpose is to provide government with the tools to ensure that Sustaineo embodies the principles of sustainable development at all levels and in all decision-making. As you well know, that means promoting a fair and equitable society based on a prosperous, inclusive economy that operates within environmental limits now and for future generations - we saw no need to redefine your interpretation. The Council uses its combined expertise and experience to develop for the government a vision and strategy for the entire Sustaineo system, over a 30-year period, which we call the Strategic Development Outlook. The Strategic Development Outlook, like the Multistakeholder Council itself, has received cross-party support and will be retained throughout the government election cycles of its 30-year lifespan."

I smiled at the ensuing chorus of, "How?!"

"Because everyone here listened to the expert scientists, commentators and policymakers who advised you back in your day!" I proudly exclaimed. "It wasn't hard to see that such timescales and multilateral cooperation are essential for any and all strategic thinking, so we drew lessons from the most long-term, forward-thinking policies, like **Wales' Future Generations Bill**,⁶ or Zambia's Vision 2030. It may have its pitfalls, but **Vision 2030** was the first African sustainable development strategy to be integrated with policies such as its Poverty Reduction Strategy, displaying the

5

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7

long-term thinking and courage we needed.⁷ Zambia's scenario approach, which features baseline, preferred and optimistic categories, is also useful for planning and for setting tangible benchmarks, and is easily transferrable to Sustaineo's situation and needs." I raised my eyebrows. "Or anyone's, for that matter."

"But rather than just monitoring our own progress during our 30-year cycle, we also follow **Germany's 'Sustainability - Made in Germany'** peer review process to obtain independent, expert verification of our actions and ambitions.⁸ Like Germany, we identified eight global civil society organizations and private-sector experts to review progress on sustainable development in Sustaineo and make recommendations for strengthening our approach. This international peer group, whose new members are chosen democratically, meets every four years and provides recommendations to the Multistakeholder Council, which has taken on every single one." Noticing that the tour group liked this idea, I quipped that one day perhaps some of them may join the peer group, but the plausibility of this causes much head-scratching, including my own, over time lags and career paths.

I continued by explaining that Sustaineo's government was so impressed by **commitments** such as that **by the president of the Republic of Korea in 2008** to make low-carbon, green growth a driving feature of the country's development and to allocate an astonishing 95 percent of its \$38.1 billion fiscal stimulus to green initiatives, and by **Costa Rica's** vision in making its **National Development Plan** legally binding,¹⁰ that we followed their lead in anchoring both the Multistakeholder Council's role and the Strategic Development Outlook vision in Sustaineo's constitution.

I received a few questions on whether the Strategic Development Outlook addresses economic, social and environmental issues, and I explained, as should any sustainable development strategy worth its salt, that the Strategic Development Outlook ties together, cross-cuts and mutually supports social well-being, environmental stewardship, and an inclusive and fair green economy.

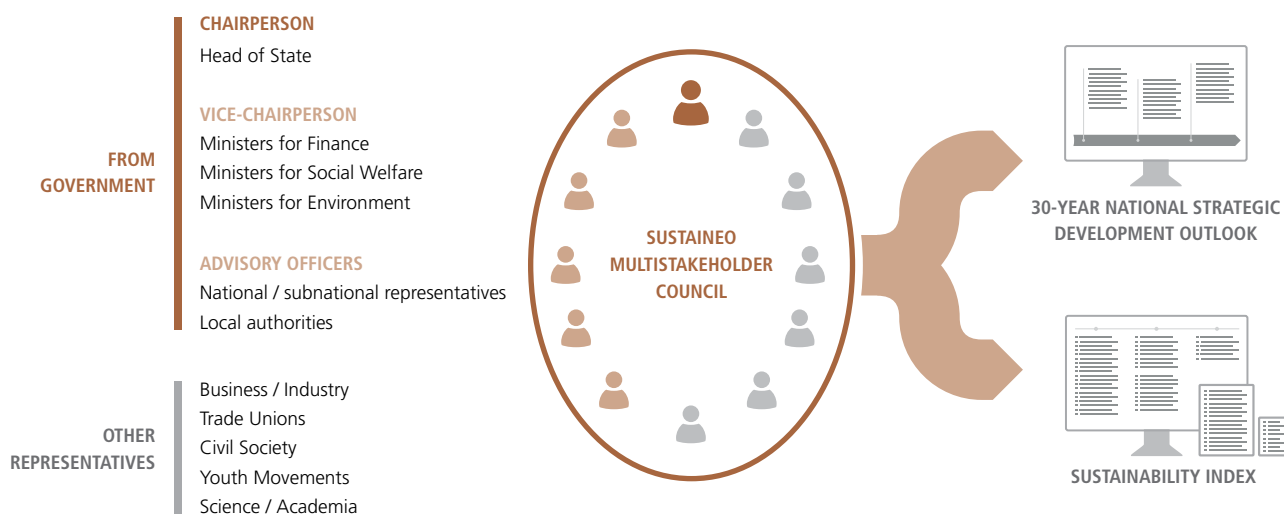
"Of course," I elaborated, "there are occasions in which the Multistakeholder Council will address a particular theme or sector. Think about the private sector - after all, it's not just the state that has an influence on sustainable development. We took an excellent example from the German Council for Sustainable Development, which, like Sustaineo's Council, has a mandate to devise and test policy options to further sustainable development at the national level. In 2011 the German Council recommended, with success, that Germany's Federal government implement the **German Sustainability Code** as a voluntary instrument to incorporate sustainability reporting into integrated investment analysis. Companies are encouraged to demonstrate their compliance with a series of standards and criteria based on extensive consultation and existing principles and indicators such as the UN Global Compact's, and their declarations are collated for open comparison in a database of good practice managed by the German Council.¹¹ While Germany's Code is based on 'comply or explain' for those participating, we made compliance and review a mandatory position for all private companies wishing to trade in or with Sustaineo. Its benefits work both ways, though. The Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council learns a great deal from these company reports and stakeholder consultations, taking lessons to apply to public sector or civil society-facing initiatives, and building a greater appreciation of how these stakeholders can work together to drive efficiency and mutual benefit. Many hands make light work, we find."

8

9

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11



The Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council's purpose is to provide Sustaineo with the vision and tools to ensure that the country embodies the principles of sustainable development at all levels and in all decision-making. It sits at the highest level of government but works with subnational institutions and draws on multistakeholder insights to ensure that all of society is both represented in and benefits from the policymaking process.

GOALS AND TARGETS

We make sure that the targets in the Strategic Development Outlook are ambitious but also grounded in reality and reliably monitored by being SMART.

The Finnish minister raised his hand, “These are fine sentiments of course, but when dealing with such all-encompassing, abstract notions, how do you set real, achievable targets?”

“Well that’s precisely the question the Multistakeholder Council asks itself.” I replied. “For a start, we loved the way that **Bhutan** made its ‘all-encompassing’ **commitment to Gross National Happiness a measurable, achievable goal** by setting targets aligned with the Millennium Development Goals and the South Asia Regional Sustainable Development Goals.¹² From a ‘developed’ country perspective, Belgium extended the duration of its Federal Plan for Sustainable Development from four to five years to better **match EU and regional legislation cycles**, and the first Flemish strategy for sustainable development was based on the European Strategy for sustainable development.¹³ We agree that this kind of logic in aligning national strategies and targets with international goals and commitments can drive greater efficiency. It also allows us to draw on others’ experience, from developed as well as developing nations. In this way we ensure that our targets follow and reflect quantitative and qualitative multilateral targets and agreements, too. In fact, our policy design only strays from

12

13

international requirements when we believe that those requirements should be more ambitious, in which case we feed observations and evidence from our higher or more prescriptive targets into the appropriate UN channels.”

I felt it important to further expand on the vertical alignment aspects. “In Sustaineo, all of our targets are applicable and transferrable to local and regional plans, too. This is a prerequisite for the preparation of coherent subnational long-term Strategic Development Outlooks that are created in each province and municipality by their own mini-multistakeholder councils. Once again, we borrowed much from **Belgium’s subnational sustainable development plans**, which include mandatory cooperation agreements to avoid incoherence across provincial and municipal governance levels, but I’ll come back to this particular point later on at our final tour stop.”¹⁴

The Costa Rican minister pressed on with questions. “And how do you make sure that such an all-encompassing strategy isn’t just lofty ambition?”

“We make sure that the targets in the Strategic Development Outlook are ambitious but also grounded in reality and reliably monitored by being SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time-bound). **Canada** ran an interesting **progress report** a year on from their 2010 Federal Sustainable Development Strategy which found that about 70 percent of targets were achievable and time-bound, but only about 30 percent were specific.¹⁵ We wanted to go beyond this in Sustaineo! We pledged to record 100 percent of targets as fully SMART. Our annual progress reports ensure that we’re hitting those marks and, if necessary, include recommendations for adjustment.” I took a breath before finishing. “And we took one more exemplar from **Bhutan**. Their **Gross National Happiness Index**, an inspirational forward-thinking move in the face of the prevailing economic obsession with GDP, enables transparent progress reporting against their targets.¹⁶ With Sustaineo’s cross-party political buy-in, the Multistakeholder Council was easily able to adapt this index approach to fit our own set of sustainable development indicators. Again, we base this on international goals as well as Sustaineo’s unique characteristics and stakeholder insight, and we have extended its scope from Bhutan’s five-year timescales to fit our 30-year Strategic Development Outlook.”

ACCOUNTABILITY

*If and when we do miss our targets,
Multistakeholder Council members are required to explain
the reasons why to Sustaineo’s parliament.*

By now Bhutan’s minister was beaming ear to ear. The Costa Rican minister continued, “And are there any obligations to change course, or penalties for not doing so?” I saw where he was going with this...

“That’s a good question. The Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council advised government to establish a legally binding duty on sustainable development by both public and private actors that is enforced through measures such as sustainable

development impact assessments on legislative decisions and investments in the public and private sectors. Naturally, the government accepted this proposal,” I responded. “Such a duty also has its roots in your day, of course. **Austria** was the first European country to adopt a sustainable development strategy that is binding both at the national and regional levels, aligning federal and state approaches to improve leveraging;¹⁷ and **Canada’s Federal Sustainable Development Strategy** is enacted in legislation,¹⁸ though we went one stage further by making each of the Strategic Development Outlook’s SMART goals legally binding, too. And, lest we forget, your own **Costa Rican government** is legally bound to report on progress against the 2011–2014 National Development Plan.”¹⁹

“But surely you haven’t been able to meet all of your national targets?” asked the Finnish minister. “How is the Multistakeholder Council held to account when that happens?” “Well,” I replied, “our policy planning system that you will learn more about at our next tour destination means we rarely miss our sustainable development targets and, of course, we have the international peer review process I mentioned earlier to keep us in check, too. However, if and when we do miss our targets, Multistakeholder Council members are required to explain the reasons why to Sustaineo’s parliament. Additionally, our parliament has the option of replacing any Council members that are failing to perform to our standards, though this has never actually happened.”

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Sustaineo made sure that a central tenet of our Strategic Development Outlook is to provide easily accessible information and opportunities for any stakeholders to get involved in the process.

“And what about the role of stakeholders in the design and review of Sustaineo’s strategy?” inquired the Costa Rican minister. “Are there any examples from our time that Sustaineo has built upon to ensure and utilize their participation?” I felt I was on thin ice with my next observation. “If I may say so, we do believe that the **Costa Rican plan** would perhaps benefit from a more accessible and transparent system of stakeholder consultation and review.” I paused, but the Costa Rican minister appeared pleased to hear suggestions. “Your plan states that such systems are in place, but we found them a little tricky to identify,²⁰ so Sustaineo made sure that a central tenet of our Strategic Development Outlook is to provide easily accessible information and opportunities for any stakeholders to get involved in the process, in much the same way that **Catalonia** dedicates one of its Sustainable Development Strategy’s seven pillars to the issue of participation.”²¹ I nodded to my Tasmanian guest, “The **Tasmania Together 2020 Plan** provides another great example of how a high-level body can base its vision on thorough stakeholder consultation.²² It is just such a shame that the Plan’s Progress board was disbanded in 2012.”

Though I would have liked to have heard more from the Tasmanian minister about the events preceding this unfortunate development, I continued with the clock in mind. “The Strategic Development Outlook’s design therefore draws on a wide scope of stakeholder consultation, research and advice. There have been good examples of the right mix of media, meetings and outreach options that have provided great lessons for Sustaineo to apply in ensuring inclusivity. For example, Singapore’s impressively high-level Inter-Ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development whips up equally impressive public participation in its National Sustainable Development Strategy through its **Sustainable Singapore** website, focus groups, public forums, dialogue sessions and the Reaching Everyone for Active Citizenry (or REACH) feedback agency.”²³

23

“We’ve designed and applied a similar consultation mix for the Strategic Development Outlook, making sure that we reach all sectors of society. Our ‘SDOnline’ website presents plans, visions and information with forums to contribute and provide feedback. And our smartphone app makes this even easier for many – the app comes free with every phone in Sustaineo so that people are informed of new structured surveys and consultations. If you can believe it, even social media’s reach and inclusivity has improved since your day, so we fully embrace the app. In addition, private-sector companies are not only obliged to respond to consultations but to inform employees of the process. We found that online consultation is not the best way to reach every sector of society, however, so we built close working relationships with a wide range of neighborhood-level community groups and individual ‘champions.’

“With closer ties and links to marginalized stakeholders or unique local conditions, these associates are often better able to convey the SDO’s relevance to a given setting and to gather views and questions. And although consultation may be undertaken in a more informal setting, we ensure that it is fed into and given equal weight in our structured process.

“Where appetite is high or important issues are identified, we work further with our associates to deliver local-level workshops featuring open debates and capacity-building sessions with toolkits, guidance and training programs designed to create a legacy of enhanced stakeholder participation. I hope you agree that this sounds good for stakeholders, but you’d be surprised by how much we benefit from this level of consultation too – capacity-building is definitely a two-way process.”

“And are these communities and their voices still heard once the consultations are over and the plans move on...?” asked the Tasmanian minister. It was a fair question, given the reputation for excellent stakeholder participation throughout the Tasmania Together program.

“Oh they’re more than just heard,” I smiled. “They keep us in check! The Multistakeholder Council and the Strategic Development Outlook are held to account not only by Sustaineo’s government but through a regular series of exercises similar to the Citizen Inspectorships and Citizen Workshops in **Ecuador’s Buen Vivir Plan**, which really introduced a paradigm shift in promoting an inclusive, sustainable and democratic economic strategy. We’ve used our technological advances to improve upon Ecuador’s interactive digital tools so that we can gather consultation results and present information to the public for rapid, regular updating.²⁴ This helps develop our policies over at the Sustaineo Planning, Policy

24

and Partnership Commission – again via the website, app and the most effective settings identified at local levels. Suffice to say that participation levels are rocketing here, and have reached levels even higher than those observed in Ecuador, which we take as high praise indeed. We also really liked Belgium’s novel requirement to justify deviations from public input to its Federal Plan for Sustainable Development, so we used it.”

“Okay,” countered the Ghanaian minister, “the vision is commendable, participation is high, and it’s all reinforced by political will and legislation, but by looking only at such long-term timescales you’ll clearly lose sight of shorter-term realities.”

What a perfect transition to the next stage of the tour, I thought to myself. “Yes, but contrary to appearances, we do not focus on the long-term alone,” I replied. “And if I may usher you back to the monorail you’ll soon see just how we plan for the shorter term and implement our policies on a daily basis, at the next stop on our tour.”

We then hopped through the doors of the monorail and I introduced Sustaineo’s next key institution. “The Multistakeholder Council meets monthly and has a secretariat of civil servants working on a daily basis to provide research to inform their visioning and advice provision, much like how the work of the Finnish National Commission on Sustainable Development is outlined and prepared by an inter-ministerial secretariat. **The Finnish team** operates as a network with each ministry’s representative(s) leading within their area of expertise,²⁵ only we’ve taken this a step further, as you’ll see at the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission, right this way ...”

The Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission

Our visitors enjoyed their quick journey from the Multistakeholder Council to the headquarters of the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission. It's always been a smooth one, not just figuratively but literally, too. The monorail system that connects these two parts of the capital city is an advanced Maglev system of the type developed and built across Asia at the turn of the century. It quite literally floats on air. The secretariat for the Multistakeholder Council sits within the Strategy Unit, one of two primary units in the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission. The other unit, the Delivery Unit, is responsible for coordinating the planning and implementation of the national 10-year plan. This setup allows those in support of the country's long-term development strategy to work in the same space as those who administered the medium-term plan for Sustaineo.

I turned to our visitors who were curiously looking at the immense circular three-story glass building that appeared on the right side of the Maglev. "Ladies and gentlemen, it is a spectacular building isn't it? This solar and geothermally powered home of the Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission was designed specifically for the functionality of the commission. The top floor is the Strategy Unit which, as already mentioned, is the secretariat for the Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council, who, among other things, is responsible for preparing and adapting the 30-year National Strategic Development Outlook. The second floor is the Delivery Unit's Planning Division, responsible for horizontal and vertical coordination in preparing the national 10-year plan. And finally, the ground floor is quite appropriately the implementation division of the Delivery Unit, responsible for coordinating efforts of the sector service agencies disbursed across Sustaineo."

I chuckled as I overheard one of the ministers remarking something along the lines of, "In our time, the implementation division is in the basement, with no way to get in or out." I smiled at the reference to the oft-cited and classic "implementation gap."

HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL COORDINATION

The building facilitates face-to-face conversations, impromptu as well as planned, among those with long-term, medium-term and short-term perspectives; in other words, the strategists, the planners and the implementers.

The Delivery Unit of the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission is, in fact, based on the structure of Finland's National Commission on Sustainable Development, as I had already mentioned to our esteemed visitors. But it also draws upon Bhutan's Gross National Happiness (GNH) Commission, which served as a type of clearing house for horizontal and vertical coordination in the country's national development planning process. I could see that our colleague from Bhutan was quite pleased to hear this. "Please correct me if I am wrong, Mr. Minister but, from what I understand, in 2008, when the GNH Commission replaced the planning commission and the Sustainable Development Secretariat was placed under its auspices, the Commission then became responsible for ensuring that **GNH principles** are firmly embedded in all core policies of the country."²⁶ This inspired our decision to place the secretariat of the Multistakeholder Council in the Strategy Unit, and the Delivery Unit alongside one another under the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission.

The minister from Bhutan delivered a smile of agreement and elaborated for the group. "Yes, this is accurate, and more specifically, the role of the secretariat of the Gross National Happiness Commission is to plan, coordinate and monitor the five-year plans and programs of the central ministries and agencies to achieve **Bhutan's five year-plans** and the long-term development objectives."²⁷

I looked to the minister with a nod of gratitude, "Thank you for your elaboration and for your role in catalyzing much-needed institutional innovation around the world at an important time early in the century. In my opinion, Bhutan was ahead of its time, and ahead of other countries, developed and developing alike. It took serious notice of things and began to create similar institutional structure to mainstream the concept of well-being, happiness and sustainability into national planning."

What I didn't have time to share with my visitors was that our overall approach was also influenced by the integrated development planning efforts that were experimented with and advanced by many of the Small Island Developing States and at the municipal level in Africa before the turn to the 21st century. For example, **South Africa's Integrated Development Planning** process for local governments was seen by many as "an approach to local planning which focuses on local issues rather than being a sector- or development-dimension-driven approach." It was also described as "a participatory approach to integrate economic, sectoral, spatial, social, institutional, environmental and fiscal strategies in order to support the optimal allocation of scarce resources between sectors and geographical areas and across the population in a manner that provides sustainable growth, equity and the empowerment of the poor and the marginalized."²⁸

Similar integrated development planning approaches were advanced at the national level in the Caribbean, when for example, the government of **Saint Lucia** and its then-Ministry of Finance approached the Commonwealth Secretariat in 2011 to support an **Integrated Approach to National Development Planning**.²⁹ And on the other side of the world, there was the **2007 Pacific Plan**, a supranational strategy adopted by all the governments of the Pacific Island Nations. This plan, spearheaded by the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, has since provided a vision, goals and success indicators that are monitored and reported on annually in the region.³⁰

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In fact, when Sustaineo began conceptualizing its governance arrangements in 2015, many initially felt that most of the innovative insight would come from developed countries. But in reality, much of the real experimentation and innovation took place in developing countries. The very cross-sectional nature of this tour group was a testament to that.

I pressed onward. “You can already see upon entering the building, the three floors are quite integrated, with atriums, open staircases and elevators making movement among the floors quick and easy. This is, of course, by design. The gap between planning and implementation was a well-known problem at the turn of the century. The building facilitates face-to-face conversations, impromptu as well as planned, among those with long-term, medium-term and short-term perspectives, in other words, the strategists, the planners and the implementers. And from a design perspective, a natural light work environment has been proven to increase creativity and productivity and lower lost days due to illness; hence all the windows.”

EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

Even policies with long track records of successful implementation remain in a pilot mode to ensure their continual review and refinement.

I could tell from the look on each of the ministers’ faces that they wished they worked in such a setting. How I do like my job. I suggested to our visitors that we begin the tour at the center of the building in Sustaineo’s renowned Sustainability Decision Theater. From this vantage point, one could see all the three floors around its periphery, making it easier to illustrate the functions of the Commission.

“Ministers, this venue at the center of the building is our state-of-the-art visual and analytically immersive theater for participatory planning and policymaking. Sustaineo built its first prototype based on the decision theaters built at the turn of the century in the United States at **Arizona State University**³¹ and then in China at **Huazhong University of Science and Technology**.³² It literally rests in the middle of the building as the Commission’s epicenter of evidence-based decision-making – nothing gets implemented without getting vetted and simulated in the Decision Theater.

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“It took several years for these theaters in your time to see application outside of the academic institutional setting, which is why you may not have heard about

them yet. But even in your time, the **Decision Theater at Arizona State University** was already providing services for policymakers in the simulation and modeling of complex systems, data analysis and information visualization, group decision-making, policy analysis and evaluation. For example, back in 2004 the Arizona Decision Theater team was asked to assist the state's Department of Health Services to monitor an outbreak of West Nile Virus and gain a better understanding of how the disease could spread. In response, they created a 'three-dimensional spatial modeling platform with a sophisticated geographical visualization interface for visual and statistical analysis of complex epidemiological data sets in real time.' Although I didn't have time to go into this level of detail, I also knew that Arizona's Decision Theater created a system dynamics model with a graphical dashboard that allowed water professionals to explore alternative scenarios for growth, water supply and water demand in the face of climate change.³³

"Isn't that an overly deterministic approach?" asked the Costa Rican minister, sounding almost a little frustrated. "I mean, the issues are so complex, how can you possibly make specific policy decisions based on computer simulations?"

Indeed, I thought. "In short," I said, "we don't. Seldom does a specific policy live or die in the Decision Theater. Instead, the simulation deliberations, which can be organized on quite short notice, typically result in a policy going back to its respective team for refinement. Following a few visits to 'the drum,' a policy is often recommended for implementation in pilot form with several specific questions being identified which must be tracked and addressed in order for the policy to be implemented at greater scales. And even policies with long track records of successful implementation remain in a pilot mode to ensure their continual review and refinement. I seem to recall a **report issued by the U.K. government** from your time that studied the use of policy pilots in government and recommended a more widespread use of the approach,³⁴ as well as a multi-year study in **India and Canada** that compiled a set of practical guidelines for creating adaptive policies.³⁵ These are all lessons in policymaking that continue to inform our activities to date."

VERTICAL ALIGNMENT

All issues are conceptualized and dealt with in a place-based context, with all sectoral delivery agencies coming together to participate in the process of place-based strategy, planning and implementation.

The minister from Ghana interrupted me briefly. "This is most impressive. But I'm admittedly slightly confused as I scan around the room. I can get a sense for the full size of the rest of the building from here and it does not look large enough to house all the different sectoral service delivery agencies - which is what I assumed would be in the building, given that you said the implementation division of the planning unit was housed on the ground floor."

“Very observant,” I replied quickly. “The sectoral service delivery agencies are mostly decentralized across Sustaineo. But the Commission, this building, is not organized by sector. Early in the formation of Sustaineo, about five years beyond your time, we came to the realization that policy silos are just reinforced by organizing government according to sectors. And with the newly formed Sustaineo essentially being a clean slate politically and bureaucratically, we took a different approach to achieve horizontal and vertical coordination across government. Sustaineo was the first country to take a truly place-based approach to planning, policy and implementation at all levels. We took to heart the bold moves in your time by countries like **Austria** which, as I mentioned previously, prepared sustainable development strategies that were binding both at the national and regional levels and thereby aligned federal and state mandates.³⁶ And also **Switzerland**, where their Federal Office for Spatial Development fostered systematic collaboration with cantons, towns and cities in the field of sustainable development and promoted the Local Agenda 21 campaign at cantonal, regional and local levels.³⁷ We also took to heart the recommendations of organizations such as the Global Water Partnership in your time, which made the call for Integrated Water Resources Management, or IWRM as it was called at the time, along with similar approaches including **integrated landscape management**³⁸ and **ecosystem-based management**.”³⁹

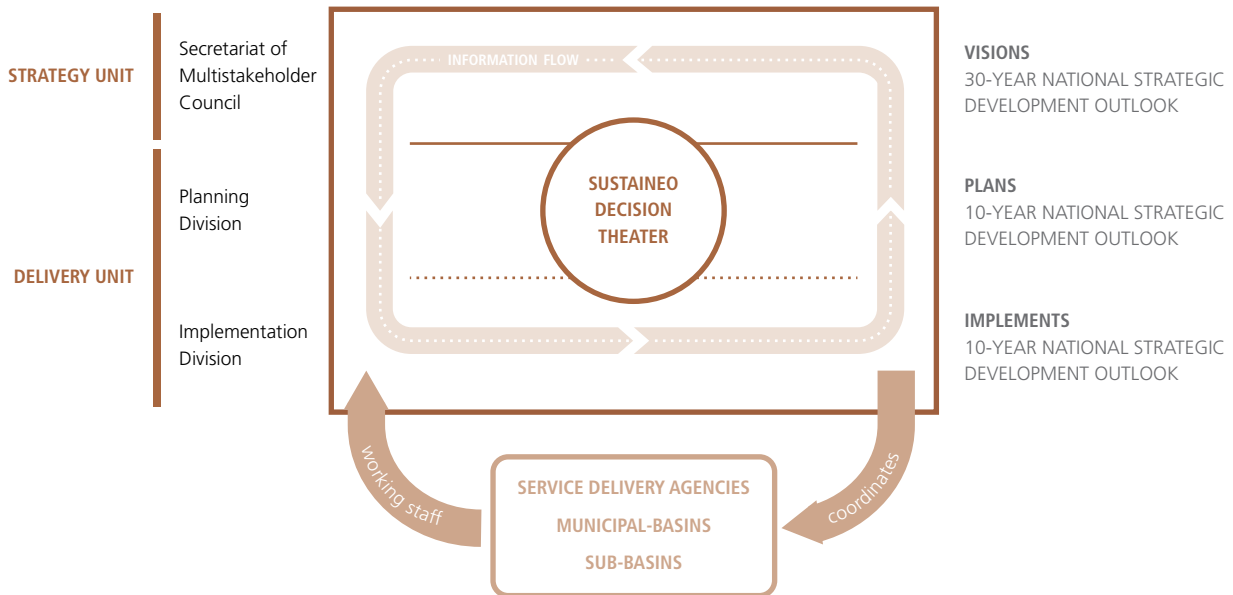
A picture was worth a thousand words, so I knew a quick tap and a swipe on one of the Decision Theater’s touch tables next to me was my best chance to explain. “You can see from the map around us that Sustaineo is divided into eight major water basins, and we define our subnational political and administrative boundaries accordingly. Further, the municipal, county or Länder boundaries, as you might call them, are based on the watershed boundaries of each basin. This approach ensured that our most important resource, water, was the fulcrum for all development planning efforts. This basis then allowed us to organize the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission, and this very building, into eight basin planning divisions, each with strategy, planning and implementation floors that physically interact on a daily basis.”

I could already tell from the exchange of concerned looks on each of my visitor’s faces that I needed to pause and elaborate a bit more. “Now I know what you are thinking – this sounds a lot like a centralized planning setup. But it’s far from it, actually. The Commission is at heart just a horizontal and vertical coordination nerve center for the sectoral service delivery agencies, the eight provincial planning basins and the close to fifty municipal sub-basins or watersheds. Each have full-time senior and junior staff working here that contribute to the aggregation of the National Strategic Development Outlook, the National Ten-Year Plan, and the implementation thereof. And these are the same persons that are intimately involved in the creation of the Strategic Development Outlooks and Ten-Year Plans of the municipal sub-basins and provincial basins. All issues are conceptualized and dealt with in a place-based context, with all sectoral delivery agencies coming together to participate in the process of place-based strategy, planning and implementation. Now this is where the ‘partnerships’ component of the Commission is really important. As I noted earlier, the long-term Strategic Development Outlooks prepared at all governance levels is a highly participatory process, with each provincial basin and municipal sub-basin having their own multistakeholder council that supports the political and administrative units.”

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The Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission is a horizontal and vertical coordination nerve center for the policy delivery agencies, the eight provincial planning basins and some fifty municipal sub-basins or watersheds. Each have full-time staff working in this building to create and deliver the National Strategic Development Outlook and the National Ten-Year Plan.

BUDGETING FOR OUTCOMES

The process in Sustaineo unfolds, first by getting a grip on the fiscal situation and establishing what funds are available, then identifying the outcomes that citizens most care about and allocating funds to each outcome.

I turned again to face my colleagues. “Consider also Sustaineo’s innovative budgeting for outcomes process that closely integrates the planning and implementation phases at the national and subnational levels and further illustrates the autonomy of the system.” Budgeting for outcomes, I knew from my own PhD research, was developed and implemented by the U.S. state of Washington in the time of our visitors. So I decided to elaborate. “The **budgeting for outcomes process**, as it was first implemented in the **United States** during your time, turned the traditional budgeting process on its head by first asking what results citizens wanted.⁴⁰ The process in Sustaineo unfolds just as it did in **Washington state**, first by getting a grip on the fiscal situation and establishing what funds are available, then identifying the outcomes that citizens most care about and allocating funds to each outcome. Outcome maps for each goal were then developed, and line agencies asked to submit their best proposals – which were typically collaborative efforts among government agencies, private companies and citizen organizations. Finally, the offers were ranked and the results purchased, and this was followed with progress tracking. And the process

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must have worked, because the state governor of that time was re-elected, and it was reported that state legislators found the budget documents that were submitted easier to understand.”⁴¹

I glanced quickly at the time in my eyeglass viewer. “Ladies and gentlemen, time is running short on this leg of the tour and I still have two important components to share with you on the workings of the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission.” But I saw that the minister from Tasmania was eager to pose a question, so I paused.

“I’ve been meaning to ask. The map on the screen - what do the blue dots signify in each of the planning basins?” she inquired.

COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

These were highly citizen-driven and participatory efforts aimed at articulating strategies for local well-being and sustainability.

I smiled and nodded, “Yes, thanks, an excellent conduit once again. The solid blue dots represent communities that have prepared and implemented Local Strategic Development Outlooks and Local Ten-Year Plans. The hollow blue dots are communities which have yet to do so. And as you can see, there are only a few remaining. We are nearing the ten-year mark and are proud to report that now 97 percent of all communities in Sustaineo, numbering almost 300, have prepared Strategic Development Outlooks and Ten-Year Plans. These were highly citizen-driven and participatory efforts aimed at articulating strategies for local well-being and sustainability, much like your **Tasmania Together** process was in your time.⁴² Additionally, our Local Strategic Development Outlook Network, which was initiated in 2020, was a significant contributor to the local successes in Sustaineo. We got the idea for the Network after reading about the success of **Udalsarea21**, the local agenda 21 network in Spain’s Basque Country in your time. As you might know, the Autonomous Community of the Basque Country in Spain published its **EcoEuskadi 2020 sustainable development strategy** around 2011.⁴³ Helping to pave the way for this plan was a community of best-practices network among municipalities that got underway in 2000 to help share best practices in planning and innovative sustainability action. Ten years later, the network had grown to include 196 municipalities, comprising almost 95 percent of all municipalities, which in that time tabled 239 community plans with more than 25,000 sustainability actions.⁴⁴ This was simply magnificent from our perspective, so we set out to replicate it.”

By now I was feeling reinvigorated by the very process of giving this tour to our visitors. I guess I had forgotten how far we had come in Sustaineo in such a short time, and how much we had learned from and built upon the experiences of those from the preceding decades.

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INTEGRATED POLICY ANALYSIS

After five years of development, we launched our Integrated Sustainability Policy Analysis Tool in 2020. It is a screening tool that must be applied to all new policies and programs implemented in Sustaineo.

I felt it was now time to tell our visitors about one last flagship element of the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission, as it provided a nice connection to the next part of our tour at the Sustaineo Sustainability Audit Office. “I believe I overheard one of you asking how we try to ensure that policies and sector service delivery programs have a positive impact on the Strategic Development Outlook goals, or at the very least, avoid incurring a negative impact. Well, this was a complex piece of our puzzle, but after five years of development, we launched our Integrated Sustainability Policy Analysis Tool in 2020. It is a screening tool that must be applied to all new policies and programs implemented in Sustaineo. This includes at the provincial basin and municipal sub-basin levels, whose respective authorities’ collaboration in this regard is part of their cooperation agreements. This is an idea that draws heavily on the **Belgium Federal Plan for Sustainable Development**, which we referenced while discussing goals and targets at the Multistakeholder Council.⁴⁵ The Integrated Sustainability Policy Analysis Tool is linked directly to the Strategic Development Outlook indicators, which you will learn more about in the next tour stop. But suffice it to say that the potential for positive or negative impact of policies and programs on the various Strategic Development Outlook progress indicators is assessed using the tool. This way we can get an overall and initial feel for the social, economic and environmental benefits or costs of a specific policy or program. Much of this analysis is done by the Decision Theater folks at the Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission.”

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The minister from Finland was visibly pleased with this part of the presentation. “This is quite similar to some of the tools that are being advanced in our time. I’m thinking about the **United Kingdom’s Integrated Policy Appraisal Tool** and the Swiss Sustainability Assessment process,⁴⁶ as well as the European Union’s impact assessment that has been applied to policy proposals since 2004. And just to elaborate, the U.K.’s Integrated Policy Appraisal Tool took into account a range of areas including public expenditure and economic impacts, environmental appraisal, regulatory impacts, equal treatment, rural proofing, climate change, and health impact assessment.”

46

“And quite similar to our tool as well,” added the Bhutanese minister. “We implemented the **Gross National Happiness Screening Tool** to complement our system of policymaking and which provides a semi-quantitative assessment of proposed policies, plans and projects for their compatibility with Gross National Happiness objectives. Proposals that fail to pass the screening tool test are sent back to the responsible ministry for revisions. We have examples of policies that get rejected multiple times before they are implemented.”⁴⁷

47

The flashing light in my eyeglass viewer told me it was time to head back to the Maglev and catch the monorail to our next stop. “Esteemed colleagues, it is most exhilarating to hear that continual progress has been made between our times. And this reminds me that societal learning is a long process, and one necessarily requiring patience. Not just because of the many minds and perspectives that have to come together, but because of the layers upon layers of detail that must come together to effectively address the complex issues of sustainable development. Now, please all follow me as we make our way to Sustaineo’s Sustainability Audit Office to meet our new ombudsperson for future generations.”

The Sustaineo Sustainability Audit Office

The Maglev was right on time, as usual. I could see that the initial adrenalin that kept our visitors alert in the first two tour stops was beginning to give way again to time lag. It was a striking view on the short trip from the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission to the Sustainability Audit Office, but our visitors were all fast asleep. I knew this was a common biophysical reaction about three hours into a time visit. To provide a change of pace, I made sure that our new ombudsperson for the future would be there, waiting to guide us through the functions of his office.

I brought my hands together making a sharp clap to awaken the ministers. “Colleagues, we have arrived, and...” But before I could complete my thought, in walked our ombudsperson, right on to the train to greet us.

OMBUDSPERSON FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

“Ladies and gentlemen, excuse my excitement,” remarked the ombudsperson. “You are the first time-visitors that I have had the pleasure of meeting. I am a historian by training, so seeing history face-to-face is a real honor. Why you ask, would a historian serve as Sustaineo’s ombudsperson for future generations? Well, being ardent students of complex systems as I’m sure we all are, we know that a respect for history is key to understanding how to successfully intervene in the present and to produce lasting outcomes for the future.” And with a deep belly-laugh, surprising for such a thin man, he concluded, “At least that is what I said when I interviewed for the job.”

I quickly intervened. “Colleagues, please meet Mr. Zy.” I thought to myself that he was precisely what our visitors needed at this point, but I was concerned about getting finished on time. “By virtue of his surname, Mr. Zy is always the last person in any alphabetized list, and thus, typically has the last word.” I turned to my colleague. “Mr. Zy, over to you.”

“Please, my friends now call me Bud. Get it?” he said, followed again by his trademark guffaw, which elicited a chorus of laughs from our visitors. Very good, I thought to myself, everyone was alert again.

Bud quickly turned to the substance. “This is an extremely important office for Sustaineo, and the very name of my position is a testament to advances made in your time – case in point being **Hungary’s ombudsman for future generations**.⁴⁸ We essentially represent the future generation and are tasked with ensuring that the country does not fall asleep at the wheel. This includes government, business and civil society. We are an independent audit office, but we do work closely with many other offices to do our job.”

MONITORING AND REPORTING

The information system for the Sustaineo Sustainability Index brings together all the sectors so that our monitoring of economic changes is linked to environmental consequences.

Bud continued. “One of the functions of our office is monitoring and reporting, for which we **partner with the Statistics Office**. I believe Germany did it this way in your time.⁴⁹ And we report progress simultaneously to the Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council and the public as a whole.”

49

He informed our visitors that monitoring progress was an integral part of the implementation of the Strategic Development Outlook and the Ten-Year Plan, at all levels of governance in Sustaineo. The Strategy Unit in the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission, which was the secretariat to the Multistakeholder Council, assembled and managed the indicator system that made up our Sustaineo Sustainability Index. The Multistakeholder Council coordinated the process to develop the components of the Sustaineo Sustainability Index, which we had been using for the past decade. Bud went on to note that “it took us two years to get our indicator system sorted out when the post-2015 period commenced. So, the earlier you can get organized, the better. Actual data collection is done by an array of agencies within the Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission and sectoral service delivery agencies.”

“Minister from Bhutan, I am sure you can see your fingerprints on our Sustainability Index,” Bud announced with a smile. “Much like **Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness Index**,⁵⁰ our index and its primary subindices deliver communicative and branding power in the media, and the sustainability concept is driven down horizontally and vertically within government and in business. GDP is one of several subindices, but it is different compared to your time in that it incorporates our natural resource accounts, making it a more realistic economic progress measure. Minister from Tasmania, I’m sure you also recognize the **Tasmania Together Benchmarks**⁵¹ in here also, specifically in relation to the role the Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council plays in identifying the indicators and reporting on them to the public. As we discussed earlier at the Council Chamber, you must have been quite disappointed when the Tasmania Together Progress Board was discontinued by government. From an audit and accountability perspective, that was definitely a step backwards, much like the ending of the U.K. Sustainable Development Commission and Canada’s National Round Table in your time. And to our Finnish minister, you, too, will see your country’s influence on our system, particularly in relation to the integration of the sustainability and well-being concepts in our Strategic Development Outlook, and in our ability to be unabashedly self-critical of our own progress.”

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Bud proceeded with his presentation. “Colleagues, it is important to note that the indicators within our Sustainability Index focus on monitoring where we want to be, instead of just mapping what is the current status of the economy, society and the environment. As such, the information system aims to monitor progress in relation to both the desired outcomes of the Strategic Development Outlook and Ten-Year Plans as well as the actions taken to achieve the associated long-term

and medium-term targets. The information system for the Sustaineo Sustainability Index brings together all the sectors so that our monitoring of economic changes is linked to environmental consequences, as was done in your time in countries like **Germany**⁵² and **Finland**.⁵³ And all the indicators across sectors are brought together into a shared reporting format so the trends, linkages and trade-offs can be compared and analyzed, much like Finland and the **United Kingdom** do in your day.⁵⁴ And of course, the Sustainability Index is directly linked upward to the global monitoring system for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, which is coordinated and hosted by the United Nations.”

I felt the need to elaborate on a dimension that we were particularly proud of. “Bud, if I may quickly add something here. Many of the indicators at the national level have their roots in the municipal sub-basin level indicators that are used to track progress in local Strategic Development Outlooks and Ten-Year Plans. And in turn, many of the indicators at this level and the associated data have their roots in traditional ecological knowledge. And the partnerships that have been established to collect such data are particularly exciting. This is much like the example of the **Paiter Surui** Indigenous Peoples in Brazil that I mentioned earlier at the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission. What I didn’t mention then was that **Paiter Surui** were the first Indigenous Peoples to partner with Google, using Google Earth and the mobile-phone technology of the time to monitor the forest.⁵⁵ Through these efforts, they were able to secure carbon-credit funding and certification. Their 50-year Sustainability Plan is required reading at Sustaineo University’s School of Integrated Development Planning, as it is a living case study of a long-term plan that has stood the test of time and continues to be updated even to this day. Citizen-based monitoring has also flourished since your time, it now makes a significant contribution to the indicator system database through the use of our generation of smartphones.”

Bud thanked me for my brief intervention, noting my extensive background in traditional practices and past experience in assisting the audit office in the early years of setting up the system. He continued to wrap up his overview of the monitoring function of the office. “The information system for the Sustaineo Sustainability Index and all of its subindices, indicators, and data sets are all fully accessible to anyone in Sustaineo with a smartphone, and this covers every household in the country. It is a map-based system. Extremely easy to use with enough layers enabling anyone to make comparisons to other communities or sub-basins, or to view a range of future projections by interfacing with the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission’s policy simulation results that are published semi-annually.”

“When Sustaineo set out to create its indicator information system just after the Post-2015 Development Agenda was initiated, we quickly learned that most of the innovation in such systems was occurring at the community level. The **Jacksonville Community Council** in the United States and their online Community Snapshot quality of life indicator system for localities across the state of Florida is a prime example,⁵⁶ as is the Peg community well-being indicator system for the city of **Winnipeg in Canada**.⁵⁷ Systems such as these were motivating factors for the comprehensive system of information we have today. And this system goes beyond just indicators. It also includes a link to all of the specific policies and

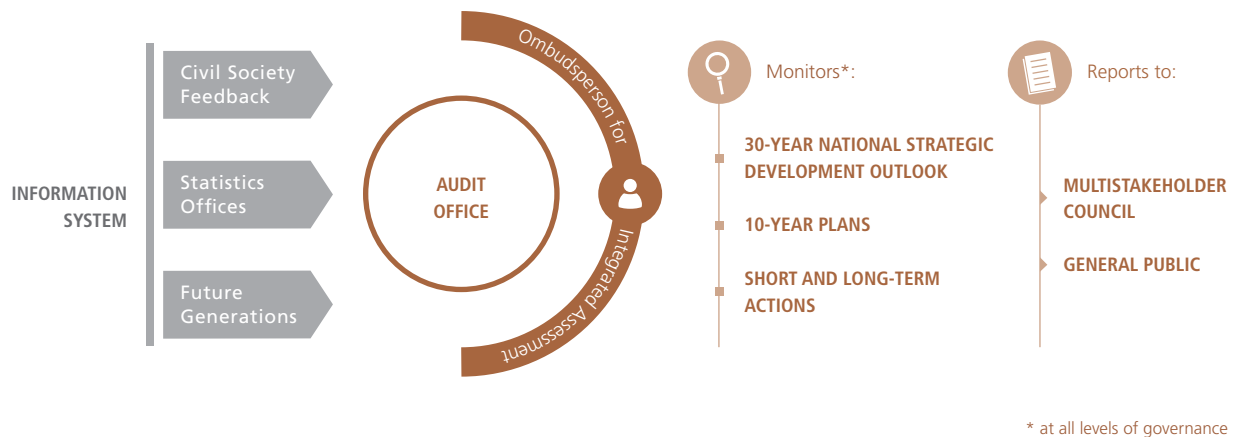
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The Sustaineo Sustainability Audit Office represents future generations and is tasked with ensuring that government and other stakeholders adhere to the national commitment to sustainable development. Its primary function is monitoring the implementation of the Strategic Development Outlook and the Ten-Year Plan at all levels of governance, and reporting results to both the Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council and the wider public.

programs that are designed to have an influence on the indicators, as well as an inventory of all of the Strategic Development Outlooks and Ten-Year Plans at the local, basin and national levels. We saw early examples of this in your time both at the community level in the Whistler 2020 system, the site of the 2010 Winter Olympics if you know your sports trivia, and also at the national level in the previously mentioned online information system supporting **Ecuador’s Plan for Good Living – Buen Vivir**.⁵⁸

58

The minister from Tasmania pressed Bud for more information on quality assurance, not just of the data, but of the targets established in the Strategic Development Outlooks. She noted in her time that the idea of **planetary boundaries** was often discussed and used as a basis for setting ecology-based targets.⁵⁹ And from what I remembered, this was also discussed in the formative years of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

59

So I was pleased to hear when Bud elaborated on the threshold-based approach for establishing targets, and that this went beyond just ecological thresholds or boundaries. With advancements in the social sciences over the past few decades, there was a better understanding of ranges for thresholds in many social and economic aspects of sustainability. I also elaborated on how, from the perspective of the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission, the use of indicators had benefits which we had not anticipated. Namely, it provided one of the primary mechanisms for building partnerships and social capital at all levels, particularly at the community level. We learned early on from many of the **community indicators systems** of your day that indicators can actually act as reference points to catalyze collaboration across a community. The U.S. Government Accountability Office reported on this very aspect in the time of our visitors.⁶⁰

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AUDITING

History informs us that while audits were known to do a good job of finding the issues, the actual findings and recommendations were rarely followed up on by the responsible line agencies.

This time it was Bud who checked his watch, and he cringed at the realization that time was so short. “Let me now quickly describe our audit functions,” he announced. “We conduct traditional audits of all the sectoral service delivery agencies with regard to their implementation of policies in support of the Ten-Year Plan, as well their basic service delivery programs. Our auditing lens in all instances is that of meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Such a basic and fundamental principle – actually quite amazing to think that widespread mainstreaming of the sustainable development concept within the basic machinery of governments only occurred in the years leading up to Rio+30 in 2022.”

“In performing these audits, we do lean quite heavily on integrated assessment approaches to provide us with a clearer picture of the cumulative impact of our sector service delivery agencies in the various provincial basins. The ecosystem services and human well-being frameworks advanced in the **Millennium Ecosystem Assessment** back in the year 2000,⁶¹ or thereabouts, and also the subsequent **Global Environment Outlooks of the United Nations Environment Program** have proven particularly useful and insightful.⁶² The Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnership Commission and their Decision Theater team undertake these assessments, but we have a team that audits these models, given how important they are in framing discussions at the policy design and implementation levels.

“One particular audit tool that we use is a peer review of our Strategic Development Outlook and Ten-Year Plan. As you are certainly aware, this practice was started in your time, something which countries such as Germany, through its **Council for Sustainable Development**, have applied consistently and helped advance the approach.⁶³ As in Germany, a peer review committee is created consisting of experts and practitioners such as yourselves from other countries, to provide a candid view of a strategy from an outside perspective. We coordinate these peer reviews with the Sustaineo Multistakeholder Council.”

“We are responsible for coordinating efforts in making improvements and adaptations to policies and programs. This is an important function as history informs us that while audits were known to do a good job of finding the issues, the actual findings and recommendations were rarely followed up on by the responsible line agencies. The result being that subsequent audits typically restated the same conclusions and recommendations. We work closely with the Sustaineo Planning, Policy and Partnerships Commission in delivering this role to ensure continuous improvement and adaptation in policy and service delivery programs.”

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Bud took a big breath to squeeze in one last point related to their audit function. “We take formal policy review processes very seriously in Sustaineo, at all levels of government. The peer review process I already mentioned is one example of that. But we also coordinate an annual review of the Ten-Year Plan focusing on different aspects of the plan each year and incorporating perspectives from those who implement and who are supposed to benefit. You have examples of this from your time, including **India’s national five-year plan process**.⁶⁴ And the results of our reviews are all publically available. When we all began to fully appreciate the insights of complex adaptive systems theory, we knew that adaptive policymaking and governance was key for sustainable development initiatives, because it is so hard to know in advance what was going to work and what wasn’t. You already knew this as evidenced by the policy literature of your time and insights for sustainability transitions learned from the **Global Environment Outlook reviews**.⁶⁵”

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PROMOTING CROSS-CUTTING POLICY BENEFITS

There is a long history of crafting policies with co-benefits – it can be done, it just needs to be scaled up to promote real transformation toward sustainable development.

The minister from Ghana posed a particularly good question in relation to the efficient use of financial resources, asking, “How can Sustaineo afford the level of analysis, coordination and planning that you have described so far in the tour?” I decided to give Bud a brief break and addressed this question myself. “Thank you for such a practical and important question,” I replied. “One thing that we have done well over the past 15 years since embarking on the Post-2015 Development Agenda is to ensure that all major policies and programs deliver co-benefits across issue areas. We believed that we simply could not afford to do what we felt we needed to do if we were continually implementing individual actions to address the array of complex and comingled issues. So we established a mandate for policy design processes to find the co-benefits, and we tooled our audit processes to ensure that they were indeed identified and implemented.”

“This was actually not that hard,” I continued. “In fact, many of the celebrated policy successes of your time were indeed policies that achieved multiple benefits. For example, consider **Costa Rica’s Payment for Ecosystem Services scheme**,⁶⁶ which built on several decades of continuous improvement. Consider as well, in a similar capacity, **Ecuador’s Socio-Bosque Forest Partner program**.⁶⁷ These programs served forest conservation objectives while at the same time providing livelihood opportunities and revenue for social initiatives. As previously mentioned, **China’s Grain for Green program** is another example from the turn of the century.⁶⁸ This program, as you may already know, started as an ecological directive to combat deforestation and soil loss, but had additional goals with respect to increasing rural household income. **India’s Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act** is another good example.⁶⁹ While it was designed primarily as a

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wage augmentation program, its auxiliary objective was to strengthen natural resource management. And more broadly speaking, the very ‘green economy’ or ‘green growth’ movement also of your time represents, essentially, a transition to policies which produce co-benefits. I guess the point I am trying to make with all these examples is that there is a long history of crafting policies with co-benefits – it can be done, it just needs to be scaled up to promote real transformation toward sustainable development.”

At this point, Bud took over once again. “We, too, have an internationally renowned program that emulates all of the examples Grace mentioned.” Noting the increasingly smaller window of time, Bud continued, “Very briefly, Sustaineo found itself being afflicted by successive flooding and droughts occurring in the same basins and in the same seasons. This was unheard of before anthropogenic climate change reared its ugly head. So we have an integrated drought and flood management program that uses the **‘waffle’ landscape concept** developed in your time that pays local agriculture producers to store excess water on their productive lands following extreme events. This helps dampen river crests and stores water for dry periods as it increases soil moisture thereafter.⁷⁰ At the same time, these **temporary wetlands produce vegetation** which can be harvested to remove excess phosphorus from the landscape, thereby preventing eutrophication of our downstream lakes and also producing biomass for return energy to local farmers.”⁷¹

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71

The End and the Beginning of the Journey

I signaled to Bud that we were very nearly out of time and that our visitors would soon be commencing their return journey within the coming minutes.

The minister from Bhutan turned to Bud and me. “On behalf of the UN Delegation for Achieving the Post-2015 Development Agenda, I thank you for your time, both literally and figuratively.” The minister paused to check if Bud caught the duality of his note of appreciation. “We have much to reflect on. The governance conundrum of post-2015 is a difficult one. We are doing many good things with respect to how to strategize, plan and act in achieving sustainable development, but no single country has yet to piece the entire puzzle together with respect to institutions, strategies and ultimately, on-the-ground delivery. We can see from Sustaineo in 2030 that all the necessary practices for setting long-term goals and strategies for deepening participation, for creating adaptive plans through horizontal and vertical coordination and partnership, implementing sustainable development solutions, and for being accountable to present and future generations for continuous improvement, is all attainable within a national and subnational context. We are inspired and motivated by Sustaineo 2030, and we are eager to return to our time and share these insights.”

I struggled to resist the temptation of telling another time-travel joke to relax our visitors before the strenuous journey back to 2015. But recalling my dismal comic debut earlier, I stuck to formality. “Thank you, minister and fellow esteemed colleagues. It, too, has been a pleasure and a unique opportunity for me to reflect on just how much our current practices are built on the ingenuity and perseverance of people such as you, as well as the diverse range of stakeholders that you both engage with and represent. We have certainly appreciated the stockpile of information that the **community of practice networks and knowledge management portals** of your day left for us to learn from and build on.⁷² I also understand from the history books that you are in a challenging time right now. Pressed to do more with less, and challenged to break down outdated institutions to make way for new ones that match the complexity and pace of development in the 21st century. Nevertheless, I am confident that your time trajectory will travel as favorably as ours has so far.”

“Mr. Zy,” announced the Finnish minister, “I believe that, by a convenient right of last name, you should have the last word.”

“Thank you,” chuckled the ever-laughing Bud. “It was a real pleasure and honor to meet with you all. I trust that the decision-makers from your time will benefit from your experience here today. And as Sustaineo’s ombudsperson for future generations, I leave you with the words of wisdom that have always given me peripheral vision in tackling sustainable development issues: respect the past, understand the present and explore the future.”

And as quickly as our visitors arrived, their journey ended, and yet began again.

Notes and Index of Case Examples

THE SUSTAINED MULTISTAKEHOLDER COUNCIL

Governance

- 1 **Republic of Korea Case Example:** Unreferenced observation in Reinhard Mohn Prize (RMP) reports (global research and longlist reports).
- 2 **Bhutan Case Example:** Niestroy, I., A. García Schmidt and A. Esche. "Bhutan: Paradigms Matter." In *Winning Strategies for a Sustainable Future*. Bertelsmann Stiftung, edited by Bertelsmann Stiftung. Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung: Gutersloh, 2013. www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xchg/SID-56E5BC37-5EBD7E22/bst_engl/hs.xsl/publikationen_118861.htm
- 3 **Canada Case Example:** Unreferenced observation in RMP reports (global research and longlist reports)
- 4 **Singapore Case Example:** <http://app.mewr.gov.sg/web/Contents/ContentsSSS.aspx?ContId=1034>
- 5 **Finland Case Example:** Niestroy, I., A. García-Schmidt, and A. Esche. "Finland: Paving the Way toward a Social Contract for Sustainability." In *Winning Strategies for a Sustainable Future*. Bertelsmann Stiftung, edited by Bertelsmann Stiftung. Verlag Bertelsmann Stiftung: Gutersloh, 2013. www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/cps/rde/xchg/SID-56E5BC37-5EBD7E22/bst_engl/hs.xsl/publikationen_118861.htm
- 6 **Wales 'The Future Generations Bill' Case Example:** <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/future-generations-bill/?lang=en>
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- 13 **Belgium Case Example:** www.esdn.eu/?k=country%20profiles&s=single%20country%20profile&country=Belgium
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SUSTAINED PLANNING, POLICY AND PARTNERSHIP COMMISSION

Horizontal and vertical coordination

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Ombudsperson for future generations

- 48 Hungary Ombudsman for Future Generations Case Example:**
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THE END AND BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY

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Development Councils network at www.eeac-net.org/, the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development at www.unosd.org, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network at <http://unsdsn.org/>, and the knowledge management sites of the IISD Reporting Services at www.iisd.ca/

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Farooq Ullah



Farooq Ullah took over as Executive Director of Stakeholder Forum (SF) in September 2012. He joined SF as Head of Policy and Advocacy in September 2011. Before this, Mr. Ullah was at the UK Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) for nearly five years

where he worked on strategic assessment; analyzing public policy, sustainable operations and procurement, strategy, governance and decision-making in order to hold the UK government to account and improve its sustainability performance. Key elements of this work included policy advice, stakeholder engagement and capability building. In all, Mr. Ullah has nine years of public sector experience at international, national and local government levels, with a further three years of private sector consultancy experience. Currently, Farooq is a Specialist Advisor to the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee and a member of the Alliance for Future Generations. Additionally, he is a founding member of Brighter Future; a climate-change action group in London.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTIONS

Bertelsmann Stiftung

In keeping with the longstanding social commitment of its founder, Reinhard Mohn (1921–2009), the Bertelsmann Stiftung is dedicated to serving the common good. Our work is based on a belief in the values of freedom, goodwill and social solidarity, and in the effectiveness of competition.

Targeting long-term social impact, the Bertelsmann Stiftung believes that expanding opportunities for participation in a globalized world is a key factor in ensuring a viable future for us all. We therefore conduct global research in order to identify innovative and effective approaches to generating such opportunities. In addition, we carry out research in our areas of expertise, which include improving education, fostering fair and efficient economic growth, promoting people-centered health care, empowering civil society, ensuring viable cultural futures and promoting international understanding. Independent and nonpartisan, the Bertelsmann Stiftung is a private operating foundation.

International Institute for Sustainable Development

The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) contributes to sustainable development by advancing policy recommendations on international trade and investment, economic policy, climate change and energy, and the management of natural and social capital. The IISD also enhances the enabling role of communication technologies in these areas. We report on international negotiations and disseminate knowledge gained through collaborative projects, thereby facilitating more rigorous research, improving capacity-building in developing countries, strengthening North-South networks, and enhancing the global connections among researchers, practitioners, citizens and policymakers.

The IISD focuses on topics ripe for transformation and on those areas where a shift in policy has the potential to snowball. It is only through a focus on game-changers that we will overcome the sustainability deficit and move us all toward a better future.

Because we aim to make a difference in how policy is crafted and implemented, we translate the insights generated by research into practical, realistic and cost-effective policy options that can be taken up by policymakers at all levels.

Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future

Stakeholder Forum is a nongovernmental organization working to advance sustainable development and promote democracy at a global level. Its work aims to enhance open, accountable and participatory international decision-making on sustainable development by enhancing the involvement of stakeholders in intergovernmental processes.

Stakeholder Forum seeks to provide a bridge between those who have a stake in sustainable development, and the international forums where decisions are made in their name. To this end, we work with a diverse range of stakeholders globally on international policy development and advocacy; stakeholder engagement and consultation; media and communications and capacity-building – all with the ultimate objective of promoting progressive outcomes on sustainable development through an open and participatory approach.

Stakeholder Forum has offices in London and New York, and works with consultants from around the world. Stakeholder Forum is a not-for-profit organization and receives funding from governments, UN agencies, foundations and international financial institutions.

Novel Futures

Economic, social and ecological issues facing the 21st century demand that we think creatively about our future, and be adaptive in getting there. Novel Futures helps communities, governments and businesses imagine the future through fictional and fact-based narratives that communicate complex issues in understandable and compelling ways. At Novel Futures, evidence-based and participatory scenario planning methods are used to write creative narratives of the future and help governments, businesses and communities envision and achieve sustainability.

IMPRINT

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Learning Sustainable Development from the Future

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