



Sustainably crafting excellent connections

The Alexander von Humboldt Foundation's Sustainability Agenda

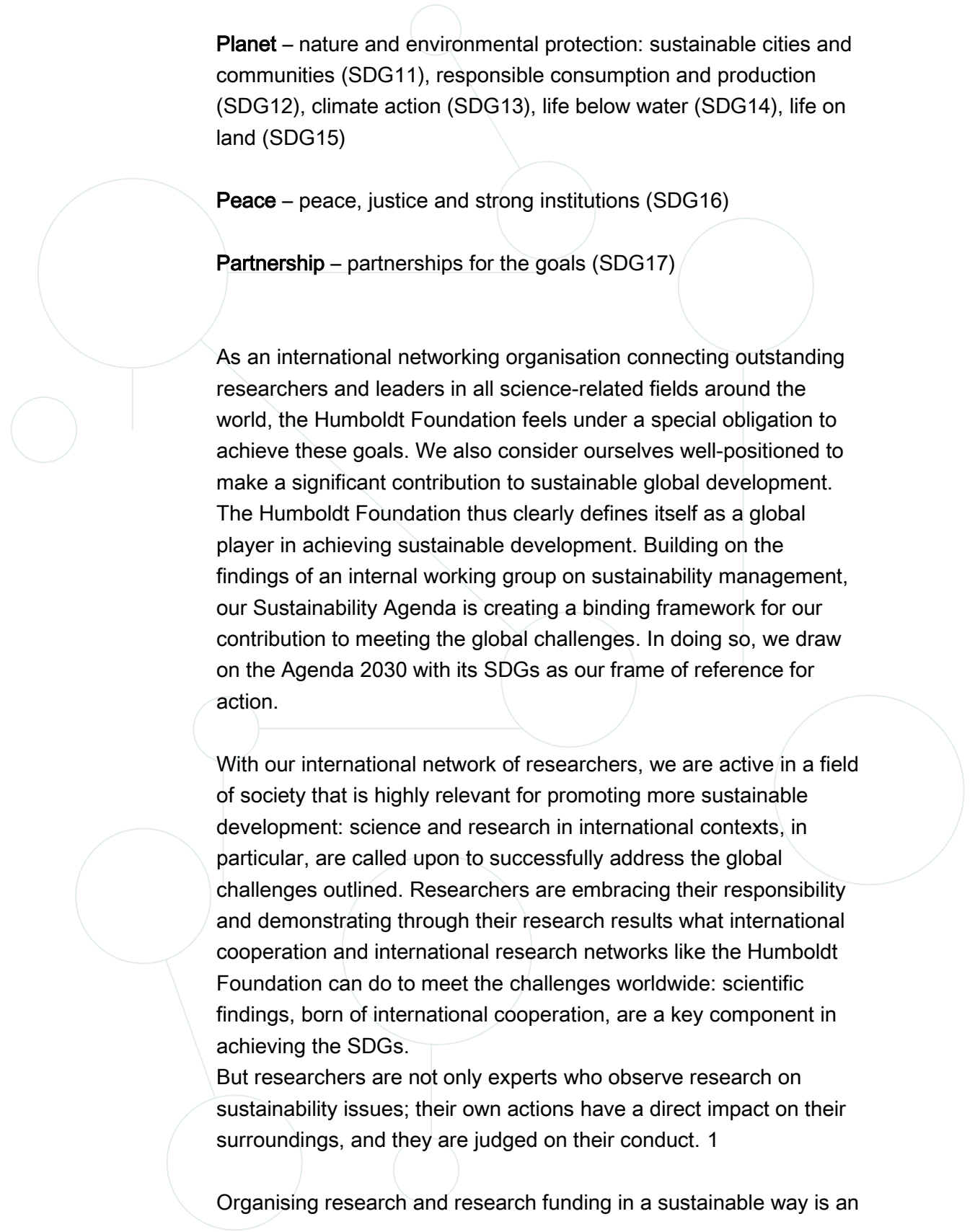
The COVID-19 pandemic is not the first issue to challenge global society. Climate change, the loss of biodiversity and demographic change are all demonstrating in a drastic fashion that our planet's resources are limited.

Securing sustainable development has become an ever-higher priority for governments, organisations and individuals worldwide. In order to ensure that the global community can continue living together long into the future, it is clear that sustainability has to be a binding goal. To achieve it, relevant measures must be implemented, systematically and resolutely.

The United Nations have entered into this obligation with the Agenda 2030. Here they define 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)¹ which set out concrete strategic targets for developing the world with a view to sustainable global coexistence – on an environmental, social and economic level. They focus on the “five Ps” as their guiding principles: **People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace** and **Partnership**:

People – focus on human beings: no poverty (SDG1), zero hunger (SDG2), good health and well-being (SDG3), quality education (SDG4), gender equality (SDG5), clean water and sanitation (SDG6)

Prosperity – affluence for all: affordable and clean energy (SDG7), decent work and economic growth (SDG8), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG9), reduced inequalities (SDG10)



Planet – nature and environmental protection: sustainable cities and communities (SDG11), responsible consumption and production (SDG12), climate action (SDG13), life below water (SDG14), life on land (SDG15)

Peace – peace, justice and strong institutions (SDG16)

Partnership – partnerships for the goals (SDG17)

As an international networking organisation connecting outstanding researchers and leaders in all science-related fields around the world, the Humboldt Foundation feels under a special obligation to achieve these goals. We also consider ourselves well-positioned to make a significant contribution to sustainable global development. The Humboldt Foundation thus clearly defines itself as a global player in achieving sustainable development. Building on the findings of an internal working group on sustainability management, our Sustainability Agenda is creating a binding framework for our contribution to meeting the global challenges. In doing so, we draw on the Agenda 2030 with its SDGs as our frame of reference for action.

With our international network of researchers, we are active in a field of society that is highly relevant for promoting more sustainable development: science and research in international contexts, in particular, are called upon to successfully address the global challenges outlined. Researchers are embracing their responsibility and demonstrating through their research results what international cooperation and international research networks like the Humboldt Foundation can do to meet the challenges worldwide: scientific findings, born of international cooperation, are a key component in achieving the SDGs.

But researchers are not only experts who observe research on sustainability issues; their own actions have a direct impact on their surroundings, and they are judged on their conduct. ¹

Organising research and research funding in a sustainable way is an

1. ¹ <https://www.bmz.de/de/agenda-2030>

indispensable prerequisite for successfully mastering global challenges together. With our sponsorship for international academic exchange, the Humboldt Foundation helps science to address the diverse issues connected with the SDGs and thus to meet global challenges. At the same time, in our role as a networking organisation, we support our members, helping them to pursue their scientific work with a view to environmental, social and economic sustainability. Being, moreover, a flagship of academic excellence in the German research landscape, the Humboldt Foundation itself has an institutional responsibility as an organisation to promote sustainability.

The Humboldt Foundation will, therefore, take concrete steps in three fields of action: On the one hand, we want to increase knowledge about sustainability through the expertise in the Humboldt Network (Field of Action 1). Furthermore, we want to organise the way we develop and foster the Humboldt Network more sustainably (Field of Action 2). And we also want to make the work of the Foundation's head office more sustainable (Field of Action 3). All the fields of action in the Sustainability Agenda draw on the three-pillar model of sustainability which reflects the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability.

1 Driving sustainability with the scientific expertise of the Humboldt Network

The Foundation sponsors a vast number of international researchers whose activities address a raft of sustainability issues. In addition, the Foundation can wield influence in promoting structures that facilitate sustainable thinking and action both within the German research landscape and abroad. We would like to systematically utilise this potential to make a significant global contribution to sustainable development. This is one of the ways in which we will live up to our responsibility as a global player in achieving the sustainability goals (SDG17).

- **Connecting worldwide expertise on sustainability:** The Humboldt Network includes a host of researchers who work on the SDGs. We will promote this potential by bringing together Humboldtians who work on sustainability issues. To this end, we will proactively and, where appropriate, digitally support dialogue and

cooperation amongst Humboldtians with similar research interests (SDG4). We will utilise the relationship of trust amongst Humboldtians to help create flexible, needs-based “networks within the network” in order to reach the UN’s sustainability goals even faster.

- **Building platforms and reinforcing awareness:** We systematically use our influence as a foundation to create platforms for exchange on issues relating to sustainable development both within the German research landscape and internationally. In the context of our initiatives (e.g., ideas competitions for universities, alumni awards) and events (e.g., colloquia and Kollegs) we are expanding our focus on sustainability.
- **Promoting academic freedom:** The Humboldt Foundation feels it has a special responsibility to protect academic freedom worldwide: Through the Philipp Schwartz Initiative that was introduced in 2016, we have created an important tool for integrating at-risk researchers in the German research landscape. The initiative has, moreover, become a highly regarded platform for implementing and sharing ideas on academic freedom – nationally and internationally. Through the Philipp Schwartz Initiative we not only champion researchers who have got into political difficulties (SDG10); their path-breaking function in the conversation on academic freedom also makes an important contribution to strong (academic) institutions (SDG16), especially in times of growing science scepticism.
- **Creating role models and channelling expertise into decision-making processes:** If we are to achieve the UN’s sustainability goals, in addition to science, we need the relevant political decisions and civil society processes from which actions ensue. We are increasing our exploitation of the potential amongst Humboldtians who can adopt a function as role models and advisors on sustainability issues. In our communications and public outreach, we specifically highlight researchers who have such potential as well as special scientific expertise on sustainability. To ensure that their expertise is channelled into decision-making processes, we connect with our stakeholders in politics and civil society (SDG17).

2 Practising sustainability and conserving resources in the Humboldt Network

The Humboldt Network is the heart of the Humboldt Foundation's activities: it connects people from all countries worldwide, both with one another and with Germany, and it offers a wealth of diverse facets, perspectives and expertise which it is our task to foster and develop. We want to do this in a sustainable way and thus grapple with issues relating to physical and virtual mobility as well as the options for hybrid forms of meeting one another. Facilitated by digital space, new forms of mobility that conserve resources play just as central a role as the power of personal encounters that are an important element of the bonds between sponsorship recipients and the Foundation. The Foundation therefore continually develops its funding tools in order to reinforce sustainability in this context and to specifically campaign for sustainable consumption and production (SDG12) as well as to adopt climate protection measures (SDG13).

- **Consciously planning personal encounters:** Personal encounters with and amongst Humboldtians are and will remain a core component of the Humboldt Network. They should continue and be extended with a view to the various dimensions of sustainability. For our networking events we are testing and establishing hybrid formats that combine online exchange with in-person elements. Being highly conscious of the worth of personal encounters, we are finding the best possible balance between climate-friendly mobility (SDG13), facilitating participation for many groups (SDG10) and personal encounters (SDG17).
- **Systematically facilitating virtual mobility:** As a foundation that promotes international networking, we fulfil our obligations with regard to resource-friendly sustainable mobility and organise it systematically: We want to offer a new programme line through which we will grant research fellowships for digital collaborations – the larger part of the research collaboration will take place online. In addition to climate protection, we are thus also committing to more inclusive access to our portfolio in order to facilitate support for groups of people for whom physical mobility is a particular challenge, for political, economic or family reasons, for example, or

because of disability (SDG10).

- **Organising physical mobility sustainably:** In all our fields of activity we are increasing awareness of the implications of physical mobility for climate protection. Whenever physical mobility is appropriate, we will systematically propose and encourage Humboldtians to use sustainable forms of travel (SDG12). We will underpin and objectify decisions as to whether air travel is appropriate with transparent criteria. For unavoidable air travel, we want to offer offsetting options.

3 Reinforcing sustainability at the Foundation

A credible commitment to sustainability also includes actions at institutional level within the Foundation. The Foundation is systematically identifying potential for change at head office and developing concrete goals and measures to continue reducing its ecological footprint whilst expanding the social dimension of sustainable development. In this way, we want to achieve even more responsible resource management.

- **Consciously crafting mobility:** We are resolutely and consistently pursuing the idea of sustainability with regard to staff mobility. Opportunities for working from home are continuously being extended and systematically improved in order to reduce, for example, commuting and business travel and/or to enable climate-friendly travel to head office (SDG13). For this purpose, we are building on existing options and scrutinising or augmenting them continuously. Wherever possible, business travel by rail will be prioritised over air travel. Efforts will be made to offset carbon emissions generated by business travel by payments to certified projects.
- **Continuing to reinforce a sustainability mindset and equal opportunities:** We regularly communicate with our staff and motivate them to behave sustainably in their daily work. This not only applies to the environmental and economic use of resources but also the individual and social dimension (SDG8). In this way, we are jointly establishing a lasting sustainability

mindset amongst and for all our staff. Moreover, a guiding principle of HR policy is conscious, resolute diversity management, such as equal opportunities for all applicants and staff, irrespective of their background, gender, religion, beliefs, disabilities, age or sexual identity, as well as the promotion of a discrimination-free, inclusive working environment (SDG5, SDG10). In its Strategy AvH2023, the Foundation has explicitly committed to this position with regard to its network and is also continuing to develop it for the organisation itself.

- **Designing and using buildings sustainably:** The design of the Foundation's new head office in Bonn embodies its commitment to sustainability: the idea of sustainability has already informed the planning stage and will continue to be a constant consideration. The new building will be characterised by high quality construction and functionality and achieve at least the silver standard according to the Assessment System for Sustainable Building. Construction and operation will have a low impact on the environment. When using and designing other spaces for the Foundation, such as the Berlin office, attention will be paid to a flexible, efficient approach that takes account both of ecological factors of sustainability like energy-saving measures as well as spatial conditions, such as accessibility (SDG11).