Interview with Portfolio Manager Henning Padberg and Michaela Zhirova, Head of Research & Products in Responsible Investments

ESG integration in practice

Nordea 1 – Global Climate & Environment Fund

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Please note that the conference call occurred on the 16th of September 2020. All market commentary and information refers to the period before then.

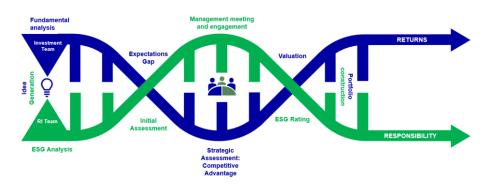
Key takeaways

- Like our dedicated ESG STARS solutions, the Nordea 1 Global Climate & Environment Fund has a dedicated Responsible Analyst who is involved throughout the investment process.
- As a responsible investor, we foster corporate improvement via engagement. Engagement can lead to:
 - o higher conviction in our positions
 - o lower conviction in our positions and even a divestment
 - increased awareness on ESG topics among the companies
- While engagement has different dimensions and can lead to different outcomes, it will always be our preferred method to contribute to a better more sustainable society.

You are in different teams: how do you collaborate on this fund?

Henning: Our job is to identify leaders in climate solutions, and ESG plays an increasingly important role in this. This integration begins at the beginning of our investment process and our strong relationship is helped by the fact we sit quite close together and can have robust discussions. As portfolio managers in the Fundamental Equities team, we have a solid bottom-up framework for assessing valuations and analysing a company in terms of its climate positive solution and the benefits to society, as well as classic business fundamentals, such as detailed cash flow modelling. The ESG analysis and insights that Michaela provides gives us additional information which is becoming increasingly important in assessing potential financial returns.

Michaela: On the responsible investment side, we conduct an analysis of business models to determine if a company is contributing positively to the Sustainable Development Goals and use this as a broad guideline when assessing societal contribution. We also look to identify whether a company's sustainable elements are truly driving growth and capex. As for broader ESG factors, we deploy our usual toolbox – such as looking at how the company is run and whether it treats its customers fairly. We also look for key risks such as workforce matters, data handling or issues related to product quality or service.



One of the clearest ways of highlighting the collaborative approach between the teams is in company engagement, can you give an example of this?

Henning: While engagement is important in helping companies move in the right direction, it is also a tool to build our conviction in the investment case. Because of our close dialogue, we get an insight into how companies respond to certain issues and risks. An example can be seen in US waste management company Republic Services. It previously had a poor ESG profile – so low we could not invest in it. When we wanted to look at it again, Michaela joined us in our meeting with the CFO. We found the company had come a long way, so much so the ESG issues would not hinder an investment. We also followed up with detailed ESG analysis on the issues the company still faced.

Michaela: Even though this business model has a lot of negative impacts, it has impressive management of these impacts. There are many examples of companies where the well-meaning sustainability function is organisationally supported, but then the management team simply does its own thing. I saw evidence both functions were on the same page at Republic Services, with capex spending supporting this. I was also reassured by the honest discussion we had with the head of sustainability in terms of the challenges ahead for the company. Another strong differentiator was the fact Republic Services was the only US waste management provider to have a science-based target for CO2 emission reductions. While the external perception of the company was poor, our internal work was validated by a subsequent upgrade from MSCI, which was beneficial, as our portfolio managers were already invested.

ESG Rating history Republic Services



ESG Rating history shows five most recent rating actions

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Surely not all engagement is positive. Do you have an example of where your ESG analysis drove you to sell a holding?

Henning: This was the case in global agriculture business Bunge. Our investment case looked at its solutions to improve traceability of agricultural commodities, as well as its ability to offer clients improved sustainability practices. While Bunge appeared good on the surface in relation to ESG – with external ESG providers rating it highly – our internal analysis identified a red flag in relation to deforestation, particularly in Latin America. In addition to not being satisfied by responses from the company, we also saw a change in management which de-emphasised the sustainability agenda. In the end, the ESG analysis and engagement process led to us selling our shares.

Can you describe how this company dialogue also crosses over with the many global initiatives currently underway?

Michaela: One initiative we undertake at Nordea is to encourage the highest emitting companies within our portfolios to adopt the standards of the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures (TCFD). We also reinforce the need for companies to inform investors more granularly about business model risks and advantages. Linde, which the portfolio managers have held for almost a decade, is a good example of our efforts here. Linde provides solutions for asset-heavy industries to cut emissions, but it has a CO2 cost itself. While it already had a strong reporting function in place, we encouraged the company to commit to the TCFD standards. It was extremely positive to see Linde take our recommendations on board and publish its TCFD alignment earlier this year.

ESG Rating history Linde



ESG Rating history shows five most recent rating actions

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