

TOGETHER 2030



International digital Conference:
“Together for the 2030 Agenda
“Municipalities as trailblazers for global
sustainable development””

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The international conference "Together for the 2030 Agenda 'Municipalities as trailblazers for global sustainable development'" was jointly organised by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), PLATFORMA - European Network of Cities and Regions and International Associations and Engagement Global gGmbH with its Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW). The event took place within Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2020.

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1. INTRODUCTION



Participants at the digital conference – Together for the 2030 Agenda – “Municipalities as trailblazers for global sustainable development” © Engagement Global

On 19 November 2020 the international conference “Together for the 2030 Agenda – Municipalities as trailblazers for global sustainable development” took place in a digital format. The German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the Service Agency Communities in One World (Service Agency) of Engagement Global (EG), PLATFORMA – the European network of cities and regions and international associations, and the European Commission’s Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO), hosted the event. Originally, the conference was intended to take place as a face-to-face event at the Federal Ministry in Berlin but had to be converted into a digital event due to the current worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. The format was aimed at delegates of municipalities and cities from the global South and North who are pursuing, planning or implementing ideas and projects to help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). About 90 municipal delegates participated in the event. After a warm welcome by the moderator Patrick Leusch, Norbert Barthle, Parliamentary State Secretary at the BMZ, set the ball rolling by introducing the first conference session. He began by pointing out that today, five years after the 2030 Agenda was agreed, there are now only ten years left to implement the vision it contains, including the SDGs. This is very little time to handle the difficult situation, which is further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. All sectors and policymakers have to come together without exception to manage the situation and deal with the challenges and opportunities arising in the particular circumstances. Municipal actors have a key role to play in implementing the 2030 Agenda. According to OECD estimates, more than two-thirds of the 169 targets in the 2030 Agenda

can only be reached through cooperation with regions and municipalities. Many examples show that partnerships between municipalities and networks for global sustainable development are a very effective way of encouraging people to learn from and inspire each other, which in turn helps spread positive results. In general, more and more people in the world are moving to cities and municipalities. Today, half the world's population live in urban spaces, and this figure is expected to grow to almost 70% by 2050. Therefore, the impact of what happens in cities and municipalities on sustainable development has an enormous effect on the whole sustainability-movement and the achievement of the 2030 Agenda objectives. Speaking on behalf of the BMZ, Norbert Barthle said that more assistance for municipalities would be provided, although he had already noticed that they were taking their role seriously. Knowledge, strategies and experience are bound together, and therefore actors at all political levels have to cooperate in using these elements in the best way possible. The BMZ offers advice and support in scaling up municipal best practice worldwide in the areas of finance and human resources. In addition to the support provided by the Federal Government of Germany on the 2030 Agenda, Norbert Barthle was pleased to be able to inform the conference that the EU Commission had presented an overarching strategy for the implementation of the Agenda the previous day. It is another step on the way that we are going along together. Cooperation and support between countries, societies and municipalities is the secret of success in implementing the 2030 Agenda. With this in mind, he said that he was looking forward to an informative conference full of interesting and lively conversations between all the participants.



Norbert Barthle, Parliamentary State Secretary at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) © Norbert Barthle

2. KEYNOTES

Emilia Sáiz Carracedo, Secretary General of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Anna Lixi, Head of Sector for Local Authorities (DG DEVCO) held a keynote outlining the importance of sustainable development in their work.

UCLG is a global network of cities and local, regional and metropolitan governments and their associations that represents and amplifies their opinions and interests in of the worldwide discussions on and support for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. In line with the views of the international movement, which was founded in 1913, UCLG is convinced that cities and municipalities must be empowered to implement and own the required transformation, because they represent most of the global population. They should act at the interface between normative ideas and concrete policies. So there has to be a connection between the global, national and local levels. But it is the task of the upper levels to notice the efforts of the cities and municipalities, to create the space required for action and to provide support in different ways. We need a dialogue in which all stakeholders from politics and business and of course citizens themselves discuss the kind of society we want to build for the future. Emilia Sáiz Carracedo described how challenging it was to reach citizens if the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs was introduced by officials, because the citizens often cannot identify with the theoretical ideas. But once you have overcome these barriers and they discover the practical opportunities, advantages and the necessity for their own lives, you have to involve them in the process – also in the political side – in order to unleash their immense power.

Anna Lixi, Head of Sector for Local Authorities DG DEVCO, gave the second keynote. The European Commission's Directorate-General for International Cooperation and Development is responsible for international cooperation with different partner countries throughout the world. It promotes international networking and provides support by also highlighting the evolving needs of every partner city. The main goals are to implement sustainable development, reduce poverty, consolidate and promote democracy and support human rights. Anna Lixi was pleased that international partnerships were a focus of the conference and that several of them had the opportunity to talk about their experiences. The COVID-19 pandemic showed once again that we are all connected and that international networking should be extended in future in order to reproduce all the good results that have been achieved in the partnerships. To support this development, it is quite often necessary to consolidate the position of the municipalities. This involves a process of decentralisation in order to integrate local authorities in sustainable development activities. Municipal partnerships enable us to see challenges from different perspectives, and although the circumstances are different, especially between the Global South and the Global North, it is useful to design measures together in partnership, harnessing the benefits of shared knowledge in order to help, learn from and inspire each other.

3. INTERNATIONAL MAYORS' TALK



Moderator Patrick Leusch with the participants of the international Mayors' Talk © Engagement Global

The international Mayors' Talk offered a good opportunity to gain an insight into the ways different municipalities are implementing sustainable development and how partnerships with other cities are being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Katja Dörner, Mayor of the City of Bonn in Germany, Hans Janssen, Mayor of Oisterwijk in the Netherlands, Rohey Malick Lowe, Mayor of Banjul in Gambia and Richmond Yeboah, planning coordinator of Cape Coast in Ghana participated in the lively discussion.

Patrick Leusch first congratulated Katja Dörner, who had taken up office a short time previously. In her opinion, partnerships played a very important role, which is why she was very pleased to be able to talk to someone from Cape Coast, Bonn's most recent partner municipality. Bonn has already done a lot of different things on sustainable development in the name of the 2030 Agenda, for example realising various programmes and projects in the context of SDG implementation and also cooperating with partner municipalities to transfer the knowledge that had been gained over the years. Katja Dörner explained that working at the level of the Bundestag was very interesting, because laws for implementing the SDGs were passed at that level. However, she preferred being a mayor, working at local level where things finally got done. Even the OECD confirmed from an official point of view that the local level was the most important for achieving the SDGs, because that's where the concrete action took place. Her work perspective had now completely changed. For

example, it was not about changing the public transport system in general, but more about discussing and implementing what was happening on real streets. It was about finding solutions to existing challenges and observing and making the most of opportunities for the City of Bonn. And even though the implementation of the 2030 Agenda had achieved some great results in Bonn, there was of course still much to be done and investigations to be conducted in various fields. For example, in the use of renewable energy, especially photovoltaic systems, Bonn was not at the forefront.



The 2030 Agenda with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) © United Nations

Hans Hanssen explained that in the early days of working on 2030 Agenda issues in the Netherlands, it was mostly about awareness raising, creating partnerships and helping each other. The Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG)¹ supports the interests of Dutch municipalities. It deals with all 2030 Agenda topics and is in contact with different political segments in the Netherlands. The association helps to create a supportive environment and to energise the citizenship, because they are directly involved. To document the course of sustainable development, the Dutch Government produces a national progress report every year in which the annual results are summarised for the Dutch Parliament. The aim is for all levels to work together and stimulate each other in order to achieve the best possible results. It is essential that international cooperation between all the different political levels and the private sector be extended. Hans Hanssen acknowledged the importance of the conference for promoting international dialogue in which participants can inform, inspire and learn from each other. In particular, the current COVID-19 situation showed once more that major crises were constantly arising and it was necessary to support each other in every way. At local level, it was important to create a comprehensive network that included all the different stakeholders; at international level, it was important to maintain

1 https://www.vng-international.nl/sites/default/files/Brochure%20Nieuwjaar%20VNGi%20%202020_small.pdf

partnerships and stabilise conditions wherever possible, because COVID-19 showed that we all belonged together.

Richmond Yeboah was representing Hon. Ernest Arthur, Mayor of Cape Coast, who was unable to attend the discussion. He started by explaining that the COVID-19 pandemic was currently under control. Of course, it had an impact on the partnership with Bonn. Unfortunately, a face-to-face meeting as in previous years was not possible, but they remained in online contact. In general, the partnership with Bonn was very important for Cape Coast. As a result of their joint work, the city had become one of the cleanest in Ghana. That is why everyone was looking forward to continuing the relationship with the German municipality.

Rohey Malick Lowe, Mayor of Banjul in Gambia, reported that in her town they were struggling to cope with the enormous tasks. The COVID-19 pandemic had caused a lot of problems in the areas of mobility, unemployment and medical care. She described the situation as a very hard test for African countries. It was clear that in the future more investigations would have to be carried out in various sectors, in particular in the medical care system. It was an open secret that corruption was a huge problem in African countries and that politicians were tempted to invest more money in political activities than in education or the health sector. For this reason, it was hard for municipalities to achieve positive changes in these segments, because the policies were decided beyond their sphere of authority, even though local politicians were much closer to the citizens and knew more about their needs. The current situation highlighted the importance of municipalities, as many areas were cut off from each other, and in the municipalities themselves, local politicians were the only official representative that stayed in touch with their citizens. While the education system had almost completely collapsed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Government of Gambia was not able to react quickly, the local politicians in Banjul had tried to organise as many laptops as possible in order to continue to provide the children with some form of access to education.

Little had changed with regard to the partnership with Ostend in Belgium. They were still in contact, and Rohey Malick Lowe reported that many projects could have been implemented. As part of a jointly designed concept, many new trees had been planted, and a new awareness of the importance of waste separation had been established.

Katja Dörner, referring to cooperation in a partnership with another city, explained that a complete theoretical strategy based on the SDGs was needed, and then specific projects had to be implemented with the involvement of citizens. In this way, everyone would feel included in the process, which would in turn raise the level of awareness and support.

Moving on to the current situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, she agreed with Rohey Malick Lowe that there is a need for action in the health system. Germany was no doubt on a different level, nevertheless it would be interesting to share information on the challenges and the kind of solutions that emerged. Apart from that, social cohesion

appeared to be improving. We were all facing the same crisis, and solutions had to be found together – so the importance of the “leave no one behind” principle in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda seemed more relevant than ever at the moment.

4. THE 2030 AGENDA IN EUROPE AND AROUND THE WORLD

Bodo Ellmers opened the second part of the conference by presenting the current status of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in different parts of the world. In the breakout sessions, the participants then had an opportunity to discuss in smaller focus groups how to localise the 2030 Agenda. Professor Stefan Siedentop ended the session with an input about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

4.1. Current status of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Europe and around the world



Bodo Ellmers, Director of the Global Policy Forum's Sustainable Development Finance Programme © Global Policy Forum

Bodo Ellmers, Director of the Global Policy Forum's Sustainable Development Finance Programme, outlined the current status of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at international level. Following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda in 2015, various economic and social crises and now the COVID-19 healthcare emergency have shown us once more how serious the situation already is. A UN SDG report published in 2019 called for a faster, more effective and ambitious response in order to achieve the SDGs. It is important for actors and stakeholders at all levels to work together to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It is also necessary to empower and support municipalities and local authorities to realise and support the process of change. That is why all governments are called on to mobilise the required financial resources and support the responsible institutions in anchoring the implementation of the SDGs in everyday municipal life.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacts the implementation of all the SDGs. The UN SDG Report 2020 revealed that only 3 of 21 targets with a 2020 deadline will be reached, and in 6 cases either no progress was made or the situation has deteriorated. This is certainly not entirely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but the pandemic does aggravate the pre-existing conditions. It is having a devastating effect on healthcare systems around the world. Over 1.4 million deaths have been counted so far, and there are massive job losses in every sector. This has caused a catastrophic increase in the global poverty rate, while the wealth of the ultra-rich has reached new record levels. UN Secretary-General António Guterres proclaimed:

“COVID-19 has been likened to an X-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built. It is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere:

- The lie that free markets can deliver healthcare for all;
- the fiction that unpaid care work is not work;
- the delusion that we live in a post-racist world;
- the myth that we are all in the same boat.

Because while we are all floating on the same sea, it's clear that some are in superyachts while others are clinging to drifting debris.”

Calls to apply the principle of “building back better” are getting louder and louder, but how can this be realised? Many massive rescue and stimulus programmes have been created to help alleviate the situation, but it is hard to decide who should benefit from this support. Quite often, help packages from richer countries merely support their own local population and their own national economies. It is not quite clear if real structural changes are planned or if these help packages are merely intended to maintain the status quo. Many voices from both the civil and political spheres are calling ever more loudly for a new, socially responsible course for the future, starting now.

At global level, the High Level Political Forum 2021 will take place in New York in July. The conference will focus on the sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic in line with the 2030 Agenda and provide new impetus for its implementation. In addition, 44 Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) will be presented. The German report will be based on the German Sustainable Development Strategy, which is currently being updated. There is also a growing number of Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), which are often conducted in countries in which governments do not pay much attention to sustainable development.

Turning to citizens' involvement, there is considerable pressure from a growing number of groups that advocate sustainable change, for example the “Fridays for Future” movement for climate change, which is big in Europe, and in the Global South there are a great many social protests. This shows that people from many diverse groups and backgrounds see the COVID-19 pandemic as a wake-up call for sustainable change.

4.2. Localising the 2030 Agenda

The participants also had an opportunity to discuss issues in smaller focus groups in the form of “breakout sessions” on how to localise the 2030 Agenda.

Municipal Partnerships for Sustainable Development

Municipal partnerships are regarded as very productive and helpful for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The sharing of knowledge and experience generally helps both sides to learn from each other and to see things from new and rewarding perspectives.

Vera Strasser, Service Agency, spoke with various municipal delegates about the early days, their communication tools and implementing projects in municipal partnerships. The panel discussion made clear that all three partnerships that were discussed, Bremen (Germany) – Durban (South Africa), Bijeljina (Bosnia and Herzegovina) – Langenhagen (Germany) and Travnik (Bosnia and Herzegovina) – Leipzig (Germany), have a lot in common. Contacts between Bremen and Durban started quite early in the late 1970s. All three partnerships were formed initially through civic engagement and led to many school exchanges and cooperation on cultural projects and sports events. With participants meeting and getting to know each other personally, an environment of trust and friendship developed on both sides of the partnerships. After the municipal relationships were officially announced and cooperation on joint projects began with Service Agency support, work also commenced at structural level on the joint implementation of the SDGs. The municipal delegates from Bijeljina and Durban explained that the friendships established between the two partner municipalities had greatly helped to promote acceptance among residents of their common aspirations.



SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals.
© United Nations

After the official announcement of the municipal partnership between Bremen and Durban in 2011, the two cities started to focus on climate change mitigation and resource conservation projects. Given its initial situation, Durban in particular was supported by the partner municipality in anchoring these themes in political thinking and decision-making and translating them into municipal action. In the past, the residents had often felt quite isolated and neglected by policymakers, so the municipal partnership offered a good opportunity for a restart and greater integration in the municipality. The partnership was described as a success story, because for Durban it was not only an enrichment for

the municipality itself but also for the people. In order to maintain regular contact, Bremen is arranging municipal partnership conferences with partner municipalities in addition to online exchanges in which the partners sum up the progress made in implementing the SDGs at local level.

The municipal partnership between Bijeljina and Langenhagen started around 15 years ago. Following several citizens' exchanges the two cities participated on the SKEW-Project Municipal Partnerships for Sustainability in 2016 on the implementation of the SDGs. Experience exchange regarding inclusion and integration were part of the main topics. This led to a new understanding of the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda itself and the importance of civic engagement for maximising successful outcomes. While developing one strategy it became clear that measures in line with the 2030 Agenda were already being implemented in both municipalities. Evidently, it would be helpful to use the corresponding results by integrating them into a new structure and then building on the progress already made. Leipzig and Travnik have also participated together in this SKEW project and gained positive experience

in implementing the 2030 Agenda together. In addition to that, the partnership has already been nominated twice for the award “Municipal Partnerships” as part of the German Sustainability Award. Finally, the participants realised that all these forms of municipal partnership could be maintained during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SDGs, sustainability development plans and Voluntary Local Reviews

When they adopted the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations member states committed to working closely with local and regional governments on implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



The SDG wheel of fortune in front of the city hall in Bonn
© City of Bonn

At local implementation level, the municipalities set the overall course for 2030 Agenda implementation. Bearing in mind that there are only 10 more years until 2030, the focus should be on developing effective monitoring systems and producing reports that analyse the current status of implementation. Developing municipal sustainability strategies helps localise the global goals in the everyday life of the municipalities. In addition, municipal sustainability strategies promote interdepartmental cooperation across policy areas and serve as the basis for Voluntary Local Reviews. As a prerequisite

for the development of a municipal sustainability strategy, the North Rhine-Westphalian Working Party on Agenda 21 (LAG 21 NRW) involves various groups of stakeholders in order to ensure transparency and legitimacy among political decision-makers and the public. A recommendation was also made to focus on specific fields of action in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the increasing role of monitoring tools and indicators as part of implementing the 2030 Agenda should be highlighted. In the follow-ups and review mechanisms, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development encourages municipalities to conduct regular and inclusive reviews of the progress made at local level. In this spirit, local governments are increasingly engaging in such sub-national reviews of SDG implementation, which are also called Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs).

The City of Bonn, which has developed a municipal sustainability strategy in cooperation with the LAG 21 NRW as part of the Service Agency's Municipalities for Global Sustainability project in North Rhine-Westphalia, reported on its process from Sustainability Monitoring to Voluntary Local Review. As one of the first cities in Germany, the City of Bonn recently presented its first Voluntary Local Review on the implementation status of the 2030 Agenda.

Together with the Service Agency, the City of Mannheim has developed a model process within the Mannheim 2030 project for implementing the 2030 Agenda. It reported on the

lessons learned so far. Citizens were closely involved in the process through various participation procedures.

Mannheim was also the first German city to publish a Voluntary Local Review, in which it reports to its citizens and the United Nations on the progress it has made on sustainability.

While the VLRs have no official status, the process of undertaking these sub-national reviews is generating multiple benefits for the entities involved and for SDG implementation in general. The VLRs can also help to reinforce vertical coherence and complement and contribute to the national Voluntary National Reviews on SDG implementation. The importance of the local level for implementing the 2030 Agenda should be highlighted at national and international level.



Peter Kurz, Mayor of the City of Mannheim at the High Level Political Forum in New York
© City of Mannheim

City-to-city partnerships in Eastern EU Neighbourhood

The third breakout session dealt with municipal partnerships in the EU neighbourhood countries in Eastern Europe. The panel discussion, chaired by Bella Tskhelishvili of PLATFORMA, included various stakeholders in this field and focused on the reform of the governance system for regional and local development and the decentralisation reform of responsibilities and resources in Ukraine, which is being supported by the U-LEAD with Europe programme. The BMZ is supporting the reform process of the Ukrainian Ministry of Communities and Territories in the areas of coordination and effective communication. The reform process, which has been ongoing since 2014, has already resulted in adjustments to the budget and tax laws, enabling municipalities to independently generate more revenues and so strengthen their own municipal finance systems. These processes must be further developed in the future as they are an important prerequisite for democratisation and the promotion of good local governance.

In addition, a presentation was given on cooperation at municipal level within Eastern Partnerships (EaP), taking Lithuanian municipalities as a concrete example. Here, cooperation is often supported by peer-to-peer networks, which offer the possibility of working together on the same content using digital formats.

Furthermore, the implementation of the association agreements concluded between the EaP countries and the European Union was reported on. Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine recently concluded such association agreements. To support this process, local elected representatives and municipal officials from the three countries are taking part in workshops in EU countries, where they will gain concrete ideas for measures and

projects as well as specific insights into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Digitisation, gender equality, e-governance, climate change, waste management and public administration are some of the themes in the spotlight.



Forum on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the EaP
© European Union

The EaP celebrated its 10th anniversary in May 2019, and a forum for local leaders from the EU and the EaP was organised to mark the occasion. In terms of content, the focus was on the localisation of the SDGs in Lithuania, Georgia and Moldova.

A further common finding of the round table was that the role of municipalities in implementing the 2030 Agenda needs to be recognised in order to build accountable, inclusive and strong institutions at all levels. In addition, national governments and international institu-

tions should adopt a multi-level approach when they work with people at the local level and with their sub-national governments. This means offering them a seat at the table, involving them in decision making and providing the right kind of support, for example in the form of capacity building and financial assistance. More consolidated support is needed for decentralised cooperation with the EU and international partners as the pandemic limits many options for action.

The role of national and international local authority associations

The fourth breakout session was chaired by Boris Tonhauser, PLATFORMA, and focused on national and international associations within the local context – how they use local indicators to ensure localisation of the SDGs, how they are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and how they cooperate with national associations in partner countries.²

Over the years, the Association of German Cities, in cooperation with the Bertelsmann Foundation and other partners, has developed a list of indicators that makes it possible to measure the progress made on SDG implementation in the respective municipality and to identify successes and failures. These indicators are made available to the municipalities through an online portal.³ In this way, the status of SDG implementation in German municipalities can be viewed online, enabling comparisons to be made between the municipalities themselves. The lessons learned in monitoring SDG localisation is to be scaled up to international level in order to create a global version of the portal. Projects are already under way with Italian municipalities, and further cooperation with associations in partner countries, such as Morocco, is being considered.

2 <https://platforma-dev.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CEMR-PLATFORMA-SDGs-2020-EN-Final.pdf>

3 www.sdg-portal.de

During the COVID-19 pandemic, it became clear that cooperation between local authority associations and initiatives on the one hand, and municipalities on the other, is beneficial at all levels. The effective crisis management activities undertaken by the National Federation of Tunisian Towns (FNVT) in cooperation with the central Tunisian authorities included national surveys conducted in cooperation with the ministry on the needs of municipalities, communication with social groups, a municipal awareness campaign on health measures and dialogues with experts.



German SDG-Portal © Bertelsmann Stiftung

Local authority associations are increasingly becoming an important link between global agendas and municipal development. One aim of the local authority associations is to align the content of these agendas. In this context, the associations support municipalities in providing local services that improve the citizens' quality of life, and they have been given a mandate in the democratic process.

The Connective Cities partnership project of the Association of German Towns and the Service Agency reported that a meeting of international municipal associations had recently taken place on SDG localisation. The main focus of the meeting was to share expertise and lessons learned with regard to the international opportunities and challenges associated with SDG localisation and to discuss joint project ideas. All present agreed that successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda can only be achieved by localising the SDGs.

4.3 Sustainable development in times of corona

Is the pandemic a cause for a course correction?

Professor Stefan Siedentop, Scientific Director of the Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development (ILS), posed the question whether the current situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic would lead to a course correction in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Worldwide, there have been more than 60 million infections and 1.4 million deaths, and more than 100 countries have imposed lockdowns. This global challenge requires us to rethink the concept of urban sustainability in order to guarantee its resilience. The United Nations published the following statement in 2020:

"Avoiding a return to the pre-pandemic status quo and instead transforming cities globally for future resilience, inclusion, green and economic sustainability has never been more urgent."



Prof. Dr. Stefan Siedentop, Scientific Director of the Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development (ILS)
© Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development

Previous crises have shown that positive change is possible. The cholera epidemic, for example, led to the introduction of modern sanitation systems, and the tuberculosis outbreak changed modern architecture and housing regulations. It is possible that the COVID-19 pandemic will bring about better and sustainable buildings and transportation, more green spaces in cities and smart infrastructure in general. In Berlin, for example, several pop-up bike lanes have been established. The same “(post-)pandemic result” was achieved at very low cost in Milan. Stefan Siedentop then went on to speak about urban sustainability and resilience – the idea that an urban system must be able to regain stability even in the face of change. Urban spaces are always confronted with complex and dynamic movements because they are open and constantly in flux. Transformation is one of the basic demands placed on urban spaces. The COVID-19 pandemic was just an extreme change that cities must be prepared for. We learned that our cities have many weaknesses, and that these need to

be addressed. In terms of vulnerability and in the case of COVID-19, urban density seems to be less significant than factors such as housing supply, income or health status. All in all, urban spaces have better coping capacities than rural areas. In the Global South, urban density is often very high and cities face the problem of overcrowding. Regional growth management policies are required in order to tackle this problem. The COVID-19 pandemic has hit vulnerable groups harder than others. Key factors are the area in which people live and work, gender, age and pre-existing health conditions, income levels and access to services. The urban poor, migrants, informal workers, displaced persons and the elderly are more likely to run into financial difficulties or have restricted access to medical care in a crisis. Responsible societies have a duty to empower those groups and to provide improved access to essential services. This will also strengthen the resilience of the whole society. Stefan Siedentop summed up by pointing out that well-financed, pro-active, well-informed and integrated local governments had managed the COVID-19 pandemic more effectively. But it was also important to support municipalities, because they were not able to solve the problem alone. Intergovernmental collaboration at all levels is crucial in order to empower local governments to confront the situation and to identify and reduce structural social inequality – because when recovery and transformation are the objectives, solid municipalities are the solution.

5. CONCLUSION

In her concluding words, Anja Wagner, BMZ, thanked all the participants for their interesting inputs. She said that the conference had shown once again how important municipal partnerships were for implementing the 2030 Agenda. Dialogue between municipalities and all other levels was important, effective and necessary, not only in the EU but also worldwide. She urged stakeholders from all municipalities to share ideas, knowledge and the lessons learned in localising the SDGs.



SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. © Engagement Global

Marlène Siméon, PLATFORMA, said she very much regretted not being able to meet everyone face-to-face in Berlin but was nevertheless relieved that during the COVID-19 pandemic the innovative digital format had enabled participants to engage in rewarding discussions throughout the conference day. She thanked the BMZ, Engagement Global and the European Commission in particular for their work, and she hoped that the cooperation would be as successful in the future as it had been in the past. As representative of PLATFORMA, she emphasised the importance of implementing the 2030 Agenda in conjunction with localising the SDGs, and she supported the view that local leadership

mattered. Marlène Siméon was amazed by the wealth of impressions she gained and the diverse learning opportunities on offer from different municipal perspectives. It was evident that acts of solidarity and partnerships were more important than ever during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, she drew attention to the European Days of Local Solidarity⁴ at the end of November. This is a two-week campaign to promote international cooperation between cities and regions across the world. PLATFORMA and its partners invited elected officials at European, local and regional level to come together and raise awareness of their international cooperation activities.

In his concluding words, Dr Stefan Wilhelmy, Service Agency, pointed out that the event was intended to highlight the role of local authorities in international, decentralised development cooperation. The 2030 Agenda must be seen as a helpful instrument for development work within individual municipalities as well as in cooperation with international partner municipalities. These municipal partnerships also provide necessary support for implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by reaching as many municipalities as possible and disseminating information on successful outcomes. The individual partnerships presented at the conference were not only anchoring the SDGs in everyday municipal life

4 <https://localsolidaritydays.eu>

through the jointly planned projects, but also fulfilling an important supportive roll in difficult times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. After thanking all the conference participants, Dr Stefan Wilhelmy concluded by underlining the urgency of the situation, as there were less than 10 years left to implement the 2030 Agenda.

6. ANNEXES

6.1. Programme

Together for the 2030 Agenda

“Municipalities as trailblazers for global sustainable development”

Digital conference on the 19th of November 2020

Moderation: Patrick H. Leusch, Head of International Affairs, Deutsche Welle

09.30	Registration
10:00	Welcome & Short introduction of the day
10.10	Welcome Address and Opening Speech Mr Norbert Barthle Parliamentary State Secretary, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, BMZ
10.20	Keynote Speech Ms Emilia Sáiz Carracedo Secretary General, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Questions & Answers
10.35	Keynote Speech Ms Anna Lixi Team Leader – Local Authorities, European Commission, European Commission’s Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) Questions & Answers
10.50	International Mayors Talk “The Multi-sectoral and cross border Partnership approach for sustainable development” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Katja Dörner, Mayor of the city of Bonn, Germany • Mr Hans Janssen, Mayor of Oisterwijk, Netherlands • Ms Rohey Malick Lowe, Mayor of Banjul, Gambia • Mr Richmond Yeboah, Planning coordinator, City of Cape Coast, Ghana Followed by discussion
11.50	Video-Session
12.00	Digital Lunch Break
13.00	Presentation Current status on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Europe and around the world Mr Bodo Ellmers Director of Global Policy Forum’s Sustainable Development Finance Programme

- Questions & Answers
- 13.30 **Check-In Breakout Sessions**
- 13.40 **Digital Breakout Sessions**
Localizing the 2030 Agenda - Theme Rooms with Best Practice Examples
1: Municipal Partnerships for Sustainable Development
2: SDGs Sustainability development plans and Voluntary Local Review Reports
3: City-to-city partnerships in Eastern EU Neighbourhood
4: The role of national and international local authority associations
- 14.40 Coffee Break & Check-In in the Main-Conference
- 14.55 **Summary of the Breakout Sessions**
Flashlights
- 15.10 Presentation
Sustainable development in times of Corona - Is the pandemic a cause for a course correction?
Prof Dr Stefan Siedentop
Research institute for Regional and Urban Development (ILS)
Questions & Answers
- 15.40 Closing Remarks / Interview
Anja Wagner, Head of Unit, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Marlène Siméon, Director of PLATFORMA
Dr. Stefan Wilhelmy, Service Agency Communities in One World (SKEW) of Engagement Global
- 16.00 **End of conference**

6.2. List of abbreviations

BMZ.....	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development
COVID-19.....	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DG DEVCO.....	European Commission's Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development
EaP.....	Eastern Partnership
EC.....	European Commission
EG.....	Engagement Global
EU.....	European Union
FNVT.....	National Federation of Tunisian Towns
GPF.....	Global Policy Forum
HLPF.....	High Level Political Forum
OECD.....	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PLATFORMA.....	European Network of Cities and Regions and International Associations
Service Agency.....	Service Agency Communities in One World
SDGs.....	Sustainable Development Goals
UCLG.....	United Cities and Local Governments
U – LEAD.....	Ukraine – Local Empowerment, Accountability and Development Programme
UN.....	United Nations
VGN.....	Association of Netherlands Municipalities
VLR.....	Voluntary Local Review
VNR.....	Voluntary National Review

