

# Conference Report

Bonn Symposium 2016



## Leave no one behind. Agenda 2030: a social policy mandate for the local level

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The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined in Agenda 2030 aim to balance the three dimensions of sustainability: economic, social and environmental. 'Leave no one behind' – the principle running through Agenda 2030 – is thus its social policy mandate. The local level has a key role to play in its implementation. On the one hand, this is where the fault-lines, fears and concerns within society manifest themselves. On the other, it is to a large extent here that social cohesion is built through concerted action by people from diverse backgrounds – provided that the right conditions are in place.

The Bonn Symposium 2016 therefore brought together municipal representatives from various regions of the world and other renowned experts to explore ways of implementing Agenda 2030's social policy mandate at

the local level. What is the nature of the transformative mandate created by Agenda 2030? Which practical tools are available to the municipalities in healing the fault-lines within society? How can conflicts of interests be dealt with by policy-makers and administrations? What are examples of good practice in social policy at the local level?

### Transforming our world

Agenda 2030's aspirations for the social dimension of sustainability are encapsulated in its title – 'Transforming Our World'. The Agenda is an intergovernmental document. As such, in the view of Jens Martens, Executive Director of the Global Policy Forum in Bonn and New York, the fact that it describes the world's problems with unaccustomed clarity is an indication of the seriousness and urgency of the task that lies ahead. Inequalities and vast disparities in opportunities, wealth and power are expressly identified as challenges in the Agenda. Business as usual is therefore no longer an option for its implementation. "Agenda 2030 offers the opportunity to translate social policy principles such as solidarity into practical action," was Jens Martens' summary. The universality of the Agenda – in other words, its applicability to every country of the world – also breaks new ground, he said. So far, only a few industrialised countries – Germany, Switzerland and Sweden among them – have initiated a debate about what the SDGs mean for domestic policy-making. The situation was neatly summed up by Dr Heike Kuhn, Head of Division, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Reduction of Poverty and



Fatimetou Mint Abdel-Malick, City of Tevragh-Zeina

Inequality, at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in Bonn: “Implementing Agenda 2030 also means giving up some of our own privileges.”

But what exactly does ‘inequality’ mean? Paul Ladd, Director of the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) in Geneva, defined inequality as a multidimensional challenge. From an economist’s perspective, inequalities are an impediment to growth. However, they also impact on social cohesion and political representation and worsen environmental degradation. Social policy, by contrast, encompasses everything that reduces inequality and



Tausi Kida (ESRF) and Paul Ladd (UNRISD)

supports the attainment of a ‘healthy’ society and economy – at every political level. However, complete eradication of inequality is a utopian aspiration. “Policy-makers must define the level of inequality that is deemed acceptable,” said Dr Ilcheong Yi, Senior Research Coordinator at UNRISD.

According to the Reflection Group on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in order to implement the social policy mandate created by Agenda 2030, change is needed in three areas. Firstly, alternative models of progress and a new mindset must be developed. Secondly, new fiscal policy approaches are required – ones which are compatible with sustainability. And thirdly, the gap between the ‘already converted’ and those who feel left behind due to the worsening of social inequalities over the past 20 years must be narrowed. Agenda 2030 may be a suitable mechanism for making these changes, in Jens Martens’ view.

In Tanzania, Agenda 2030 is already having an initial impact. As Dr Tausi Kida, Executive Director of the Economic and Social Research Foundation (ESRF) in Dar es Salaam, explained, in their day, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) mainly focused on economic growth. Now, for the first time, Tanzania has a National Development Plan which nurtures economic transformation and human development through strategic repositioning.

## What role for the municipalities?

The Bonn Symposium left no room for doubt that the municipalities have a key role to play in implementing Agenda 2030. As keynote speaker Fatimetou Mint Abdel Malick, Mayor of Tevragh-Zeina in Mauritania, pointed out, municipalities are a key focus of SDG 11 on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (SDG 11) – important objectives for urban areas across the world. However, in her view, all the Sustainable Development Goals have local relevance. “Development is local. It does not happen at the level of the UN or the nation state,” said Paul Ladd. Or as Eshetu Wondafrash, a consultant for the MiGlobe Programme and a member of the City of Aachen’s Integration Council, put it: “Everything that happens at the local level affects everyone, right from the start.”

Municipalities are ideally placed to implement the Agenda: by localising and fleshing out the SDGs, they enable them to be lived and experienced. In this way, municipalities can build a practical awareness of the various dimensions of sustainability. They can also lobby on behalf of local interests at the national level. In addition, by drawing attention to the structural impediments over which they themselves generally have no direct influence, they contribute to the monitoring of progress on SDG implementation. Furthermore, local policy-makers have a clear obligation to address inequalities and other challenges in their communities and to involve citizens, a point emphasised by Mayor Abdel Malick.

If responsibility for implementing the Agenda is transferred to the municipalities, however, appropriate financial resources must also be provided. This is extremely important as the municipalities generally have limited revenue sources of their own.

## When are social policy projects successful?

In parallel to this general discussion, participants explored a variety of other topics: education; prevention of violence; gender equality; demographic change; migration, integration and participation; affordable housing; and fair procurement. Which factors determine the success of integrated local policies in addressing these issues? The participants agreed that small-scale projects, which need not be expensive, can often achieve a great deal. What’s more, as Patrick Burton, Executive Director of the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (CJCP) in Cape Town, explained, effective interaction between government departments can cut costs and have positive impacts in other policy areas. For example, local authorities often find preventing youth violence particularly challenging. But if the education system and social security network are well-functioning, this will inevitably increase urban safety.

Another fundamental prerequisite for successful social policies at the local level is support from municipal leaders and long-term political backing; this point was emphasised by a number of participants. And on cross-cutting issues such as gender equality, crime prevention and fair procurement, there must be continuous and consistent implementation by all departments of the administration (mainstreaming).

Birgit Zoerner, City Councillor and Head of the City of Dortmund's Department for Labour, Health, Social Affairs, Sport and Leisure, and Allison Howland from the Baltimore Neighborhood Indicators Alliance drew attention to the important role played by neighbourhood networks in pooling local residents' skills and expertise: "Networks are far more than the sum of their parts," said Councillor Zoerner. They also highlighted the importance of collecting and providing access to reliable data. This is the only way to establish projects on a sound footing. Data availability also enhances transparency. Citizens thus have the opportunity to identify possible mismanagement in their neighbourhoods, make comparisons with the situation elsewhere and then take action. Also important for transparency is a monitoring system which measures projects' progress against a set of predetermined indicators.

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## Integration and participation

One particular challenge currently facing municipalities worldwide is integrating migrants and refugees and facilitating their participation in society. Dr



Small Group Gender Equality

Andreas Hollstein, Mayor of Altena, has deliberately accepted more Syrian refugees than the official allocation. In his view, many municipalities underestimate what integration really means: "Ensuring that refugees and migrants are fed and housed is something that every local authority can manage. But there is much more to participating in society than that." Genuinely integrating refugees and migrants rather than simply accommodating them in hostels requires policy-makers to show real backbone.

Dr Ramy Lakkis, Director of the Lebanese Organisation for Studies and Training (LOST) in Baalbeck-Hermel, contrasted the German experience with Lebanon's, where, in some municipalities, there are as many Syrian refugees as there are local residents. Here, a new definition of 'local community' is needed. In developing social policy for the local level, it is essential to prioritise the shared needs of host communities and migrants and not put politics first. He preferred to avoid the term 'integration'. Because culturally and linguistically, the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are fairly well-integrated. However, due to the sheer numbers of refugees, the capacities of Lebanon's political institutions and society are overstretched. For the Lebanese, it is therefore important to know that the refugees will someday return to their home country. A policy of integration would counter this. Ultimately though, politics should care about everyone participating in society. Countries with an active civil society have shown themselves to be more resilient, according to Dr Lakkis. That is one reason why it is easier for migrants to be accepted in small communities, Dr Hollstein added.

Paulino Miguel, Project Manager, Diaspora, Migration and Development Cooperation, at Forum of Cultures Stuttgart e.V., gave a presentation on local refugee dialogues in Baden-Württemberg. They offer a forum for discussing issues regarding community relations, participation and integration together with refugees and are proof that any topic can be addressed through dialogue at the local level. In this instance, the dialogues focus mainly on future-oriented issues and on practical measures to build relationships between communities.

Participation is not always easy for the municipalities, according to Justice Amoah, District Coordinating Director in Nadowli-Kaleo, Ghana. Rural regions in Ghana often find it very difficult to provide and fund transport, accommodation and daily allowances for these activities. However, as Dr Yi pointed out, social policy and participation should not be viewed as a burden on policy-makers and administration. They always bring benefits for citizens and communities.

The participants agreed that the establishment of local refugee dialogues and integration councils, etc. in Germany should be viewed positively. However, these and other similar mechanisms are relatively new. In a more critical vein, Paulino Miguel pointed out that until around 10 years ago, Germany did not bother with integration – aside from plans to send migrants back to their home countries.

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## Conflicts of interests – what happens then?

It became apparent during the Bonn Symposium that "sustainable development policy can never be entirely conflict-free," as Dr Marc Jan Eumann, State Secretary at North Rhine-Westphalia's Ministry for Federal Affairs, Europe and the Media in Düsseldorf, put it.

Rehana Moosajee reminded participants that conflicts of interest can also escalate into violence. In 2010, she led the team that successfully delivered Rea Vaya - Africa's first full Bus Rapid Transit System - and was confronted with a diverse range of interests. As she explained, many political conflicts arise because politicians are not experts in the subject area on which they are making decisions; logistics is a example. By the very nature of things, each person will at first only see a small part of the whole. In order to facilitate an open debate, it is essential to create an atmosphere in which people have the confidence to reveal their fears and concerns to policy-makers.



Justice Amoah, Rehana Moosahee and Erik Lierenfeld (l.t.r.)

Erik Lierenfeld, Mayor of the City of Dormagen, shared some very personal insights into his approach to managing goal conflicts. It is important, he said, to be empathetic and to recognise that there is a conflict of interests. In order to deal with it, it is essential to gather factual information and not only listen to different views but also to accept them and then to work with citizens to identify shared solutions. And finally, it must be made clear that the outcome is likely to be a political decision which cannot satisfy everyone. This decision must be presented and justified in a consistent manner. Dr Eumann expressed the firm belief that the discrediting of compromises, whether by citizens or politicians, conflicts with the fundamental concept of democracy.

## Appeal for courage, speed and dialogue

The participants called for courage, speed and, above all, dialogue in order to implement the transformative social policy mandate created by Agenda 2030. "2030 is just around the corner. We can only do justice to the task ahead if we are creative," said Mayor Abdel Malick.

Dr Jens Kreuter, Managing Director of Engagement Global – Service for Development Initiatives in Bonn, viewed the implementation of Agenda 2030's social policy mandate as a challenge, given that social cohesion is declining in many German municipalities. Nonetheless, Agenda 2030 may also offer an opportunity to stand up for local communities and to work together to effect change at this level. One way of strengthening social policy at the local level may be to forge stronger links between social policy actors and development groups, which have been active for decades in many places and have well-established networks, said Dr Hollstein.

The importance of more intensive national and international dialogue among municipal representatives was also emphasised. At the domestic level, alliances of municipalities have the potential to make their voices heard more effectively vis-à-vis regional and national governments. In the international arena, shared learning is important, e.g. through institutionalised city partnerships. One criticism voiced by a number of participants is the lack of systematic learning processes at both national and international level.

The Bonn Symposium made it clear once again that international exchange should never be a one-way street running from the 'Global North' to the 'Global South'. The numerous examples of best practice projects and policies from the 'Global South' presented at the Symposium show that German municipalities have a lot to learn from initiatives in other regions of the world. "For Agenda 2030, every country is a developing country" – a point frequently emphasised at the Symposium. However, genuine capacity building and knowledge transfer against the usual direction of travel require not only appropriate investment but also a radical rethink in the 'Global North'.



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