

## **Rio +20 - Sustainable development at the local level!**

Serving as a national preparation and input to the World Summit 2012, the Fifth Network 21 Congress called “Rio+20 – Sustainable development at the local level” was co-organized by 23 German partner organizations dealing with politics, economics, environmental protection and consumerism. It was held in Hannover from 7 to 9 December 2011. More than 700 attending participants committed to policies and projects to promote sustainable development at the local level. Over two days of debate experiences were shared, trends analyzed and more desirable prospects for the future discussed.

The participants passed the following declaration via acclamation. The declaration is submitted as suggestions for and comments to the German delegation to Rio+20:

## **Rio +20 – Many accomplishments, but more is to be done**

Twenty years after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro the global community prepares itself again for a new summit to be held in 2012. Threats, which appeared only on the horizon in 1992, are now realities that call for decisive action. The ecological footprint of humanity far exceeds the biocapacity of the Earth. Climate change continues with undiminished speed. Appropriate action is now more urgent than ever before to ensure that development of human civilization remains sustainable. At the same time, the number of countries that uphold the vision of sustainable development and that incorporate its fundamental and guiding principles in their national development plans and programmes keeps growing.

Over the past 20 years, many important measures have been initiated in Germany to promote sustainable development in many areas. However, a lack in adequate regulations governing the real and financial economy remains.

Moreover, only a few pioneering communities have succeeded in significantly improving their ecological balance. It therefore seems necessary to further promote ecological urban and regional development in a manner that enhances “regenerative communities” and mainstreams the concept of sustainable development on a larger scale.

## **1. A sustainable future can only be achieved through local action**

As a model, the natural, healthy, socially equitable and climate-neutral city is accepted by many. Private consumers and businesses, as well as cities, municipalities and regions can contribute to a reduction of greenhouse gases through the intelligent use and conservation of energy, the renovation of existing buildings, sustainable procurement and sustainable forms of mobility. Gradual adaptation to climate change requires a future-oriented supply structure and waste disposal structure. These efforts must be intensified in the coming years. Measures for a caring and livable city will achieve greater social cohesion and integration of people with immigrant backgrounds. Such a city will guarantee all residents to participate in public life and have access to public goods.

In recent decades, innovative communities, companies and associations as well as numerous Agenda 21 processes and diverse other sustainability initiatives have shown that achieving sustainability at the local level is possible.

## **2. We need further profound and measurable changes**

We need to build on the experience of successful models and pilot projects and take further comprehensive and measurable steps in the redevelopment of cities towards a sustainable future, including better infrastructure, buildings, enterprises, private households and public institutions. In this context, concrete local measures to protect the climate and to accelerate the transition towards greater use of renewable sources in energy supply will need to play a special role.

Nature and biodiversity are of high value in their own right. In addition, the urban natural environment and quality of life in cities is an important factor for companies seeking to locate to a city.

Natural green spaces are of particular importance for adaptation to climate change and its impacts and for quality of life in general. Currently many of the German and European communities are still far from making full use of their opportunities to achieve sustainable development.

## **3. Sustainability requires participation and cultural change**

In order to inspire more people to practice sustainable lifestyles and to adopt a policy of sustainability, it is necessary to strengthen public participation in decision-making, to ensure accountability, and to give greater recognition to social engagement. Robust future-oriented, integrative solutions require the cooperation of all actors and the solicitation of public acceptance. Sustainability must be embedded as a principle in everyday actions, including production processes, efficient use and saving of energy, consumer preferences, behavior and mobility, caring social safety nets and daily work life. Local authorities must encourage and empower the public to get more involved by sharing their knowledge, experiences and ideas in sustainability-oriented projects and processes.

Education for sustainable development, cultural and artistic creativity and social commitment is an important task. It is essential to develop and communicate positive images of an attractive, natural, healthy, climate-neutral and socially equitable city. These goals include a cultural shift towards more practical applications and greater appreciation of sustainability and its value.

## **4. Business and environment, as well as economy and ecology must move closer together**

An ecological reconstruction of the economy is imperative. This should achieve greater energy and resource efficiency, closed circuits of material flows and a social market economy, whilst also recognizing the limits of ecosystems.

Many companies and their employees have already taken significant steps towards a sustainable economy. Production and consumption on the one hand and nature and

environmental protection on the other hand have to be reconciled in order to achieve a resource-conscious restructuring of the industrial society. Innovations are particularly needed in resource- and energy-intensive industries. The expansion of renewable energies creates new regional value chains, which need to be developed further. Economies of the future will not do well without applying new concepts of use and service offerings, solidary forms such as cooperatives and a new appreciation of public goods. In the context of the ongoing preparations for the UN conference in Rio in 2012, the advocacy for a 'Sustainable Economy' ('green economy') calls not only for national measures, but also for international agreements and standards as well as their local implementation e.g. in the contracting of infrastructure projects or the procurement of other public services.

### **5. We need sustainable energy supply and climate-friendly mobility**

A nuclear-free and CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral energy supply structure requires significantly more and better energy saving measures than those currently implemented. The expansion of renewable energies is well on its way. The use of agricultural land for production of biomass, wind energy and photo-voltaic electricity must not lead to unacceptable negative impacts on food production or nature conservation. This must be applied nationally and internationally (e.g. no deforestation of rain forest for the energy supply of industrialized countries). With regard to mobility, there are huge gaps on the road towards a CO<sub>2</sub>-free future. More compact communities, nationwide car-sharing schemes, limited fuel consumption and emissions, as well as more efficient technologies. Especially needed are measures against growing freight traffic on roads. Key to climate-friendly mobility is an ambitious expansion of cycling and public transport and better integration of transport services. Since the concept of sustainability should be developed in a regional context in the first place, cities and their surrounding municipalities need to work closely together to better plan material flows, energy supply network and mobility needs and services.

### **6. Big changes can only succeed if we work together**

As local actors we need the collaboration and support of state governments, the federal government and the European Union.

Policies directed at municipalities, private and public institutions, companies and associations, as well as residents should enable them to act sustainably. This requires that local authorities in particular are provided with adequate resources. The required balance between revenues and expenditure also needs to be re-established.

Public funds must be used so that they serve to reduce the consumption of resources, promote social cohesion of society and work against the exploitation of third world countries.

Taking a global perspective, local authorities can pursue their responsibility more strongly to promote cooperation with local communities on other continents, sustainable use of resources and the establishment of democratic, local structures, as well as to combat climate change together.

## The Declaration of Hannover

A central concern of the German government delegation at the UN conference next year should be to give more recognition to the pioneering initiatives that were driven by local actors in the past two decades in many countries. The aim is to support local innovation and momentum towards sustainable development and to untap undiscovered potentials. International organizations, the European Union, the Federal Government and the state governments should involve local authorities as a key partner in sustainability processes from the beginning. International strategies such as the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations and national strategies such as the sustainability strategy of the Federal Government are important guidelines for the actions of local actors. International organizations, the EU, the Federal Government and the States must turn their policies more firmly than before to the principles of sustainability. That is the signal of the "RIO +20 - Sustainable development at the local level" congress in Hannover.

## Projektpartner



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