



**The full interview from ICLEI publication Connections #41, which focuses on the upcoming Rio+20 Conference.**

**Dr Norbert Röttgen, German Federal Minister for Environment is in the hotseat.**

**Many German cities, including Hamburg, Hannover, Freiburg, Ludwigsburg or Bremen, are at the forefront of local sustainability initiatives, known for their good mobility systems, renewable energy solutions or success in greening their economies. In your opinion, what is the recipe for their success? Is there anything cities and national governments in other countries could learn from the German experience?**

Local Agenda 21 provided an important impulse for cities and municipalities to take action towards sustainability. The key to success for local sustainability initiatives in German cities is their broad-based and consultative approach that builds on participation by citizens and local organisations while being anchored in strong political commitment. Also, cooperation and exchange between local sustainability initiatives fosters peer-learning and diffusion of innovative ideas and best practices. Where dedicated citizens and committed local governments join forces to make cities more liveable and more sustainable the chance for success is very high.

**The Rio+20 Conference is only a few months away. In January the conference secretariat released a zero draft of the outcome document, titled “*The Future We Want*”. What is your opinion on the proposals included in this document - can it really give us the future we want? If you were to choose one thing that the conference should achieve, what would that be?**

Rio has to generate a strong push towards accelerated implementation. The zero draft of the outcome document contains a number of important proposals, which would put the world on a more sustainable development path by combining a framework of actions for the transition to an inclusive green economy with a reform of the UN institutions dealing with the environment and with sustainable development. UNEP in Nairobi must be upgraded into a specialised agency. If we do not act now our children will ask us why we missed the chance offered by the Rio conference.

**The concept of green economy raises the question of establishing global environmental and social standards for a globalised economy. Which standards would you like to see agreed at Rio+20?**

Through its holistic view on the environment, the society and the economy as the three dimensions of sustainable development, the concept of a green economy

itself sets a standard for environmental and social protection. Rio+20 can contribute to raising global environmental and social standards by accelerating the worldwide transition towards a green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development. The EU has proposed a Capacity Development Scheme providing tailor made advice on the transition to a green and low carbon economy for interested countries. The window of opportunity is closing soon.

**ICLEI argues that sustainable city is a one that ensures good quality of living for all, while keeping within the environmental limits. How would you respond to those that say that implementing this vision needs to wait until we are out of the financial crisis?**

In the face of current trends in urbanisation it is quite clear that cities have a key role to play for a global shift towards sustainable development, and that we have no time to lose to ensure that current and future urban areas are built and managed sustainably. Postponing the implementation of this vision until after the financial crisis would only make the transition to urban sustainability costlier.