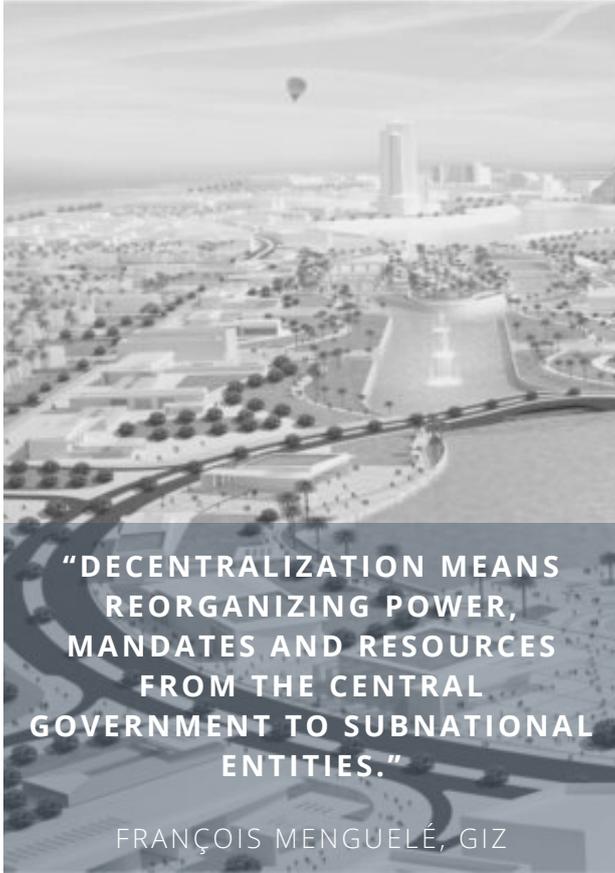


72ND CAIRO CLIMATE TALK REPORT

Sustainable Infrastructure: Post-Covid-19 Paths to the SDGs

2 DECEMBER 2020 // PREPARED BY AMENA SHARAF & LILLY VON STACKELBERG



On the 2nd of December 2020 the 72nd Cairo Climate Talks hosted a conversation between experts from several fields to discuss sustainable infrastructure possibilities and required efforts to address the challenge of rapidly increasing populations with the added strain that COVID-19 has imposed on the world.

Moderator of the evening Marwa Barakat stressed that “as we all work towards achieving the strategic development agenda for the year 2030, both for Egypt and globally, we need to recognize the centrality of infrastructure systems. When we look at the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), sustainable infrastructure not only is the core of 4 goals out of the 17; namely goal 6 on clean water and sanitation, 7 on affordable and clean energy, 9 on industry, innovation and infrastructure, 11 on sustainable cities and communities. It also plays significant role in achieving most of the other goals such as reducing poverty and inequalities and fostering good health and well-being”.

But despite progress, many people still lack proper access to basic services and infrastructure networks and the Covid-19 crisis magnified the implications of this and the pressing need to review the way we build our cities and provide urban infrastructure. Egypt is at a crucial point in time with ambitious plans for mega projects, and an equal ambition to realize the SDGs. In his opening remarks,

Philippe Maupai, Head of the Science Department at the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany in Cairo, underlined “the importance of developing infrastructures everywhere around the globe but especially in countries with growing populations, without compromising the environment which we equally need to survive.”

Eng. Samah Saleh, Manager of the Sustainable Development Unit at the Ministry of Environment of the Arab Republic of Egypt, reassured the panel and the audience that despite the stagnant nature of the past year, the Egyptian government is taking an assertive approach to ensure the realization of the SDGs. She shared that the government plans to double the budget allocated for environmental projects and sustainable development. In addition, Eng. Samah Saleh pointed out that “all projects coming from the ministry of housing will be reviewed from the perspective of sustainable development principles” including calculating the carbon footprints from the start of the implementation phase until after the project is concluded and utilized by the community.

A HUMAN FOCUS ENABLES DEMAND DRIVEN SOLUTIONS FOR LOCAL DAY TO DAY CHALLENGES

Prof. Dr. Heba Abouelfadl, Associate Professor at the Department of Architecture at Alexandria University kicked off the conversation explaining that infrastructure is an integral part of city planning and includes needs and services like roads, sanitation, and electricity. Infrastructure planning, she stressed, “does not plan just for current density and population but also for future generations” as urban spaces are not static but dynamic. This will also ensure urban resilience, which according to Dr. Heba Abouelfadl is “the ability to plan for certain stressors that might exist in cities, like what we are having now with the pandemic, climate change or sudden growth of population which will affect the city and its inhabitants”

A specific challenge for Egypt is providing essential services for unplanned settlements, which lack access to formal and quality infrastructure and pose a threat to its inhabitants who take matters into their own hands. Dr. Hassan Elmouelhi, Senior Researcher at the Habitat Unit - International Urbanism, and Project Leader at the Urban Development Department TU Berlin Campus El Gouna, highlighted that at the moment national strategies for urban planning tend to be superficial, without covering the social and economic aspects of development, while development cooperation projects often fail to create lasting change due to a lack of evaluation and learning from one's failures and successes. Dr. Hassan Elmouelhi clarified that development needs both the "technical infrastructure (sewage, water supply, etc.) and social infrastructure which are the services provided by the government (school, health care)", and adapted to the actual needs and density of the local population.

The German Development Cooperation (GIZ) follows a human focus when planning sustainably according to François Menguelé, Head of Capacity Building through Urban Infrastructure Development Project (CBUID) at GIZ. According to François Menguelé, we can no longer launch small pilot projects and raise a flag and call it a success, rather we need to make sure we improve the development literacy of the demand side be it civil society networks or local administrations. He described the human focus as applying a notion of capacity development, which entails looking at people as co-producers of public goods. Consequently the GIZ has "a structured planning methodology which starts with the identification of needs, going right through the analysis of the cause and effect relationships – a school of local democracy where people really get to understand how do the problems at a local level, the day to day problems they are having, led to one another and how do you go about solving them."

Furthermore, decentralization is an opportunity to divert the pressure on infrastructures, and hence was mentioned by all panelists as a vital part of sustainable planning. François Menguelé emphasized that "we need to create conditions for the increasing populations to be evenly distributed across a network of cities which means identifying the conditions that must be available for people to see a need to move." However, according to him "decentralization has to be tied the administrative and political traditions of a country and cannot be a solution to all the problems, because the problems have to be solved by the people." Encouraging social economic development can hence be a great gateway to support local development, hence the German Development Bank (KfW) enables access to finances especially in support of SME's. "The positive impact of such investments is sometimes much higher than targeting one or two large infrastructure projects" according to Walid M. Abdel-Rehim, Deputy Director of the KfW Cairo Office. The Egyptian and German governments have agreed on three main focus areas of development cooperation, namely water, energy and job creation with the technical cooperation implemented by the GIZ and the financial by the KfW. All development projects are in support of and in cohesion with Egypt's long-term sustainable development plans and focuses on reforming sectors to add financial sustainability and efficiency to large national projects.

In regard to COVID-19 and its relation to infrastructure, François Menguelé explained that responses are not supposed to be aimed at facing one specific disaster or crisis but meant to build resilience and adaptability. He clarified that we need to make sure people living in overcrowded areas have proper ventilation, clean water and social rights that ensure their protection like good jobs and healthcare, since "human behavior is the essence of it. When we know that we can strengthen the communities in a way that they behave in a preventative manner, it is a great deal of contribution towards avoiding these kinds of situations." And Walid M. Abdel-Rehim added that "we have the resources, but we do not use them efficiently. If we put our heads together because there is a serious thread, we see it works."

Wrapping up the discussion Marwa Barakat reiterated the "need to engage in a dialogue on how to reform institutional, legal and administrative frameworks in order to enable proper planning, finance, and management of sustainable infrastructure systems", beyond the pandemic and in our efforts to build back better.

FRANÇOIS MENGUELÉ

HEAD OF CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (CBUID) AT GIZ

François Menguelé is the Cluster Coordinator for Urban Development and Head of the BMZ/EU co-funded Capacity Building through Urban Infrastructure Development Project at the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) Egypt. An affiliate of numerous professional networks such as the International Society of City and Regional Planners, he is a development practitioner with a master's degree in Urban & Regional Planning from the Technical University of Dortmund and a certified Public Affairs Specialist from Quadriga University of Applied Science, Berlin. He focuses on institution building in pan-African contexts, local governance, decentralization, urban upgrading, housing, sustainable livelihoods and local economic development. Before Egypt, he worked in Germany, Ghana, Ivory Coast, South Africa, Cameroon, and Mali.

Hassan Elmouelhi is a senior researcher at the Habitat Unit, a research center affiliated with TU Berlin. In 2014, he completed his doctoral degree with a research paper entitled 'Culture and Informal Urban Development: The Case of Cairo Ashwa'eyat - Informal Settlements' at the TU Berlin. His research focuses on culture and urban informality, patterns of use in urban space, priorities of informal settlements development projects and power relations within informal communities. He teaches on the international Urban Development master's course (Campus El-Gouna) as well as several master's courses in Architecture and Urban Design.

DR. HASSAN ELMOUELHI

SENIOR RESEARCHER AT HABITAT UNIT AND PROJECT LEADER AT THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT TU BERLIN CAMPUS EL GOUNA

PROF. DR. HEBA ABOUELFADL

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE AT ALEXANDRIA UNIVERSITY

Heba Abouelfadl is an Associate Professor in the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Fine Arts, Alexandria University, where she earned her Ph.D. in collaboration with Howard University in Washington D.C., United States. She is the Academic Coordinator for the Double Master Program "Urban Design Revitalization of Historic City Districts", collaboration between Cairo University, Alexandria University and Brandenburg University of Technology (BTU), Germany. Her work focuses on heritage, housing, urban revitalization, and small cities' strategic planning among other topics.

Walid Abdel-Rahim is the Deputy Director of the Cairo Office of the German Development Bank (KfW), which has been involved in the financial cooperation in Egypt for decades and implementing major reform and development programs in the water and energy sectors. Before joining KfW in 2001, he headed the environmental studies teams in prominent consulting firms such as the Egyptian PACER, and the Dutch IWACo. He also worked as an advisor to the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency for 3 years.

WALID M. ABDEL-REHIM,

DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE GERMAN DEVELOPMENT BANK (KFW) CAIRO OFFICE

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Cairo Climate Talks are conceived, organized and hosted as a cooperation between the German Embassy in Cairo, the Egyptian Ministry of Environment, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Corporation for International Cooperation (GIZ).

 [facebook.com/cairoclimatetalks](https://www.facebook.com/cairoclimatetalks)

 www.cairoclimatetalks.net

 [youtube.com/cairoclimatetalks](https://www.youtube.com/cairoclimatetalks)

 info@cairoclimatetalks.net