



GLOBAL THINK TANK

*“Shaping the Future Together:
City Partnerships as a Chance
in the Fight for Green Innovations
and against the Climate Crisis?”*

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Afrika Medien Zentrum e.V presents

Global Think Tank

Success Factors for the Revitalization and Sustainability of City Partnership

KENAKO AFRIKA - FESTIVAL 2023/4

“Shaping the Future Together: City Partnerships as a Chance in the Fight for Green Innovations and against the Climate Crisis?”

Introduction

As part of the KENAKO Africa Festival 2023/24, a Global Think Tank was established, marking the first time since the festival’s inception that inter-year events were held in a digital space. On the occasion of the festival’s 10th anniversary and in light of current global challenges, the Think Tank is dedicated to the theme “Shaping the Future Together” to foster collaboration between actors from African nations and Germany. Under the guiding question: “Can city partnerships be an opportunity in the fight for green innovation and against the climate crisis?” the Afrika Medien Zentrum e.V. invited stakeholders involved in city partnerships between municipalities in African countries and Germany to assess whether and to what extent these partnerships allow for equitable collaboration and to identify the challenges they face concerning the climate crisis. The resulting position paper outlines specific actions for city partnerships and political as well as socio-economic actors.

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Actors from African countries who do not reside in Germany are underrepresented at the KENAKO Festival. Contributing factors include a lack of financial support, significant travel efforts required for an eleven-day festival, and substantial bureaucratic hurdles such as visa applications. Despite this, we aim to enhance cooperation with international partners, leading to the establishment of the Global Think Tank. The objective was to organise virtual meetings with stakeholders from city partnerships between Germany and African nations, as well as other interested parties, to jointly explore how city partnerships can mobilise communities to develop globally equitable solutions to challenges arising from climate change. Engagement is a critical foundation for long-term sustainable collaboration. For instance, involving local schools and civil society in climate education projects can strengthen community participation and responsibility, ultimately enabling the community to relay their concerns to policymakers.

Between November 2023 and April 2024, three meetings were organised, attended by 57 participants to discuss, experiment, and evaluate ideas. Insights from the Africa Climate Summit 2023, held in Nairobi, Kenya, were integrated into these discussions.

Cooperation

The Afrika Medien Zentrum contacted 80 out of approximately 100 city partnerships between German and African cities, inviting them to participate in the Global Think Tank. Representatives from 27 partnerships across 14 countries, alongside 14 additional interested individuals, participated in the meetings. Despite multiple attempts, contact could not be established with 42 partnerships. In addition to city partnership actors, experts were invited to contribute their insights. The partnerships between Würzburg and Mwanza and between Hanover and Blantyre presented their work as exemplary cases of vibrant, equitable collaboration. Eva Heuschen from SKEW discussed support programmes for municipal partnerships.

Purpose of the Position Paper

Through the Global Think Tank, the KENAKO Africa Festival and the Afrika Medien Zentrum e.V. provide a platform to present the demands and solutions developed to stakeholders in politics, business, and civil society. Voices from African countries are still insufficiently heard. The proposals presented here, signed by numerous actors, will be showcased to a broad audience at the 2024 KENAKO Africa Festival. Accompanying the conference on 31 August 2024 is a vibrant programme offering opportunities to deepen understanding of city partnerships and engage with topics related to climate change and green innovations (KENAKO Africa Festival, 23 August–1 September 2024).

The meetings conducted as part of the Think Tank revealed that exchange among city partnership actors and civil society is beneficial and widely desired. The findings presented here are based on shared experiences and insights from the Think Tank, claiming neither absolute correctness nor comprehensiveness. Instead, they aim to inspire policymakers to initiate positive change.

Challenges of International Collaboration

Limited Capacity and Low Political Priority: Many municipalities are overwhelmed with their own responsibilities, and funding for city partnerships is typically limited to larger cities. Partnerships often depend on external funding, such as from SKEW, leading to a lack of sustainable structures. Consequently, coordinating roles are often absent, and the reliance on external funding demands significant volunteer effort to launch projects. Insufficient engagement is a major issue, as evidenced by a German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) study indicating that 65% of inactive municipalities cited inadequate staffing as the reason for their inactivity.

Unequal Power Dynamics: It is essential to develop a shared understanding of climate change and climate protection, recognising that these are not universal concepts but are heavily influenced by Eurocentric approaches. Partnerships must establish a common foundation for sustainable collaboration, transcending political differences. Furthermore, inequalities within participating actors need addressing, as significant unpaid engagement creates power imbalances, excluding those from socially disadvantaged contexts.

Limited Exchange Opportunities: Although SKEW organises triennial exchange meetings and provides a networking platform via "Connective Cities," there is a demand for more frequent exchanges. Such opportunities foster learning from one another and help guide inactive partnerships in their engagement efforts. Frequent interactions, like those of the Würzburg-Mwanza partnership, which meets quarterly, demonstrate the potential for impactful collaboration.

German Bureaucracy: Bureaucratic processes complicate city partnerships, requiring alignment of regulations across institutions and administrations. While legal hurdles were identified by only 1% of municipalities in an IDOS study as a cause of inactivity, 17% of GTT survey respondents advocated for reducing bureaucratic obstacles. The low-threshold application options provided by SKEW are a positive step in this regard.

These challenges highlight the complexity of city partnerships and underscore the need to adapt these structures to enable genuinely sustainable and equitable collaboration.

Demands and Proposals

The proposals presented here derive from the research of Afrika Medien Zentrum e.V., contributions from participants in the Global Think Tank, and discussions with other interested and active stakeholders. While they reflect the perspective of Afrika Medien Zentrum e.V., stakeholders in city partnerships and representatives from politics and administration are invited to endorse these proposals and thereby demonstrate their support for the initiative. These suggestions do not claim to be exhaustive and are intended to serve as a foundation for further dialogue. The proposals are organised into three key areas of focus:

1. Decolonisation of City Partnerships

City partnerships are uniquely positioned to address global challenges such as climate change while promoting diverse and inclusive perspectives. However, they remain influenced by post- and neo-colonial structures, which impact political, economic, and societal cooperation. Raising awareness of these structures and challenging them critically is an essential first step. City partnerships can play a pivotal role in dismantling these barriers, but this requires commitment, particularly from actors in the so-called "Global North."

2. Decolonisation of Thought

Decolonising thought involves recognising and challenging the Eurocentric perspective that shapes concepts of climate change, development, and green technology. These constructs are culturally influenced and not universally applicable. Partnerships must be based on mutual understanding, transparent communication, and shared decision-making.

Practical Recommendations:

- **Joint Funding Applications:** Funding should be sought collaboratively from both German/European and partner-city sources, addressing power imbalances in the process.
- **Building on Existing Resources:** Utilise and strengthen existing local resources and approaches in both partner cities to foster sustainable structures and support successful initiatives.
- **Solidarity During Crises:** Partnerships should remain resilient during economic or political instability, maintaining contact and continuing collaborative projects wherever possible.
- **Global Responsibility:** German cities, as part of an industrialised nation, must address the causes of climate change while African partner cities tackle its symptoms. A globally equitable approach is essential.

3. Decolonisation of Structures

Structural decolonisation requires dismantling societal and political barriers to ensure equitable collaboration.

Key areas include:

- **Easing Visa Restrictions:** Barriers in visa procurement must be reduced, as unwarranted rejections disproportionately affect African partners.
- **Expanding Funding Opportunities:** Partnerships should have access to a broader range of funding sources beyond the BMZ (German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development), such as the BMU (Federal Ministry for the Environment) and BMI (Federal Ministry of the Interior).
- **Reducing Bureaucratic Obstacles:** Application processes should be simplified and bilingual to allow equal participation from all partners.

Political and Economic Priority for City Partnerships

City partnerships are often vulnerable to political changes, particularly in the absence of robust networks of civil society initiatives or organisations. Political and financial support is crucial to sustain these efforts.

Recommendations:

- **Recognition of Municipal Development Cooperation:** Municipalities should be mandated to establish departments for international exchange, supported by government funding. Stable structures would reduce reliance on external financing.
- **Increased Visibility:** A central hub to connect partnership associations, NGOs, and economic actors could enhance the visibility of their work.
- **Expanding Partnerships:** More partnerships should be established with African cities. Currently, only about 1% of German city partnerships involve African countries, with most partnerships being intra-European.

Strengthening Partnership Networks

City partnerships do invaluable work, often with limited visibility. To maximise their impact, their networks must be strengthened, and their activities integrated into broader societal frameworks.

Recommendations:

- **Interdisciplinary Networks:** Encourage collaboration across diverse fields, such as medicine, agriculture, IT, and administration, to foster innovative solutions and shared learning.
- **Engaging Younger Generations:** Efforts should be made to involve younger people, such as partnerships with youth-focused movements like Fridays for Future, and promoting exchange programmes as part of city partnerships.
- **Regular Exchange Meetings:** Frequent gatherings of partnerships are necessary to foster dialogue, address challenges, and share best practices. The current three-year interval is insufficient.
- **Visibility of African Perspectives:** African voices must be more prominently represented in partnership activities and public discourse. Collaborating with diaspora communities in Germany can facilitate deeper cultural understanding and equitable project development.

Conclusion

The strengthening of city partnership networks through interdisciplinary and transgenerational dialogue, more frequent interactions, and greater visibility of African perspectives is essential to ensure their impactful and sustainable contribution to global challenges. These measures are critical to bringing the valuable work of city partnerships to broader public attention and enhancing their long-term effectiveness.

Impressum

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