

Joint action and shared responsibility in local and regional contexts will “make or break” the UN’s 2030 Agenda

This statement captures a sentiment that was palpable throughout the two-day conference “**Connecting Actors for Sustainable Development in the Context of the United Nations 2030 Agenda**”, held at the Sant Pau Art Nouveau site on the 10th and 11th of November 2015.

Organised with the participation of over 15 institutions, including 8 resident international offices at Sant Pau, the Conference aimed to explore *what* the 2030 Agenda is, *why* it is important and *how* a diverse range of actors at local and regional levels can work together to meet the Agenda’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

More than 150 people participated in the two-day meeting, which brought together multilateral agencies, think tanks, local and global NGOs, business executives, students, researchers, government officials and technical staff in interactive dialogues and workshops to explore the obstacles and opportunities to meet the SDGs in local and regional contexts.

A universally applicable agenda requiring collaboration to address ambitious goals and cross-cutting issues

The conference highlighted the universal character of the new global agenda for sustainable development, as well as the importance of shared responsibility and joint action in local and regional contexts. Another key message that emerged in numerous dialogues and presentations was the importance of thinking and acting in a holistic manner in order to increase the impact of measures adopted and avoid distorting the agenda’s cross-cutting issues, which are the foundation for development.

Ariel Monells, Managing Director of the Catalan Fund for Development Cooperation, summarized this idea succinctly, stating, “Working together doesn’t just add value, it multiplies it.” Likewise, Jaume Ciurana, Councilor for Presidency, General Services and Relations with the City of Barcelona for the Barcelona County Council, insisted on the importance of involving everyone in order to keep the Agenda from becoming “empty words”.

Paradigm shifts for all

Participants and expert panelists also agreed that work to advance the SDGs will require paradigm shifts on the part of all actors.

Governments at all levels will need to act holistically and reach out to a broad range of sectors and institutions in implementation efforts. In this sense, Manuel Manonellas, Director General of Multilateral and European Affairs for the Government of Catalonia,

announced the preparation of a strategic plan to apply the agenda in Catalonia through interdepartmental work and multi-actor engagement. Likewise, Valentí Junyent, Councilor for Natural Areas and the Environment at the Barcelona County Council, indicated that the coordination of local implementation efforts will be critical to success.

Dídac Ferrer, Head of the Sustainability and Equal Opportunities Office at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, asserted that universities and research institutes should abandon “hyper-disciplinary approaches” in favor of “cross-cutting projects”, while also working to define new indicators and methodologies and promoting cooperation in the local territory as a matter of social responsibility. Likewise, many workshop speakers and panelists remarked on the importance of education and knowledge exchange in support of all SDGs.

In the opinion of Elisabeth de Nadal, Member of the Executive Committee of the United Nations Global Compact Local Network, the private sector will need to support the 2030 Agenda. In addition to arguments emerging from the framework of corporate social responsibility, she observed that greater equity, better education and healthier environments are all catalysts to stronger economies.

Similarly, Oriol Illa, Chair of the Committee of Third Sector Organisations in Catalonia, noted that the social-service mission of NGOs is echoed in the 17 SDGs, particularly in relation to employment and education. Consequently, NGOs will foreseeably play a very active role in implementation efforts. Likewise, he noted that local cooperative action will be critical to address growing inequalities within countries, a circumstance that merits attention even as economic differences between nations are decreasing.

All actors have a role to play

In a keynote address, Teresa Ribera, Director of Institut de Développement Durable et des Relations Internationales (IDDRI) and Co-President of the Sustainable Development Solutions Network in Spain (REDS), called this agenda a “public agenda for the 21st century” and challenged participants take stock of their role and capacity as citizens to insist that governments work to make this ambitious agenda a reality. She also called attention to the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21), as an important first step to advance the SDGs.

The interdependence of countries, cities and peoples was also a recurring theme throughout the conference. Guy Fleuret, Director of the Transport and Urban Development Area of Union for the Mediterranean, cited the current immigration crisis in Europe as an example of how unmet goals in one part of the world create real and immediate impacts in cities and towns thousands of miles away.

Sant Pau as a meeting point for the 2030 Agenda

Five office and program directors of Sant Pau resident institutions closed the event with brief messages highlighting their work in relation to the 2030 Agenda. Tamás Evetovits, Head of the World Health Organization Barcelona Office for Health Systems Strengthening a.i.; Dan Lewis, Chief of the Urban Risk Reduction Unit at UN-Habitat and Head of the Un-Habitat City Resilience Profiling Programme (CRPP); Inazio Martínez, Director of the European Forest Institute Mediterranean Programme (EFIMED), Josep Maria Vilalta, Executive Director of the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI) and the Catalan Association of Public Universities (ACUP), and Rafael Bueno, Director of Politics, Society and Education at Casa Àsia communicated a common vision of Sant Pau as a unique meeting point to facilitate dialogue and work in the promotion of global development, particularly in local and regional contexts.

Eduard Vallory, Chairman of the Center for the UNESCO of Catalonia, closed the conference by reiterating the importance of joint efforts in support of the 2030, Agenda, and in particular, the need to promote collaborative action through education.

Barcelona, 18 November 2015