

Visions from the Global South on the sustainable city

A study by the Sustainable Cities Platform, March - June 2023



THE RESULTS IN A NUTSHELL

Western vs non-Western vision of the sustainable city

- There is **no single vision of the sustainable city** from the global South (just as there is no single vision in the 'West').
- The **basic elements of the vision of the sustainable city do not differ** between the West and the global South. SDG themes and basic needs are central to both visions.
- **Difference in**
 - **prioritisation of themes in global South**
 - Climate & environment = less urgent (but considered fundamental to the realisation of the sustainable city)
 - More focus on themes linked to daily survival, such as health, housing, income
 - Local policies as essential factor in achieving the sustainable city in the global South
 - **approach to achieving the sustainable city**
 - Culture, local practices & ways of working are not sufficiently considered by (Belgian) development actors
 - Specific agenda e.g. gender, LGBTQ+, democracy and approach is imposed by (Belgian) development actors

Obstacles in the global South to achieving the sustainable city

- **Privatisation** of social services hinders access to basic social services (education, food security, income, health,...)
- **Politics**: the impact of political interests, corruption, clientelism and pre- and post-election dynamics on political decisions at all levels of government and on policy implementation
- Lack of **citizen participation**
- Lack of **transparency** in local policy development and implementation
- **Tension between different levels of government** (central and local)
- **Absence of a shared vision of the sustainable city** between actors in the global South

Shortcomings of international cooperation

- Lack of **holistic view** of dynamics and relationships between local actors
- Lack of understanding of **local cultures** and practices
- Imposing its **own thematic priorities** (e.g. gender, LGBTQ+, democracy) without regard for specific local contexts
- Lack of **synergy** between projects and actors (both local and higher level)

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BELGIAN ACTORS OF SUSTAINABLE CITIES PLATFORM

- Greater focus on strengthening **multi-actor participation mechanisms** in policy preparation and implementation. This can be done through the support and capacity building of partners in the following areas:
 - Methodology for developing shared perspectives in partner countries in the global South as regards sustainable urban development
 - Methodology (knowledge and tools) for participatory planning processes
 - Specific support for innovative multi-stakeholder participation approaches
 - Methodology for long-term urban planning and spatial organisation
 - Lobbying and advocacy (for policy change at higher political levels)
- Strengthen **synergies** between programmes and actors
- Sharper focus on (financial, social and technical) **sustainability** of projects of the partner organisation and possibly other local actors
- Better **understanding of local realities** (local dynamics between actors, culture, etc.) in all project phase
- Revise the approach to **themes such as gender, democracy, LGBTQ+** in projects: integrate them more strongly within a context-specific approach, improve alignment between international actors' expectations and the local reality on the ground

BACKGROUND

Research questions

- What is the global South's partners' vision for the sustainable city?
- How can (Belgian) development organisations support partners to realise their vision of the sustainable city?

By whom?

- Researchers: South Research
- Commissioned by the Sustainable Cities platform. These are 5 Belgian organisations working on the realisation of the sustainable city worldwide, namely Brulocalis, Echos Communication, Rikolto, UVCW and VVSG.

Methodology

- Literature review
- Online survey for partners from the Global South
- Interviews with external experts
- 12 online focus group discussions with partners from the Global South
- Online "Sense-making" workshop with partners from the Global South

Research limitations

- Limited number of participants (survey: 103 participants; expert interviews: 3 people; focus groups: 41 participants; sense-making workshop: 17 participants)
- Large participation (majority) of African partners, male participants, public sector participants and those between 30 and 50 years old

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