

Conference Report

Implementing the SDGs- Practical Challenges, Creative Solutions and Best Practices for Knowledge Transfer and Policy Learning



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VIRTUAL ALUMNI CONFERENCE 2021
November 12-14th, 2021

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Overview

The alumni conference was hosted by the Master's programme in International and Development Economics at HTW Berlin, in cooperation with MA Development Management (*MADM*) at Ruhr University Bochum and Small Enterprise Promotion and Training (*SEPT*), University of Leipzig.

This digital conference took place from the 12-14 November 2021 and was funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (*DAAD*). The conference featured presentations, workshops and networking sessions on topical issues relevant to the development of the Global South as well as sessions with matter experts and a Keynote speaker.

Objectives

The conference addressed the obstacles and challenges of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the Global South through a process of knowledge sharing of approaches and arriving at creative solutions on a grand level. Four main pillars were discussed and workshopped: Pro-poor growth policies, Technology & Infrastructure, Community Building, and Circular Economy.

Lessons Learned

Through case studies and workshops, the conference aimed to form creative solutions under the framework of know-how transfer and policy learning for participants to bring back home and eventually implement in public, private, and civil society sectors. Also, day 3 included sessions to network around topics of Gender Equality, Socioeconomic effects of COVID in the Global South and the Future of Employment.

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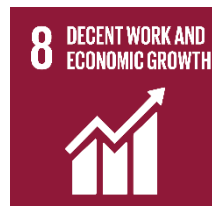


Session 1 Pro-Poor Growth Policies and Entrepreneurship

HTW Berlin Alumni Francis oversees numerous commercial bank examinations and has held several roles within the Bank of Zambia as well as having extensive experience participating in meetings and workshops at the Federal Reserve Bank in the USA, The Bank of International Settlements in Basel, Bundesbank in Frankfurt and the South African Reserve Bank among others. He also possesses experience as a Data Liaison Officer at the IMF, and he currently represents the Bank of Zambia in the Long-Term Finance Project (LTF) at the African Development Bank.

Main Takeaways from the Workshop

- Francis, who also happens to be a farmer, brought forward a powerful case study he is directly involved that details strategies led by the Bank of Zambia to promote financial inclusion and entrepreneurship, reduce gender inequality, and promote economic diversification within the ranks of the most vulnerable populations in the country.
- The project helped identify a huge gender gap with only 37.6% of women financially included with very few having formal education, employment opportunities or covering positions of influence.
- Identifying the fact that lack of financial education hinders economic diversification, training on agricultural/tourism-based businesses were advised during the discussion and emphasis on introduction of financial schemes promoting female entrepreneurs was encouraged.
- The audience also insisted that an extra effort is required to make financial inclusion pro-poor, education plays a vital role to create awareness especially in countries where cultural and religious standards contradict or totally oppose the SDGs + barriers to change.
- Some of the challenges and limitations of this case included leaving out the most marginalized groups, creating a new default crisis with the type of funding offered. It was suggested that screening for funding is needed to avoid some of these issues.



Session 2 Economic Dynamics, Technology, and Infrastructure

HTW Berlin Alumna Natalia Batista da Silva from Brazil is a Global Data Analyst for Customer Finance at the Engie Energy Access and a graduate of the MIDE program at HTW Berlin. Apart from conducting rigorous data analysis and data modeling, she also works closely on several projects to enhance customer repayment in her challenging industry. Natalia has extensive experience in credit analysis and assessment as she worked in major financial institutions, such as HSBC and the InterAmerican Development Bank USA for 4+ years, until she joined the solar industry.

Main Takeaways from the Workshop

- Natalia presented the case study of a new approach to electrify rural households in Sub-Saharan Africa through Savings Groups. The case proved that using a platform that is familiar to the final beneficiary has the potential to foster community development and empower entire villages.
- Even though the fight against poverty has been successful over the years, the challenge remains largely relevant, therefore new approaches and technologies should be continually tested to improve the living conditions of so many unelectrified people in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- The discussion highlighted the role of solidarity in collective communities, and that relying on it to enhance and promote the project adoption was a very smart employment of the society's features and strengths.
- Sole critiques of the projects were that it more of a business-focus without adopting any development indicators to reflect the wellbeing of the target group; as well as the lack of educational activities regarding the maintenance of the solar cells could hinder the longevity for the project
- The project depended completely on social and informal channels to collect the money and pay the solar cells' installments, which might bring negative consequences in case of disagreement and/or theft.
- Although this project is intended to be replicated in Uganda, the discussion covered the importance of customizing the project to the needs of the Ugandan society and introducing it to the people and help them adopt it on larger scale.




Session 3

People, Communities and Public Utilities

MBA-Sept Alumna Durdana Prado presents the case study of Nido de Lluvia (Spanish for Rain Nest) on the implementation strategy of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals in the western state of Jalisco in Mexico. Durdana leads efforts on the advancement of the 2030 agenda within the government and brings forward a groundbreaking case study of rain harvesting systems in 600 households in the state. The case proves not only to be a great benchmark for environmental sustainability but also has huge potential for alliances with the private sector to encourage the optimization of water management systems for industrial production.

Main Takeaways from the Workshop

- An environmental sustainability project based on co-creation projects with the NGO, civil society, private sector, and government to tackle issues of water shortages in the metropolitan region of the midwestern Mexican state of Jalisco.
- After a year of operations, this multisectoral program has proven to be successful and scalable. The project has benefited rural households' utility budget by paying less for municipal water supply; as well as reduced the amount of water demanded from public supply systems.
- The transferring of ownership is the biggest challenge of the program. For the project to sustain in time, management responsibilities must be transferred to household with knowledge transfer and expertise.
- Financing in the long term is an additional challenge that has not been addressed. Co-financing potentially represents an additional financial burden to an already poor household
- Gender mainstreaming might be needed to highlight the narrative of the program to prove the intersection of gender and climate
- There are no set Risk Analysis foundations in the program as of now but seems feasible a phase two for scalability and replicability purposes.
- Through government funding, present open-sourced projects for people and governments to adopt, finance, an execute freely
- The audience of the workshop claimed Rainwater Harvesting has lost popularity over the years, however social enterprises and NGOs are still fighting to get them in legislation

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- NGOs have historically designed financing programs for rural household related topics of sustainability. TECHO in Mexico is one example and a great idea to engage in for *Nido de Lluvia*
 - Setting local SDG Governance in local governments is key to build and follow up on these projects. Local governance must have a strict key stakeholder management mapped out in the private sector, local governments, NGOs, and civil society.


Session 4

Rethinking Economic Development: The Circular Economy

HTW Berlin Masters students in International and Development Economics with the help of Prof. Dr. Zikos, have put together a wonderful case on Circular Economy. These second-year students workshop their own ideas that challenge not only linear economic models but also challenge established topics on circular economies. The case study involves consumers, investors, and regulators as main stakeholders of circular economy in the world and asks the question: Who is responsible? among other relevant questions around the principle of circularity which becomes more and more relevant in today's business environment as well as policy making.

Main Takeaways from the Workshop

- The project challenges the traditional linear economic model (*make-take-consume-dispose*) to reduce waste to a minimum and tackle SDG 12 in a Latin American context.
- Circular economy implementation has several benefits to society such as the creation of jobs, reduction of waste and pushing corporations to finally be environmentally friendly.
- Partnerships with international organizations and governments is fundamental for the project to tackle properly the biggest polluters of the world
- The implementation of more ambitious and bigger projects of Circular Economy will and should be enabled by government policies in hand with the private sector readiness/
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, sometimes it is more expensive to produce used items here might be a trade-off between what is supposed to be achieved with it; therefore, a bottom-up approach is important for implementation
- Gender and Safety and Law mainstreaming, and regulations might be needed to highlight the narrative of the program to prove the intersection of SDG with these two topics
- The private sector might not respond positively to these projects if alternatives to produce-use-reuse are not affordable and easily available.
- Sustainability of Circular Economy projects will depend mainly on behavioral education shift of multinationals, governments, and civil society
- The audience of the workshop claimed that Corruption is hard to measure, read out



& solve and huge obstacle for progress and that Development Cooperation will highly contribute financially in an initial phase.

- NGOs have historically designed programs for multinationals to embrace Circular Economy projects and sometimes even governments. For example, Pakistani local governments where plastics was abounded by law or Colombian local governments that simply changed the colors of public waste bins to separate residues proved to be impactful.
- Setting local SDG Governance in local governments is key to build and follow up on these projects. Local governance must have a strict key stakeholder management mapped out in the private sector, local governments, NGOs, and civil society.