

Spring School “Global transformation towards Sustainability – Transdisciplinary peer learning between Africa, Europe and Rising Powers for the 2030 Agenda”, April 1-10, 2019, Bonn

Final Report

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The German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik (DIE) and the International Office at the University of Bonn co-organized the **Alumni Spring School „Global transformation towards Sustainability – Transdisciplinary peer learning between Africa, Europe and Rising Powers for the 2030 Agenda”**, which took place from **1 – 10 April 2019 in Bonn, Germany**. The programme was financed by the DAAD and took place in the framework of the Bonn Alliance for Sustainability.

Within the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, multi-stakeholder participation is an important approach to contribute to sustainable changes in economies, societies and the environment. Especially SDG 17 emphasizes the importance of strengthening global partnerships to support and achieve the ambitious targets of the Agenda 2030. The programme is a tool to promote effective partnership between Germany/Europe, the rising powers and Africa. At the same time, it refreshed the linkage of Germany alumni to discussions in Europe and strengthened their role as potential bridge-builders between their home countries and Europe, here: Germany. The activity further strengthened the idea of life-long learning and provided a specific cooperation format within the Bonn Alliance for Sustainability Research/Innovation Campus Bonn.

The report provides information on the content, participants, aims and evaluation of the programme, innovative methods as well as inspiration and further steps for the future.

1. Content

The content of the Spring School was organized around the topics of sustainability, digitalization, and interaction of different actors in transformative research and policy advise. The global challenges humankind jointly has to address – climate change, sustaining development success in some countries and supporting renewed efforts in others – affect all our societies and interlink them. Therefore, a sustainable development path is a common task for all countries, irrespective of their “levels” of economic development, as defined in the Agenda 2030. Activities of the ten days programme in Bonn included seven thematic sessions of around two hours each (modules), inter alia

- Combining social, economic, ecological dimensions,
- Digitalisation and its challenges,
- Sustainability and replicability of development - Rising powers and Africa,
- Interactions between science, society and policy,
- The challenge of safeguarding biodiversity.

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Participants prepared a knowledge product (short film) during the Spring School. Divided in working groups of five to six, each group was responsible to produce a film regarding the main messages of one day of the Spring School. This exercise was meant to support reflection of the content in an entertaining format. At the same time, it provided a practical exercise of identifying and communicating key messages. Basic training in video formats and their use in social media was provided at the beginning of the spring school – and during the wrap-up session of each day. The groups of the day collected interviews or statements and recorded them by mobile phone camera. The material was then used to produce a short film at the end of the programme. In order to have low-tech approach that participants can also use upon return to their home countries, a cost free app was used to cut and arrange the video material. Besides thinking about the important take-aways of the day, the hands-on creation and condensation of input in a knowledge product enabled the participants to learn more about science-policy-society communication and practically experience how to improve communication with policy and decision makers.

Excursions, guest lectures and other evening events complemented the programme. During the excursion to the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), participants had the opportunity to discuss the German Digital Africa Strategy with Mr Hendrik Denker and Mrs Rita Walraf of BMZ in the former chancellor cabinet. At the United Nation Campus in Bonn, Prof. Dirk Messner, director of the United Nation University’s Institute for Human Security and Environment (UNU-EHS) engaged the participants in a lively discussion regarding the implications of digitalization for human development. During the visit of the Research Campus Kleinaltendorf of the University of Bonn, participants of the Spring School learned more regarding renewable energy resources, especially regarding fast growing plants. Mr Jean-Paul Affana of Germanwatch, as a representative of the civil society, shared views on global interlinkages, such as the effects of unsustainable consumption patterns on the Global South, and reported about the challenges of advocacy for climate change mitigation. Dr Anke Frank of the Research Museum Alexander König highlighted the importance of biodiversity conservation as a dimension of global sustainable development. Evening events as a presentation and discussion on Arts, Science and Sustainability showed a quite different approach to address the emotional dimension of sustainability and to subsequently get civil society and politics on track towards transformation.

2. Participants

24 highly qualified experts from research, civil society organisations as well as public administration and policy, aged between 29 to 58 years and with diverse national and institutional backgrounds, took part in the Spring School (see attached list of participants):

- 8 MGG Alumni, of which two from Brazil, and one each from China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and South Africa;

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- 16 Alumni of German universities from various African countries. It is noteworthy that participants came from all regions of Africa, notably from Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sudan, Tunisia, and Zambia;
- Amongst the African participants were three PhD students and five Alumni of Bonn University.

The particular composition of the group thus included participants from emerging economies as well as from Africa. Discussion about protecting global commons and working for a global common good require a broad range of regional and professional backgrounds so as to include a wide variety of perspectives, as the debate is constitutive for a common understanding. This premise was well reflected in the composition of the group of participants and helped to enrich the (lively) discussions. The partnership and dialogue between alumni as key actors (bridge-builders and change-makers) Germany/Europe, emerging countries and Africa further intensifies through formats like the Spring School.

3. Objectives

The format of the Spring School aimed at highly interactive, moderated learning from each other. We aimed at stimulating discussions and exchange of perspectives among the participants, as we consider dialogue and knowledge exchange and creation on eye-level – across traditional biases, across disciplines, hierarchies and nations – as crucial to achieve effective global cooperation and as a basis of inclusive sustainable development. On an interpersonal level, the Spring School functions, in line with the Managing Global Governance Academy, as laboratory for global cooperation on a larger scale.

The Spring School specifically aimed at generating knowledge exchange among participants from African countries and Southern powers at the science-policy-interface. The philosophy behind the concept followed the concept of the DIE’s Managing Global Governance (MGG) Programme:

- (1) Peer Learning: interdisciplinary, solution-based analyses of challenges in economies, societies and the environment.
- (2) Transdisciplinary work: Participants from multiple backgrounds (MGG and Africa, academia, civil society and administration) and with multiple perspectives acknowledging the diversity of cultures within the global dialogue.
- (3) Science communication: generating and sharing targeted knowledge products through dynamic peer learning.

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4. Innovative Methods to achieve targets of the spring school

Modules, wrap up and reflection sessions as well as feedback rounds provided space for participation and interactive learning to enable peer learning, dialogue and exchange. One key aim of the Spring School was to enable and foster peer learning in an interdisciplinary way. We consider trust as a crucial element of successful cooperation. In the context of the Spring School, peer learning can be regarded as an outcome of fruitful cooperation among the participants. Therefore, it was our aim to inspire an atmosphere of trust, which enabled the participants to openly share their expertise, knowledge and opinions. We dedicated specific time to getting to know each other, to exchanging about motivations and sharing expectations. All modules provided time and space to enable discussion, reflection and mutual exchange among the participants. After time for individual reflection (with the journaling method), participants split up in small groups. Each group was hosted by one member of the “group of the day” responsible for creating the day’s knowledge product. In these small groups, key messages of the day were discussed. The following three examples demonstrate in more detail how participation and mutual sharing of experiences were fostered during the Spring School.

Example 1): Combining economic, social and ecological dimension

The aim of this session was to discuss whether combining economic, social and ecological dimensions of the Agenda 2030 is desirable and possible, exploring contradictions or synergies between SDGs. After an introduction to different development pathways and the discussion of the question whether humanity has to decide between “saving the planet or saving the poor”, participants split up in three working groups. In three rounds, each group discussed all three dimensions of sustainable development with an expert from DIE. The most important problems in the participants’ countries as well as potential solutions were reported in the plenary afterwards.

Example 2): Embedding justice and fairness in transformative research and policy advice

Designed as a planning game, this module aimed at highlighting the complexity of decision-making processes as well as the difficulty of making just and inclusive decisions based on values and/or facts. After an input on transformations and a discussion on fairness in development, the participants took part in a five-round planning game. The task was to decide which of eight candidates should receive a donor kidney. In each round one additional element of information or a different strategy of persuasion or negotiation has been practiced. In the end of the session, participants discussed how to transfer insight to the diversity, distribution and direction of pathways towards sustainability.

Example 3): Walk-Shop

In a walk-shop at the recreational forest area in Bonn, the Kottenforst, participants discussed on the topic of interconnecting science, society and policy in their home countries. In contrast to arranging

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an interactive workshop in an ordinary seminar setting, a walk-shop offers space for some additional experiences and a learning experience addressing additional levels beyond factual learning:

- Possibility of reconnecting to nature, as a basis of appreciating the natural environment and its beauty in order to inspire positive motivations for engagement on the topic of sustainability (interlinkage with arts and sustainability). In addition, nature may inspire new thoughts, new arguments
- Elements of meditation to stimulate reconnections to oneself and one’s surroundings. On a less spiritual level, concentration and clarity of the mind help to communicate more clearly and focus on important aspects
- Neuroscience shows that different parts of the brain are stimulated when moving, allowing more creative ideas to flow.

5. Inspiration for next year’s Spring School and further formats

In addition to some organisational and administrative take-aways of the team, in next year’s Spring School we plan to provide even more networking opportunities among and between the participants and other German and international peers. Ideas include informal evening events as well as networking activities targeting future cooperation topics. To do so, we aim at including a session in the middle of the programme, which provides room for a presentation of the participants’ expertise as well as collaboration ideas. A diverse involvement of members of the Bonn Alliance for Sustainability is desirable, as well as an additional exchange or excursion to local sustainability initiatives to illustrate examples from practice.