



The Solutions Lab

Scaling for Sustainable Infrastructure

Insight Report 1

Berlin, Germany

The solutions lab, an 8-month journey involving three face-to-face meetings and virtual co-creative dialogue processes, was convened jointly by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH and the Global Solutions Initiative (GSI). The Emerging Markets Sustainability Dialogues (EMSD) provided thematic leadership for the lab while the Global Leadership Academy (GLAC) provided methodological support and facilitation. Experienced leaders and change agents from the worlds of policymaking, business, development practice, academia and civil society, united by their passion for Sustainable Infrastructure and their commitment for transformation and scaling solutions, came together to develop answers to two questions:

- 1) How can we as leaders and change agents ensure that sustainability considerations are systematically integrated at every step in the planning of Infrastructure Development?; and
- 2) How are economic, social and environmental benefits of sustainable infrastructure best quantified?

We were 25 participants drawn from 14 countries, namely Argentina, Denmark, France, India, Italy, Kenya, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Switzerland, United Kingdom and United States of America.

Our journey began with an online onboarding session where we got to know each other, connected for the first time, shared expectations and introduced our expertise on sustainable infrastructure. This was followed by the first face-to-face meeting in Berlin where the focus was on kick-starting the solution development process. To seed the dialogue, the two guiding questions were proposed (see above). Reflecting on those, participants worked together through a combination of generative dialogues, expert inputs, and innovative knowledge exchange for-

to analyze the status quo and identify the challenges, ideate possible solutions, and explore strategies to scale solutions.



In an early dialogue, participants identified their feelings of inadequacy and helplessness in the face of the challenge. One asked, "Do we know the answers? Have we started to develop solutions?" Another commented, "We are all embedded, but we are collectively stuck".

The group identified key thematic areas of focus as: Sustainability dimensions – specifically environmental, economic, social, financial, and institutional; Integration of various sectors and systems – energy, water, transport, digital, natural, and infrastructure; alignment with global development agendas – Agenda 2030, Paris Agreement, Osaka Declaration; Sustainability along the entire project lifecycle – planning, designing, procurement, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning; Climate resilience and Multi-Stakeholder engagement.

One of the early results was the development of a working definition of sustainable infrastructure: "Sustainable infrastructure is a solution (built and/or natural) that provides a service to the public based on a full lifecycle approach (planning, design, procurement, construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning) in a

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manner that ensures [value/ feasibility/ viability] across the dimensions of economic, financial, social (inclusive, equitable, purpose- and needs-driven, aspirational), environmental, resiliency (including natural and human-made disasters), institutional (capacity, governance, transparency)". With this working definition the participants proceeded to map the system and identify suitable points of leverage where interventions could make a difference.



A discussion on the underlying rationale for the solutions lab identified three areas where the participants felt the lab could add value:

- 1) upstream – in policy development
- 2) implementation level – linking local to global
- 3) finance – enabling a paradigm shift that transformed narratives

Participants felt that addressing these three areas would enable the global community working on sustainable infrastructure to go beyond pilot projects. There was a consensus that while technical solutions were in existence, there were political and economic challenges that blocked their implementation at scale and that needed addressing. These challenges were categorized as systemic and defined as holding back progress in the sector. This prompted a question within the group "Do we have the capacity to address these types of challenges?"

The final decision on potential interventions was: to develop policy briefs for the T20; to review upstream considerations; to translate accepted guidance and principles into a pragmatic process for ensuring sustainability at project and pipeline levels; and to develop a coherent vision and narrative that provides the underlying rationale for the interventions. The agreed objective was to define scalable processes, including the meaningful integration of sustainability tools, to ensure sustainability on the



ground as well as along the entire infrastructure project cycle. These areas of intervention were used to define the lab workstreams that would continue working together in the online co-creation phase to build a better understanding of the challenge in preparation for the development of solutions. An additional workstream was created to focus on the cutting edge of the dialogue and explore possible innovations that had the potential to transform the sustainable infrastructure system in the future.

We left Berlin having made commitments to contribute to the various workstreams, and to have at least one group call where all participants could touch base on the progress we had made and support the co-creation of the program for the Mexico meeting in February 2020. The meeting in Nairobi concluded with thoughts about joint future project ideas and proposals as well as next steps to develop ideas further, to collect and publish stories and setting up communication and collaboration channels.



More impressions and information about the Lab:

www.we-do-change.org/the-action/the-solutions-lab-scaling-for-sustainable-infrastructure

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