



Project no.: 018401

Project acronym: RELAy

Project title: Research for Local Action towards Sustainable Human Settlements

Instrument: Specific Support Action

Thematic Priority: Sustainable Development, Global Change and Ecosystems

Final Publishable Activity Report

Period covered: 15 May 2005 to 15 July 2006

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Start date of project: 15 May 2005

Duration: 14 months

Project coordinator name: Barbara Anton

Project coordinator organisation name: ICLEI Europe **Revision:** final

1. Project Execution

Increasing the impact of sustainability research on local policy and practice: the RELAy project

a. In brief

Focus of the project RELAy was to explore how research on local sustainability issues can be improved in order to increase the relevance of the results and the likeliness of their application in local government policies and practices. The project also explored what has to be done to make research results more easily accessible for local governments.

In response to these questions, a number of recommendations on ‘Bridging the Gap between Research and Action’ were developed. Summarising, the project came to the following conclusions:

- Communication between those working in the academic sector and those working in the local government sector needs to be strengthened in order to build mutual trust and facilitate better collaboration.
- A closer collaboration also depends on adequate structural pre-conditions for research incl. the provision of suitable financial frameworks.
- Research results need to be easily understandable and accessible for local governments.
- Local governments need to become involved in all stages of the research process – from the formulation of the actual research questions up to instruments for making the results available – in order to ensure the relevance of research outcomes for their policies and practices.

These conclusions have been gained through the discussions and deliberations of the members of an Advisory Committee and the participants of the Nanning International Conference on Sustainable Urban Development (China, 9 to 11 November 2006).

The project was a component of a joint research initiative launched by UN-HABITAT and Directorate-General Research of the European Commission and co-funded by them. ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability acted as the project coordinator.

The full text of the recommendations can be downloaded from the project website (www.iclei.org/itc/relay) in four languages: English, French, German and Spanish. Also for download is the brochure ‘Bridging the Gap between Research and Action – Recommendations and Examples of Good Practice’ that provides some more context to the recommendations (English only).

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b. In detail

Project objectives

The overall objective of the RELAy project was to provide an international forum for discussing ways and means on how research and its outcomes can best contribute to the local implementation of policies and practices for urban sustainable development.

This forum was mainly to be realised through a conference convening experts specialising on issues of sustainable management, planning and governance; land-use planning; and housing and construction. Apart from researchers, local governments, their associations and other supporting institutions as well as national and international actors providing framework conditions and financing for research were to be invited for joining the debates.

The conference was envisaged to be a component of a joint research initiative launched by UN-HABITAT and Directorate-General Research (EC-DG Research) of the European Commission at the World Urban Forum II in Barcelona, Spain, in September 2004.

Outcome

The key insights of the RELAy project have been reflected in a set of recommendations mainly targeted to the research community, local governments and their associations and to those shaping the framework conditions for research on topics concerning sustainable development at local level.

The recommendations highlight the following major points:

- Communication between those working in the academic sector and those working in the local government sector needs to be strengthened in order to build mutual trust and facilitate better collaboration.
- A closer collaboration also depends on adequate structural pre-conditions for research incl. the provision of suitable financial frameworks.
- Research results need to be easily understandable and accessible for local governments.
- Local governments need to become involved in all stages of the research process – from the formulation of the actual research questions up to instruments for making the results available – in order to ensure the relevance of research outcomes for their policies and practices.

The recommendations are available for download on the project website (see below) in the following languages: English, French, German, and Spanish. Hard copies can be ordered at ICLEI's European Secretariat.

Outputs

Conference

The activities of the RELAy project culminated in the Nanning International Conference on Sustainable Urban Development held in China from 9 to 11 November 2006.

The Conference was co-organised by ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability, UN-HABITAT, Directorate-General Research of the European Commission, the Chinese Ministry of Construction, and the People's Government of Nanning City. The event attracted ca. 350 participants from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe, mainly representing local, regional and national governments, universities, research institutes, and international organisations.

Recommendations

The full text of the recommendations as mentioned further above are available for download on the project website (see below) in the following languages: English, French, German, and Spanish. Hard copies can be ordered at ICLEI's International Training Centre.

Publication: 'Bridging the Gap between Research and Action'

The recommendations also form core of the final RELAy brochure entitled 'Bridging the Gap between Research and Action'. Developed by the ETH Zurich, the brochure provides more context and background to the recommendations and illustrates relevant issues with case examples. It also contains a brief description of the Nanning Conference and a list of selected case studies.

Case studies

In coordination with the other project partners, the AIT selected the following case studies from the Nanning Conference programme for full elaboration and edited them for electronic publication on the RELAy website. Titles and authors of the case studies are:

- The German Institute of Urban Affairs (difu) – Partner for German cities (by Dr. Werner Heinz, difu, Germany)
- NORISC: Network-Oriented Risk Assessment of Contaminated Sites (By Dr. Barbara Möhlendick, City of Cologne, Germany)
- Urban Laboratory Gothenburg (ULG) – Cooperation for generation and transfer of knowledge and know-how (by Prof. Knut Strømberg, Chalmers University of Technology, Sweden)
- Action research for introducing urban environmental management in Yala, South Thailand (by Dr. Jitti Mongkolnchaiarunya, Thammasat University, Thailand)
- Anchoring environmental planning and management capacities in national and regional institutions: Experiences from the Sustainable Cities Programme (by Cecilia Njenga-Kinuthia, UN-HABITAT)
- The STATUS Project - researchers and practitioners identify common indicators for urban sustainability target-setting in Europe (by Prof. Bob Evans, Sustainable Cities Research Institute, University of Northumbria at Newcastle, UK; and Paul Fenton, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability)

Use and impact of project outcome

The recommendations have been widely distributed to their target groups and to multipliers with the expectation that they will be taken up in the design and implementation of future research programmes. In the long run it is hoped that they will contribute to the improvement of sustainability conditions at local level.

RELAy project website

All outputs of the project are available at www.iclei.org/itc/relay.

Contractors involved

Coordinator

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

European Secretariat

Freiburg, Germany

www.iclei.org/itc

Partners

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT)

Policy Analysis, Synthesis and Dialogue Branch

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www.unhabitat.org

Asian Institute of Technology (AIT)

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Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich (ETH Zurich)

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