



Global Europe Summit: green infrastructure matters for the sustainability of resilient communities and economies

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Recommendations

- In terms of financial contributions, **the approach of international organisations and other donors should shift from providing aid mentality to creating an investment mindset**. Putting a stop to the use of terminology like ‘recipient country’ and ‘donor’ would enable further change as this would reinforce the notion of interdependence, mutuality and reciprocity as we are all allies in a global world.
- **The EU must use successful resilient green infrastructure projects, such as Enabel’s ‘Green Gaza’, as guiding principles when deciding what projects to invest in next**. Resilient green infrastructure can save lives and helps communities more than quick fixes in the long term.
- Attention must be paid to how green infrastructure is implemented – it should involve private sector actors as well as civil society actors; and its aim should be to needs led and sustainable over the long-term creating opportunities, reduce inequalities and increase healthy livelihoods.
- All actors should recognise and ensure that resilient green infrastructure is about future proofing our world and is critical in benefiting people, places, communities, economies and planet.
- The approach to financing resilient green infrastructure should aim to alleviate debt rather than increase it and should be regarded a global common public good.
- International actors must keep in mind that investing in **green infrastructure does not end with the implementation of projects; those structures will require maintenance and protection**, such as in the case of armed conflict, if they are to truly help a community.

Green infrastructure matters for the sustainability of resilient communities and economies

Community-driven, sustainable infrastructure implemented on a global scale would lead to a significantly more secure world that is better equipped to deal with crises as they arise, speakers told an engaged crowd at Friends of Europe's Global Europe Summit.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, several new crises have unfolded in parallel, each one of them demonstrating that infrastructure matters, noted the event's moderator **Dharmendra Kanani**, Chief Operating Officer and Chief Spokesperson at Friends of Europe.

Recent crises have also shown the impact of infrastructure on communities, as well as the need not only for robust structures to be put in place but for sustainable, green practices to become the norm, he further explained.

Jorge Moreira da Silva, United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), kicked off the discussion by calling attention to the fact that we are currently living in a state of ongoing polycrisis, with several large-scale military conflicts unfolding at the same time — the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars, to name a couple — all against the backdrop of a worsening climate crisis. “If you ask me what keeps me awake at night, that’s getting things done,” Moreira da Silva said.

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He pointed out that Europe is off track when it comes to financing social development and meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement, the treaty aimed at strengthening the global response to climate change and keeping global warming at a maximum of 1.5°C. The Earth is currently set to warm by a whopping 2.5°C to 2.9°C – numbers that predict catastrophe according to scientists.

Moreira da Silva further noted that the coronavirus pandemic exacerbated an already existing financing gap when it comes to funding efforts to stave off global warming, from \$2.5tn to \$3.9tn in just one year. “We are off track,” he said, “and

in some cases, we are even in reverse mode.” Financial means are not enough to combat our issues. They need to be paired with a robust regulatory framework, policy and an extra element that organisations like UNOPS bring to the table: the capacity for implementation.

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Jean Van Wetter, Managing Director of the Belgian Development Agency (Enabel), echoed the calls for enabling change, stressing the importance of collaboration among organisations. Enabel’s ‘Green Gaza’ project sought to build green infrastructure along the Wadi Gaza river, one of the most important coastal wetlands located on the eastern Mediterranean Basin. Projects like a hospital that relied on solar panels for its energy saved lives after the Israel-Hamas war began earlier this autumn, Van Wetter shared, particularly during periods when fuel was running low.

“We need to decrease silos between different types of agencies,” Van Wetter urged. “The narrative has to change in international development. We should no longer speak about the North and the South but speak about a common investment in the future.”

He went further into outlining a new mindset: “‘Recipient country’ is not appropriate anymore; we are partners. I like to say every country is in development, including Belgium, because of the challenges ahead with climate change. We all need to reinvent our society.”

Van Wetter then called on one of his colleagues in the room, Enabel’s project manager on ‘Green Gaza’ who had just been evacuated from the region a week before the Friends of Europe event took place, to contribute to the discussion on how green infrastructure has been helping the region: “I admire the courage of UNOPS and Enabel for continuing to work in fragile states where green infrastructure is also very much needed. Palestine and Gaza suffer from multiple vulnerabilities — we are also paying the price of climate change that we are not causing.” He went on to emphasise the region is the most affected by global warming but has contributed to it the least.

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Jean Van Wetter, Managing Director of the Belgian Development Agency (Enabel)

Green infrastructures with solar panels — such as water desalination units, supermarkets running on solar energy, waste management transfer stations and hospitals — were “giving people life,” he said.

“ The past decade in our region has witnessed widespread conflict, showing no permanent possibility for solutions

Saja Majali, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Jordan to Belgium, the EU, NATO and Luxembourg

Another country sharing that geopolitical space is Jordan, which will be receiving a package of support from the European Union to the tune of €902mn.

Saja Majali, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Jordan to Belgium, the EU, NATO and Luxembourg, called the country’s partnership with the EU “a partnership that we value and that is based on an association agreement.”

“The past decade in our region has witnessed widespread conflict,” she said, “showing no permanent possibility for solutions and, in fact, has not only been measured in terms of unacceptable human suffering, death, destruction and displacement but also in terms of the devastating impact on the society, economy and environment that undermine prospects for sustainable development.”

Majali pointed out that while hearing the green infrastructure has been beneficial is good news, that should not draw our attention away from the devastation that is still ongoing and the help that is still needed: “We salute the courage of UN [and other] international organisations that have chosen to stay there and to assist these civilian people that are under constant shelling.”

“ In this day and age, we also need to see what we can do within our means and how we can chip in into this global environment

Hirut Zemene Kassa, Ambassador of Ethiopia to the Benelux Countries and the EU Institutions

Jordan is a country of 11mn people and currently hosting about 3mn refugees, while being the second most water-scarce country in the world. Its annual renewable water resources are significantly below the UN threshold, which defines severe water scarcity. “It affects every aspect of our lives and is a great challenge,” the ambassador pointed out. While Jordan is providing a “public good” through hosting refugees in great numbers, she said, the EU’s support in this is crucial. Although Jordan has been making significant progress and adopting structural reform, the development has not been going as fast as hoped.

Joining via video call, **Hirut Zemene Kassa**, Ambassador of Ethiopia to the Benelux Countries and the EU Institutions, echoed the call for a redesign of global cooperation but added a new element: “In this day and age, we also need to see what we can do within our means and how we can chip in into this global environment.”

“ Let’s not confuse negotiation with action

Hirut Zemene Kassa, Ambassador of Ethiopia to the Benelux Countries and the EU Institutions

Ethiopia benefits from various sources of clean energy, she explained, such as hydropower. Clean energy will mean “our women in the countryside will have better healthcare, a better lifestyle and their children can also go to school and have the necessary infrastructure to do so.”

On the topic of the COP28 climate summit, which takes place in late November in Dubai, Moreira da Silva emphasised that the world is running out of time and that COP28 must be the summit that implements a framework for loss and damage funding. “Let’s not confuse negotiation with action,” he pointed out.



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