

Graz, 13 January 2026

Project report

"Peer-to-Peer Learning Webinars for Human Rights Multipliers of Local Authorities from African Cities and Graz"

1. Contents and objectives of the project

1.1 What was implemented and when?

The International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights in Communities and Regions under UNESCO's auspices and the African Local Government Academy (ALGA) of United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLG Africa) have jointly hosted three webinars on women's rights at the local level in 2025. The webinars were implemented as follows:

- Political participation of women on 19 March 2025
- Prevention of gender-based violence on 10 June 2025
- Inclusion of women and girls through sport on 17 December 2025

The work included the preparation of the content of the webinars, the application and mobilization of participants (including public relations), as well as the documentation of the webinars.

1.2 What was implemented by whom?

The planning and thematic focus was carried out in exchange between the two project partners. The selection of topics was made on the basis of the following criteria:

- Thematic relevance for women's rights
- Responsibility of the local authority in African cities and Graz
- Experience with examples of good practice in African cities and Graz
- Transferability of approaches and practices (rather than strongly contextual topics)

In the preparation of the webinars, the division of labour between the partners was as follows:

The UNESCO Centre was responsible for the methodological and content-related design of the programme, as well as for the provision of the infrastructure of the webinars (including the creation of flyers, social media activities, conception of the methods and procedures of the webinars). The ALGA was mainly responsible for mobilizing the participants from African cities, as well as for moderating the exchange and providing ad hoc translations and interpretation in French and English.

1.3 What were the objectives of the project?

The objective of the project is to promote a partnership between the city of Graz and African cities in order to be able to effectively and jointly address human rights challenges at the local level.



The webinar series focused in particular on the promotion of gender equality and the greater involvement of women in politics, on the prevention of violence and the inclusion of women and girls through sports. The webinars offer multipliers as representatives of local authorities from African cities and their colleagues from the city of Graz a platform to enter into dialogue, exchange knowledge and jointly address and solve context-specific problems.

The webinars were based on a peer-to-peer learning approach with representatives of local authorities and female political leaders from African cities, as well as representatives of the city of Graz. Through the webinars and the exchange within the framework of peer-to-peer learning, the participants became human rights multipliers who pass on in their networks what they have learned and experienced.

The webinars were intended to empower human rights multipliers to disseminate knowledge and successful approaches to promote women's political participation at the local level, prevent gender-based violence and strengthen social inclusion for girls and women through sport in their contexts. By exchanging the expertise, experiences and diverse perspectives of women in local authorities from Graz and African cities, the project actively contributed to strengthening cross-city cooperation and sustainable development in both regions.

1.4 For which target group was it planned?

Elected women in political functions, mayors, gender experts, activists at the local level were the target groups of the webinars.

2. Implementation processes and procedures

2.1 Content and methodological planning

Content planning: For each of the three webinars, a concept note was prepared that explains the topic in more detail, as well as the relevance in connection with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other relevant UN documents (such as from UN Women), as well as regional strategies (African Union Agenda 2063 and its Protocol on Women's Rights 2003). Objectives, target groups and the modalities of the exchange were also an important part of the concept papers. Based on the concept, each webinar's the agenda and speakers were determined.

The agenda of each webinar included the following elements:

Opening remarks

- Opening remarks by the project managers
- Opening remarks and empowerment by high-level political representatives from Graz and the African Association of Cities

Examples of good practice

- Presentation and discussion of 2-3 examples of good practice from African cities and Graz

Discussion

- Moderated discussion on the most important barriers, challenges and solutions for the implementation of the respective topic at the local level in Graz and African cities

Conclusion and outlook



The selection of the **speakers** was based on the following criteria:

- Being well known in the region / city "Role Model"
- Experience and expertise on the topic (topical expertise and application experience with an example of good practice)
- Geographical balance
- Leadership personality and charisma

2.2 Mobilisation and networking of multipliers

The following strategies were successfully applied to mobilize participants and establish a network among them, as well as to promote the webinar series:

- Key people in access to the target group

Dr. Najat Zarrouk, Director of the Academy of Administration of the African Association of Cities (ALGA) and partner of the project, has proved as key in accessing elected women and local politicians to participate in the webinars. In addition, the ALGA, in the person of its director, Dr. Najat Zarrouk, has good contacts with the Network of locally elected Women of Africa (REFELA), as this network was founded by UCLG Africa in 2011. The REFELA network also played a key role – as an example of good practice, as well as in mobilising participants in the webinars. The ETC Graz, as the office of the Graz Human Rights Advisory Board, also has good contacts and long-standing cooperation relationships with the human rights city of Graz, its representatives, as well as the human rights scene in Graz. This well-networked nature of the two project partners was a key factor in achieving the project's objective and mobilising the multipliers.

- Creation of a flyer and promotion on social media and newsletters

A flyer was designed for the mobilization of participants, as well as the application on social media. The flyer contains information about the objective, purpose and target group of the webinar series as a whole, as well as more detailed information about each of the three webinars. This was disseminated on the social media profiles of the project partners. In addition, the ETC Graz regularly sent out information about the webinar series (and about each one) via its own newsletter. Furthermore, newsletters of thematically relevant organizations and departments / departments of the City of Graz were used, for example the newsletter of the Integration Department of the City of Graz, as well as that of the United Nations Public Administration Network (UNPAN).

- Presence and presentation of the project at the FairStyria Day

On June 24, 2025, the Province of Styria hosted the 20th edition of FairStyria Day in the Joanneum Quarter in Graz. This year's FairStyria Day was dedicated to the United Nations' fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5): gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls. As part of the programme, the UNESCO Centre presented the webinar series on women's rights at the local level. The event also met with great interest among students.

- WhatsApp Gruppe "SERIE OF WEBINARS UCLGAFRICA-CENTRE GRAZ 2025"

A WhatsApp group was founded for networking and the sustainability of the dialogue and exchange. All participants and speakers were added to this group based on their consent. Currently (as of January 9, 2026), the WhatsApp group has 60 members. This group continues to exist after the end of the project / webinar series and is still active. Even after the webinars have ended, the WhatsApp group is used by the women to empower each other or exchange relevant information. Here is a quote from a participant:



"We have started, dear all. And if we work around the clock together, we will make a difference."

2.3 Detailed Reporting / Webinar

Webinar Women's Participation in Local Politics on 19 March 2025, 12-14h, online

The women shared best practices and challenges related to promoting inclusive political participation at the local level, with a particular focus on engaging marginalised communities, creating an enabling environment for women's participation in local politics, reconciling their responsibilities at the local level and in their families, and investing in networking and capacity building. The women emphasized the importance of "female empowerment".

The speakers:

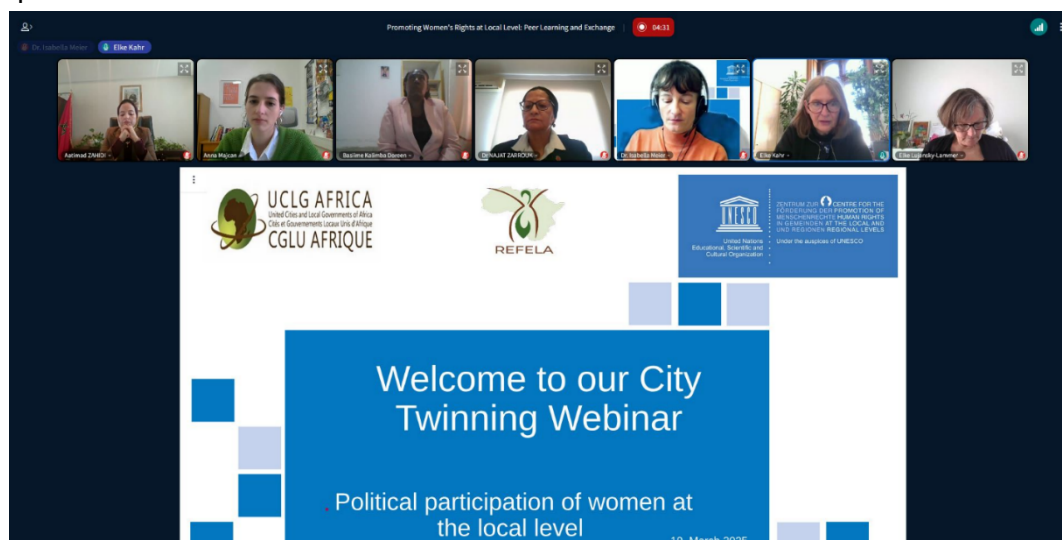


Figure 1 Opening Webinar 1

- Elke Kahr, Mayor of the City of Graz, Austria,
- Rohey Malick Lowe, President of REFELA, Mayor of Banjul, Gambia,
- Fatna El Khel, Vice-President of REFELA for North Africa, President of REFELA-Morocco, President of the Municipal Council of Arbaoua, Kingdom of Morocco,
- Milka Moraa Areba, Member of the District Assembly, Mombasa District, President of the Women's Committee of REFELA-Kenya, Vice-President of REFELA for East Africa,
- Aatimad Zahidi, President of the Prefectural Council of Skhirate-Temara, Kingdom of Morocco,
- Leslee Way, Deputy Mayor of Siteki City Council, Kingdom of Eswatini,
- Doreen Kalimba, Member of the RLAGA Board of Directors, Chairperson of the Local Economic Development Commission, Chairwoman of the Kayonza District Council, Rwanda,
- Anna Majcan, Managing Director and Spokesperson of the Graz Women's Council
- Dr. Elke Lujansky-Lammer, Chairwoman of the Human Rights Advisory Board Graz, Austria.

Moderators: Dr. Isabella Meier, Dr. Najat Zarrouk



Figure 2 Participants Webinar 1

Participants: The first webinar saw the participation of 25 representatives from about 15 countries from Austria and Africa as well as local and regional governments (Cameroon, Eswatini, Kenya, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, etc.).

Webinar: The Prevention of Gender-Based Violence on 10 June 2025, 12-14h online

How can femicides be prevented? And what needs to happen to create a life without violence for all women? What can local authorities do to prevent violence against women? What are good practices and approaches in African cities and in Graz? These and other questions were addressed in the second webinar, in which local politicians and experts from Graz and African cities discussed challenges and best practices.

After the successful kick-off event in March 2025, the second peer learning webinar on the promotion of women's rights at the local level took place on 10 June.

Good practices include one-stop shops for victims or survivors of gender-based violence, providing medical, forensic, psychosocial and legal services, as well as the ability to remove perpetrators from their homes in cases of domestic violence, while victims can remain in their familiar environment. The experts agreed that women must be informed about their rights and entitlements as schoolgirls and empowered to exercise these rights. In this context, it was recommended that women-only rooms be set up in schools for mutual exchange and empowerment.

Among the biggest challenges are persistent cultural stereotypes that intimidate victims of gender-based violence and discourage them from seeking protection and support. Representatives of African cities and from Graz cited structural and economic inequalities that lead to poverty or economic dependence of women, as well as a lack of trust in authorities and law enforcement officers. The recommendations include measures to promote the civil courage



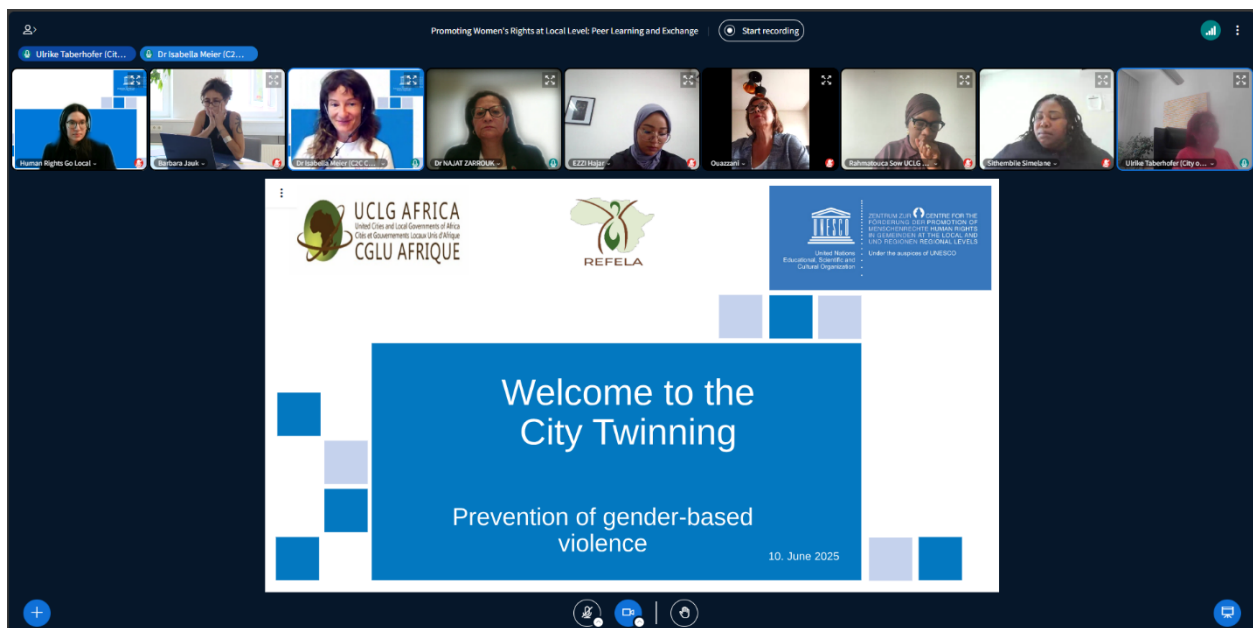


Figure 3: Opening Webinar 2

of witnesses of gender-based violence, as well as information campaigns as part of the United Nations' "16 Days against Violence against Women". In addition, the participants agreed that men must also be involved in the fight against gender-based violence (e.g. through "He for She" campaigns).

On the part of the city of Graz, the brochure "Be Safe", as well as the Violence Protection Centre and its low-threshold offers in the field of victim protection were reported as examples of good practice. Measures to strengthen the safety of women in public spaces (Rabat, Marrakech), as well as low-threshold offers to inform women living in slums about their rights (Kenya) were reported from African cities. Sierra Leone provides its own means of transport for women in order to ensure their (subjective feeling of) safety on public transport. Furthermore, the multipliers from African cities report on shelters for women affected by violence that provide medical, legal and psychological services (Kigali, Rwanda).

The speakers:

- Uli Taberhofer, Municipal Councillor, City of Graz, Austria
- Milka Moraa Areba, Member of the District Assembly, Mombasa District, President of the Women's Committee of REFELA-Kenya, Vice-President of REFELA for East Africa,
- Dr. Barbara Jauk, Styrian Violence Protection Centre
- Nyiramasengesho Jeannette, Chairwoman of Ngororero District, Rwanda.
- Aatimad Zahidi, President of the Prefectural Council of Skhirate-Temara, Kingdom of Morocco,
- Leslee Way, Deputy Mayor of Siteki City Council, Kingdom of Eswatini,
- Doreen Kalimba, Member of the RLAGA Board of Directors, Chairperson of the Local Economic Development Commission, Chairwoman of the Kayonza District Council, Rwanda,



Moderators: Dr. Isabella Meier, Dr. Najat Zarrouk

Based on the experience of the first webinar, the need for a French translation was identified. Women from the target group speak French as a second language, not English. Therefore, the presentations of the 2nd webinar were translated in writing into English / German / French.

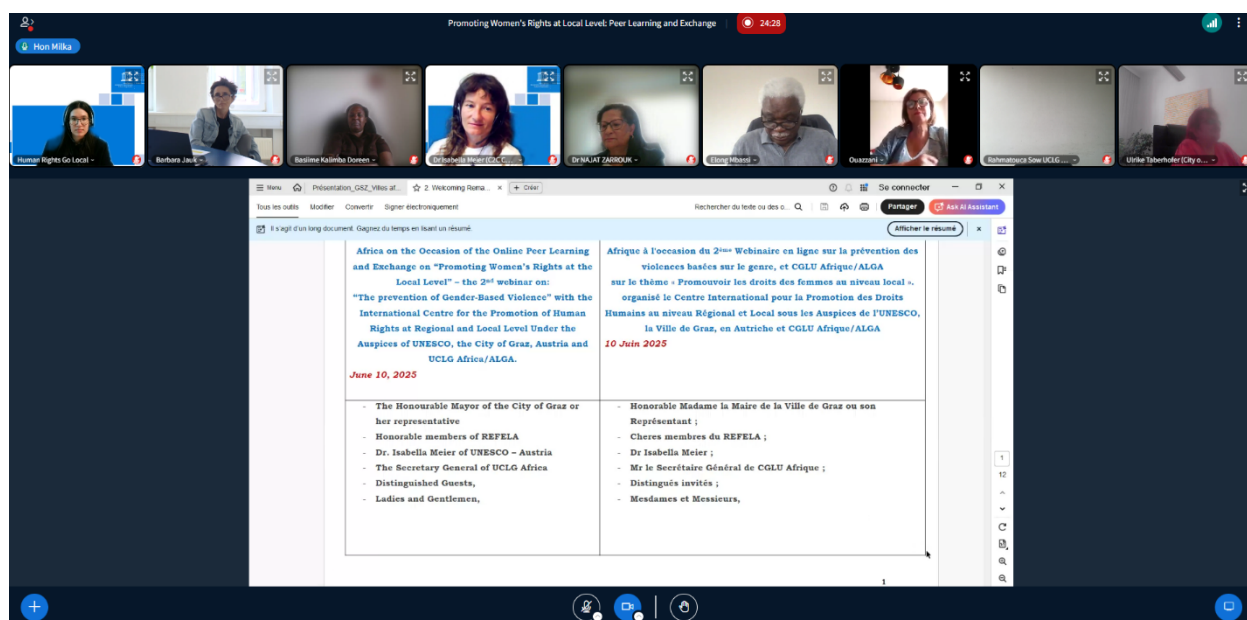


Figure 4 Participants Webinar 2

Participants: 23 people from Rabat, Maroua, Mombasa, Kigali, Siteki, Accra, Montréal, Freetown, Mandlakazi, Nansana, Cairo, Graz and Paris took part. The participants are mainly representatives of these cities (in politics and administration), as well as of city networks, REFELA, consultants, CEOs and experts, trainers and program managers.



Webinar: Inclusion of girls and women through sport, 11-14h online

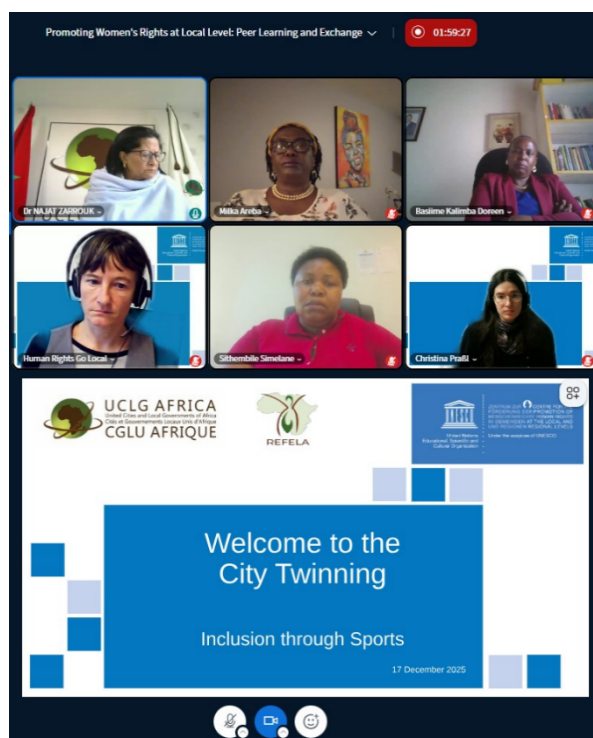


Figure 5 Opening Webinar 3

The third and final webinar in the series explored the question of how sports can be used as a means of empowering girls. The webinar took place on December 17, 2025. The starting point for the measures in African cities was the fact that sport is very fragmented in public spaces by young people. There is no structured, long-term offer in the field of sports. City administrations also offer hardly any services in the field of sports and certainly not with a view to education, upbringing and inclusion. As a consequence of this, and also because public spaces in African settlement areas are often not safe, girls hardly do any sports. For example, cities are investing in a structured, regular and low-threshold accessible offer in the field of sports. Furthermore, sport is now used as a "tool" for education, upbringing and the promotion of social cohesion. The following were mentioned as concrete effects of these measures: increased use of sports facilities (in general), increased diversity of users, increased safety of sports facilities, positive feedback from the neighbourhood. Subsequently, sport was also integrated into regular lessons, which in turn had the positive effect of drop-out prevention. After all, young people have also been trained as coaches and work on the maintenance of the sports areas.



Another reported practice tries to integrate sport as a "cross-sectional matter" into other offers of the city and into clubs (volunteer fire brigade, school). Central challenges are: little budget, few staff, inadequate sports facilities, lack of safety in public spaces.

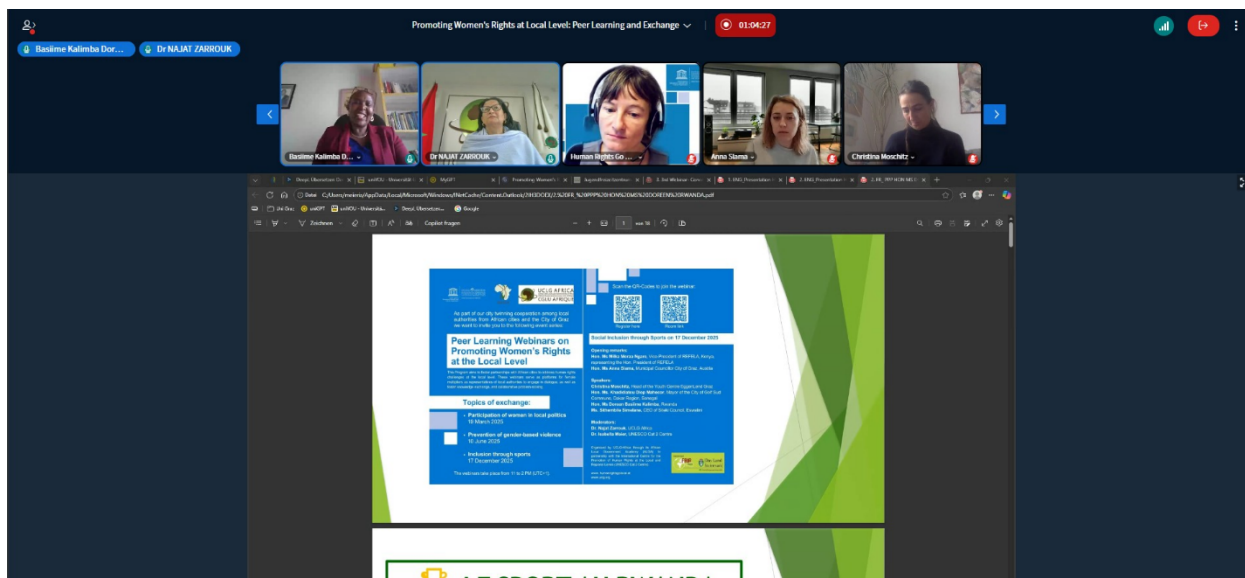


Figure 6 Participants Webinar 3

The Graz lecture showed how sport can be used in open youth work to strengthen girls and make the entire offer more accessible to them. The director of a youth centre reports on one "girls' day" a month, where only girls have access to the sports facilities. Especially on Girls' Day, the fitness rooms of the youth center are used particularly intensively. For many, Girls' Day is an important introduction to sport – not only in terms of positive body awareness and self-confidence. The following factors were identified by the Graz-based expert to make true inclusion through sport possible: Safe and protected sports spaces, especially for girls; low-threshold access (free of charge and without pressure to perform); female role models; Participation of young people in the (co-)design of the offers. Last but not least, the diversity of the offer, as well as a good infrastructure, is important so that sport can be used as a means of inclusion of girls.

All participants agree that girls-only spaces are still important – they are safer and more well-behaved spaces. However, the participants from African cities emphasized that safety is also important on the way to and from the sports facilities. The main differences between Graz and the African cities are: Sport is a regular offer in schools in Graz, the infrastructure and public transport in Graz are largely safe for use by girls. In African cities, the diaspora is used to identify role models and resources.

The speakers:

- Milka Moraa Ngare, Member of the Mombasa District Assembly, Chair of the Women's Committee of COG Kenya, Chair of G100 Mombasa County, Vice-President of REFELA for East Africa, Kenya, Representative of the Honorable President of the Association of Women Local Politicians of Africa (REFELA)
- Anna Slama, municipal councillor of the city of Graz, Austria.
- Christina Moschitz, head of the EggenLend Graz youth centre.
- Diop Khadidiatou Mahecor, Mayor of Golf Sud Municipality, Dakar Region, Senegal.



- Doreen Kalimba, Chairperson of Ayonza District Council, Member of RRAGA Executive Committee, Chairperson of the Local Economic Development Commission (LED), Rwanda. "Sport in Rwanda".
- Sithembile Simelane, Executive Director of Siteki Council, Eswatini. "Sport as a catalyst for inclusion, well-being and networking of employees

The last webinar of the series consisted of 38 participants (including speakers) from Kinshasa, Djibouti, Ouagadougou, Casablanca, Accra, Rabat, Gold Sud, Mapai, Mombasa, Tripoli, Nairobi, Graz, Lolodorf, Lome, Afanloum, Koudougou, Siteki, Nansana, Libreville, Segou, Maseru, Maputo, Otjiwarongo, Raaba-Grambach. The participants are mainly representatives of these cities, but also researchers, experts or program managers. The comparatively high number of participants at the last webinar may also be due to the fact that – as in the 2nd webinar – the practices were translated into English and French. This made it easier to reach French-speaking representatives from African cities.

3. Evaluation / Results of the Project

Planned results (according to project application)	Actual results (and evidence)
Increased participation of women in local politics: Through the targeted webinars, the knowledge and skills of the participants are strengthened to increase the political influence of women at the local level. Participants will be empowered to develop and implement strategies and examples of good practice for more effective women's political participation.	This result was achieved through the intensive exchange of best practices to strengthen women's participation in local politics in the first webinar. From Graz, the diverse advisory board system was reported as an example of functional participation of women in politics. The representatives of African cities focused on the need for women's networks and empowerment to foster women's political participation. The joint discussion of female practitioners and experts about challenges and solutions to the topic served to strengthen and secure the exchange for a more effective political participation of women.
Strengthened prevention measures against gender-based violence: The project will lead to the development and implementation of locally tailored measures for the prevention of gender-based violence. The participating representatives should be able to apply the findings in practice in their communities and promote measures to combat violence.	This result was also achieved through the exchange of information about successful practices in violence prevention and the offers for survivors. The practices with different focuses and objectives were explained, and common challenges and solutions were discussed. This exchange of information and discussion helped to deepen the knowledge of the representatives of the municipalities.



Promoting social inclusion through sport: The webinars will teach participants how sport can be used as a tool for social inclusion. In particular, this will promote the integration of girls and women into social and sporting activities in order to overcome barriers and strengthen social cohesion.	The exchange of good practices and prerequisites for sport to be a tool for social inclusion has contributed to the achievement of the aspired result. However, there were differences in the starting conditions between African cities and Graz on this topic. In African cities, greater importance must be given to the safety of girls on the way to sports facilities and in public spaces. In Graz, the focus is mainly on empowerment of girls in the area of body awareness and self-esteem. Exclusive spaces for girls are of central importance in both regions for the accessibility of sports activities, as well as for empowerment.
Deepened networks and partnerships: The peer-to-peer exchange creates new networks between the participating African cities and Graz. These partnerships can sustainably promote the continuous exchange of knowledge, experience and examples of good practice.	Looking back on the webinar series, it is clear that it was a peer-to-peer exchange at eye level, in which all participants were able to learn from each other. It was also surprising that contextual factors hardly played a role, so that the examples of good practice could certainly be transferred to the respective partner cities. Women's rights as a cross-cutting issue of local politics is very well suited to establishing deeper networks and partnerships. Only on the topic of "sport and inclusion" do the two partners find different prerequisites, each of which requires different solutions. This fact, in combination with the appreciative and respectful atmosphere at the webinars (according to feedback from the participants) in combination with the "networking tool" of the WhatsApp group with 60 members, made it possible to build a sustainable platform for continuous exchange.
Strengthening gender equality: An important outcome of the project will be raising awareness and promoting gender equality at the local level. The participants are strengthened in their role as multipliers in order to promote gender equality in their communities.	The participants were already highly aware of the need to strengthen gender equality and had practical application experience and expertise on how to implement this in their local contexts. The exchange in the webinars strengthened the participants and encouraged them to carry this knowledge and experience to the outside world as multipliers. Experience has shown that the



	format of a peer-to-peer exchange, initiated by key people who enjoy the trust of the target groups, is well suited to train and empower multipliers.
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Table 1: Results aspired set and achievements

4. Insights for the future

English is not enough as a working language for cooperation with African cities. French is the official language in many West and Central African countries that are former French colonies. These are not accessible with English-language formats. For the further development of such peer-to-peer exchange formats, interpreting into at least English and French is indispensable. For the project in question, the exchange was nevertheless made possible by the makeshift translation of the project partners also for French-speaking participants. For future exchange projects of this kind, however, professional interpreting services must be planned and calculated.

WhatsApp as a medium of networking and founding a platform for exchange has proven to be better than e-mail distribution lists. While WhatsApp is rarely used as a medium of professional communication in Graz, this is quite different in African cities. For future events and cooperation with African cities, it is therefore recommended to rely on WhatsApp as a communication and networking platform from the very beginning.

Without key people who enjoy the trust of the target group, the webinar series would not have been such a success. Key people are central to the mobilization and participation of the target group, as well as to the open and intensive exchange.



5. Attachments

Concept note (exemplary)

Flyer (example)

