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***Welcome Note for the Closing Conference of the SOLID I Project
Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences, 21 November 2024***

by Sherif Azab-Elis, DAAD

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues and Friends, distinguished Participants,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the closing ceremony of SOLID, *Social Work and Strengthening NGOs in Development Cooperation to Treat Drug Addiction*, here at the Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences. Today, we celebrate the successful conclusion of five years of dedication and commitment to advancing social work as both an academic field and a practical tool for professionals at all partner organizations.

SOLID is part of the **exceed Programme**, funded by the **DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service)** with support from the **Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)**. The exceed Programme empowers universities and their partners in the Global South to contribute to the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** as outlined in Agenda 2030 for sustainable development. The work of all seven exceed networks, including SOLID, reflects an incredible effort to tackle global challenges through collaboration in both education and research.

The current phase of the funding Programme began in 2020 under extraordinarily challenging circumstances. A global pandemic limited mobility and traditional ways of working. Yet, the participating networks adapted to these constraints with resilience and innovation. Virtual platforms



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became the new stage for collaboration, enabling activities to continue despite these obstacles.

SOLID: Reflecting the Exceed Vision

In its mission to empower universities to fulfill their societal role, the exceed Programme aims to enable universities to address critical development issues. SOLID exemplifies this approach by advancing social work education and fostering research that meets the needs of its partner organizations.

- **Equipping students and scholars:** Exceed prioritizes preparing students and graduates with skills to address development challenges. In SOLID, this vision has supported 17 doctoral candidates and 7 post-doctoral researchers, empowering them to bridge research, teaching, and practice.
- **Generating tangible community outcomes:** Like other exceed networks, SOLID has connected academic research with real-world impact. Its contributions to addiction treatment and social care practices have directly benefited communities across its partner countries.
- **Aligning with SDG-focused research topics:** The funding programme concentrates on SDG-aligned research priorities. SOLID's three pillars—drug treatment, infectious diseases, and care for vulnerable groups in closed settings—are outstanding examples of this alignment.

Achievements of SOLID

As we today officially close the SOLID I chapter, we celebrate the foundation that has been built. Yet, we also recognize that this is just the beginning of a



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longer journey. The exceed Programme reflects our shared commitment to fostering sustainable development through higher education, and SOLID stands as a shining example of what can be achieved.

Looking to the Future

The next funding phase, beginning in 2025, presents an opportunity to deepen our impact. Our focus will shift toward:

- Expanding training programs to reach even more students and practitioners.
- Strengthening partnerships with global and regional extramural organizations
- Further integrating social work into healthcare and development policies.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of all participating partners. I would like to extend my gratitude to all partner universities represented here today. Your commitment has been invaluable to the success of the network. I also wish to thank the Frankfurt University of Applied Sciences for hosting this event and for its consistent support throughout the project.

I wish us all a successful event filled with engaging discussions and valuable exchanges.

Thank you for your attention.