Cities: Part of the SDGs

The importance of cities and urban development as a concern for the international community was greatly emphasized by the 193 Member States of the United Nations when they agreed on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015.¹ The SDGs are a voluntary formula for coordinating all global development assistance, to maximize the effectiveness of global development work and alleviate the worst problems of interational poverty, underdevelopment, and insecurity. There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals, each with several sub-goals, for over 120 in all. Cities are coordinated under SDG Number 11.

Agenda for the world’s cities

- How best to assure proper housing and social services?
- How best to assure proper security from violence and crime?
- How best to assure employment in cities?
- How best to slow internal migration: ensure opportunity and hope, so people can stay in their villages and the countryside?

With problems like these in mind, in 2015 the 193 Member States of the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a global development agenda that lays out 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be achieved by 2030.

The SDGs came into effect in January 2016. They are a universal set of goals, targets and indicators that set out quantitative objectives across the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.

Addressing critical sustainability issues such as poverty, climate change, inequality, economic development, and ecosystem protection, the SDGs are designed to be implemented in all countries, across different territorial scales.

Governments are not required to follow the SDGs, but passing them unanimously shows strong interional commitment. As implementation gets more expensive, though, Member States may begin to hesitate and even defect from that consensus.

Cities and human settlements will be key to achieving the global SDGs. The SDGs come into effect in a world that is increasingly urban, with a little over half the global population now living in cities. Urbanization has thrown up

some of the world’s greatest development challenges, but it also has tremendous opportunities for advancing sustainable development.

SDG 11 recognizes the central role of urbanization in sustainable development, and calls for ‘mak[ing] cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.’ As one of the 17 SDGs that will shape public policy priorities and guide development finance flows for the next fifteen years, the ‘urban SDG’ provides a tremendous opportunity for cities to build robust partnerships and gain additional resources for advancing sustainable urban development. Key points:

• Half of humanity – 3.5 billion people – lives in cities today
• By 2030, almost 60 per cent of the world’s population will live in urban areas
• 95 per cent of urban expansion in the next decades will take place in developing world
• 828 million people live in slums today and the number keeps rising
• The world’s cities occupy just 3 per cent of the Earth’s land, but account for 60-80 per cent of energy consumption and 75 per cent of carbon emissions
• Rapid urbanization is exerting pressure on fresh water supplies, sewage, the living environment, and public health
• But the high density of cities can bring efficiency gains and technological innovation while reducing resource and energy consumption

Sustainable cities key to implement SDGs, says head of UN regional forum

UN News Centre 4 October 2017

Noting the high speed of urbanization in Latin America and the Caribbean, the United Nations development arm in the region underlined the need to keep a close watch on the provision of services, equipment, mobility, housing and urban land to make sure they can match pace with the demand.

Speaking at the opening of the Cities Conference, Alicia Bárcena, the Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) underscored that despite significant progress in reducing poverty, high degrees of socioeconomic residential segregation continues to persist in metropolises and large and small cities and towns.

“The socioeconomic segregation deepens inequity and contributes to social fragmentation and the high levels of violence that characterize many cities in [the region],” she said.

According to estimates, by 2030 – the timeframe to realize the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – there could be more than 92 million additional people living in cities in Latin America and the Caribbean. The region is already the most urbanized developing region in the world.
Sustainable Cities: The Main Issue

The world is urbanizing at a rapid pace. By 2050, more than 2 billion additional people will be living in cities — about two-thirds of the global population. Moreover, the vast majority of this growth will be concentrated in developing countries, with nearly 90 percent of the increase from cities in Asia and Africa. Cities are therefore the best place to start addressing three mega-trends that drive global environmental degradation: urbanization, a rising middle class and population growth.

As engines of economic growth, cities already produce 80 percent of the world’s gross domestic product (GDP). They consume over two-thirds of global energy supply, and generate 70 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. Cities are also uniquely vulnerable to climate change: 14 of the world’s 19 largest cities are located in port areas.

If managed well, compact, resilient, inclusive and resource-efficient cities could become drivers of the green economy, contributing to both local liveability and global public goods. If managed poorly, sprawling urban areas will degrade land, strain ecosystems and essential infrastructure services, increase levels of air and water pollution, and increase the size of vulnerable populations.
Urbanization and Development of Disadvantaged City Settlements

Cities with more than 10 million people in the year 2015

These will be the world’s biggest cities in 2030

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Forecast Population, millions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tokyo, Japan</td>
<td>37.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delhi, India</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanghai, China</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mumbai, India</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beijing, China</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhaka, Bangladesh</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karachi, Pakistan</td>
<td>24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cairo, Egypt</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagos, Nigeria</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico City, Mexico</td>
<td>23.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UN World Urbanization Prospects, 2014 revision
In recent decades, the world has experienced unprecedented urban growth. In 2015, close to 4 billion people — 54 per cent of the world’s population — lived in cities and that number is projected to increase to about 5 billion people by 2030. Rapid urbanization has brought enormous challenges, including growing numbers of slum dwellers, increased air pollution, inadequate basic services and infrastructure, and unplanned urban sprawl, which also make cities more vulnerable to disasters. Better urban planning and management are needed to make the world’s urban spaces more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. As of May 2017, 149 countries were developing national-level urban policies.

- The proportion of the urban population that lives in developing country slums fell from 39 per cent in 2000 to 30 per cent in 2014. Despite some gains, the absolute number of urban residents who live in slums continued to grow, owing in part to accelerating urbanization, population growth and lack of appropriate land and housing policies. In 2014, an estimated 880 million urban residents lived in slum conditions, compared to 792 million urban residents in 2000.

- As more and more people move to urban areas, cities typically expand their geographic boundaries to accommodate new inhabitants. From 2000 to 2015, in all regions of the world, the expansion of urban land outpaced the growth of urban populations. As a result, cities are becoming less dense as they grow, with unplanned urban sprawl challenging more sustainable patterns of urban development.

- The safe removal and management of solid waste represents one of the most vital urban environmental services. Uncollected solid waste blocks drains, causes flooding and may lead to the spread of water-borne diseases. On the basis of data from cities in 101 countries from 2009 to 2013, 65 per cent of the urban population was served by municipal waste collection.

- Air pollution is a major environmental health risk. In 2014, 9 of 10 people who live in cities were breathing air that did not comply with the safety standard set by WHO.
SDG Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, 2015

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11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage

11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations

11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities
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