

OCEAN CITIES

Snapshot for Policy-makers Delivering Resilient Solutions in Pacific Island Settlements



AUTHORS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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All \$ currencies are US dollars unless otherwise stated.

About this document

The Ocean Cities Snapshot for Policy Makers serves as a companion document to the Ocean Cities Regional Policy Guide. The Snapshot provides an Executive Summary of the Ocean Cities concept, the context, challenges and opportunities of Ocean Cities, and outlines several policy recommendations for the implementation of solutions for simultaneously achieving urban climate resilience, improved sustainability of ocean resources and better integration of landscape and seascape planning. Interested parties are encouraged to refer to the Regional Policy Guide document (available online on the ESCAP website at <https://www.unescap.org/our-work/environment-development/urban-development/resources>) for additional in-depth content.

This Guide and Snapshot are the initial outcomes of the work of ESCAP on Ocean Cities. ESCAP invites interested representatives to contact the Environment and Development Division (escap-edd@un.org) to discuss developing possible future collaborations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ocean and the city

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) established a partnership with Pacific island developing States to develop an integrated policy approach for ocean-focused and climate-responsive urban development strategies. Concentrating on urban areas in Pacific island developing States, this guide introduces an approach that has been adapted for island systems and local, national, regional and global development plans. Within the context of ongoing urbanization processes in Pacific island developing States, the guide recognizes the important links between the impacts of urban growth and development, climate change impacts, ocean health and coastal systems, and the effect these factors have on the development and resilience of “Ocean Cities”.

Ocean Cities are where urban landscapes and seascapes meet, where built and natural environments near coastlines interface and where human behaviour and urban development have profound impacts on both terrestrial and marine ecosystems. Ocean Cities are at the forefront of the climate change consequences, the urbanization challenges and other development pressures. Cities face many challenges – demographic, climatic, economic – but they also generate many positive opportunities for future action. This guide is about making that future a bright one by harnessing those activities and supporting a Pacific Way for cities that is culturally and environmentally affirming.

Addressing the interlinked issues that are characteristic of Ocean Cities in an integrated, ocean-focused and climate-responsive manner is vital for sustainable development within island systems, including the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), Sustainable Development Goal 13 (take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts) and Sustainable Development Goal 14 (conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development).

The context and some key challenges for Ocean Cities:

- Ocean Cities are the living places of tomorrow, with rapidly growing and youthful populations.
- Ocean Cities are particularly vulnerable and exposed to natural hazards, including storms, tropical cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic activity.
- A changing climate exacerbates several risk and vulnerability factors.
- Most Pacific island communities and economies are dependent on healthy coastal and ocean resources, but these are often depleted by increasing human populations.
- There has been a rapid rise of people living in informal settlements in Ocean Cities and these communities are often at the front-line of climate change impacts.
- Customary land and resulting complex land tenure systems and mechanisms.
- Food, energy and water security are subject to significant pressures, and waste management challenges are also overwhelming many urban systems.

Nature-based solutions in Ocean Cities

Nature-based solutions relate to the goals of increasing human well-being and resilience by working with, conserving or restoring nature and understanding ecological systems across interconnected landscapes, ocean ecologies and socio-cultural systems. Nature-based solutions can be defined as actions to protect,

sustainably manage and restore natural or modified ecosystems while simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits. To be really applicable in cities, nature-based solutions have to be more than just about ecosystem protection. They need to involve an awareness of how natural systems work and letting this awareness inform urban design and form.

Nature-based solutions through an ocean-focused lens should be explored for the urban challenges and needs in the small island developing States. If carefully and holistically designed, nature-based solutions can produce win-win situations across multiple connected social-ecological-economic systems. Employing an integrated, participatory nature-based solutions approach to addressing societal challenges is an important way to take into account complex ecological and socio-cultural issues while taking a long-term view to improving human resilience and well-being, with notable additional ecological co-benefits.

The practice of working closely with nature to create human settlements while maintaining healthy ecosystems, and the services they provide, is not new and, indeed, is a cornerstone of many indigenous belief systems. It may not always be possible or appropriate to place financial value on nature-based solutions; economic valuation alone can omit or misinterpret socio-cultural values or environmental benefits. It is thus necessary to take a holistic approach to valuing the various benefits and trade-offs associated with nature-based solutions and to understand that their value will change over time.

Advancing implementation

An enabling environment for the implementation of solutions requires a wide range of resources, partnerships and meaningful engagement from countries and stakeholders at the regional, national and local levels:

Elevating a “blue” urban agenda: Ultimately, the strengthening of political will is needed to elevate and adequately prioritize urban issues and resilience in the Pacific region. A strengthened strategic Pacific regional approach to managing urbanization and Ocean Cities’ resilience is also crucial.

Building meaningful partnerships with all stakeholders: An all-of-society approach, along with multi-stakeholder partnerships that are aligned with customary practices is necessary. Increasing the engagement of youth, women and vulnerable communities’ is especially important.

Strengthening capacities for building resilience and action: Island settlements at the nexus of ocean health, climate change and urban development need to build anticipatory, absorptive, adaptive and transformative capacities in the face of myriad complex risks. Strengthening the role of urban spatial planning and design is also key for increasing resilience.

Improving evidence for action: Mapping spatial and socioeconomic vulnerability in urban systems and communities, as well as improving technical capacity for research and data gathering, are crucial first steps towards improving evidence for building resilience in Ocean Cities.

Accessing finance for major, transformative resilience-building initiatives: Such initiatives are usually dependent on state-level actions to undertake reforms that empower local governments through intergovernmental transfer systems, efficient revenue collection and support for creditworthiness. This creates more certainty for subnational investment and strengthens municipal decision-making. Leveraging climate finance for ocean-focused sustainable urban development is an opportunity to protect vital carbon sinks and build resilience against climate change impacts in Ocean Cities.

The guide concludes with suggestions for priority policy actions for short-, medium- and long-term planning horizons.

Urban development in Ocean Cities

Actions		
Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
<p>ent policy statements on the vision linking to SDGs 11, 13 and 14.</p> <p>urban and urbanization policy and plans.</p> <p>tend basic services, including water, waste collection and electricity, into settlements.</p> <p>management policies for “quick wins”.</p> <p>is” (refuse, reduce, reuse, repurpose, or effective waste management</p> <p>adaptation initiatives, including urbanization and greening.</p>	<p>Update the legislative framework for the management of urban growth.</p> <p>Assign an existing or new government agency to strategically manage sustainable urban growth.</p> <p>Progressively extend basic services, including water, sanitation, solid waste collection and electricity, into informal settlements.</p> <p>Prioritize policy and actions to address current and future ocean health, with a focus on awareness, formal education and enforcement.</p>	<p>Develop modern sanitary landfills.</p> <p>Increase the supply of affordable and sustainable housing.</p> <p>Upgrade informal settlements.</p>
<p>akeholder participation, consultation and processes.</p> <p>Dialogue with peri-urban customary authorities for appropriate public-private and other financing options.</p>	<p>Pilot and begin work to value nature-based solutions.</p> <p>Begin or consolidate partnerships with the private sector.</p>	<p>Consider extension of town boundaries where required to ensure better management of urban and (current) peri-urban areas but manage urban sprawl.</p> <p>Consider tenure and governance structures for informal settlements on customary peri-urban land.</p>
<p>itize capacity needs.</p> <p>orm human resource development</p>	<p>Target capacity building through skills development and education, with emphasis on women and youth.</p>	<p>Increase government positions for urban planners, urban designers, landscape architects, engineers, etc.</p>

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