
"WORKSHOP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN ASIAN AND PACIFIC CITIES"

30 November – 1 December 2016
United Nations Conference Centre, Bangkok, Thailand

BACKGROUND PAPER

1. THE ROLE OF CITIES IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF INTERNATIONALLY AGREED DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The Asia-Pacific region has undergone tremendous change in recent decades in economic, social and environmental terms and this change will accelerate in the next twenty years. Cities have been at the centre of such change and will be at the forefront of the region's transition to a sustainable pathway. In two years' time the majority of the population of Asia and the Pacific, which only a few decades ago was predominantly rural, will be living in cities. The region is currently going through an urbanization process that is unprecedented in human history both in terms of size and scale. Between 1980 and 2010 the region's cities grew by over one billion, a further one billion will be added again by 2040.¹ There is no historical precedent for an urban transition on such a massive scale.

Asian and Pacific cities are now the pre-dominant hubs of economic growth and wealth creation. The economic successes and transformation of cities in the region has lifted millions of people out of poverty. The number of those estimated to be middle class in the region will reach 3.2 billion by 2030. This will represent 80 per cent of the world's total middle class population.² At the same time, the region's urban economies have developed through environmentally exploitative models which have also often increased social exclusion. As a result many cities are now confronted with daunting environmental challenges and multiple crises of liveability. The impact is especially felt by vulnerable groups – the half a billion people in Asia and the Pacific who still live in slums, those who are particularly exposed to poor air quality, those who are without adequate access to basic infrastructure, including safe water and sanitation and basic services such as education and health.

1 ESCAP & UN-Habitat (2015) *State of Asian and Pacific Cities Report 2015*.

2 Kharas, H., and Gertz, G. (2010), *The New Global Middle Class: A Cross-Over from West to East*, Wolfensohn Center for Development at Brookings.

Thus it is in cities where we need to look for solutions to many of the challenges that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is aiming to address.³ The important role that cities play in the pursuit of sustainable development is explicitly acknowledged by the dedicated goal on cities – Goal 11 – which aims to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.” Cities will, however, play a critical role in the implementation of the entirety of the 2030 Agenda, as much of the action required is to be taken at the local level. An analysis of the 2030 Agenda shows that all SDGs have an urban component, and implementation of two-thirds of all targets will require direct involvement of local actors.⁴ The important role that cities play in the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda was also highlighted at the 2016 Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.⁵

The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), held last month in Quito, Ecuador, provided a unique opportunity to refocus the attention of policymakers on how cities are planned and managed. The New Urban Agenda adopted at Habitat III is complementary to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as other key global mandates – such as the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Paris Agreement – and provides a tremendous opportunity not only to advance the agenda of cities in the region but also to drive implementation of these other landmark global commitments at the local level.

2. CITIES LEADING THE WAY

Cities may concentrate development challenges, but they are also best placed to develop the solutions. We need innovation in all areas of sustainable urban development, including in urban policy and planning, municipal governance and data, in urban finance, as well as infrastructure and operations. Many cities in Asia-Pacific are leading the way in the transition to sustainability through innovative solutions.

The Seoul Metropolitan Government, for example, has introduced several innovative policies and initiatives in recent years, in a broad and diverse array of areas, such as transportation, e-governance, urban regeneration as well as pioneering the sharing economy and the use of big data for urban planning and management. The local government of Almaty, Kazakhstan has introduced a range of innovative programs to increase participatory urban planning. For example, citizens have been actively involved in the decision-making process and design of public spaces and facilities. In Seberang Perai, Malaysia, gender-responsive urban budgeting, strengthened through community resource mobilization and oversight, has served as tool to ensure that the city’s policies and resource allocations can support different groups of women and men. In Singapore, many innovative integrated sustainable development initiatives can be found, such as the city’s integrated public space and water infrastructure programs, which improve wastewater management, recycling and reuse, in addition to increasing the supply and improving the quality of the city’s public spaces and biodiversity corridors.

Cities’ best practices can be the basis for crafting national policies to address specific issues. It is imperative to learn from such best practices and to up-scale and replicate them.

³ January 2016 marked the official launch of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted unanimously last year by all 193 member countries of the United Nations. The new Agenda calls on countries to begin efforts to achieve 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) over the next 15 years. <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

⁴ <https://www.uclg.org/en/media/news/sustainable-development-goals-what-local-governments-need-know>

⁵ <http://www.unescap.org/events/international-forum-urban-policy-sustainable-development-goals>

3. THE NEED FOR KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND CITY-TO-CITY COOPERATION

Cities have the capacity to generate innovative solutions for the implementation of the SDGs. At the same time, cities require support to address barriers in terms of capacities, financing, governance, access to appropriate and affordable technologies, and data availability.

The APUF-6 Jakarta Call for Action, adopted at the sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum held in Jakarta on 19-21 October 2015⁶, recognized the need for local government to be more effectively supported and empowered to carry out its mandate and responsibilities, the importance of broad-based partnerships and the need to enhance the information base.

Collaborative efforts and city-to-city cooperation can go a long way in enabling cities to develop and adopt innovative solutions to shared challenges. As cities seek to find solutions to persistent and emerging issues and develop policies and initiatives in response to sustainable development challenges, it will be important to highlight and share innovative policies and initiatives among cities, and to facilitate knowledge sharing and cooperation. Sharing best practices among cities will be critical to maximize the impact of the SDGs and create a more sustainable future for all.

The need for knowledge sharing around urban policy and the role of local government in achieving the SDGs were highlighted at the 'International Forum on Urban Policy for the Sustainable Development Goals' held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, from 8 to 10 June 2016.⁷ The Seoul Communique, adopted at the meeting, emphasized partnerships and knowledge sharing among cities as key guiding principles.

4. THE URBAN SDG KNOWLEDGE PLATFORM

Online platforms can play an important role in supporting the work of cities, by connecting local government representatives and providing information on best practice policies and initiatives for urban development. The digital age presents an opportunity for urban practitioners to harness the power of digital platforms and tools to tackle urban challenges, increase interconnections and spread knowledge.

Urban practitioners are increasingly taking advantage of this opportunity, and a number of knowledge platforms on various aspects of sustainable urban development have been released in recent years. Yet, few online platforms exist that work to facilitate city-to-city connections and improve the capacity of urban practitioners by sharing the knowledge acquired by local governments, particularly locally sourced knowledge related to implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) and CityNet have come together to establish the 'Urban SDG Knowledge Platform' to promote and support regional knowledge sharing and cooperation for sustainable urban development.

⁶ <http://www.unescap.org/events/apuf6>

⁷ <http://www.unescap.org/events/international-forum-urban-policy-sustainable-development-goals>

OBJECTIVES

The Urban SDG Knowledge Platform will support local action for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including through up-take and replication of successful initiatives and good practices, by:

- Providing a repository of policies, initiatives and good practices at the city level by municipal governments and other stakeholders;
- Facilitating north-south, south-south, and triangular cooperation by linking cities that have developed specific policies, initiatives and good practices with other cities interested in replicating them;
- Facilitate regional follow-up and review implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by providing a platform for local governments to share progress and lessons learned.

TARGET USERS AND AUDIENCE

The main target users of the Platform are local governments. Cities will be able to register to the platform, upload their initiatives, access other cities' initiatives and interact with one another.

The Platform will also provide a useful knowledge base for national government officials, in particular those tasked with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, multilateral agencies and donors, as well as civil society organizations active in cities.

Visitors and users of the Platform will be able to interact using social media handles, such as Twitter or Facebook.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING NEEDS SURVEY

In order to assess the current and projected needs and requirements of the main target users (local government officials), a survey was prepared and circulated to a number of local governments in July 2016. The survey was designed to generate feedback on key issues and design variables, in order to help ensure that the Platform meets user needs and responds to existing user preferences. Key findings include the following:

- All local governments surveyed were aware of the SDGs and keen to share their experiences and learn from other cities on this topic, yet many do not have systems in place to do this.
- There is a demand for information regarding the implementation process (including in terms of stakeholder engagement, challenges encountered, etc), rather than simply the achievement of the urban policies and initiatives.
- The Platform content should be structured in a manner that is conducive to analysis and arranged around key sectoral priorities and themes identified as most important to cities (such as waste, transport, housing, etc), and not only around specific SDGs.

FUNCTIONALITY OVERVIEW

The Urban Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform will operate as follows:

- **The urban policies and initiatives database repository:** The Platform will provide a database repository of urban policies and initiatives that member cities are implementing in pursuit of sustainable urban development. The database will provide site visitors access to a range of strategies that deliver sustainability solutions to common urban growth, management or planning problems, while showing casing the innovative and impressive steps that cities are already taking to implement the SDGs.
- **User-generated content:** The core content of the Platform will be the user-generated knowledge sharing of urban policies and initiatives, sourced directly from local government representatives. Members will be able to upload policies and initiatives.
- **Database searches:** Anyone can browse the site and search the database of policies and initiatives. Site visitors can search for policies and initiatives by theme, SDGs, region, thematic area or keyword.
Value-added policy and initiative knowledge sharing: The display page of each policy and initiatives will include information about the key parameters of policies, including contribution to SDGs, results, success factors, risks involved, resources required, as well as connect to further resources and information.
- **Interaction:** Members of the site will be able to interact with other users through the comments sections, as well as connect with other users who have delivered solutions or are proposing solutions on the platform. Visitors to the site will be able to share platform content on social media.
- **City-to-city collaboration:** To facilitate contact and collaboration among local government representatives, the platform will include the contact information of focal points in each city, as well as the social media accounts and website of the responsible city government agencies.
- **Other knowledge sharing opportunities:** Visitors to the site will be able to access further information about the SDGs and view sustainable-development themed webinars. Further information about the partner organizations and upcoming events

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https://www.yunbaogao.cn/report/index/report?reportId=5_2123

