



Towards Green And Just Cities

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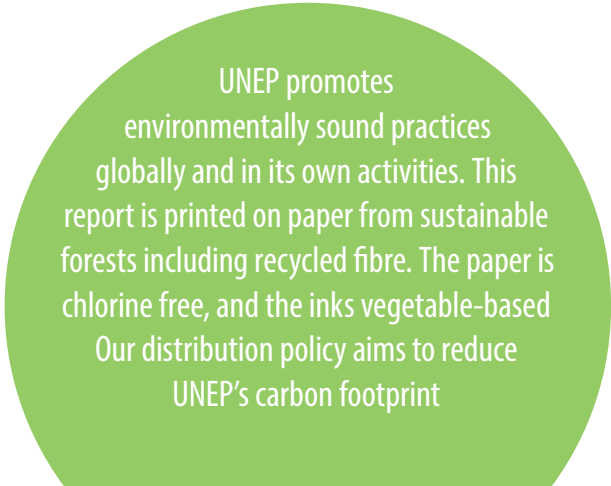
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Strategic Agenda

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Executive Directors' Foreword

Cities can be dynamic engines of economic and social development but come with a huge environmental footprint. Our cities are also weathering the impacts of climate change, sometimes almost daily. The sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6) identified urbanization as one of five main drivers of environmental change. The report also looked at the impact on cities and city residents of related challenges such as biodiversity loss and pollution. The GEO for Cities looks at these issues, but also presents the types of solutions that can lead to environmentally sustainable and just cities.

To achieve this vision, GEO for Cities proposes that decision-makers act decisively to: achieve net zero circular cities; build resilient and sustainable cities; and, foster inclusive and just cities.

This report links social equity and justice with environmental sustainability to avoid the worst impacts of gentrification and, at the same time, to improve the lives of those living and working in informal settings. Equity and environmental sustainability must go hand in hand if cities are to contribute to the positive transformational change described in this publication.

GEO for Cities also highlights the complexity that city managers are confronted with. Many of us are locked into socio-political or behavioural patterns that prevent us from taking action. In other situations, cities are locked into a particular type of political economy or urban planning approaches that inhibit change. These can lead to physical lock-ins of carbon and energy intensive infrastructure that perpetuate inequity across the city.



However, there are tools, such as participatory governance and innovative city networks that can help cities overcome these lock-ins. GEO for Cities looks to provide real-world pathways for achieving the vision of environmentally sustainable and just cities and to support decision makers in overcoming the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution and waste.

As the voice for human settlements and the environment within the UN system, we are extremely pleased to present a detailed roadmap for decision makers. It is based on the best science we have today and compiled by world-renowned experts. We hope this report will provide practical guidance adding to the extensive work by other groups to propel cities towards a new environmentally sustainable and just future.



Inger Andersen



Majnunah Mohd Sharif

Co-chair's Foreword

The GEO for Cities journey began in May 2019, when the Advisory Committee was convened to discuss how this publication could cover environmental trends; the diversity of cities; resource constraints and inequality in cities and across the world; visions for transformation; and the potential of cities to be transformative. While we were focused intensely on the future and the next five, 10, 20 and even 50 years – especially in terms of urbanization and cities and environmental impact and sustainability – none of us could have foreseen the turbulence of the immediate future.

Since work started on GEO for Cities, approximately 70 billion tons of carbon dioxide have been emitted into the atmosphere, the world's urban population has grown by 159 million people, 20 million hectares of forests have been lost and 16 million tons of plastic have been dumped into the ocean. We have also seen the global COVID-19 pandemic sweep across the planet, widespread protests for racial justice in cities and towns around the world, people facing job losses, cities grappling with cuts to municipal budgets, devastating forest fires spreading in urban and peri-urban areas in Australia and the western United States, catastrophic flooding in cities in Indonesia, India and Europe, a record hurricane season in the Atlantic and crops and livelihoods destroyed by a locust plague in East Africa.

From the global to the individual level, our world is changing at a rapid pace and we need inspiration and solutions more than ever at this critical juncture. We hope this report rises to these challenges and that its careful consideration of the current situation can catalyse and contribute to action and better outcomes for cities, people, the planet and the environment.

Some of the questions explored here concern the past and present. What are the urban dynamics that have resulted in environmental degradation and inequality? How can we overcome barriers to create a more sustainable future in different types of cities? How are cities affecting fresh water, land, biodiversity, the oceans and air? And how are changes



pressing issues. Here, the equitability and urban mobility of the second and third dimensions of the vision in chapter 4 may provide the best starting point. In other cities, where the COVID-19 pandemic may be a catalyst, the case study on Cape Town in chapter 5 provides an example of how a severe shock can lead a city to create institutions focused on long-term and inclusive urban resilience.

The report addresses different urban stakeholders. For young people, the problems caused by the current political economy and limited job opportunities (chapter 2), combined with acute concerns about climate change and marine plastics pollution (chapter 3) may point to a focus on circular cities and decarbonization (dimension one in chapter 4). Inspiration may be found in case studies on integrated policies for decarbonizing different sectors in Toronto, Canada, and on redesigning material flows in a circular way with social justice and job creation integrated as end goals in Alappuzha, India.

This document has not been produced in isolation, disconnected from other assessments, efforts and initiatives. Instead, it builds on many valuable and insightful reports on cities and climate change and the growth of cities that have come before it. It also acts as a bridge to other GEO reports, including the GEO-6 comprehensive

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