

Sustainable Cities Programme 1990-2000

A decade of United Nations Support for Broad-based
participatory management of Urban Development



UN-Habitat

United Nations Human Settlements Programme



UNEP

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

Preface



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Sustainable Cities Programme - 1990 to 2000

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The Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP) is a practical response to the universal search for sustainable development. A programme of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the SCP focuses primarily on capacity building in urban environmental planning and management, on broad-based partnership and participation, on the advancement of collective know-how, and on the leveraging of technical and financial resources at every level, to resolve urban environmental problems.

In the early 1980s, Habitat and UNEP jointly prepared Environmental Guidelines for Settlements Planning and Management. In the early 1990s, the Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP) was launched to put the concepts and approaches of the guidelines into practice; and in 1995, Habitat's Human Settlements Commission and UNEP's Governing Council instructed that the SCP be transformed into a truly joint facility. Together, UNEP and Habitat utilise the Sustainable Cities Programme to demonstrate and support the United Nations' new development paradigm of information sharing through a common conceptual framework.

This new approach to technical cooperation is a significant shift away from the provision of ready solutions. Based on collaboration, comparison and cross-reference, it brings partners together, cities and programmes from the North and South, to focus collective energies on the development of solutions for the common problems facing our cities.

Since its inception, the SCP has been involved in building capacities in urban environmental planning and management at the local level in cities around the world. This document highlights the programme's approach and reviews the achievements in the period from 1990 to 2000 and looks ahead to future directions of the SCP based on lessons learned and experience gathered from the ongoing city projects. While the process of achieving sustainable development may be long, the achievements of the SCP and its partners at every level indicate that the ultimate goal - attaining visible improvements in the living environment of urban residents all over the world - is in sight.



United Nations Human Settlements Programme



United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)



The Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP)

Cities are the driving force of social and economic development. They harbour tremendous energies and have the potential to generate enormous creativity and significant economic betterment. They provide shelter, jobs and services and are the centres of productivity. For this reason, they attract more and more people and at present absorb two thirds of all population growth while generating over half of the Gross National Product (GNP), even in countries where the majority of the population is engaged in agriculture. People who live in cities expect clean water and adequate sanitation; they count on city authorities to ensure the efficient collection and disposal of domestic and industrial refuse; and they require good roads and a satisfactory transport system.

But with the start of the new millennium, what characterises many of the world's cities is uncollected garbage and filth, poor drainage and impassable roads, unsafe water supplies, inadequate infrastructure, polluted rivers and fouled air. These problems lead to, and are exacerbated by, reduced living standards and increased costs, growing disease and loss of productivity. The unprecedented pace at which many cities are growing, particularly in developing countries, outstrips their existing capacity for effective urban planning and management. The resultant degradation of the urban environment hinders the full realisation of the contribution cities can make to development, by threatening economic efficiency, social equity and the sustainability of hard-won development achievements.

“...cities are the dynamic force of modern economies. They generate wealth and prosperity that no rural idyll could hope to match...”

- The European, 6-12 June 1996



The SCP at work

The Sustainable Cities Programme is a direct response to the needs of today's cities. Established in the early 1990s to put into practice the concepts and approaches of the document 'Environmental Guidelines for Settlements Planning and Management' developed by UN-Habitat and UNEP, the SCP has become a key instrument for implementing the environment dimension of the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21 at the city level. The Programme spearheads United Nations efforts to effect a positive change in urban environmental planning and management by strengthening the capacity of cities to manage natural resources and to control environmental hazards in a sustainable way, and concentrating on ensuring the full participation of stakeholders from every sector of the city.

The SCP operates at several levels. It spends more than 90 per cent of its resources in strengthening capacities at the city level, through technical cooperation with municipal authorities and their partners in the public, private and community sectors in the field of environmental planning and management.

At the global level, the SCP promotes the exchange of information and experience among cities worldwide, helps advance collective know-how through networks such as the Urban Environment Forum, and captures lessons of operational experience in re-usable tools. Pre-eminently a locally focused programme, the SCP derives support at the country, regional and global levels for the needs and priorities identified at the city level.

As an inter-agency programme, the SCP helps to mobilise technical and financial resources with a variety of partners in multi- and bilateral organisations, as well as international Non-Governmental Organisations and associations of local governments, and facilitates the implementation of technical expertise and knowledge as practical city level operations. The SCP currently works with more than 40 cities around the world, advancing new approaches to solving urban problems based on city experiences and adhering to a bottom-up, decentralised and broad-based partnership approach to urban environmental management.

The SCP is one of the oldest and most successful programmes of its kind within the United Nations system. It uses its funds carefully to develop abilities among local governments and their partners in the public, private and community sectors to deal with urban environmental problems. These funds are used for city demonstrations, local project staff, consultants, volunteers, equipment and meeting costs, and for leveraging other technical and financial resources. Only a marginal share of the programme funding comes directly from Habitat or UNEP; most of it is mobilised at the city level and globally from multilateral funding institutions and interested donor countries.

This report of the Programme's activities demonstrates the significant role that the SCP is playing in empowering people to turn the cities of tomorrow into more hospitable places to live and work in.

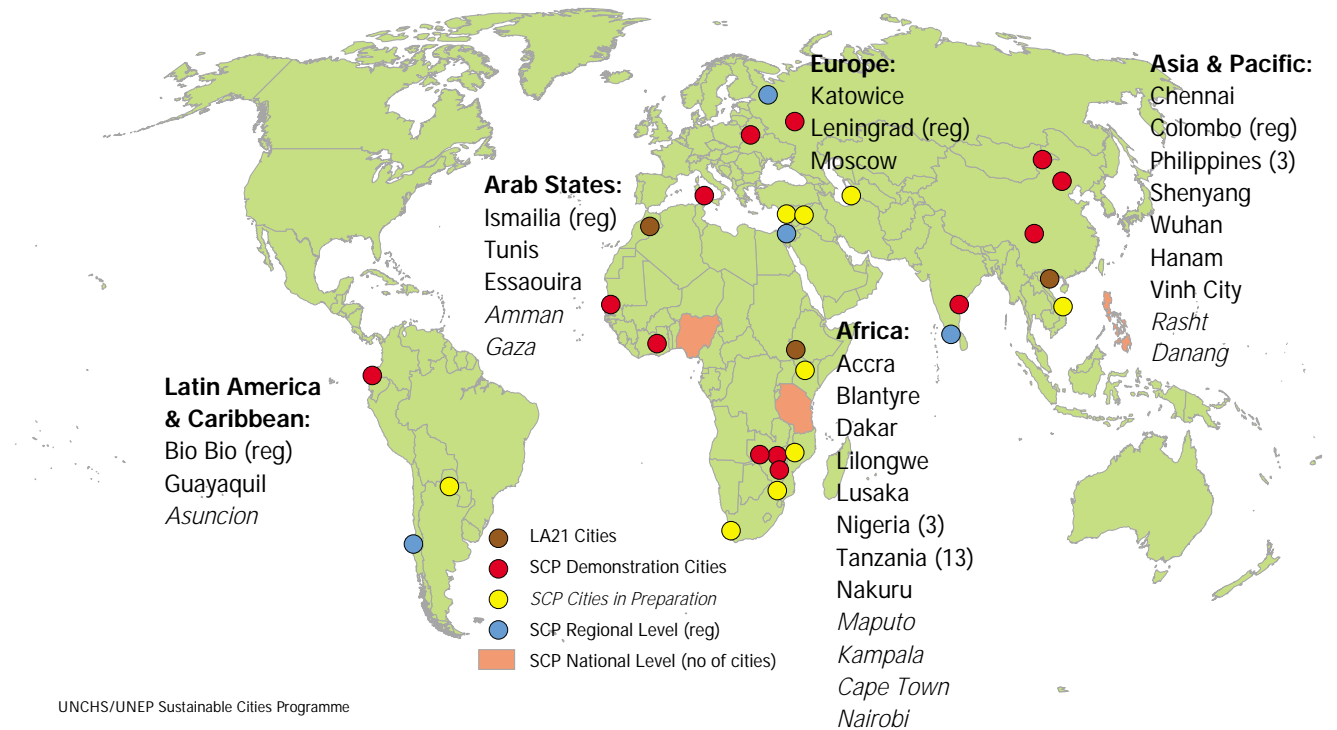
"With 50% of the world's population living in cities and towns, the environmental future of the planet is closely linked to sustainable urbanization. Good environmental management must prioritize the urgent needs of the urban poor"

Mrs. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka,
Executive Director, UN-Habitat





Today some 40+ cities are participating in the Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP)

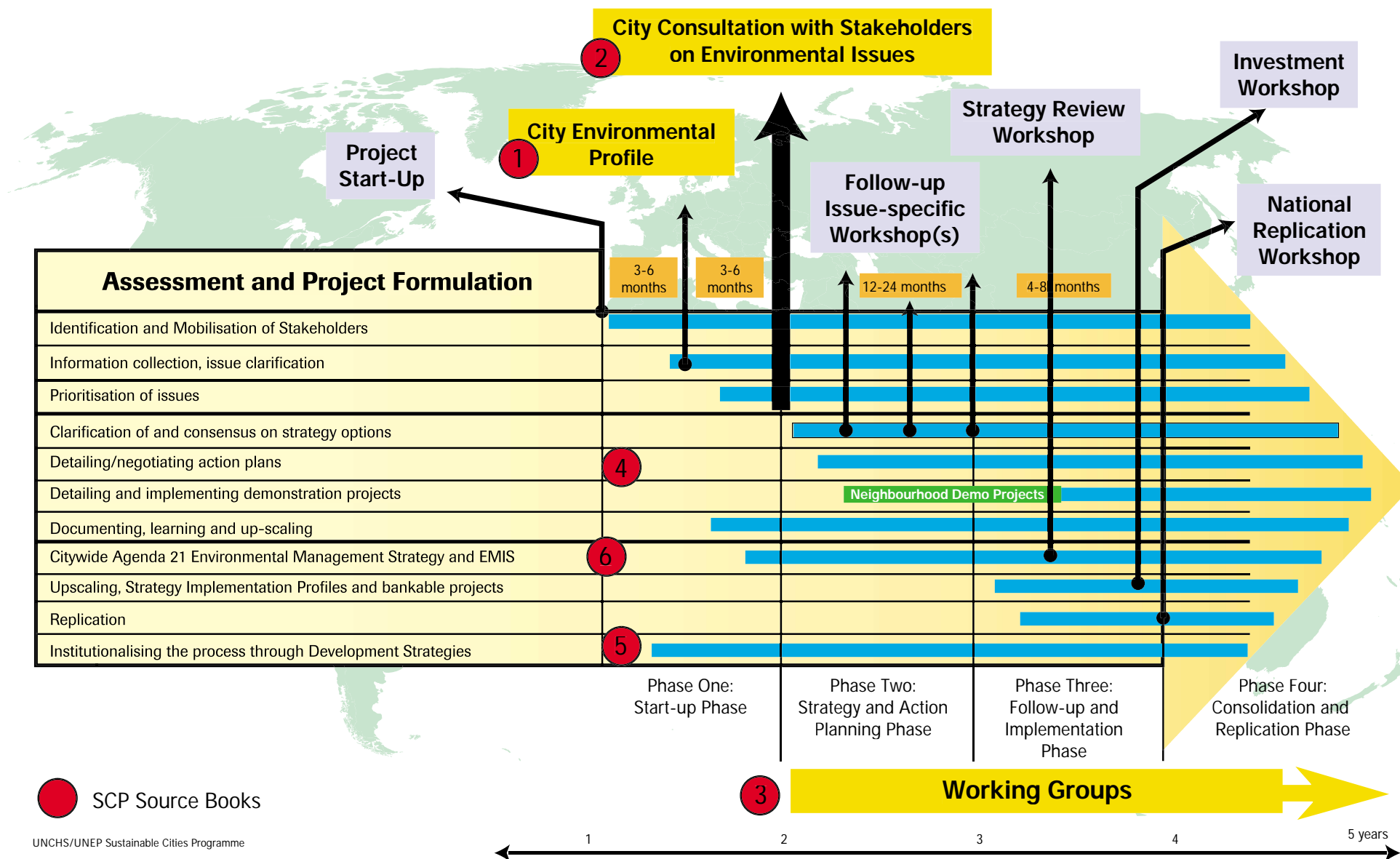


What is a Sustainable City?

A sustainable city is a city where achievements in social, economic, and physical development are made to last. It has a lasting supply of the environmental resources on which its development depends, using them only at a level of sustainable yield. A sustainable city maintains a lasting security from environmental hazards that have the potential to threaten development achievements, allowing only for acceptable risk.



SCP City Demonstration Process



Habitat and UNEP Co-operation

The urban environment and local governance have received a great deal of attention in the recent international debate on development. As a joint facility of UN-Habitat and UNEP, the Sustainable Cities Programme's unique technical, financial, and political resources make the programme an ideal vehicle to advance the explicit mandates and overall agenda of the United Nations and to respond to the priorities of the cities it works with. The basic elements Programme includes a joint portfolio of activities, joint global support and a core team, joint funding mechanisms, and a joint advisory committee. The Programme is recognised by the governing bodies of UNEP and UN-Habitat as their primary instrument for implementing Agenda 21 at the local level, and the environment dimension of the Habitat Agenda - in short, the urban environment agenda.

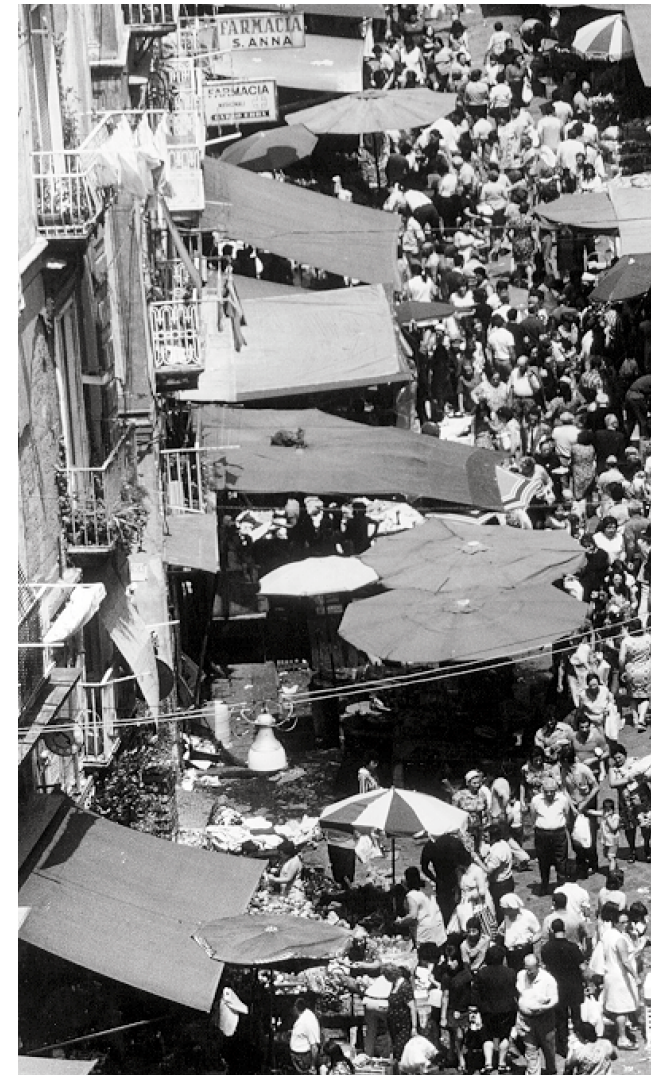
The urban environmental mandates of UN-Habitat and UNEP correspond, and their scientific, technical, and financial resources are complementary. Habitat's operational experience, with its long history of project-level involvement in urban development and accumulated expertise in urban management, combines with UNEP's scientific and technical expertise in all aspects relating to the environment, forming a powerful mechanism that provides a practical response to the universal search for sustainable development.

The SCP became an official joint UNCHS/UNEP programme in January 1996 following several years of successful collaboration in joint projects with the Global Environment Monitoring System (GEMS), the Industry and Environment Office, the Oceans and Coastal Areas Programme and others. Based on this history of collaboration, and in response to growing demand for the type of support the SCP could provide, the Governing Bodies of UN-Habitat and UNEP established a Task Force to clarify modalities for expanded cooperation.

The strengthened collaboration between the UN-Habitat and UNEP on the urban environment translates into concrete and practical action on the requests by the General Assembly (resolution 40/199, 17 December 1985), the Commission on Human Settlements (resolution 15/8, 1 May 1995), and the Governing Council of UNEP (decision 18/15, 26 May 1995) for a more effective co-operation between the two agencies. This cooperation was reconfirmed in Decision GC/19/9 of 7 February 1997 and Resolution HS/C/16/20 of 6 May 1997.

“...sustainable development of cities will depend on closer work with the majorities of urban poor who are the true city builders, tapping the skills, energies, and resources of neighbourhood groups and those in the informal sector...”

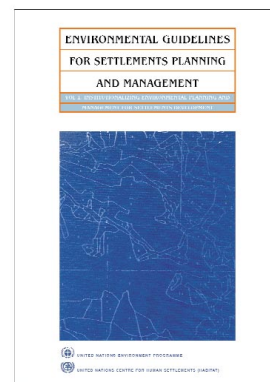
- Our Common Future - The World Commission on Environment and Development



Supporting the Habitat Agenda

The urban environment, increasingly threatened by fast-growing populations, unplanned growth and poverty, is of central concern in the pursuit of global sustainable development. The potential economic productivity, social advancement and well-being of city residents - who today make up half of the world's population - continues to be hampered by the environmental problems they face in their daily existence. Problems caused by the pressures of urban growth, if unresolved, will be much greater, and far more costly, in future years. It is the poorest groups living in cities who suffer the worst impact of unplanned urban expansion. The inability of local authorities to provide basic services and facilities needed for an adequate human existence leads to problems such as overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, polluted water and poor health, inefficient liquid and solid waste management and lack of recreational facilities. These are the issues that the Habitat Agenda addresses which are first and foremost experienced in people's dwellings and places of work. But a deterioration in the urban living environment is not inevitable. All the resources necessary for sustainability are already present in cities. It has become widely recognised that the bottleneck in urban development is usually management and governance rather than financial resources and technical expertise. With commitment and energy, not just from the city authorities directly responsible for dealing with the problems

Experiences at the local, regional and national levels are shared at the global level, facilitating information sharing and partnership. This has given rise to a shift away from the provision of ready solutions towards the advancement of collective know-how. In the Istanbul Declaration, an agenda for urban environmental planning and management and related international support, National Governments recognise local authorities as essential partners in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. They also resolve, within the legal framework of each country, to promote decentralisation through democratic local authorities and to strengthen their financial and institutional capacities in accordance with the different conditions of countries, while ensuring their transparency, accountability and responsiveness to the needs of people. Consistent with these goals, the SCP is involved in creating and strengthening self-reliant management capacities at city level through city demonstrations



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