

## CITIES AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Climate Change is one of the defining challenges of our age and it is one of the priorities of the UN System. Adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change is a key issue for all countries, especially developing countries, which are often the most vulnerable and least equipped to defend themselves. The least developed countries, small island developing States and countries in Africa face the most difficult challenges and urgently need the assistance of the international community in order to successfully safeguard the lives and livelihoods of their peoples, while attaining their development goals.

The Bali Action Plan speaks of the need for enhanced action on adaptation, which among other things entails international cooperation to support urgent implementation of adaptation actions especially in support of the most vulnerable; risk management, risk reduction and disaster reduction strategies; economic diversification to build resilience; broader synergies between multilateral bodies, the public and private sectors and civil society, as a means to support adaptation in a coherent and integrated manner.

The purpose of this paper is to briefly sketch the key climate change adaptation challenges from an urban perspective, to highlight UN-HABITAT's role and ongoing activities, and to raise some key issues for discussion.

### Key Challenges from an Urban Perspective

The future of hundreds of millions of people in urban areas across the world will be affected by the different impacts of rapid urbanization and climate change. The impacts will vary depending on the form of settlement, geographic considerations and the nature of the local economy. The overall vulnerability of human settlements will increase as confirmed by various scenarios which project that further global warming over the next decades is inevitable.

More than half of the world's population now lives within 60 km of the sea, while three quarters of all large cities are located on the coast. Most of the world's urban population resides in vulnerable areas which are ill-equipped for adaptation, with 1 billion living in slums, and likely to become environmental refugees. It is estimated that in addition to sea level rise, 3 to 4 of every 10 non-permanent houses in cities in developing countries are located in areas prone to floods, landslides and other natural disasters – further exacerbated by climate change.

Since climate change impacts will undermine country efforts to achieve the goals of sustainable development, adaptation is needed. This is crucial particularly because climate is already changing and most countries do not have the adaptive capacity to respond or be prepared to face the climate change impacts on cities, settlements and on livelihoods.

The adaptive capacity and the capability of systems to actively and adequately respond are largely influenced by wealth, availability of technology, appropriate decision-making capabilities, human capital, social capital, risk spreading (e.g. insurance), ability to manage information, and the perceived attribution of the source of stress. Climate change brings new challenges, which impact on the natural and built environments and aggravates existing environmental, social and economic problems. Clearly these changes will affect different aspects of spatial planning and the built environment, including external building fabric,

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structural integrity, internal environments, service infrastructure, open spaces, human comfort and the way people use indoor and outdoor space. Coupled with the challenges of rapid urbanization, climate change impacts will undermine country efforts to achieve the goals of sustainable development.

Despite national decentralization programmes and the inclusion of good governance principles in national policies and strategies, many governments do not aptly consider local governments as important partners in the articulation of action plans. Meanwhile, the effects of climate change are mainly experienced at the local level with many households and livelihoods affected. Institutional design and structure can heighten or diminish society's exposure to climate risks, yet, a clear imbalance still exists between demands and the existing administrative and financial capacities in the context of decentralization.

Climate change perspectives are not fully integrated within the broader framework of sustainable housing and urban development and the much needed holistic approach to participatory governance, urban environmental planning and management is not well articulated in the national plans of most developing countries. Local authorities are therefore in need of further support regarding capacity building, specified tools, and technical expertise, so that they can develop adaptation actions and strategies for reducing the severity of many of the impacts.

### UN-HABITAT and Climate Change Adaptation

UN-HABITAT supports national and local authorities in their efforts to cope with the impacts of climate change. UN-HABITAT's work on localized climate change adaptation builds on 15 years of experience and activities is responding to global trends in urbanization and poverty reduction. Working in over 100 cities globally, the Sustainable Cities and Localising Agenda 21 programmes have promoted interactive environmental governance and stakeholder participation through environmental planning and management. This approach provides a strong entry point to address climate change at the local level. City consultations have been used as an effective tool by which to mobilize additional stakeholder support in order to reach consensus on key issues, while clarifying the institutional arrangements for follow-up actions, and mobilizes political, as well as partner support and commitments.

Building on the long collaboration through the Sustainable Cities Programme, UN-HABITAT and UNEP are committed to provide a better and wider range of services to local and national governments in the field of urban environment through a Strategic Partnership Framework (2008-2013). UNEP and UN-HABITAT will provide a menu of services on agreed focus areas and actions including climate change, urban air quality and transport.

Two performance indicators of the Medium Term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTSIP, 2008-2013) contribute directly to Cities and Climate Change Adaptation, while several others contribute indirectly.

MTSIP Focus Areas	Relevant Performance Indicators
Focus Area 2: Promotion of participatory urban planning, management and governance.	An agreed number of cities adopting disaster mitigation, and environmental planning and management policies
Focus area 4: Environmentally sound basic urban infrastructure and services.	An agreed number of cities with strategies to minimize and deal with climate change effects.

## The Sustainable Urban Development Network (SUD-Net)

UN-HABITAT' work on Cities and Climate Change is framed within the Sustainable Urban Development Network (SUD-Net), which works with actors and networks who are focusing on promoting inter-disciplinary approaches to sustainable urban development. SUD-Net is designed to support poverty reduction strategies and the wider national development strategies.

SUD-Net engages with external and internal partners to create coherence and promote inter-disciplinary approaches to sustainable urban designs and systems for improving basic infrastructure services. Internally, SUD-Net will play a crucial role as an institutional mechanism for carrying-out the Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan and as one of the targeted ongoing actions for advancing the Global Campaign for Sustainable Urbanization that will facilitate better choices for cities. SUD-Net will also provide a coordinated global portal through which urban players can access up-to-date information, interact and jointly engage through the SUD-Net partnerships and networks.

## The Cities in Climate Change Initiative (CCCI)

The "Cities in Climate Change Initiative (CCCI)" is the first component of SUD-Net. Its first phase is designed to promote policy dialogue, develop tools and implement pilot activities in the cities of Sorsogon (Philippines); Esmeraldas (Ecuador); Maputo (Mozambique); and Kampala (Uganda). The current financial support for CCCI is from the *Government of Norway and the UN Development Account*. The key objectives of the Cities and Climate Change Initiative are:

- To promote active climate change collaboration of local governments and their associations in global, regional and national networks.
- To enhance policy dialogue so that climate change is firmly established on the agenda.
- To foster the implementation of awareness, education, and capacity building strategies supporting the implementation of climate change strategies.

CCCI aims at advising and supporting cities and towns prone to the different impacts of climate change by offering innovative approaches and solutions for national and local development planning. Outputs expected from the Cities in Climate Change Initiative include:

- Setting up and supporting networks of national and local government associations, non-governmental bodies, universities, the private sector, and UN organizations addressing climate change
- Localization and implementation of national adaptation and mitigation strategies
- Strengthening of capacities of local authorities to integrate climate change concerns in local and city wide planning and budgeting for cost-effective policy responses
- Strengthening of the capacities of local government training institutes to provide training for local governments
- Assessment and designs of possible replicable models for possible scaling up both at the normative and operational levels.
- Show-casing good practices and replicable tools through targeted communication channels.

UN-HABITAT works to promote the growth and diversification of the donor base to expand the range of SUD-Net entry points to address priority areas of cities. There are ongoing discussions with interested sponsors of SUD-Net and the Cities in Climate Change initiative, including *Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Spain and Sweden*.

## Issues for Discussion

- **Improving resilience to climate change at the local level:** A primary focus of UN-HABITAT and other development partners' work is to address the low resilience levels of local government in the developing and least developed countries to address the impacts of climate change. Levels of awareness are low and so are the technical, human and financial capacities to localize climate change policies. Engagement with the communities is crucial in the development of adaptation actions if they are to work effectively on the ground.
- **Reducing the impacts of climate change on the urban poor.** Official urban policies can increase poor people's vulnerability to environmental hazards and climate shocks, rather than reducing them. UN-HABITAT in cooperation with other UN agencies, attempts to identify the role and right of informal communities via slum-upgrading and other activities. Special attention is paid to indigenous people, women, disabled persons and youth.
- ***Complementarity of mitigation and adaptation policies, strategies and actions:*** To avoid conflicts, priorities need to be set to build synergy between mitigation and adaptation approaches and not create potential policy clashes. The two are inherently connected and should remain so particularly when dealing with the planning of infrastructure systems and designs.
- **Accessing available knowledge and resources on climate change adaptation.** Although cities in other parts of the world are already carrying out a vast range of adaptation activities, current platforms for sharing of experience and knowledge are not well enough developed to make meaningful interventions that impact on the lives of the poor in vulnerable countries. Information exchange is necessary to create early attention to adaptation, as well facilitating smart partnerships to develop best practice networks.
- **Integrating climate change in education and local knowledge.** City-to-city networks will aid cities in timely sharing of experiences and information through knowledge arenas and other forms of collaboration which promote the inclusion of local knowledge in policy and decision-making to help adapt to climate change.