

In focus SDG11: “Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”

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Room VIII

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Context: sustainable development goal 11

In recent decades, the world has experienced unprecedented urban growth. In 1960, when the urban population reached the 1 billion target, only about a third of the world's population lived in urban areas. Today, taking action towards making cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is more relevant than ever before, as 4,2 billion people, 55% of the global share, live in cities. By 2050, almost two thirds of all humanity, 6,5 billion people, will be concentrated in cities.

As well as lifting hundreds of millions of people out of poverty and bringing about increased prosperity for many, a booming movement of people from rural to urban areas has produced new challenges. High population density, aging and inadequate infrastructure, lack of affordable housing, slum creation, flooding, pollution and congestion are only some of the issues at the top of today's national, regional and local governments' agendas.

Through roundtable discussions, the '**In focus: SDG 11**' event produced illuminating and refreshing dialogues, reflecting on the successes and challenges in the implementation of policies tackling urban issues. Discussions centred on the need to coordinate policy efforts and attracting and channelling investment in a way that is socially, environmentally and economically sustainable.

Indeed, Sustainable Development Goal 11 stresses the importance of adopting a holistic approach to urban governance, where drawing synergies from different sectors of planning and adopting long-term strategic plans is seen as playing a pivotal role in reaching the ambitious goals set by the 2030 Sustainable Agenda.

Opening Remarks: 10:00am-10:30am

Ms. Kari Eik, Secretary General at the Organization for International Economic Relations (OiER) opened the event calling all stakeholders in the room to question whether they are moving towards the same direction, and affirmed the need to do more to coordinate efforts at all relevant levels. The purpose of this event is exactly this one; opening up a platform bringing relevant actors together to understand where each we all stand and plan the next steps accordingly.



The opening of the event continued with **Ms. Olga Algayerova**, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), who emphasised the importance of translating key global principles into practical policies at the local level. In this context, documents such as the Geneva UN Charter for Sustainable Housing¹ and Geneva Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Housing² are powerful tools to influence cross-sectoral dialogue and policy action. Further, adopting a synergistic approach to tackle urban challenges will require coordinated efforts from all and every urban actor, from national ministries to the private sector, to civil society.

Some of the ways in which the UNECE aligns with these practices is through the preparation of country profiles on housing sectors³, social housing studies⁴, national action plans⁵, and reviews at the city level as well as the promotion of energy efficient practices⁶.

Ms. Asa Jonsson, UN Habitat, stressed the key role of urbanisation in today's development policy. In her view, harnessing the full potential of urbanisation will require increased efforts in the collection and sharing of reliable data, which shall be appropriately used to ensure that policy making is based on verified evidence. Furthermore, UN Habitat advocates for integrated urban planning and management, by means of coordinating with other international organisations and national, regional and local governments.

In 2018, UN Habitat produced an in depth review on progress towards Goal 11 and other urban related SDGs for member states⁷. One of the main conclusions of this report was that many cities lack the data to assess progress and impact as well as the skills to implement policies aligned with urban related SDGs. To this end, the new UN wide strategy for sustainable development looks at the nexus between the different urban related SDGs and encompasses **4 key elements**: 1. Improving knowledge



¹http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/EN_Geneva_UN_Charter_on_Sustainable_Housing.pdf

² http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/2017/ECE_HBP_2017_1.en.pdf

³ <https://www.unece.org/housing/countryprofiles.html>

⁴ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/Social_Housing_in_UNECE_region.pdf

⁵ <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/hlm/documents/Publications/ee.ap.montenegro.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.unece.org/housing/eestandardsinbuildings.html>

⁷ SDG 11 Synthesis Report 2018 on Sustainable Cities and Communities

production monitoring and reporting 2. Coherent policy support to countries and cities 3. Advocacy outreach and partnerships 4. Innovative financing methods.

Roundtable Discussions: 10:30am - 1:00pm

Moderator: Ms. Kari Eik

Ms. Luis Maria Silva from the **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** opened the roundtable discussion with a reflection on the role of cities in light of current and future urban development. Today, cities are primary agents for sustainable development and engaging with localities directly has become essential to achieve change. This statement was supported **Ms. Kari Eik** and reiterated by the **International Organization for Migration's (IOM)** representative, adding that cities are the first responders to some of the major issues of the 21st century. Cities are in fact at the forefront of the management of migration flows, welcoming and integrating refugees with uncertain legal status. Here, strategic plans at the regional level could benefit significantly from the inclusion of migration.

Ms. Cécile Riallant from **IOM** highlighted that cities can be formidable integrators however there keeps existing important barriers, from housing to health care. Importantly, attention needs to be given to secondary cities too, especially in the Global South. To this end, the IOM's efforts concentrate on assisting cities through capacity building and synthesis reports. Together with UNDP and UN Women, they issued a study with concrete tools to centralise cooperation. One of the major issues they found is that there is a widespread gap in technical and economic resources to effectively assist migrants, adding of course to major political obstacles.

Ms. Luis Maria Silva added that the challenge at **UNDP** is to encourage governments to go beyond technical solutions and establish a new social contract with citizens, fighting corruption, increasing the trust of people in governments by reducing inequality. Further, driving sustainable progress it is crucial that governments work with their own local realities (SDGs localisation). Partnering with local authorities, UNDP supports bottom up solutions and the institutionalisation of capacity building to accelerate SDGs.



Ms. Alia El-Yassir from **UN Women** stressed the crucial link between urbanisation and women’s rights, affirming that gender considerations need to be integrated in strategic plans and public spaces planned and managed accordingly. Through their Global Flagship Initiative “Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces”⁸, they developed laws, policies and tools to prevent violence against women and girls in public spaces. Engaging with leading women’s organisations, UN agencies and over 70 global and local partners, UN Women called for enhanced resources and efforts at all levels to change attitudes on this highly relevant issue.

As well as these asserted actions, **Ms. El Yassir** supported the Importance of collecting reliable data to link important SDGs such as goal 5⁹ and 11. For this reason, establishing partnerships with the private sector is key as they have the innovative technology readily available, such as for the reporting of violence. **Ms. Reyna Mireya Ubeda Rivera** from the **International Telecommunications Union (ITU)** further emphasised the need to harness the potential of IoT, block chain etc. to make cities more sustainable. In this context, the ITU and UNECE partnered through the United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC) developing key performance indicators (KPIs)¹⁰ that facilitate the monitoring and progress towards the SDGs. As accounting for contextual differences is of fundamental importance, the U4SSC has been developing case studies, with over 50 cities worldwide already implementing these KPIs.

Mr. Rowan Palmer from **UN Environment** presented their current work on sustainable infrastructure. Stressing the centrality of the building and management of infrastructure, a key message of the 2030 Agenda refers to our ability to deliver on the ecological side as well. Through research and consultation with partners, it became clear that there are already many tools both at project and sector level, but they are often applied too late to have a tangible impact. For this reason, we must move beyond assessing projects in isolation, adopting a more synergistic approach which considers the different elements of sustainability. A final point we must reflect on is what types of institutional arrangements

⁸ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/10/safe-cities-and-safe-public-spaces-global-results-report>

⁹ Sustainable Development Goal 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

¹⁰ itu.int/en/ITU-T/ssc/Pages/KPIs-on-SSC.aspx

are needed for countries and cities to unlock further action for the development of the green economy.

Ms. Oksana Tarasova from the **World Meteorological Organization (WMO)** discussed the dangerous position of cities with regards to natural disasters. The global dimension of climate change impacts cities the most, as further to the pollution that gets produced at the city level, there is all that pollution that is produced elsewhere but accumulates around urban centres. In addition, cities are heavily responsible for climate change as they produce 70% of GHG emissions worldwide. Ms. Tarasova stressed the need to make sure that proper science is wired into the right services. To this end, the WMO developed an integrated urban guide to address the cross cutting nature of hydro-meteorological disasters.

Integration can already happen at the level of observation, but also at the level of modelling. We need other agencies to work with us (difficult to do so sometimes due to the complexity of the subject), but also need research and development to improve and take forecasting science further. Finally, WMO has pilot projects and demonstration cities such as Toronto and Stockholm who have integrated weather and flood forecasting.

Ms. Alice Charles from the **World Economic Forum** focussed her talk on the preparedness of cities in the context of the 4th Industrial Revolution. Building upon other participants, she stressed the difficulty in getting data from cities, also due to the different archetypes of cities. Discussing with mayors across the globe, they found that affordable housing is the number one issue cited by cities. Cities need to think of what they got right and what they got wrong and adopt long terms plans to integrate housing into existing problematic areas. Further, 75% of smart cities projects are failing at local scale suggesting that cities need to be agile on many sectors, building, mobility etc. In terms of project scoping, municipalities are massively under resourced, while there's a lot of money flowing into innovation.

Mr. Stefan Ebner, CEO and founder of Braintribe delivered a short presentation stressing that often times, resources and time is spent in collecting big data, which, alone, has no meaning. Companies like Braintribe work to connect cities with each other, translating big data into smart data, sharing both the good and bad news. For example, they developed a KPI Dashboard platform to input data and make it comparable. Ultimately, we should reflect on the ownership of such data, which should be owned by citizens rather than companies. **Mr. Santo Hulkkonen, CEO of Solve**, an on demand sustainability platform, reiterated the need to adopt integrated solutions due to the complexity of sustainability related issues. Building upon **Mr. Ebner's** message, **Mr. Hulkkonen** highlighted the importance of getting priorities right and find the right people and providers to connect with to unlock finance. Solve does so by means of getting stakeholders together, with a network of sustainability experts of 4,000 people, allowing companies and cities to promote their solutions and share their challenges.

Ms. Claudia Schweizer from the **World Business Council for Sustainable Development**, brings together over 200 companies working on topics such as sustainable mobility and the circular economy. The main hinder for more effective collaboration between the private sector and cities is trust. Other major difficulties of working with cities is related to the length of project implementation and issues related to changes in the political context, which may completely destabilise the work done

Their global work is often performed and targeted locally, through partnerships with local companies, academia and citizens group so as to better reflect needs at the local level. Finally, they also see that it is easier to work as a group of companies rather than alone. Partnering with C40 for example, they have been successful at analysing cities climate action plans.

Ms. Rebecca Huang from **UNECE's Sustainable Transport Division** provided a brief update on the work of the *Working Party on Road Transport (SC.1)*, stressing the key importance of integrating efforts on digital road infrastructure development.

Ms. Madoka Saji from the **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights** delivered a concluding statement asking for housing to be treated as a human right rather than a commodity. In this context, governments have the obligation to provide housing to their population and cannot delegate this role to the private sector alone.

Next steps:

- On the issue of urban migration, the World Economic Forum proposed to create a coalition of partners to coordinate efforts. Further, innovative stakeholder management mechanisms needed to leverage finance for infrastructure. When PPPs don't work is because frameworks don't work. Institutional building is thus necessary.
- UN Women commented on the need to map out the type of work that different agencies are doing rather than necessarily starting something new.
- UN Habitat stressed the need to coordinate these efforts at the city and town level.
- Vladimir Kaplinskii, academia representative from the Russian Federation called for increased participatory budgeting. In this context, participation shall be seen as a resource.
- Edmundo Werna - ILO's approach is on livelihoods. If livelihoods aren't taken into account, there's not going to be such a thing as sustainable urban development.

What do we need to achieve SDG11?

While inter UN cooperation is much needed to ensure long term goals are attained, urban issues are so far reaching that little impact will be achieved without involvement of private sector, academia, NGOs, civil society etc. Analytical capacity very important but it is getting lost due to UN budget cuts.

- Economic partnerships
- Social partnerships
- Urban PPPs
- Resource pooling
- Idea of spatial capital within the city
- Effective and enabling normative frameworks
- Civil society participation