

Towards the New Urban Agenda: Linking with international processes

ICLEI BRIEFING SHEET - Urban Issues, No. 07

In 2016, the Habitat III conference will set a New Urban Agenda of the United Nations for the next 20 years. This will shape national urban agendas worldwide. This brief explains how four major processes and landmark events in 2015 addressing disaster risk reduction (Sendai Framework/ HFA2), financing for development (AAA), global sustainable development goals (SDGs), and the new post-2020 climate regime (COP21) have set the scene and will shape this new global agenda for cities and local governments in the years to come.

Key Messages

- The 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted as part of the UN's "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" represent one of four major international processes in 2015 that will influence the New Urban Agenda to be adopted at Habitat III (the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development) in Quito, Ecuador, from 17 – 20 October, 2016. In particular, Goal 11 to "*Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*" has set the tone for this New Urban Agenda, which will shape the future of regional and national urban agendas and drive the direction of funding worldwide.
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 agreed by the United Nations in March includes a broad recognition and engagement of stakeholders with strong references to the empowerment and capacity building of local authorities to secure resilient cities.
- In July, world leaders met in Addis Ababa to agree on Financing for Development. The resulting Addis Ababa Action Agenda acknowledges that investments in sustainable development need to be made at the sub-national level and promises to strengthen capacities of municipalities and other local authorities, supporting their efforts to mobilize appropriate revenues and turn their financing needs for sustainable development into investment opportunities.
- In December 2015, the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is expected to adopt a binding agreement on the long-term reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.
- The New Urban Agenda being developed between now and the Habitat III conference in October 2016, must harness the outcomes of these processes and include concrete implementation plans for sustainable urban development that secures the ecological basis for universal social and economic development in the world's cities.

Background

Four international processes in 2015 have set the stage for the New Urban Agenda which is to guide policies and strategies for effectively harnessing the power and forces behind urbanization over the coming decades.

Each of these events and global agreements between nation states have fundamental impacts on sustainable development in cities, and the frameworks within which local governments around the world can act to improve the inclusiveness, sustainability, resilience, and quality of life in their cities.

International processes: all roads lead to... cities

Sendai – a new global Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction

The Third United Nations World Congress on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR) was the first of the four decadal intergovernmental conferences of 2015, held in March in Sendai, Japan. The WCDRR set out to finalize the design of the international and multi-stakeholder framework of collaboration on disaster risk reduction for the next several decades. Complementing the expiring Hyogo Framework of Action implemented in the 2005-2015 period, the [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030](#) (also referred to as Hyogo Framework for Action 2, or HFA2) includes a much broader recognition and engagement of stakeholders. Strong references are given to the empowerment and capacity building of local authorities; convening local platforms in addition to national platforms; the concept of “Build Back Better”, which enables synergy with ecosystem and community based adaptation; a vision for quantifiable time-bound targets and indicators; and an appeal to the High Level Political Forum to coordinate and ensure synergy and integrity with the other post-2015 processes described in this brief.



How did local governments shape the Sendai outcome?

Local and subnational authorities gave their input to the conference and its outcomes with the “[Sendai Declaration of Local and Subnational Governments](#)” adopted at the preparatory Local Authorities Roundtable. The Declaration was delivered via the Local Authorities Major Group for the WCDRR process, which is facilitated by the global city networks ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) (in close collaboration with the “Making Cities Resilient Campaign” secretariat). The Local Authorities Major Group enables



local government representative accreditation for the UN events and contributions to the negotiations through interventions and dialogue with national delegations at various Preparatory Committee meetings and sessions.

Resilience - the ability to anticipate, accommodate, and recover from hazardous events or situations - was brought into international debates as an objective of urban planning and guidelines for municipal decisions by ICLEI in 2001.

Since then, international city networks and initiatives have contributed to the development of strategies, tools and solutions to build resilience locally through a number of national and global initiatives such as Resilient Cities for America or 100 Resilient Cities.

The Resilient Cities congress series hosted annually by ICLEI and the City of Bonn brings together leading experts from international institutions and municipal decision makers. It has been established as the annual forum to monitor progress of the HFA2 at the local level, and will similarly monitor progress on urban resilience and adaptation aspects of the SDGs.



Addis Ababa – agreeing on Financing for Development

In July 2015, world leaders – including Heads of State or Government, relevant ministers for finance, foreign affairs and development cooperation – came together to look for ways to pay for the ambitious and costly new global Agenda for Sustainable Development (the SDGs), at the UN's Third Financing for Development conference held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The outcomes of the conference included an inter-governmentally negotiated and agreed outcome document, the [Addis Ababa Action Agenda \(AAAA\)](#). The agreed Agenda aims at creating “an enabling environment at all levels for sustainable development in the spirit of global partnership and solidarity”. The document includes more than 100 actions in the areas of infrastructure, technology, trade, social protection, support to enterprises and capacity building – covering practically all means of implementation – financing, capacity building and technology development. With respect to urban areas, the AAAA acknowledges that expenditures and investments in sustainable development need to be made at the sub-national level and promises to scale up international cooperation, strengthen capacities of municipalities and other local authorities, as well as to support local governments in their efforts to mobilize

appropriate revenues, reinforce debt management, where appropriate, establish municipal bond markets, and help sub-national authorities turn their financing needs for sustainable development into investment opportunities.

The reaching of an agreement in Sendai and Addis Ababa provided the basis and important positive momentum necessary for the last stretch of negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, culminating at the UN Sustainable Development Summit 2015 with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

United Nations Sustainable Development Summit 2015 – the 17 SDGs

The United Nations Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 marked the adoption of the global “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, which is built up around the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will guide global action and investment for sustainable development over the next 15 years.

In particular, the inclusion of a so-called “Urban SDG”, Goal 11 to “*Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*” has raised the profile of cities in international dialogues and will help local governments get support and access financial means to implement the ambitious projects that are needed to transform urban lifestyles and built environments towards sustainability.

For the overall development agenda, the Urban SDG is not only about cities, but rather represents a novel place-based approach to development with specific focus on urban, rural-urban and regional linkages. As such, the 17 interlinked SDGs – and SDG 11 in particular – have set the stage and the tone for the ongoing preparations for the UN’s Habitat III conference in 2016, and the New Urban Agenda that will shape the future of regional and national urban agendas and drive the direction of funding in cities worldwide.

COP21 in Paris, a new global climate regime

In December 2015, the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is expected to adopt a binding agreement on the long-term reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

As sustainability is entering the political mainstream at the local level, city leaders expect more from national counterparts at COP21 and beyond. Many municipalities have already shown exemplary ways of dealing with climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Local self-commitments, action plans and many related measures show not only the ambition of municipal efforts but also the



global leadership that the local level has assumed on this issue - in other words, *raising the **global** level of ambition for tackling climate change through **local** climate actions.*

This great contribution of local authorities and their networks has for years been conveyed to the national government negotiating Parties of the UNFCCC by the advocacy efforts of the [Local Government Climate Roadmap](#). This lobbying aims to achieve the support from governments for an even greater engagement of the municipal and regional level. Given the frequent lack of capacity, expertise and financial resources at the local level, the recognition and empowerment of local activities is a crucial part of future climate protection efforts.

The [Compact of Mayors](#), launched in 2014 by city networks ICLEI, UCLG and C40, together with the UN SG’s Special Envoy for Cities and Climate, Michael Bloomberg’s Office, the UN Secretary General’s Office, and UN-Habitat, is the world’s largest coalition of city leaders addressing climate change by pledging to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, tracking their progress and preparing for the impacts of climate change.

Conclusions: Habitat III and a New Urban Agenda

It is clear that national government commitments will not be enough to determine how quickly urban sustainability transformations can be achieved. The contributions of local and subnational governments and the communities that they serve will be invaluable. However, national visions, policies and legislation provide the frameworks within which their local and subnational counterparts must act, which can either create incentives or obstacles for sustainable development action. Local governments therefore call for faster and more target-oriented national and international frameworks for the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the outcomes of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, and for the preparation of the Habitat III Conference in 2016.

What is Habitat III?

Habitat III (the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development) is the third ever global conference of nations focusing on urbanization, cities and human settlements, building upon the previous two conferences held in 1976 in Vancouver, Canada and 1996 in Istanbul, Turkey.

To take place from 17-20 October, 2016 in Quito, Ecuador, Habitat III is expected to play a definitive role in the global trends for sustainable urban development in the next couple of decades by creating an immediate link from the global sustainability agenda to the local level, taking into account conclusions of the key intergovernmental processes on sustainability in 2015 discussed in this brief.

What will come out of the Habitat III conference?

Habitat III aims for the global adoption of a New Urban Agenda to define the future of regional and national urban agendas. Parallel regional processes are also already under development. As the other international processes from 2015, the New Urban Agenda is also expected to drive the direction of funding for sustainable urban development worldwide.

Cities, local and subnational governments, offer numerous examples for the New Urban Agenda (see the *ICLEI Briefing Sheet – Urban Issues No. 03* for examples of such pioneers). The outcome of the UN Habitat III Conference in 2016 should draw on such success stories for a New Urban Agenda with concrete implementation plans for sustainable urban development that secures the ecological basis for universal social and economic development. To realize this vision, it will have to specify approaches, instruments and mechanisms to engage local and sub-national actors as governmental stakeholders through integrated policies and implementation programs.

More Briefing Sheets from this series about the SDGs and cities:

02: Cities and the SDGs

03: The urban SDG, Goal 11

04: The importance of each SDG for cities

05: Implementing the SDGs in Cities

And more, available at: www.iclei.org/briefingsheets

Further Reading

- United Nations (2015) Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030. Online. (http://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf)
- United Nations (2015) The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development. Online. (http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/CONF.227/L.1)
- United Nations (2015) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Online. (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>)
- ICLEI Briefing Sheets - Climate Series (for more info about the COP21 and cities): www.iclei.org/activities/cop21
- Habitat III official website, "About" Habitat III: <https://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/about>



More briefing sheets here

Author

Kathrine Brekke, Urban Research Officer, ICLEI World Secretariat

Contributor: Yunus Arikan, Head of Global Policy and Advocacy, ICLEI World Secretariat; and Monika Zimmermann, Deputy Secretary General, ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

Supported by:



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability is the world's leading network of over 1,000 cities, towns and metropolises committed to building a sustainable future. By helping our Members to make their cities sustainable, low-carbon, resilient, ecomobile, biodiverse, resource-efficient, healthy and happy, with a green economy and smart infrastructure, we impact over 20% of the global urban population.

These ICLEI Briefing Sheets are a joint service of the City of Bonn and the ICLEI World Secretariat to provide background information on current themes and debates regarding local and urban sustainability:

www.iclei.org/briefingsheets

ICLEI World Secretariat

Kaiser-Friedrich-Straße 7, 53113 Bonn, Germany
Email: urban.research@iclei.org