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**Making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable:  
regional priorities and opportunities**

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**Note by the secretariat\*\***

*Summary*

The 2030 Agenda, through Goal 11 and beyond, reflects the significance of inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities to future global sustainable development efforts and commitments. The importance of urban areas to the achievement of the SDGs in the Asia and Pacific region also cannot be overstated. In 2018, for the first time in the ESCAP region, more people will live in urban than in rural areas. This is a profound economic, social and cultural shift, with environmental consequences, which member States, international organisations, and key stakeholders must recognize and respond to.

This note provides an assessment of the role that cities can play in implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Through the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Paris Agreement and in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development (Habitat III), cities and their leadership have been put on the global agenda. This note further reflects on what regional actions can be taken to support this momentum, including outcomes from the sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum held in 2015. The note highlights two priority areas where cities can lead in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda: strengthening data, capacity and knowledge exchange; and the further development of regional networks and platforms.

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## Introduction

1. It is now widely recognized that the Asia and Pacific region is urbanizing rapidly and that its future is very much bound to the performance of its urban areas. Today, the region is home to 60 per cent of the world's total urban population. In 2018, Asia and the Pacific will be considered, for the first time, predominately urban, with over 50 per cent of its total population living in urban areas. The significance and impact of this transition cannot be overstated. The urban population of the region more than doubled between 1950 and 1975, and doubled again between 1975 and 2000. It is projected to almost double once more between 2000 and 2025. Today, more than 2.1 billion people live in the region's urban areas, a figure set to rise to 3.2 billion in 2050. Given the relative significance of urban areas in Asia and the Pacific, this region has a key role to play in shaping a global future underpinned by sustainable and inclusive urbanisation.

2. The United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, has been unequivocal in connecting future urban development with that of global sustainable development. According to the Secretary-General, "our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities. The human future is largely an urban future. We must get urbanization right, which means reducing greenhouse emissions, strengthening resilience, ensuring basic services such as water and sanitation and designing safe public streets and spaces for all to share."<sup>1</sup>

3. This background paper is divided into three parts. In Part A, this paper starts by contextualizing the increasing importance of sustainable urbanization within international development agendas. It does this by highlighting the outcomes of key recent global meetings and agreements and looks at the implications and opportunities for regional action. Specifically it draws attention to urban-related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and looks forward to the New Urban Agenda, to be deliberated upon at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, this October.

4. Building on this context, Part B of this paper explores the opportunities and roles of cities and their leadership in localizing and implementing global agreements. Specifically, it highlights the role of cities in the lead up and proceedings of the twenty-first conference of the parties (COP21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), as well as the expected role of cities in implementing the COP21 outcome, the Paris Agreement. The paper then turns to the Addis Ababa

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, "'Our struggle for global sustainability will be won or lost in cities', says Secretary-General, at New York Event", remarks to the High-level Delegation of Mayors and Regional Authorities, New York, 23 April 2012. Available from [www.un.org/press/en/2012/sgsm14249.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/press/en/2012/sgsm14249.doc.htm).

Action Agenda, which further recognized the role of cities in implementing the SDGs, and addressed capacity and finance gaps.

5. In Part C, this paper examines how to connect local action for implementation with a regional agenda. It does this by taking stock of the Asia and Pacific region's position in regards to sustainable urban development, as deliberated upon at the Sixth Asia Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-6), and its outcome document, called the 'Jakarta Call for Action'. It addresses how regional platforms and processes can be more effectively aligned with supporting urban dimensions and stakeholders in implementation, and what enabling frameworks are required for this.

6. A lack of effective action at the local level would clearly undermine the aspirations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. But local actions must be connected, both vertically (with other levels of government, and the international community) and horizontally (across cities, and engaging with key non-State stakeholders). To support such connections, this paper puts forward two priority areas for future action on sustainable urban development in the Asia and Pacific region: a) data and information; and b) regional knowledge sharing. Regional initiatives have an important role to play in sharing good practices, supporting capacity for implementation, providing a common platform for all stakeholders and levels of government, and in supporting review processes. In particular, these priority areas would directly support the aspirations of SDG 17 (Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development), specifically with regard to capacity building (17.9) and multi-stakeholder partnerships (17.16 and 17.17).

## **A. Urbanization and international sustainable development**

### **A1. Cities and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**

7. In recognizing the significance of urban transformations worldwide, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015<sup>2</sup> included an urban-specific goal (Goal 11) "Make cities and human settlements more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable".

8. Reflecting the scope of the SDGs, Goal 11 represents a very broad and ambitious agenda for the region's cities. It consists of seven outcome-oriented and three process-oriented targets, namely to: (1) ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums; (2) provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, (3) enhance participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries, (4) strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the urban cultural and natural heritage, (5) provide improved access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities, (6) enhance efficiency of resource use in urban areas, including through measures to improve urban air quality, and through improved management of municipal or other waste, (7) enhance preparedness and resilience to disasters with a view to reduce human and economic losses.

<sup>2</sup> For more, please refer to <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>.

9. In terms of implementation Goal 11 focusses on three key targets, namely: support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and their surrounding rural areas; substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels; and support integrated policies and plans which support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance for sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials.

10. Much more will need to be done in the region to support achievement across Goal 11, especially in terms of understanding and measuring trends and achievements. For example while the proportion of urban dwellers living in slums is decreasing, more than half a billion people in Asia and the Pacific still live in slums. Despite the rapid pace of urbanization across Asia and the Pacific, the proportion of urban dwellers living in slums has decreased by an average of 19 percentage points between 1990 and 2009, but the absolute number of such slum dwellers has increased.<sup>3</sup> Across cities there are also high levels of differentiation with regards to targets and their qualitative dimensions. For example access to green and public spaces is necessary for inclusive and liveable cities but according to the Asian Green Cities Index, in 22 major Asian cities the average total of green space per capita ranges from as low as 1.8 m<sup>2</sup> per capita in Kolkata, India, to 166.3 m<sup>2</sup> in Guangzhou, China.<sup>4,5</sup> Such data says little about access however.

11. Creating more sustainable cities is critical for achieving more sustainable consumption and production patterns. Between 1990 and 2010, domestic material consumption in the region increased threefold from 12.4 billion tons to 37.1 billion tons per year. This equates to an average growth rate of 5.6 per cent annually – more than four times the population growth rate and 0.9 percentage points higher than the average GDP growth rate during the period. Since 1990, the Asia and Pacific region increased its material footprint of consumption on average by 5.5 per cent annually.<sup>6</sup> Given the substantial growth in middle class populations in the region, meeting rising aspirations through more sustainable consumption and production patterns should be an urgent priority.

12. Similarly, managing fresh water and wastewater are critical challenges for the region's cities. The availability of clean water and sanitation services, envisaged within SDG 6, for example, is fundamental to healthy cities in the region. Despite progress under the Millennium Development Goals, sanitation remains an unfinished agenda in many countries in the region. While Southeast Asia has made notable progress in this regard, improving access to sanitation from less than 50 per cent coverage in 1990 to 72.3 per cent in 2015, over one hundred million still practice open defecation in the sub-region.<sup>7</sup> In South and Southwest Asia,

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<sup>3</sup> ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2015.

<sup>4</sup> ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2015.

<sup>5</sup> The WHO recommends 9m<sup>2</sup> per capita as a minimum. World Health Organization, 2010, 'Urban Planning, Environment and Health: From Evidence to Policy Action'.

<sup>6</sup> ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2015. "Material footprint" is a consumption-based indicator of resource use and represents the "global allocation of used raw material extraction to the final demand of an economy"

<sup>7</sup> ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2014.

around half of the population in 2015 still lacked access to basic sanitation - albeit a reduction from 75 per cent of population who lacked access in 1990.<sup>8</sup> Such gaps have important negative health and social impacts, and also generate economic and social costs for the region. In many of the region's cities wastewater continues to be untreated.

13. Solid waste management is also a pressing challenge in many of the region's urban areas and is particularly acute in rapidly growing smaller urban centres where service provision is less comprehensive. The World Bank has estimated that urban areas in the Asia and Pacific region currently generate around 700,000 tonnes of municipal waste per day – a figure that is projected to rise to 1.8 million tonnes in 2025.<sup>9</sup> Given that much organic waste is still disposed of in open dumpsites, waste management is also highly relevant to regional increases in methane emissions. Much more must be done in the region's cities to divert organic waste and move toward waste-to-resource models.

14. Finally, disaster risk reduction is also highly relevant to the region's cities – and disaster risk reduction efforts for the region's vulnerable cities will be essential to their realization of broader development goals. Around 60 per cent of Asia-Pacific city dwellers, 742 million people, are now at 'extreme' to 'high' disaster risk. For 'extreme' disaster risk, the largest population group are in megacities. By 2030, the number at 'high' or 'extreme' multi-hazard risk could reach 980 million.<sup>10</sup>

## **A2. Towards a New Urban Agenda: from the SDGs to Habitat III**

15. It is important to note that the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development (Habitat III) will be convened in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016 – a year after the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development was agreed upon in September 2015.<sup>11</sup> Habitat III will seek to reinvigorate global commitment to sustainable urbanization, through a "New Urban Agenda". This New Urban Agenda will provide a framework for a wide range of actors - member States, multilateral organizations including development funders, local governments, private sector, and civil society for the next 20 years. This agenda will also lay the groundwork for national urban policies and regulations that will extend, and impact, far into the future.

16. The focus at the Habitat III Conference will be on six core areas:<sup>12</sup> (1) 'Social Cohesion and Equity - Livable Cities' on the issues of (i) Inclusive Cities, (ii) Migration and Refugees in Urban Areas, (iii) Safer Cities, and (iv) Urban Culture and Heritage; (2) 'Urban Frameworks' on the issues of (i) Urban Rules and Legislation, (ii) Urban Governance and (iii) Municipal Finance; (3) 'Spatial Development' on the issues of (i) Urban and Spatial Planning and Design, (ii) Urban Land, (iii) Urban-rural linkages, and (iv) Public Space; (4) 'Urban Economy' on the issues of (i) Local Economic Development, (ii) Jobs and Livelihoods; and (iii) Informal Sector; (5) 'Urban Ecology and Environment' on the issues of (i) Urban Resilience, (ii) Urban Ecosystems and Resource Management, and (iii) Cities and Climate Change and Disaster Risk Management; and (6) 'Urban Housing and Basic Services' on the issues of (i) Urban Infrastructure and Basic Services,

<sup>8</sup> ESCAP Statistical Yearbook 2015.

<sup>9</sup> UN-Habitat and UN-ESCAP The State of Asian and Pacific Cities Report 2015. p.128.

<sup>10</sup> ESCAP Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2015.

<sup>11</sup> For more, please refer to [www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/about](http://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/about).

<sup>12</sup> [www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/issue-papers](http://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/issue-papers).

including energy, (ii) Transport and Mobility, (iii) Housing, (iv) Smart Cities, and (v) Informal Settlements.

17. Habitat III is expected to provide an opportunity to discuss and chart new pathways in response to the challenges of urbanization, and is an opportunity to support implementation of the sustainable development goals, particularly Goal 11 and its targets. Again, the Asia and Pacific region will play a key role in not only defining the agenda agreed upon in Quito, but also, through implementation of these decisions in Asia and the Pacific, in determining the overall success or otherwise of that agenda.

## **B. The growing voice and role of cities in implementing international sustainable development agendas**

### **B1. Regional action on climate change and cities: Building on the outcomes of Paris**

18. One key example in which cities are increasingly demonstrating local leadership for global transformation is climate change. Cities are and will remain at the forefront of efforts to combat climate change. Cities are responsible for 71 to 76 per cent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>13</sup> It is estimated that the Asia and Pacific region's cities are expected to double their energy-related emissions from 2007-2030 (which would make the region responsible for 45 per cent of global energy-related emissions) and also double their share of global transport-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (to 34 per cent of global emissions) over a similar time period.<sup>14</sup> The region's cities therefore have a critical role to play in meeting emission reduction targets. The way they develop will be essential to the state of our future climate.

19. The region's cities and population are also highly vulnerable to the projected impacts of a changing climate. Exposure to water-related disasters is especially high for many cities.<sup>15</sup> As acknowledged in the 'APUF-6 Jakarta Call for Action' (see section C1, below), reducing the vulnerability and contribution of cities to climate change and natural hazards calls for a reconsideration of the way cities are planned and transformed, and the way infrastructure is developed. This includes through adopting compact, mixed-use urban form, green urban growth and green city development models, as well as resilience strategies with enforcement of building codes and retrofitting of critical infrastructure that is people-centred, pro-poor and inclusive. These measures, supported by integrated technology and information and respecting heritage, have the potential to improve the health, liveability and competitiveness of the region's urban areas.

20. The key role of cities in addressing climate change was prominently highlighted at the landmark twenty-first conference of the parties (COP21) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), including through its outcomes. The Paris Agreement and the COP21 decision text explicitly acknowledged the role of non-Party stakeholders,

<sup>13</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 2014, "IPCC Fifth Assessment Report", [www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/](http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/).

<sup>14</sup> The State of Asian and Pacific Cities Report 2015, p.141

<sup>15</sup> See UN-ESCAP, Rockefeller Foundation and UN-Habitat, 2014, Quick Guide for Policy Makers on Pro-Poor Urban Climate Resilience in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok and UN-ESCAP (2013) Daegu Outcome Document on Priority Policy Recommendations for Urban Flood management in the context of Climate Change in Asia and the Pacific: [www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Daegu\\_Outcome%20Document.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Daegu_Outcome%20Document.pdf).

including cities and other subnational authorities and encouraged them to scale-up their efforts and support actions to reduce emissions and/or to build resilience and decrease vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change.<sup>16</sup>

21. Cities had led the way to the Paris negotiations with a host of pledges and commitments, which considerably built on the momentum created by the United Nations Climate Summit, in September 2014. Several programmes and alliances involving cities were initiated, including the Compact of Mayors. The Compact is the world's largest cooperative effort among mayors and city officials to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions, track progress, and prepare for the impacts of climate change. The Compact of Mayors was launched by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his Special Envoy for Cities and Climate Change, Michael R. Bloomberg, under the leadership of the world's global city networks – C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40), Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) – with support from UN-Habitat. The Compact encourages cities to voluntarily publish and track commitments, targets and actions for both Greenhouse Gas emissions mitigation and assessing and adapting to climate risks. More than 400 among the world's leading cities have already signed up to the Compact, including 64 from the ESCAP region.

22. Other important initiatives had been launched in the lead up to Paris. The Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance was launched at the United Nations Climate Summit in September 2014. Comprising commercial and development banks, governments, networks of cities and civil society organizations, the Alliance seeks to address the finance gap (estimated at US\$ 4.5-5.4 trillion a year) for low-carbon urban infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> At the ICLEI World Congress 2015 in Seoul, Park Won Soon, Mayor of Seoul, launched the Seoul Action Plan, in order to motivate more cities to participate and collaborate in the Compact of Mayors, also through the newly introduced Transformative Actions Program (TAP) that was officially launched at the COP21. One element of the TAP is to select 100 promising transformative projects every year ahead of the annual UNFCCC COP with the aim of enhancing capital flows to cities.<sup>18</sup> The TAP is designed to address and create aiding mechanisms to help find ways to address key issues around subnational climate finance, and provide tools and knowledge necessary for local and subnational governments to design and implement transformative climate actions. It is a joint effort by networks of local and subnational governments to support investment in urban areas over the next ten years.

23. Several cities and regional jurisdictions in the Asia and Pacific region are already taking action, on a voluntary basis, on climate-related issues. While most commitments are identified in developed countries of the region, jurisdictions of developing country Parties have also been active. For instance, signatories of the Compact of Mayors include cities from Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Vanuatu. Some of these have committed to GHG emission reduction targets. For instance, the city of Adelaide pledged a 35 per cent reduction of GHG emissions by 2020, and has

<sup>16</sup> FCCC/CP/2015/L.9/Rev.1

<sup>17</sup> Cities Climate Finance Leadership Alliance (CCFLA), 2015, "The State of City Climate Finance 2015", [www.citiesclimatefinance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CCFLA-State-of-City-Climate-Finance-2015.pdf](http://www.citiesclimatefinance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/CCFLA-State-of-City-Climate-Finance-2015.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> [www.un.org/climatechange/blog/2015/04/mayors-announce-new-commitments-climate-action-ahead-2015-paris-climate-conference/](http://www.un.org/climatechange/blog/2015/04/mayors-announce-new-commitments-climate-action-ahead-2015-paris-climate-conference/).

the ambition of becoming the first carbon-neutral city in the world. In India, the city of Rajkot has committed to reduce its GHG emissions by 16 per cent in 2016. In seeking to become a Green Technology City State by 2020, and in identifying mitigation actions, the Malaysian city of Melaka completed a GHG Inventory Report in 2013.<sup>19</sup>

24. Other climate change mitigation initiatives are identified in the region beyond the scope of the Compact. Cities and regions in China, for example, have committed to GHG emissions reduction targets, such as Beijing (to achieve the peaking of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions around 2020), the province of Sichuan (CO<sub>2</sub> emissions peak by 2030) or Wuhan (CO<sub>2</sub> emissions peak by 2020). Furthermore, carbon markets have been piloted in five cities (Beijing, Chongqing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Tianjin) and two provinces in China (Guangdong and Hubei), which will lead to the establishment of a national emissions trading scheme to be launched in 2017.<sup>20</sup>

## **B2. Supporting change: Realizing the Addis Ababa Action Agenda**

25. Cities in the Asia and Pacific region disproportionately contribute to national economic growth in relation to population share. In all sub-regions the GDP share of cities outstrips the proportion of urban population.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless many cities face critical financing gaps – often a reflection of their weak fiscal base and limited authority to raise revenue through additional sources and taxes.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, for example of the case of infrastructure or basic service provision, notable gaps have emerged with regard to investments made and what is required to meet needs.

26. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda<sup>23</sup> specifically referred to the role that local authorities could play in achievement of the sustainable development goals – but also noted the gaps in capacity and the need for greater recognition and support. In its call for ‘scaling up international cooperation to strengthen capacities of municipalities and other local authorities’ it acknowledged the importance of devolution of financial resources to municipalities and local authorities in order to address gaps in financing and technological capacity. The AAAA further called for support in local revenue mobilization to finance necessary investments, including through municipal bond markets and lending from financial institutions and development banks. Such support was explicitly linked to addressing a number of targets under SDG11, including resilient and environmentally sound infrastructure, energy, transport, water and sanitation, and sustainable and resilient buildings using local materials.

27. Of significance, the AAAA emphasized that the participation of local communities in decisions affecting their communities (such as in improving drinking water and sanitation management) could play a critical role in supporting policies towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, and resilience to disasters. To support the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, national and local

<sup>19</sup> Melaka State, Greenhouse Gas Emission Inventory Report 2013. ICLEI South Asia

<sup>20</sup> Munnings *et al.*, 2014, Quemin and Wang (2014) or World Bank (2015) may be consulted for a more detailed analysis on China’s carbon markets.

<sup>21</sup> The State of Asian and Pacific Cities Report 2015, p.57.

<sup>22</sup> M. Lindfield, 2015, ‘Financing our urban future’, in The State of Asian and Pacific Cities Report 2015.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, 2015, Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development.

capacity for prevention, adaptation and mitigation of external shocks and risk management required strengthening. Finally, the AAAA noted the need for developing mechanisms for follow up and review, including the engagement of local authorities and stakeholders through regional commissions.

## C. Opportunities for urban action in the Asia and Pacific region

### C1. The state of preparedness in the region: localizing global goals

28. The successful implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will greatly depend on the localization and ownership of goals and targets, as shown by the experience of Millennium Development Goal implementation.<sup>24</sup> The importance of cities in the attainment of the 2030 Agenda is clear, and many other goals and targets will rely on implementation at the local level. In fact, it can be argued that the vast majority of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda depend upon what happens in cities, and their ability to deliver on the SDGs.<sup>25</sup> As such SDG 11 should not be seen as the only entry point for urban development.<sup>26</sup>

29. Local governments are key partners in the implementation of global agendas and will play a critical role also in this process. Indeed in the case of the 2030 Agenda it has been noted that all SDG targets are directly or indirectly related to the work of local and sub-national government.<sup>27</sup> This extensive set of responsibilities includes, amongst others, service provision, healthcare, education, public transportation, waste management, land planning, reductions on carbon emissions, taxation, infrastructure planning and development, and so on. The leadership of local authorities and mayors in particular will be also required to engage stakeholders, forging partnerships and managing concerted and cohesive efforts across urban agglomerations and provincial and rural authorities, as urban patterns of growth in the region increasingly transcend administrative boundaries.

30. Of course, implementation cannot be achieved by local governments alone. Yet local governments are in the position to effectively involve all key parties, engaging in “vertical” partnerships with national governments, “horizontal” partnerships with other local authorities (especially within metropolitan regions, but also through networks of cities), and multi-stakeholder partnerships encompassing diverse urban actors ranging from private sector to academia, and civil society. Local governments have the

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, 2014, Report on Localizing the Post-2015 Development Agenda [www.worldwewant2015.org/localising2015](http://www.worldwewant2015.org/localising2015).

<sup>25</sup> One analysis has shown that 10 of the 17 SDGs can be directly linked to Goal 11, while 30 per cent of targets and 39 per cent of indicators are linked with Goal 11. See Cities Alliance (2015) Sustainable Development Goals and Habitat III. Cities Alliance Discussion Paper 3.

<sup>26</sup> For a fuller analysis and mapping of local government and the SDGs see UCLG (2015) The Sustainable Development Goals: What local governments need to know.

<sup>27</sup> All SDGs are Local: Towards an action agenda in Habitat III. Statement delivered by representatives of local and regional government networks gathered around the global taskforce. 27 September, 2015, New York. The Statement concluded: “We, local and regional government leaders gathered in New York today, are fully committed to the success of the 2030 Agenda and , call for a new Global Governance Architecture under a renewed United Nations System with enhanced participation of stakeholders in general, and the recognition of local and regional governments as governmental stakeholders in particular.”

potential to also share their best practices as a basis for crafting policies at the national and regional level.<sup>28</sup>

31. This was recognized in the outcomes of the Sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-6). Following agreement on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in preparation for Habitat III, ESCAP organized APUF-6<sup>29</sup> from 19 to 21 October 2015, back-to-back with the Habitat III Regional Meeting for Asia-Pacific<sup>30</sup> hosted by the Government of Indonesia in Jakarta. The outcome of APUF-6 in the form of a Call for Action emphasized that to achieve implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the outcomes of Habitat III it is essential to re-focus attention on building effective partnerships spanning national and local government, as well as the private sector and civil society.

32. The Call for Action noted the need for a radical shift in the way cities are planned, developed and managed, with people seen as change agents rather than beneficiaries. This requires an integrated approach to urbanization that includes the effective deployment of appropriate and progressive urban legislation and policy frameworks, sound and innovative financing mechanisms, appropriate land governance, high quality and resilient urban planning and design, and a strong civil society that is more effectively engaged in decision-making as well as implementation of urban development. In this way, building off the Call for Action, major priority areas for future action on sustainable urban development in the Asia-Pacific region can be identified. These priority areas contribute to the localization and implementation of SDG 11 and the urban-related SDGs, more generally, and support cities in their roles in achieving a sustainable future in the region.

## **C2. Priority Area 1: Closing data and information gaps**

33. Mayors and other local authorities will need to draw from and expand their resources, financial and human, in order to meet future needs and expectations. This includes investing in innovative forms of public engagement to strengthen public participation in urban planning and management, for example through participatory budgeting or community-driven slum upgrading and disaster protection, as in the case of San Mateo in Metro Manila, Philippines, where community members monitor flood risks and can provide early warnings through mobile messaging.<sup>31</sup> Cities are already seeking to develop their capacity to access credits and prepare bankable projects, in order to diversify their financing sources for urban services. Accountability and transparency will be crucial for this purpose, with cities having the prospect to become more effective catalysts for citizens and the private sector. At the same time, the leadership of mayors will be crucial to restructure and negotiate the regulatory and legal frameworks at the national level, to ensure that appropriate powers and resources are deployed to manage local and urban development.

34. The lack of urban data for effective spatial, economic, environmental and poverty reduction policies has driven the call for an ‘urban data revolution’. There is a clear need for data on intra-urban conditions such as disparities in housing conditions, access to safe water and sanitation and solid

<sup>28</sup> APUF6 Chair’s Summary, [www.unescap.org/events/apuf6](http://www.unescap.org/events/apuf6).

<sup>29</sup> For more, please refer to [www.unescap.org/events/apuf6](http://www.unescap.org/events/apuf6).

<sup>30</sup> For more, please refer to [www.habitat3.org/jakarta](http://www.habitat3.org/jakarta).

<sup>31</sup> UN-ESCAP, Rockefeller Foundation and UN-Habitat, 2014, Quick Guide for Policy Makers on Pro-Poor Urban Climate Resilience in Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok.

waste collection, and on inter-urban conditions, including disparities between large and small cities, all of which are crucial for the implementation planning and monitoring for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (specifically meeting implementation of SDG targets 17.18 and 17.19 on data, monitoring and accountability).

35. Urban data collection and reporting have not kept up with the needs of urban planners and city managers, thus affecting planning of city development, as well as the understanding of urban change, including complex social change. This 'data deficit' is acute when addressing marginal groups living in informal settlements or areas outside administratively defined urban boundaries. The consequent lack of evidence hinders policy-making processes, planning and even the comparison of urban trends and conditions. Better data and information are needed to determine the numbers and characteristics of people who move into various urban zones and commute between them, as well as move from rural to urban areas on a daily, weekly or seasonal basis. Such data would help in understanding needs related to urban infrastructure and services, as well as employment and mobility trends, and enable local governments to develop more focused and effective policies.<sup>32</sup>

36. Cities have become too complex and dynamic for traditional existing information systems and large-scale surveys, which are expensive and require longer processing time, resulting in critical information and time gaps. While reliable, coherent, up-to-date and comparable data remains difficult to attain, potentially rich sources of data are becoming available, including those collected through crowdsourcing and participatory enumeration projects, or through high-resolution satellite imagery. One of the methods currently being used in Afghanistan is the extraction of up-to-date information from satellite images of urban areas, using remote sensing technologies and GIS to generate data sets on land-use as well as estimates of urban population size.<sup>33</sup>

37. Local authorities could also make better use of the data that is already being generated in cities; buses and trains, water infrastructure and gas line networks, hospitals, condominiums and office buildings all generate data, which can be collected and analysed in real time. Participatory data creation and feedback mechanisms have been successful in narrowing the gap between top-down urban policies and the actual needs of the urban poor. Also, many global economic and investment institutions, consultancy companies and the private sector collect quite comprehensive data on cities. However much of this data is not readily available for local decision makers and planning authorities.

38. Integration of quantitative and qualitative data, geospatial, statistical and other information for urban policy is challenging but fundamental. Greater attention needs to be paid to the information base, including standardized collection, analysis, monitoring, and dissemination. A clear understanding of what kind of data is required and for what policy or planning purpose can help overcome the barriers to integrated urban data. However, acquiring such data requires new methods, including participatory processes, engagement, and outreach, for which many local governments lack the capacity or time to pursue. For cities to consistently collect and analyze data, and report on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda over time, national governments will have to create incentives and standardize collection, analysis, and monitoring methodologies across cities and States,

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<sup>32</sup> Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific 2015.

<sup>33</sup> The State of Asian and Pacific Cities Report 2015, pp 50-52.

overcoming inconsistencies in interpretations and definitions. There are already mechanisms and tools for standardization that can be used. One important example is ISO 37120 ‘Sustainable Development of Communities: Indicators for city services and quality of life’, which has been developed to provide cities with comparable and relevant indicators through which to measure and compare performance as well as learn from other cities.<sup>34</sup>

39. Availability of information for all stakeholders can also strengthen governance through better-informed stakeholders, with academia and think tanks having an important role to play in this regard.<sup>35</sup>

### **C3. Priority area 2: Promoting regional knowledge sharing and cooperation on sustainable urban development**

40. Reflecting the urgent need for action on urban sustainability, and the benefits of collaboration, information exchange and cooperation, a greater number of cities have sought to develop ways to engage in joint efforts. In recent years city-to-city cooperation has materialized and resulted in a number of initiatives to share experiences and gain knowledge while providing access to policy tools. As highlighted in the ‘APUF-6 Jakarta Call for Action’, to achieve implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the outcomes of Habitat III, it is essential to re-focus attention on the building of effective partnerships spanning national and local government, as well as private sector and civil society (thus supporting implementation of SDG targets 17.16 and 17.17).

41. Regional networks have proven their efficacy in reflecting the demands of cities to focus on emerging issues, and have contributed to strengthening the capacity of local governments to successfully implement national and global agendas. Regional networks have been particularly effective in the implementation of Agenda 21 as well as the Millennium Development Goals in part due to their capacity to mobilise a range of stakeholders, as in the case of ICLEI which recognizes through its membership municipalities, metropolitan governments, urban communities, administrative committees of new towns and eco-industrial zones, towns, villages, counties, and prefectures. At the same time ICLEI engages local leadership with industry leaders, think tanks, and national agencies.

42. Partnerships can also play a key role in linking together authorities and key stakeholders responsible for otherwise fragmented planning processes, as the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) Pacific office has done strengthening urban local and sub-national governments in Small Island Developing States, and supporting knowledge sharing and interaction between ministries, national and provincial departments. Associations of urban stakeholders, such as CityNet, involve also United Nations agencies, private companies and research centres to provide its network of municipalities with opportunities for training and technical resources, ensuring cooperation on tangible projects to respond to city demands in line with sustainable development principles. The role and influence of local government in the international community and global governance has risen thanks to organizations such as UCLG, a “network of networks” that has headed the call for localizing the global sustainable development agenda and is contributing towards Habitat III through the empowerment and inclusion of local authorities in decision-making.

<sup>34</sup> [www.iso.org/iso/catalogue\\_detail?csnumber=62436](http://www.iso.org/iso/catalogue_detail?csnumber=62436).

<sup>35</sup> APUF6 Chair’s Summary [www.unescap.org/events/apuf6](http://www.unescap.org/events/apuf6).

43. In future, the Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development can also provide a platform which builds upon and connects regional and sub-regional multi-stakeholder forums, such as the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum, and networks of cities to facilitate the reviewing of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Asia and the Pacific. As cities seek to find solutions to persistent and emerging issues and plan initiatives in response to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other global commitments, it will be important to highlight and share innovative policies and initiatives among cities in the region and facilitate knowledge sharing and north-south, south-south, and triangular cooperation. Such initiatives could more effectively bridge the gaps between global commitments and local implementation. Through such regional initiatives, cities, and their leaders, can play a critical role as partners in supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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