**HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

#HLPF #SDGs #GlobalGoals

SDGs in focus:

SDG 11 and interlinkages with other SDGs – Sustainable cities and communities

Thursday, 13 July 2023, 10:10 AM- 1:00 PM

Secretariat Background Note

Background

Eight years into the implementation of SDG 11, progress has been mixed. While significant strides have been made on some targets of SDG 11, such as transport and national urban policies, vast gaps remain on the others, specifically on targets related to slums, provision and access to public spaces and waste management.

It is urgent to address negative trends such as:

- As of 2022, nearly 1.1 billion people lived in slums or slum-like conditions in urban areas, with an additional 2 billion expected to live in slums or slum-like conditions over the next 30 years. The growing slum population is a manifestation of the housing crisis, a situation in many instances that has now been exacerbated by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The global average municipal solid waste (MSW) collection rate in cities is at 82%, and the average MSW managed in controlled facilities in cities is 55%. MSW collection rates in sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania are less than 60%. Uncollected waste is the source of plastic pollution, GHG emissions, and sources of incubation for infections.
- Data for 2020 from 1,072 cities in 120 countries indicate that more than three-quarters of these cities have less than 20% of their area dedicated to open public spaces and streets, about half of the proportion recommended. On average, open public spaces account for a meagre 3.2% of urban land, about 4 times less than the share of land in streets.

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic

Cities have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, accounting for 95 per cent of all reported cases around the world. The pandemic placed unprecedented pressure on local governments, requiring them to be innovative, and responsive to the needs of their communities while confronting serious constraints such as diminishing revenue. The pandemic had significant financial impact. In many cities, the pandemic caused a sudden drop in revenue when, among others, economic activities and public transportation ridership declined.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have not been felt the same in all cities and human settlements, and have differed widely between different population groups and areas within those cities and settlements. Some of the key factors accounting for the varied impacts include infrastructure, housing conditions, service availability and labour market conditions, amongst others.

The pandemic brought also positive impacts to cities around the world. Many local governments shifted their priorities towards healthier solutions to support collective transport and non-motorized transport options, and in many cities, walking and cycling increased significantly. The COVID-19 pandemic has also reinvigorated the debate on urban densities and the future of how cities and urban areas should grow, with high densities associated with increased risks and low densities associated to reduced urban efficiencies. There is no single sustainable urbanization model, but each city should create a baseline on density upon which an assessment of the desired future and actions towards it can be analysed based on the indicator values.

In general, the pandemic also presented windows of opportunity for policy changes that should be utilized to the fullest. In numerous cities, inhabitants appreciated the open public spaces in a new way and local governments found new ways of engaging people and of delivering critical services amidst serious constraints. The pandemic also spotlighted many areas for action and people who were being left behind, such as the housing needs of older persons and slum

dwellers. Generally speaking, the pandemic demonstrated that governments at all levels can move quickly and make drastic policy changes, if needed.

Policies and actions to maximize synergies, mitigate trade-offs and drive transformation

To build back better following the COVID-19 pandemic, progress under SDG 11 needs to shift from incremental to transformative change, with multi-sector, multi-stakeholder collaboration. Potential policies for accelerated transformation include:

Investing in capacities for integrated urban planning and for ensuring policy coherence

Capacities for integrated planning are still missing in majority of cities around the world. Ideally, all sectors would be trained and empowered to consider integrated approaches and solutions, such as integrated basic service provision. Urban policies should also consider the functional geographies and relations addressing urban-rural linkages by means of integrated policies.

Improving data collection to ensure that no one and no place is left behind

While data availability has considerably increased, there is still a lack of both shared indicators and data to assess the needs and the effectiveness of actions, particularly in relation to vulnerable urban communities and the urban poor. Urban data systems are still not harmonized, and hence the development and subsequent endorsement of the Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF) by UN Statistical Commission in March 2020, is a good starting point. Data availability is also enabling cities across the world to increasingly leverage artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), big data, ubiquitous connectivity, and a range of other technologies to help solve their most pressing urban issues, from population growth and congestion to environmental sustainability and improved administrative efficacy.

Ensuring participatory processes, including through digital services

3

All population groups, including marginalized groups, should be represented in urban planning, service delivery decision-making and other processes of urban governance. Active outreach and co-production of local solutions together with relevant communities, as well as community-based management of basic services, can often make interventions more effective and targeted. However, open processes are not enough. There is a need to ensure that stakeholders are truly able to participate. For example, digitalization has allowed new ways of connecting with populations. When designed and implemented well and supported by a forward-looking development strategy, local e-government can simplify people's lives, provide multiple channels of contact and communication, and increase administrative efficiency. At the same time, particularly older persons and persons with disabilities may be left offline and unable to contribute.

Fully leveraging nature-based solutions

Local governments should fully assess the opportunities for utilizing nature-based solutions for improved health and well-being, reduced pollution, increased disaster resilience, climate mitigation and revitalized urban spaces.

Harnessing the full benefits of the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) have emerged as an innovative tool by and for cities. The reviews will be more fully addressed in the HLPF session titled Transformation from the ground up: Acting at local level.

Means of implementation

Local governments require significant financial resources to implement their SDG plans, from improving public transport, promoting green spaces to retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency. Globally, fiscal autonomy of local and regional governments is often low and there is a need to diversify their funding sources. Innovative financing solutions, such as guarantees, green bonds, technology-based mechanisms or pooled financing to aggregate smaller projects

and capture financing jointly by sharing the risk and interests, can complement tax funds and grants.

Local governments should set up appropriate governance structures and institutional frameworks to facilitate SDG implementation within government structures. SDG implementation can be led and monitored at the sub-national level through central government efforts, sub-national structures, or joint, multi-level structures and mechanisms. In most cases, joint structures can for example enable allocation of budget resources across territories and bring synergies from common reporting methods and overall understanding of implementation opportunities and challenges.

Local governments can foster partnerships and innovation among different stakeholders by supporting initiatives such as business incubators, innovation clusters and by providing space and seed funding for community innovation. Additional efforts are needed to engage the private sector. Local governments can provide incentives for private sector stakeholders to engage in SDG initiatives, including through tax benefits, access to land, and other forms of financial assistance.

Capacity building programs are needed to enhance the skills of city officials, planners, and other stakeholders involved in sustainable, green and smart urban development. For these purposes, information and knowledge exchanges and peer-to-peer networks can be useful tools for sharing lessons learned between cities and stakeholders.

Proposed guiding questions:

- What can be learned from the experience of local governments in crisis response and working towards recovery and resilience? How can we ensure that we leave no one and no community behind?
- How can cities and communities navigate the intersecting challenges of COVID-19, conflicts, climate change impacts, inequality and other challenges?

**HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

#HLPF #SDGs #GlobalGoals

- What steps are being taken to promote managed density, regulate urban expansion, and reduce rural-urban land conversion?
- How can cities reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change? How can local municipalities and cities build resilience?
- What are some high-impact solutions in effective governance, digitalization, service provision and other policy spheres that could be scaled up to accelerate progress towards SDG 11?