



**Opening of the Integration Segment and  
Interactive panel discussion: How can urbanization policies promote integration of economic,  
social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development?**

ECOSOC Chamber, 27 May 2014, 10:00 – 13:00

INFORMAL SUMMARY

**Highlights and recommendations**

- In order to achieve sustainable urbanization, policy-makers at the local, national and international level should take into account the **interlinkages between the social, economic and environmental dimensions** of sustainability in the context of urban planning and apply a holistic approach aimed at long-term sustainability.
- Governments should develop a national perspective on the role of urban centres in national development and on country-specific challenges of urbanization, articulated in the form of **national urban policies**.
- Investment in **basic services** and adoption of policies that support **affordable housing and transportation** must be a priority.
- There is an urgent need to focus on **resource efficiency** and improve **production and consumption patterns** to achieve sustainable urbanization.
- **Communities** need to play a central role in sustainable urbanization and their role as a strategic partner should be recognized.
- **Partnerships** between the **data** owners and those seeking to use data for their own purposes can resolve conflicts in ownership by incentivizing both partners to be actively engaged and to leverage each other's strengths.
- Urban planning can play a significant role in overcoming **governance** fragmentation in public policy formulation and implementation, since most national and local development policies and related investments have a spatial dimension.
- Sharing strategies to build on each other's success is key to promoting sustainable urbanization at the global, regional, national and local levels. **Peer-to-peer learning** through platforms like the ICLEI, C40 and UCLG offers an opportunity to exchange successful policies, adapt them to local conditions and build capacities.
- The outcome of the **Integration Segment** should contribute towards the framing of the issue of sustainable urbanization within the post-2015 development agenda as well as the preparatory process for Habitat III.



- Member States should participate in the upcoming **Climate Summit** of the United Nations Secretary-General in New York in September 2014 at the highest level of leadership to help shape an ambitious agenda to tackle the climate challenge.

The world is becoming predominantly urban and by 2050, 9.6 billion people – more than 70% of the world population – are predicted to live in cities. Currently, cities cover only 3% of our planet’s surface, but contribute to 80% of world GDP and account for 75% of its greenhouse gas emissions. Cities are places of both great **opportunities** and **challenges**. They are centers of economic opportunity, technological innovation and economic growth and play an important role for environmental sustainability and climate change adaptation and mitigation. At the same time, many cities face challenges with regards to basic infrastructure and service provision, inequality and employment, security and a growing number of the new urban poor.

The **urbanization** process is a significant global trend and a transformative force that shapes our economy, political systems, the environment and societies. In the past, only a few countries have transitioned from poverty to prosperity without urbanization, with cities functioning as a source rather than the outcome of development. And while challenges may become more noticeable when concentrated at high density, solutions are also easier to scale up and reach more people at the same time.

With regard to the post-2015 development agenda, sustainable cities and human settlements are recognized as important factors and contributors to sustainable development, as recognized in the Rio+20 Outcome Document. Urbanization continues to figure as one core area of international consultations, among others in the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, and it will play an important role at the Climate Summit 2014 in New York. There is overwhelming support for a **stand-alone sustainable development goal on cities and human settlements**, and the recently adopted **common position of African leaders on the post-2015 development agenda** incorporates cities and human settlements. **Habitat III** in 2016 will build on these processes and address the question of how to achieve sustainable urbanization within the overall framework of post-2015 development agenda.

The question is not whether urbanization is a positive or negative phenomenon, but rather how the growth and development process of cities can be planned and managed in a sustainable fashion. **Sustainable urbanization** requires national, regional and local governments to address citizens’ needs and expectations through coherent and integrated policies across all three dimensions of sustainable development. **Good governance** of cities requires adequate and accountable institutions at all levels of decision-making, sound and just management of spatial configurations to foster economic efficiency, social cohesion and environmental sustainability, smart interventions to minimize economic and social inequality, and the political will of leaders to provide change for citizens.

Cities are increasingly becoming centers of action on specific challenges, such as **climate change**. Mayors have a range of executive powers that enable them to take immediate action to address many challenges. Cities, however, should also be supported and strengthened by international, regional and national governments. The recent natural disaster in the **Balkans** highlights the urgency of mitigating and adapting to the changing climate. **New York City** provides a successful example, where specific, targeted actions led to a 19% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions over six years.



Actions targeted at addressing climate change can help attract private investment, drive economic growth, improve public health and raise living standards. For example, the cable-car system in **Medellin** not only minimizes carbon emissions and air pollution, but also connects marginalized communities to the city centre, jobs and services. Cities are also building on each other's success, such as the expansion of bus rapid transit system introduced in **Brazil** in the 1960s, now spread to cities like **New York, Paris** and **Guangzhou**.

When addressing today's challenges and concerns for sustainable urbanizations, policy-makers should take on a long-term perspective, taking into account the impact of short-term policies on the next generations. For instance, when providing slum dwellers with water facilities, local authorities must also provide infrastructure for the treatment of increased amount of wastewater created. Otherwise, people will eventually not be better, but worse off. In view of a growing middle class with new consumption patterns, a holistic approach will help mitigate the risk of unplanned and spontaneous urbanization in the future.

Some countries and communities are turning waste into economic opportunities and social and environmental benefits through effective waste management. **China**, for example, has created 10 million jobs in recycling. A waste management programme in **Montevideo (Uruguay)** has successfully demonstrated how people could come together to manage waste, which in turn empowered them to get identity cards and open bank accounts. Waste management is also important for health, since outdoor pollution contributes to the death of 3.7 million people per year.

There is a persistent gap between the formulation of integrated policies, especially at national levels and their implementation on the ground. While many countries have passed **national urban policies** and their role for creating a vision was emphasized during the discussion, these plans often lack concrete implementation strategies.

The integration of local authorities, communities and neighborhoods allows for effective bottom-up policy- and decision-making, which is fundamental for people-centered sustainable urbanization that prioritizes citizens' needs. The outcome document of 7<sup>th</sup> **World Urban Forum, the Medellin Declaration**, further supported the notion of promoting a new urban agenda that establishes a people-centered urbanization model. While the relevant role of national governments for urban policy-making in terms of financial resources, legislation and the level of centralization is recognized, local communities and citizens can provide a holistic perspective, as they are economic, individual and cultural persons all at the same time. Their engagement can help to look beyond silos which often persist in sectoral city governments.

The important role of **local governments** as managers of urban development should also be reflected and strengthened through fiscal decentralization. For example, the government of **Rwanda** adopted decentralization system, emphasizing government accountability and a commitment to reducing corruption in order to ensure resources appropriated for urbanization are solely used for this purpose. Furthermore, cities may consider asymmetric governance for different areas of urban governance, since different areas, such as transport, housing, economic development or education may not require the same structure and level of governance.

Planning for sustainable urbanization should also take into account the inherent dependence of cities on hinterlands and ecosystems surrounding them. Integrated policy-making should



consider this **spatial aspect**. A city's territory includes the city, but also suburbs, intermediary areas and the periphery. Particularly in the area of transport, this requires an integrated approach beyond the immediate boundaries of the city itself. Looking at the wider production and consumption chain of cities, e.g. with regard to food and water, the central role of a cities' surroundings becomes clear.

There is agreement that **data** can be a very useful tool for sustainable urban planning and management, if transformed into actionable knowledge and information. Despite local conditions, cities are all facing similar challenges in terms of basic infrastructure and service provision. Whether collected in big databases or at the community-level, data can serve to the benefit of cities' citizens. As data is usually held in different places, different stakeholders or entities of a city are required to cooperate and collaborate in order to make use of data, as seen with the example of a consolidated emergency platform established by **IBM Smart Cities** for the city of **Rio de Janeiro**. This approach fosters an integrated, multi-stakeholder approach to sustainable urbanization. Moreover, data is key to ensure greater transparency and accountability of urban governance as well as better results for citizens.