



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



2022-23 International Mayors Forum

Dakar, Senegal, 25-28 April 2023

Concept Note and Agenda

1. Background

Cities and sustainable development are intrinsically linked. Globally, over 50 per cent of the population lives in urban areas. By 2050, 68 per cent of the world's population is projected to be urban.¹ As the world continues to urbanize, the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals depends increasingly on the successful management of urban growth, especially in the least developed countries and in lower-middle income countries where the most rapid urbanization is expected between now and 2050. The rapid rate of urbanization poses significant challenges to progress in social and economic development, particularly the need for sustained investments in urban infrastructure and services such as quality and affordable housing, education, health care, decent work and a safe environment, focusing on the needs of the urban poor and other groups in vulnerable situations. Today, nearly 1 billion urban poor live in informal settlements while conflicts contribute to pressure on cities as 50 per cent of refugees and internally displaced people live in urban areas. Integrated policies are also required in order to improve the lives and livelihoods of both urban and rural dwellers. In addition, rapid urbanization gives heightened urgency to ensure sustainable patterns of production and consumption while also protecting and preserving the environment. Understanding and planning for future urban changes is essential to getting back on track and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Cities are incubators for knowledge generation and production, innovation in science, productivity, and business. They are also innovators in governance and responding to shocks, provision of public goods and services, and foster vibrant arts and culture communities. Cities also play a leading role in the economic development of countries, contributing as much as 80 per cent to the global gross domestic product (GDP).² However, the current trend of urbanization is also often accompanied by significant social and environmental challenges, such as the lack of access to adequate, affordable urban land and housing options, urban infrastructure and basic services for a growing number of citizens, who suffer from rising inequality and exclusion, unemployment, food insecurity and extreme poverty. This is particularly true in developing countries, where 95% of urban expansion will take place over the next decades. It is also a matter of major concern knowing that cities and urban areas of developing countries are already accommodating most of the 883 million people living in slums, their number increasing rapidly as in many cases urbanization is taking place mostly informally, through uncontrolled urban expansion, and poor land use planning and management. This uncontrolled growth is contributing to urban sprawl, pollution and environmental degradation. Besides lacking adequate sanitation services, including drainage, waste-water collection and treatment, garbage collection and adequate access to safe water, informal settlements are particularly susceptible to hazards such as floods and landslides.

Unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are found to a large extent in cities, which are also main contributors to climate change and environmental degradation. While accommodating more than half of the world's population on only 1 to 3 per cent of the earth's land, world's cities nonetheless account for 60-80 per cent of global energy consumption and generate as much as 75 per cent of the energy-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Rapid urbanization is exacerbating the

¹ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Urbanization Prospects 2018: Highlights (ST/ESA/SER.A/421).

² <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview>

environmental impact of cities exerting pressure on fresh water supplies, sewage, the living environment, and public health. Figures from 2016 showed that air pollution was affecting 90% of urban dwellers, causing 4.2 million deaths.

Cities and urban settlements are at the core of major global frameworks, starting with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 adopted in March 2015, which calls for supporting cooperation and mutual learning among local governments for disaster risk reduction. Four months later, in mid-July 2015, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda proposed a new global framework aligning all financing flows and policies with economic, social and environmental priorities. It guides all the financing of the global sustainable development agreements, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals that were adopted in September 2015 with Goal 11 specifically aiming at making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. While focusing mainly on the national governments, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, adopted in December of the same year, is nevertheless very much interlinked with cities, which are becoming heavily more affected by climate change and will need investment in climate action, particularly with regard to adaptation. The New Urban Agenda adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador, on 20 October 2016 placed even more emphasis on the role of cities in achieving the SDGs well beyond Goal 11. Actually, it is today a well-known and recognized fact that that about 70 per cent of the 169 SDG targets can only be achieved through the substantial involvement of local actors, particularly those in urban areas, hence the need for localizing the SDGs, where local governments and local stakeholders play an essential role in adapting and implementing those SDG targets in cities and human settlements. Beside the triple planetary crisis that humanity currently faces, namely climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss, the COVID-19 pandemic has confronted the world with unprecedented additional challenges, exposing and exacerbating existing inequalities, weaknesses in public service delivery systems, lack of policy coherence and coordination between the different levels/bodies of governments. Women, youth, the poor and other vulnerable groups were among the most severely affected by the pandemic. Urban dwellers have also experienced rising inequality and social exclusion, unemployment, food insecurity and extreme poverty —a situation that the COVID-19 pandemic has not only unveiled but also aggravated in both developed and developing nations. These developments have been worsened by rising cost of living crisis that is being fuelled by rising inflationary pressures and the war in Ukraine.

Local authorities were also particularly affected by the COVID-19 crisis as cities and urban agglomerations were among the hardest hit at early stages of the crisis. As a matter of fact, it was estimated that 90 per cent of all reported COVID-19 cases during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic were identified in urban areas, where all sectors have been deeply impacted. Local governments are playing a critical role in providing access to basic services in normal times and ensuring that the supply of these public services is continuous and uninterrupted in times of adversity. Given their closeness to the communities concerned and their knowledge of the reality on the ground, they are also very effective frontline responders in crisis response and recovery. Paradoxically, local authorities have too often limited financial and human resources at their disposal to carrying out these responsibilities.

Aside from the challenge of restoring life to normal, local governments who were often already struggling to maintain their services due to limited financial resources before the crisis, are also facing additional challenges on multiple fronts. For instance, cities and urban areas are rapidly becoming more sensitive to environmental problems and vulnerable to weather- and climate-related extreme events, which are getting more frequent and severe with climate change. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 90 per cent of major disasters over the last two decades have been climate-related disasters. At the same time, they are themselves major contributors to climatic disruption and land and environmental degradation, which are making human settlements and their populations more vulnerable to environmental problems and extreme events.

The United Nations Office for Sustainable Development

Established in 2011, the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (UNOSD) is part of the Division for Sustainable Development Goals (DSDG) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA). UNOSD contributes to building, exchanging, and facilitating the use of knowledge in support of sustainable development.

Over the recent years, UNOSD has organized various capacity building activities and events in support of the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs, including preparatory meetings for international conferences and events such as the United Nations high-level political forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) as well as trainings, expert group meetings and fora where national policymakers could learn from and interact with each other, practitioners, experts, scholars, civil society, the private sector and representatives from regional and international organisations, including the United Nations. More recently, UNOSD has undertaken a series of activities targeting subnational authorities, including mayors and senior city management officials and supporting the implementation of the SDGs at local level. These include the first International Mayors' Forum co-organized by UNOSD and the United Nations Office for Regional Development (UNCRD, Nagoya, Japan) that was held in Vientiane, Lao PDR in March 2017, where close to 70 mayors, leaders and representatives of local governments from around the world presented experiences of their cities and discussed key questions and issues related to the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 11 focusing on Making Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable.

In May 2018, a second Mayor International Forum took place in Lilongwe, Malawi, where the central role of cities in making societies sustainable and resilient and of local governments in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs was reiterated. Beyond discussing the challenges, the Forum also showcased successful experiences of SDG implementation at local level, such as Incheon City, South Korea, a country that has transitioned from recipient to donor of official development assistance (ODA) and from being predominantly rural to highly urbanized (above 90 per cent urbanised today) over a very short period. The Forum also discussed the importance of sustaining and reinforcing efforts to develop mayors and city leaders' skills, knowledge and capacity to deliver on Goal 11 in making their cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable as well as on the other SDGs at local level.

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent editions of the International Mayors' Forum were organized virtually in 2020 and in January 2022. The International Mayors' Forum to be held in Dakar, Senegal is therefore an opportunity for UNOSD to have in person interactions with its traditional international stakeholders while also being accessible to the wider audience through real-time web audio and video conferencing throughout the Forum.

2. Co-organizers and partners

UNOSD organize the International Mayors' Forum in Dakar in partnership with the United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD). UNOSD is also collaborating with the United Nations Resident Coordinator Office, the United Nations country team (UNCT), including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Senegal. Other local and regional partners include the Association of Mayors of Senegal, and the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLGA–Africa), the *Ministère des Collectivités territoriales, de l'Aménagement et du Développement des Territoires* and the City of Dakar in Senegal.

3. Objectives and Target Audience

The main objective of the International Mayors' Forum is to provide a platform for policy dialogue and knowledge sharing through presentations and discussions on key aspects related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals and other internationally agreed development frameworks such as the Paris Agreement at the local and regional level.

In line with the 2023 high-level political forum, the International Mayors' Forum will strive to support local and regional governments and communities to share experiences, lessons learned and good practices, particularly with regard to the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 and trigger the in-depth transformation needed to accelerate the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local and regional levels.

Mayors and other leaders of local and regional governments from developing and developed countries, countries in special situations, particularly African countries, least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small island developing States and countries in conflict and post-conflict situations and countries with economies in transition, representatives of UN agencies, international experts and other stakeholders will discuss successes and challenges, policy options, initiatives as well as actions undertaken at local level helping in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals with a focus on SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17, the interlinkages between them and with other SDGs, and their interlinkages and complementarities with other adopted international agreements.

More specifically, the objectives of the International Mayors' Forum are:

- Knowledge and skills acquisition for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs —SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17, in particular at local and regional level;
- Enhance participants' understanding of the interlinkages between SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 and with other SDGs, and other international frameworks, such as the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework and the New Urban Agenda;
- Expand the network of mayors and other leaders of local governments working towards achievement of the SDGs at local level;
- Share experiences and peer-to-peer collaboration amongst mayors, local government leaders, experts and other stakeholders involved in the implementation of SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17, and other related SDGs at local level;
- Learning from best practices, gaps and challenges implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs in cities and human settlements.

4. Structure

The International Mayors Forum will be structured around the SDGs 6, 7, 9, 11 and 17 while seeking to maintain a balance between the three pillars of sustainable development, economic, environmental and social. Regarding SDG 11, targets 11.1, 11.2, 11.3, 11.5, and 11.6 will be given special attention. While there is no distinct target on urban and local governance under Goal 11, some important aspects of governance are particularly embedded in Target 11.3. The governance goal (Goal 16), on the other hand, refers to institutions at all levels, without further expressing what may constitute such responsibilities at the local and urban level. The Forum will thus strive to create an interface between Goal 11 and Goal 16 and address them in a complementary way. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration's 11 principles of effective governance for sustainable development will further guide and inform discussions.³

Target 11.6 looking at environmental impact of cities is particularly related to energy (Goal 7), industry, innovation and infrastructure (Goal 9), waste management (predominantly present in Goal 12 – Responsible consumption and production), and also to Target 11.2 looking at sustainable mobility. The forum will also strive to explore Goal 17 on Means of Implementation and the Global Partnership, particularly targets 17.1, 17.2, 17.3, 17.6, 17.7, 17.14, 17.16 and 17.17 among others— at local levels.

5. Methodology

The Forum, taking place in a hybrid (in-person and virtual) format, will consist of several interrelated modules, each covering concepts and issues of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, particularly SDGs 6, 7, 9,

³ <https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Intergovernmental-Support/Committee-of-Experts-on-Public-Administration/Governance-principles>

11 and 17 at local level, and its interlinkages with other related SDGs and other internationally agreed development frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework and the New Urban Agenda. It will consist of presentations by international experts, scholars, mayors, and practitioners followed by interactive discussions. A half-day field trip to visit projects that reflect the Senegalese experience in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs is foreseen.

6. Schedule and venue

The International Mayors' Forum is scheduled to take place from 25-28 April 2023 at Dakar, Senegal (venue to be shared via Info Note).

7. Language

The Forum will be conducted in English and French. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in English and French.

8. Registration

Participation in the Forum is by invitation only. Local authorities and other experts interested are invited to contact any of the co-organizers at the addresses provided here below.

Participation in the Forum is free of charge but participants are expected to cover their own travel costs and living expenses during the Forum. However, some limited funding covering economy class roundtrip airfare, terminal expenses and daily subsistence allowance (DSA) will be provided by UNOSD and UNCRD for eligible participating mayors and senior officials from developing countries as per UN rules and regulations.

9. Contacts for further information

Mr. Yujeong Kim, Senior Sustainable Development Officer, UNOSD

Email: yujeong.kim@un.org

Tel.: +82 (32) 822 9083

Ms. Nana URAKAMI, Researcher, UNCRD

Email: nurakami@uncrd.or.jp

Tel: +81-(52)-561-9415

Ms. Ilae Kim, Programme Management Assistant, UNOSD

Email: kim23@un.org

Tel: +82 (32) 822 9087

Mr. Huiyong Kim, Administrative Assistant, UNOSD

Email: hui.kim@un.org

Tel: +82 (32) 822 9083