

Forum: Sustainable Development Commission 1 (SDC1)

Issue: Measures to make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable [SDG11]

Student Officer: Jasmin Unsworth

Position: Deputy President



Introduction

Urbanisation has accelerated globally since the 19th century, resulting in cities becoming the epicentre of economic growth, cultural exchange, and social innovation globally. Though this process of urbanisation has changed economies, intercultural understanding and social change for the better, this rapid expansion has also brought about challenges such as overcrowding, inequality, environmental degradation, and vulnerability to disasters. This expeditious urbanisation has significantly influenced shifts for better and worse in regard to human well-being, as well as planetary health. This has led the United Nations to include Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To ensure that cities are inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, recognizing their pivotal role in shaping the future of global development, in its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Over 50% of the global population, approximately 4 billion humans, live in urban areas, which has been increasing rapidly since the early 1800s and is expected to increase to around 60-70% by 2050. Cities also have a significant impact on global and domestic GDPs, providing more than 80% of the world's Gross Domestic Product, and playing the role of significant stakeholders in each nation's economic prosperity or hardship. However, on a social and environmental level, they are having detrimental impacts on resource consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, contributing significantly to many of the most pressing issues of today, including climate change. Cities are also hubs of opportunity and sources of inequality, equally presenting with push and pull factors, where the divide between urban poor and rich is exacerbated; the urban poor often living in unsafe, overcrowded conditions without access to basic services whilst the urban rich capitalise upon opportunities provided in such settings, further cementing the stratification between the two.

Increasing urban livability would not only result in an increase in urban wellbeing but also an increase in managing other global objectives such as eradicating poverty, gender equality, access to healthcare and climate change. As the population and influence of cities continue to increase, their influence over national and international policy also consequently shifts, and thus making them more

inclusive and resilient is critical to achieving sustainable development.

Definition of Key Terms

Urbanisation

Urbanisation refers to a significant increase in urban population concentration, particularly in developing regions. This has been a defining feature of global development since the Industrial Revolution.

Inclusivity

According to the Cambridge Dictionary inclusivity refers to the assurance that cities provide equal opportunities and accessible services to all residents, regardless of gender, income, ethnicity, or ability.

Resilience

Defined by ScienceDirect, resilience refers to the capacity of cities to withstand and recover from natural disasters, economic shocks, and social disruptions while maintaining essential functions.

Sustainability

The UNIDO (United Nations Industrial Development Organisation) defined sustainability as meeting the needs of present urban populations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs, particularly in environmental, economic, and social terms.

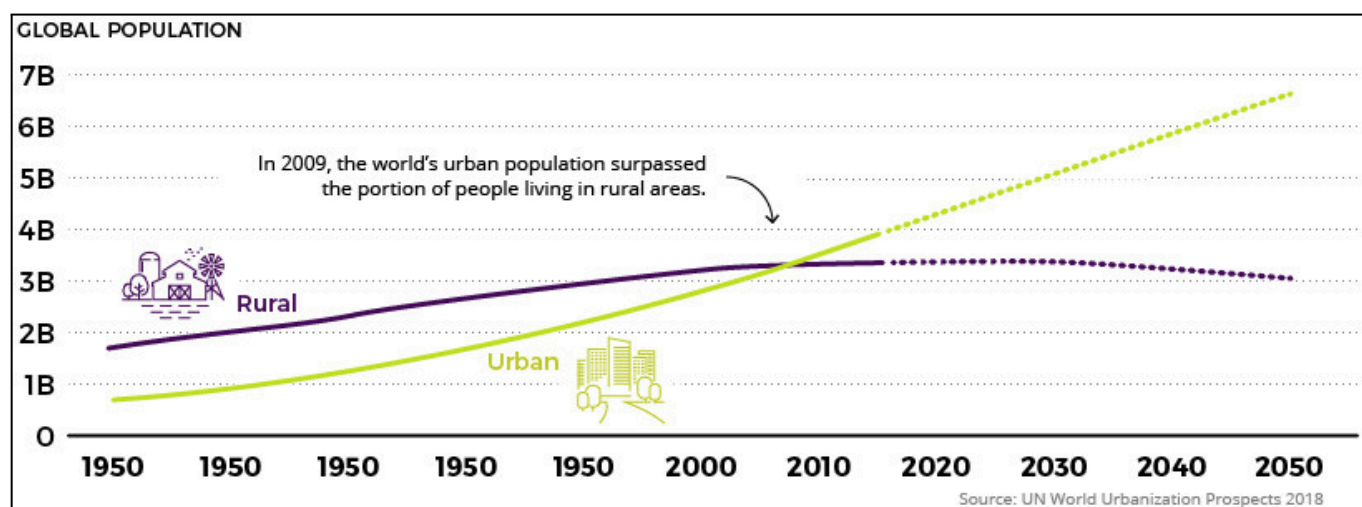
Urban Planning

Urban Planning refers to the process of designing and regulating land use, infrastructure, and public spaces to foster balanced and sustainable city development.

Background Information

Urbanisation refers to the increase in population concentration within cities. This global phenomenon began during the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th centuries, as the industrial advancements led to people in rural areas migrating to urban areas in search of better professional, living and economic opportunities, leading to rapid growth in cities across Europe and North America first, then later other parts of the world, particularly in developing countries in Asia, Africa, Oceania and

Latin America. This trend continued and just a few years later in 1950, 30% of the world's population lived in urban areas; today more than 50% of the global population lives in urban cities and this number is continuously increasing, with projections suggesting that it will rise to 60-70% by 2050.



Graph showing the shift of global populations towards urban growth since 1950 and predictions until 2050

This shift of populations from sustainable concentrations spread out rurally to being all condensed in urban areas has increased international economic activity, transforming cities into economic powerhouses, with 80% of the world's GDP being generated in these cities. However, increased urbanisation does not just have positive impacts, it also has significant negative impacts as it exacerbates challenges such as poverty, inequalities, and environmental degradation which consequently significantly increase the effects of climate change. Another major issue that is a result of urbanisation is the issue of informal settlements or slums. High housing costs or lack of housing in urban areas has caused approximately 1 billion people globally or 24% of the urban population in developing regions, to live in these areas of informal settlements or slums. People in these areas often live in severe poverty and have a lack of access to basic services like clean water, sanitation, and electricity, all of which compound to create significant risks to human health and safety.

Housing and Urban Development Initiatives

At the beginning of the 20th century, urbanisation populations had been increasing and growing for over a century, which led to increased awareness of the challenges that arise from it, and thus governments began to try and increase the well-being of people in these areas. Many of these early responses were centred around housing as there were many more people moving to these cities than the housing infrastructure could handle which led to informal and unsafe housing such as slums. To try and address this issue programs such as public housing in the United States and mass social housing projects in Europe were implemented. However, many of these efforts were unsuccessful due to a

variety of reasons, including criticism for isolating low-income residents, which exacerbated the economic divides and created areas of concentrated poverty.

More recently, since the beginning of the 21st century all LEDCs (Less Economically Developed Countries) and many developing countries, have implemented slum upgrading programs, aiming to improve housing infrastructure and government-subsidised living arrangements, aimed at increasing well-being without displacing residents. An example of this is the Favela-Bairro Program in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, which has provided better access to essential services like water and electricity while fostering community participation in planning.

Sustainable Urban Planning

In the late 20th century, there was increased effort around global awareness towards the effect of urbanisation on the environment and its effect on increasing climate change. To combat this urban planning began to incorporate principles of sustainability, emphasising public transportation, reducing car dependence and increasing green spaces/energy, promoting energy efficiency. Cities like Copenhagen and Curitiba became pioneers in this aspect creating sustainable cities that are forging the way for a more sustainable city globally.

For example, Copenhagen has focused on investing in cycling infrastructure, with almost 50% of its residents commuting by bike every day. The city has also invested hugely in renewable energy, with the aim of becoming carbon-neutral by 2025. An example of Copenhagen's innovative district heating system is utilizing waste heat from power stations, hence reducing energy consumption and waste to a minimum.

Meanwhile, Curitiba is hailed for its functional and very inexpensive public transportation, especially the so-called Bus Rapid Transit, or BRT, serving as a model for the whole world. The city also pioneered progressive policies in managing trash: the "Garbage That's Not Garbage" program, where residents are encouraged to sort out recyclable trash and exchange them for food or bus tokens. Curitiba's investment in walkable green areas, such as its network of interconnected parks, has also aided in the reduction of flooding and enhancement of urban biodiversity,

These cities are examples of how integration among water and waste management, walkability, and renewable energy can make urban areas more sustainable and resilient in the face of climate change.

Inclusivity and Equality in Urban Areas

To be able to create inclusive and equitable cities, systematic and structural inequalities facing marginalised and vulnerable populations including women, children, people with disabilities and other

minorities need to be addressed. Urban planning must also factor in equitable access to education, healthcare, housing, and transportation, as well as other necessities and infrastructure. All of these must also be easily accessible in all areas of the city irrespective of socio-economic status or wealth. These cities must also ensure accessible employment opportunities and provide tenable opportunities for civic participation as well as civic accountability. Social and economic disparities can also be reduced by the implementation of policies promoting mixed-income neighbourhoods, accessible public spaces and affordable/subsidised housing. Additionally, community engagement in decision-making processes also fosters belonging and empowers all citizens to contribute to urban development. Currently, most city councils consist of elected representatives who have backgrounds in politics and are often richer or come from influential backgrounds. However, to be able to overcome these barriers as well as effectively address the lack of inclusivity and equality, these city councils need to be made of people from different walks of life such as people representing minorities and from low-income backgrounds.

Ensuring General Safety in Urban Areas

Ensuring safety in urban areas is also fundamental in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11; this involves reducing crime rate, improving emergency response systems (such as the police, fire, and ambulance services), and implementing appropriate infrastructure in cities to mitigate risks from natural disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes. Strategies which can be employed in this regard include investing in efficient street lighting, fostering community-based policing and implementing early warning systems for natural disasters. Urban safety is also strengthened through sustainable infrastructure such as green buildings and flood-resistance structures, which can protect communities and minimise disruptions during crises. Cities with high crime rates also need to implement additional infrastructures such as widely accessible panic buttons, female-only train carriages, and increased surveillance in high-crime areas and at high-crime times.

Ensuring Safety in Regards to Natural Disasters

Some of the highest risks to urban populations today come from earthquakes, tsunamis, and flooding. In improving safety, investment in early warning systems that can give timely warnings to citizens is encouraged for cities. Building sturdy infrastructure, like earthquake-resistant buildings and flood barriers, is necessary to be better prepared in case such an event happens. Urban planning may also consider avoiding hazard-prone areas to avoid various risks. Public education campaigns and frequent disaster preparedness drills can further help the community respond fittingly during disasters.

Ensuring Safety for Women

Safeguarding women in cities means the adoption of targeted approaches that would minimize certain risks women are faced with. Easily accessible panic buttons, female-only carriages, and stepped-up surveillance in high-crime areas and at high-crime times are what high-crime cities should adopt. Besides, community-based initiatives women's safety networks, and self-defence training programs can make them better equipped to handle the challenges of urban life. Some of the policies promoting gender-sensitive urban design include well-lit public areas, accessible transportation, and safe public toilets that contribute to making the environment safer for women.

Economic implications

Economic growth is directly impacted by sustainable Urban Development, inclusive cities attract diverse Talent and Foster innovation, which in turn helps significantly increase economic growth. This economic growth also affects the amount of safe and resilient infrastructure, as both government and private stakeholders have more monetary resources at their disposal. More economic resources mean that a nation will also be able to invest more in public transportation, renewable energy, and green technologies as well as create jobs and promote long-term economic stability. However, it is also crucial to balance this development with environmental conservation and social equity, and thus this urban development, even in nations that have the economic resources at their disposal, requires thoughtful planning for the allocation of resources and international cooperation.

International Frameworks and Agreements

Some of the most major International Frameworks and agreements in regards to this issue are the **3 Habitat Conferences**. The first United Nations Habitat Conference (Habitat 1), occurred in 1976 and was the first UN Conference that discussed Human Settlements. Habitat II which occurred in 1996, set the global goals in regards to ensuring shelter/housing for all, making human settlements (especially cities) safer, and most importantly making all cities healthier and more livable, all of these goals were inspired United Nations Charter, were discussed and endorsed by 25,000 national/local government officials and 180 countries. The most recent Habitat Conference, Habitat III which occurred in 2016, discussed our modern urban challenges and aimed to overcome them and provide viable solutions. Notably, Habitat III resulted in the adoption of the **New Urban Agenda**, which is a blueprint for sustainable urbanisation that has been and will be adopted globally.

The establishment of **Sustainable Development Goal 11** in 2015 also marked a milestone, as it was the first time clear targets for creating inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities had been set and agreed upon by all 191 UN Member States. These goals include ensuring access to adequate housing, improving public transportation, and reducing the environmental impact of cities.

Current Statistics and Challenges

- **Rapid Urbanisation:** In the last 6 years (2018 and 2024), city populations globally have been increasing at a significant rate with approximately 60 million residents moving from rural to urban areas annually, with the fastest-growing urban areas being in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where drought, famine and lack of opportunity has caused significant amounts of rural citizens to move to urban areas.
- **Environmental Impact:** Urban areas also have a significant detrimental environmental impact, accounting for 78% of global energy and for over 70% of greenhouse gas emissions. Thus, addressing the environmental impacts of cities is imperative in reducing its effects on climate change and the global environmental crisis.
- **Disaster Vulnerability:** By 2030, it is estimated that 60% of urban populations will be at risk from natural disasters, particularly in coastal and flood-prone areas. A country that is at significant risk of this is Australia, where all major cities and 85% of the population live in coastal areas at risk of the sea level rising, and floods.

Previous Shortcomings

Even though there have been various initiatives to try and combat this issue's challenges in relation to urbanisation, it still persists. Many of the programs that were set up in these urban areas have suffered from inadequate funding, lack of community involvement, and a failure to address systematic inequalities. This issue is furthered as the people who have the funds to be able to support these initiatives often don't, as they are in a higher socio-economic bracket and thus don't face or have an appreciation of the struggles of those who face such challenges and the people who do face these issues are often in the lower socio-economic bracket and thus do not have the resources to be able to contribute to the initiatives. An example of this is that whilst slum upgrading has improved living conditions in some areas, the scale of global informal housing remains immense. Similarly, sustainability measures that have been implemented to try and combat the environmental consequences of urbanisation are often disproportionately distributed with wealthier cities often benefiting far more than less wealthy cities, as richer cities have stakeholders who have more funds to be able to allocate to these measures, conversely poorer cities have a lower concentration of richer people and thus do not have the funds to be able to improve to sustainability measures.

Moving Forward

The realisation and the ability for SDG 11 to be effectively implemented requires a far more integrated and equitable approach globally. Areas like urban planning, investment into resilient infrastructure and most importantly global collaboration are imperative in helping the attainment of this goal globally. It requires global participation as many of the poor countries do not have the funds, resources or manpower to be able to invest in increasing the inclusivity, safety, resilience and sustainability of cities, so they require aid from nations who do have these resources at their disposal to be able to enact the goals set in SDG 11. Global collaboration is also imperative as countries could learn

from each other's past successes and failures to help create a more streamlined achievement of the goal and so that cities can be transformed into inclusive, sustainable spaces that foster innovation and enhanced quality of life for all people residing within them.

Major Countries and Organisations Involved

UN and International involvement: The United Nations and other international bodies have been instrumental in supporting the implementation of SDG 11 through various resolutions, programs, and initiatives. Some key actions include:

- **New Urban Agenda, 2016 (A/RES/71/256)**
Focuses on promoting sustainable urbanisation, enhancing inclusivity, and making cities more resilient. Progress reports on this are to be submitted to the UN General Assembly via the Economic and Social Council, every 4 years.
- **Global Compact on Migration, 2018 (A/RES/73/195)**
This compact addresses migration, focusing on safe and inclusive urban integration, making cities more resilient and sustainable for migrant populations.
- **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, 18 March 2015 (A/RES/69/283)**
Emphasises disaster risk reduction and the need for sustainable urban development to enhance resilience in cities.
- **Paris Agreement on Climate Change, 12 December 2015 (A/RES/70/1)**
Although focused on climate change, the Paris Agreement also emphasises urban resilience as cities contribute significantly to climate-related risks.

Relevant UN Treaties and Events:

- **UN-Habitat: Sustainable Cities Programme (SCP)**
UN-Habitat plays a leading role in improving urban planning and management of growth, especially through its Sustainable Cities Programme. The SCP has assisted many cities worldwide in attaining the United Nations SDG 11 through the promotion of sustainable urban development practices. A flagship project within this program has been the "City Resilience Profiling Programme," which supports cities in identifying their vulnerabilities and strengthening their resilience toward environmental, social, and economic shocks. The effectiveness of the program has been demonstrated in Kampala, Uganda, for example, where specific solutions were implemented to enhance the infrastructure and environmental sustainability of the urban area. But, among others, the problems it faces are: its quest for consistent funding, and the pace of urbanization sometimes overtaking the programme's achievements.

- **UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) Urban Resilience Programme**

UNDP has been at the forefront of supporting countries to build urban resilience, focusing on inclusive, safe, and sustainable cities. For instance, UNDP supported the securing of required financial resources for cities to implement climate adaptation and mitigation strategies through projects such as the "City Climate Finance Gap Fund.". For example, in Bangladesh's capital city, UNDP worked to make the urban setting resilient by embedding climate risk assessments into the planning process of the city, enabling it to be better prepared against flooding and other climate-related disasters. So far, this program has done a great job with awareness and mobilization of funds; however, challenges remain in effectively translating resilience into larger urban development agendas, in particular in low-income countries.

Brazil

Brazil has been at the forefront of sustainable urban development in LEDCs. As a country with one of the largest slum populations, its government is implementing various ways to meet urban challenges through increasing the capacity of cities to accommodate more and more people with reduced inequalities. Key strategies include the provision of subsidies, housing programs, and social support to the very poorest.

Equally, Brazil has been a strong supporter of global initiatives such as those of the United Nations on the New Urban Agenda for sustainable and inclusive urbanization. It's actively implementing SDG 11 about making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. That pledge is reflected in a spate of national policies and programs that seek to ensure better living conditions, infrastructure, and environmental sustainability for urban areas.

These include incorporating slum upgrading within the larger urban planning strategies, access to basic services, and economic opportunities for the disadvantaged. In this regard, Brazil tries to create livable urban areas that are socially equitable and ecologically viable through multi-level governance and stakeholder participation. These developments make Brazil a leader in trying to handle urbanization challenges in LEDCs and its commitment to achieving sustainable urban growth for both the present and future generations.

Germany

The government of Germany has pinpointed climate adaptation and urban resilience among its priorities to enhance the quality of life in cities by improving urban infrastructure and public services. Large financial and human resources are being devoted to making urban areas inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

The country of Germany strongly advocates for the European Union's Urban Agenda, which is in tune with its domestic policies aligning with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 11. The Government of Germany coordinates with other European nations on the implementation of shared urban strategies while offering support for the adoption of Germany's policies in partner countries.

The country is very actively involved in the international urban sustainability initiative, highly committed to financing UN-Habitat and the Global Climate Adaptation. This also deals with strengthening resilience and responding to urban challenges to minimize climate risks.

In addition to national commitments, Germany also supports urban development projects in less economically developed countries, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. The present commitment, along with capacity building, will take shape as a matter of infrastructure development or through the promotion of principles and practices of sustainable urban planning. Further, Germany shows political leadership in fostering livable and sustainable cities at national and international levels.

India

India's large population and lack of economic resources means that many of its cities are currently unsustainable, unsafe and heavily stratified. To help combat this, India has adopted a policy called the "smart cities mission". This was one of the many things India has done to support the implementation of SDG11 within its nation; others include their creation of policies and infrastructure, policies that promote affordable housing, and efforts to improve disaster resilience aligning with UN and International frameworks. However, these efforts are currently proving futile as the government does not have enough funds to sustainably cater to the population of those who need the most support and urgent intervention, with 78 million people in India living in slums and over 70 million living in poverty. India's cities also have issues in regard to safety with the cities having some of the highest crime rates in the world.

The United States of America (USA)

The United States has been a strong supporter of urban resilience through federal and local initiatives. An example includes the Resilient Cities Network, which builds resilience among cities against environmental, social, and economic risks. Such initiatives are an important necessity in fostering sustainable growth in the urban areas to improve quality of life.

The United States has traditionally supported international efforts aimed at fostering urban

sustainability and inclusion. The country has endorsed key global frameworks that include the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 11, which focuses on making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Beyond that, the U.S. government also plays a very important role in supporting LEDCs beyond its domestic efforts. The U.S. provides financial and technical assistance and partnerships toward enhancing urban planning, infrastructure, and resilience in LEDC cities. These activities will reduce inequalities, enhance access to basic services, and promote sustainable development in vulnerable urban areas.

The United States does so by combining domestic innovation and international collaboration to further urban resilience and sustainability both nationally and internationally, setting a very good example for other countries.

European Union (EU)

The European Union has been at the forefront of implementing the 11th Sustainable Development Goal of the United Nations: making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. In this direction, a very important milestone was the creation of the Urban Agenda for the EU a framework which gave a big push toward increasing urban sustainability across member states. It encourages partnerships between governments, stakeholders, and organizations to resolve pressing issues related to urban areas while embracing growth in a sustainable manner.

Beyond the borders, however, the EU also plays a very vital role beyond the borders in supporting LEDs and other countries worldwide. The member states contribute financial and technical expertise, and policy support to enhance resilience and inclusivity around the world. This is how concerted effort ensures that cities worldwide capitalize on the commitment of the EU to sustainable urban development.

The EU also spends a considerable amount on urban development projects across the world through infrastructure, green initiatives, and capacity building. It further advocates for increased international commitments toward sustainability, using its leverage in international forums to advance policies that will help achieve SDG 11.

With these ideologies supported by all member states, the EU is uniquely placed as a unified approach to urban sustainability and resilience, setting a global standard for collaboration and impactful action in addressing the challenges of urbanization.

Timeline of Events

Date	Name	Description of event
May 31st, 1976	<i>First UN-Habitat Conference (Vancouver)</i>	The first UN-Habitat Conference was held in Vancouver, Canada, under the theme of encouraging sustainable urban development. It produced the Vancouver Declaration, which focused on rapid urbanization and the need for affordable housing, among other issues, thus laying the foundation for future global urban development policies.
June 3rd, 1996	<i>Second UN-Habitat Conference (Istanbul)</i>	The second UN-Habitat Conference, Habitat II, was held in Istanbul, Turkey. It placed a great emphasis on the need for sustainable cities and human settlements and resulted in the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda, which set global standards on urban development, housing, and environmental sustainability.
September 25th, 2015	<i>Adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</i>	The United Nations adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which had a suite of 17 SDGs. Of these, SDG 11 seeks to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The landmark agreement set a global framework to tackle urban challenges wrought by climate change, poverty, and social inequality.
June 28th, 2016	<i>Third UN-Habitat Conference (Quito)</i>	The third UN-Habitat Conference, Habitat III, was held in Quito, Ecuador. It came up with the New Urban Agenda as a framework to tackle problems of urbanization, which include affordable housing, infrastructure, and climate change. This conference laid the foundation for the global adoption of SDG 11 on sustainable cities.
October 31st, 2016	<i>United Nations Celebrates First World Cities Day Post-SDGs</i>	The first World Cities Day after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015) focused on implementing SDG 11. This event emphasised the importance of sustainable urban development and

	<i>Adoption.</i>	highlighted global challenges like housing shortages, rising urban inequality, and climate change. It set the tone for future actions aimed at creating inclusive and resilient cities.
May 30th, 2019	<i>Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (GPDRR) in Geneva</i>	This international conference evaluated progress on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030), a critical framework tied to SDG 11. Discussions focused on urban resilience, disaster preparedness, and sustainable infrastructure in cities. Insights from this platform have influenced policies that promote safer cities worldwide.
October 31st, 2021	<i>UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) Highlights Urban Sustainability</i>	COP26 brought attention to the role of cities in mitigating climate change. Leaders discussed the decarbonization of urban areas, smart city initiatives, and renewable energy integration. The event reinforced the urgency of adopting sustainable practices to ensure urban resilience against climate-related challenges.
March 21st, 2023	<i>Launch of the Inclusive Cities Framework by UN-Habitat</i>	UN-Habitat introduced the Inclusive Cities Framework, offering guidelines for urban planning that prioritises marginalised groups. This milestone marked a global commitment to inclusivity, tackling issues like accessibility, gender equality, and public participation in urban governance.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

United Nations (UN) Efforts

The United Nations has been at the center of addressing urban challenges through various frameworks and initiatives. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development brought about SDG 11, which clearly outlined targets to make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. This framework has been quite effective in raising global awareness and setting measurable goals for cities to work toward. However, its impact has been mixed. Whereas several cities have been able to incorporate SDG 11 into their urban strategy with a lot of ease, others have really struggled due to a lack of resources and complexity at the local level.

The New Urban Agenda adopted during the Habitat III Conference in 2016 provided the way forward toward sustainable urban development, emphasizing the role that social inclusion, green infrastructure, and participation play in urban planning. This has been quite a successful initiative in underlining the need for sustainable and inclusive urban growth, especially regarding green infrastructure and citizen participation. However, unequal implementation across regions has constrained its effectiveness. Those cities with better governance structures and funding capacities have gone far, but many others, especially in developing countries, face barriers such as inadequate financial support and institutional capacity. These disparities have hampered the full potential of the New Urban Agenda in attaining equitable urban development across the world.

International Community and Partnerships

Some initiatives like the Cities Alliance and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability have brought together governments, NGOs, and private entities to further sustainable urban solutions. These programs have provided immense support in bringing together the different partners and offering necessary capacity building, resource mobilization, and technical support to local governments. Where institutional frameworks are very strong, these initiatives have significantly improved urban sustainability, enabling cities to implement green infrastructure projects, improve their resilience, and further social inclusion.

However, most have realized only limited broader impacts because of inconsistent implementation and limited outreach. While they can be extremely successful in specific contexts, these initiatives often find it difficult to scale down to smaller cities or cities in less developed regions where support is most needed. Financial constraints, lack of local political will, and challenges in scaling projects have hindered their potential to drive widespread change across all urban areas. As a result, while they have achieved many notable successes, their effectiveness has been uneven, and many cities have yet to fully benefit from these programs.

Global Climate Action Platforms

Events such as COP26 and the *C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group* have emphasized the role of cities in addressing climate change. Projects like green transportation systems and energy-efficient buildings have made strides in urban sustainability. Despite these successes, disparities between developed and developing nations in accessing technology and financing have limited widespread adoption.

Evaluation of Solutions

While these attempts have made measurable progress, persistent challenges remain, including inadequate funding, rapid urbanization, and uneven policy enforcement. Addressing these gaps requires stronger international cooperation, innovative financing mechanisms, and empowering local authorities to implement tailored solutions. To better understand these issues, an analysis of five past initiatives reveals critical lessons.

Urban Green Space Development, 2015:

This project focused on increasing the green space within the urban areas, which is critical for air quality improvement, reduction in the effect of heat islands, and improving community well-being. The green space increased by 20%, hence providing healthy environments to the citizens. Due to insufficient funding and not taking the initiative further by the government, the green spaces suffered from overgrown areas and spaces that were underutilized. These challenges bring into view the need for the assurance that funds are not only allocated for initial development but also for long-term maintenance. Besides, effective community involvement in the planning and maintenance of these spaces could have bolstered the sustainability of the project to ensure that it achieved both environmental and social goals. In the future, more consistent financial mechanisms, together with long-term planning, will be required to sustain such projects and maximize their impact.

Affordable Housing Program 2016-2019

The Affordable Housing Program 2016-2019 aims at the construction of low-income houses and upgrading informal settlements, with a focus on the most fast-growing cities facing high rates of urban migration. However, the entire program has been plagued with problems of implementation, bureaucratic inefficiency, underfunding, and lack of coordination between local and national government entities. These barriers resulted in slow construction rates and unmet housing needs, especially in the most densely populated areas. In addition, while the program had been responsive to the immediate demand for housing, it often tended to neglect longer-term aspects, such as local employment opportunities and integration into the surrounding community. Lessons learned from this program show that, for future housing programs, government processes need to be leaner; there should be greater coordination between agencies, with plans for social and economic integration toward holistic growth and development.

Waste Management Initiative (2017):

It aimed to reduce urban waste through better recycling, waste sorting, and public awareness campaigns. The program had certain promising results, such as a 15% decrease in landfills within two years of the program's start; however, it faced the challenge of sustaining community involvement over time. Indeed, in the beginning, many residents participated, but afterwards, there was a high level of contamination in recycling streams and improper waste disposal. The failure of the initiative about consistent participation shows that outreach to the community and education is needed on stronger

levels in order to achieve long-term behavioural change. Besides, the fact that no incentives were in place for waste reduction and a lack of facilities in convenient places contributed to the conditions. Future efforts should rather be placed on better public education, clearer incentives to participate, and accessible waste management infrastructure that would build more lasting and effective habits in urban communities

Public Transport Expansion (2018):

This was in respect to the expansion of the fleet of buses and subways in major urban centres in order to reduce congestion and pollution. The programme functioned to increase ridership; it also had problems concerning the rapid urban sprawl because the new transit lines did not appropriate emerging suburban areas. While there were increases in inner-city routes, peripheral neighbourhoods fell under the radar and became massively underserved. Moreover, the program could not predict future population growth in some districts, which in turn led to overcrowding in the routes already in existence. It is for this reason that public transportation planning must always be proactive, considering demand not only at present but also with regard to future projections and expanded infrastructure in expanding suburbs. The public transport system should be comprehensive, available, and accessible to all residents irrespective of their residence locality for inclusivity and reduction of private vehicle dependence.

Water Access Improvement Project (2019):

This was a project focused on the improvement of water infrastructure in rural and urban areas, with an emphasis on increasing access to clean water. The program managed to increase access for more than 500,000 people but faced huge challenges regarding maintenance and local management. In many regions, the local authorities lacked the technical know-how and means for maintenance of newly built infrastructure, leading to frequent breakdowns of the systems and limited long-term effectiveness. Also, water quality and efficiency in distribution were the other flaws in the project. These flaws mean that future access to water projects will not only have to create new infrastructures but also invest valuable time and resources into training and equipping local governments with fiscal management. That these communities can manage independently, which is very important with regard to sustainability, is a lack thereof leading eventually to the deterioration of such basic services over an extended period.

These 5 examples show that, while progress is being made, addressing funding gaps, enhancing governance, and community participation remains central to the response required to overcome such persistent challenges. This involves reinforcing international cooperation, innovative financing solutions, and the empowerment of local authorities.

Possible Solutions

Urban Accessibility and Inclusivity

To foster inclusivity in urban areas, cities should prioritize the implementation of universal design standards in infrastructure and public spaces. This involves designing buildings, transportation systems, and sidewalks to accommodate individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and young children. For example, incorporating tactile paving, ramps, and auditory traffic signals ensures equitable access for all. Moreover, governments can establish municipal equity offices tasked with identifying and addressing systemic barriers faced by marginalized communities, including ethnic minorities and women. Public participation initiatives, such as community forums, can ensure that urban planning reflects the diverse needs of residents.

Enhancing Urban Safety

Urban safety can be bolstered by employing smart technology and participatory approaches to crime prevention. Cities can deploy sensor-based lighting systems that illuminate areas when activity is detected, deterring potential criminal acts while saving energy. Furthermore, establishing community policing initiatives promotes trust between law enforcement and residents, encouraging collaborative solutions to safety concerns. Urban designs that incorporate “eyes on the street” principles—such as mixed-use developments and open public spaces—help foster natural surveillance and discourage criminal activity.

Building Urban Resilience to Climate Change

Resilient urban development requires investment in green and blue infrastructure to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Cities can establish urban green belts, plant trees, and create rooftop gardens to combat the urban heat island effect and improve air quality. Constructing permeable pavements and enhancing wetlands helps manage stormwater, reducing flood risks. Additionally, creating decentralized energy systems, such as solar microgrids, ensures cities can maintain critical services during natural disasters. Resilience planning should integrate disaster risk assessments and involve community-level training programs to prepare residents for emergencies.

Promoting Affordable and Sustainable Housing

Governments should incentivize the development of affordable housing through public-private partnerships and inclusive zoning regulations. To ensure sustainability, these housing units can integrate energy-efficient designs, such as passive solar heating, and use locally sourced, sustainable building materials. Another innovative solution is establishing housing cooperatives, where residents collectively own and manage properties, fostering a sense of community while reducing housing costs. Regulating rental markets to prevent exploitative practices can further enhance housing accessibility for vulnerable populations.

Advancing Sustainable Urban Transport Systems

Cities should prioritize the development of integrated public transportation systems that are affordable, reliable, and environmentally friendly. Investments in electric buses, bicycle-sharing programs, and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure can significantly reduce urban carbon emissions. Policies such as congestion pricing encourage the use of public transit over private vehicles, reducing traffic and pollution. In underserved areas, governments can establish subsidized transportation programs to ensure equitable access to job opportunities, healthcare, and education.

Strengthening Waste Management and Circular Economy Practices

Cities can enhance sustainability by adopting circular economy principles in their waste management systems. This involves promoting recycling and composting programs, as well as establishing urban resource recovery centres to process and repurpose waste. Education campaigns targeting residents and businesses can help shift societal attitudes toward waste reduction. Furthermore, incentivizing startups that innovate in waste-to-energy technologies can create economic opportunities while addressing urban waste challenges.

Leveraging Digital Innovation for Urban Sustainability

Smart city technologies can drive sustainable urban development by improving resource efficiency and service delivery. Cities can deploy real-time air quality monitoring systems, allowing policymakers to implement targeted pollution reduction measures. Digital platforms that enable residents to report issues, such as potholes or illegal dumping, foster a sense of ownership while enhancing municipal responsiveness. Blockchain technology can be utilized to ensure transparency in urban development projects, reducing corruption and fostering trust among stakeholders.

Promoting Social Cohesion through Cultural and Recreational Initiatives

Inclusive cities should create spaces that encourage social interaction and cultural exchange. Developing multi-functional community centres that host educational programs, art exhibitions, and recreational activities can bridge social divides and foster community spirit. Public art projects, such as murals and street performances, can celebrate the diversity of urban populations and enhance cultural heritage. Additionally, promoting urban agriculture initiatives, such as community gardens, allows residents to collaborate, improving food security while strengthening social ties.

Financial Mechanisms for Sustainable Urban Development

Innovative financing mechanisms are crucial to fund urban sustainability projects. Cities can issue green bonds to attract investment in renewable energy, efficient public transport, and sustainable housing projects. Establishing urban development funds, supported by international development

organizations, can provide resources for low-income cities to implement ambitious sustainability plans. Moreover, offering tax incentives for businesses that adopt environmentally friendly practices can further encourage private sector participation in urban sustainability efforts.

Overview

By addressing the fundamental areas of inclusivity, safety, resilience, housing, transportation, waste management, innovation, social cohesion, and financing, these solutions provide a comprehensive framework for making cities more inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Bibliography

Britannica. *Urban Planning.* Encyclopaedia Britannica,
<https://www.britannica.com/topic/urban-planning>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

Cambridge Dictionary. *Inclusivity.* Cambridge Dictionary,
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/inclusivity>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

“Crime in India's Largest Cities: An Analysis.” *Observer Research Foundation*,
<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/crime-in-india-s-largest-cities-an-analysis#:~:text=Delhi%20outrips%20all%20other%20cities,low%20crime%20rate%20of%2078.2>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

Manila’s growing garbage heaps,
https://www.hdm.lth.se/fileadmin/hdm/Education/Undergrad/ABAN06_2015/Manilas_Growing_Garbage_Heaps_-_Elin_Johansson.pdf. Accessed 18 Dec. 2024.

United Nations. *General Assembly Resolution 69/283.* United Nations Population Division,
https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_69_283.pdf. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

United Nations. *General Assembly Resolution 70/1.* United Nations Population Division,
https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_70_1_E.pdf. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

United Nations. *General Assembly Resolution 71/256.* United Nations Population Division,
https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_71_256.pdf. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

United Nations. *General Assembly Resolution 73/195.* United Nations Population Division, https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/generalassembly/docs/globalcompact/A_RES_73_195.pdf. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

United Nations. *Habitat I.* United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/habitat/vancouver1976#:~:text=Habitat%20I%20was%20the%20first,31%20May%2D11%20June%201976>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

United States Department of State. *Habitat II.* United States Department of State, https://1997-2001.state.gov/issues/fs_habitat2.html#:~:text=More%20than%2025%2C000%20national%20and,development%20from%20180%20countries%20participated. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

Habitat III Secretariat. *Habitat III Conference.* Habitat III, <https://habitat3.org/the-conference/about-habitat-3/#:~:text=Habitat%20III%20was%20the%20United, and%20action%2Doriented%20outcome%20document>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

UN Habitat. *Habitat III.* UN Habitat, <https://unhabitat.org/habitat-iii#:~:text=Habitat%20III%20was%20one%20of,development%20and%20climate%20change%20goals>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

World Health Organization. *Health Data: Sustainable Development Goals.* World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/sustainable-development-goals#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20Sustainable%20Development,achieve%20by%20the%20year%202030>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

Inter-American Development Bank. “Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.” *MIT Urban Upgrading,* <https://web.mit.edu/urbanupgrading/upgrading/case-examples/ce-BL-fav.html#:~:text=Rio%20de%20Janeiro%2C%20Brazil&text=The%20Inter%2DAmerican%20Development%20Bank,253%2C000%20residents%20in%2073%20communities>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

Ritchie, Hannah. *Our World in Data: Urbanization.* Our World in Data, <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

United Nations. *Rio Declaration and Istanbul Declaration.* United Nations, <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/istanbul-declaration.pdf>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

ScienceDirect. *Urban Resilience.* ScienceDirect, [https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/urban-resilience#:~:text=Urban%20resilience%](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/urban-resilience#:~:text=Urban%20resilience%20is)

[20refers%20to%20the,current%20or%20future%20adaptive%20capacity](#). Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

UN Habitat. *Sustainable Cities Programme 1990-2000.* UN Habitat,
<https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Sustainable%20Cities%20Programme%201990-2000.pdf>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

Travellers Australia. *Urban Facts.* Travellers Australia,
<https://www.travellers.com.au/plan-your-trip/australia-facts/#:~:text=More%20than%2085%20per%20cent,take%20you%20over%2027%20years!> Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

United Nations Industrial Development Organization. *Cities and Resilience.* UNIDO,
https://www.unido.org/sites/default/files/2017-03/CITIES_22.06.2016_WEB_0.PDF. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

United Nations Development Programme. *Urban Risk Management and Resilience Strategy.*
United Nations Development Programme,
<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2021-12/UNDP-Urban-Risk-Management-and-Resilience-Strategy.pdf>. Accessed 25 Nov. 2024.

70 years of urban growth in 1 dazzling infographic (no date) World Economic Forum,
<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2019/09/mapped-the-dramatic-global-rise-of-urbanization-1950-2020/>
Accessed 18 Dec. 2024.