



The UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 **THE WORLD NEEDS AN URBAN GOAL**

When the UN meets to adopt the new Sustainable Development Goals, it is the first time the UN proposes a specific urban goal. While the urban goal can mobilize institutional, financial and human resources, it is also extremely ambitious and universal in scope.


The SDG 11 represents a shift in international development cooperation from the focus on poverty as a mainly rural phenomenon to recognizing that cities, especially in the global south, are facing major challenges with extreme poverty, environmental degradation and risks due to climate change and natural disasters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Development actors should:

- Focus on citizen engagement at city and sub-city levels to promote participatory governance and ensure that global policies translate meaningfully to the local context.
- Support city and sub-city governments as they are key actors in working for sustainable development but often have limited financial, human, and institutional resources available to solve the task.
- Pay attention to how security can be achieved in urban settlements affected by violence as violence can seriously challenge the advancement of sustainable development.

The strength of the SDG 11 is also its greatest challenge: it is extremely ambitious and universal in scope



As a framework the goal can bring the efforts of multiple actors and stakeholders across sectors together and help mobilize institutional, financial and human resources

The SDG 11 is adopted in a time when the world is becoming increasingly urban. More than half of the world's seven billion people currently live in cities. 1 billion are slum dwellers who cope with dire living conditions. If the current urbanization trends continue, indications are that an additional three billion people will be living in cities by 2050, increasing the urban share of the population to two-thirds.

Despite the overwhelming challenges, cities also have an extraordinary potential to drive sustainable development. They have become the primary locus for economic growth and development with three-quarters of global economic activity being urban. This makes interventions at the urban level essential to achieve future sustainable development.

SDG 11 as a road map

The SDG 11 with related targets and indicators provides a road map for the actions needed to promote sustainable development in the urban arena. As a framework the goal can bring the efforts of multiple actors and stakeholders across sectors together and help mobilize institutional, financial and human resources.

Too universal in scope?

The strength of the SDG 11 is also its greatest challenge: it is extremely ambitious and universal in scope. It demands multi-sectoral, multi-actor and multi-scale planning, implementation and enforcement.

The advantage is that it represents a more holistic approach to urban solutions rather than isolated, sector-specific projects. This way SDG11 can be seen as a recognition that the urban challenges are interlinked and must be treated as such. Access to basic infrastructure services such as clean water,

efficient waste management and energy access for all is pivotal for promoting better health and reduce diseases. At the same time it is necessary for economic development and prosperity. Just as good sanitation and drainage services can minimize health risks it can improve the environment and prevent flooding and other risks related to climate change.

However, multi-sectoral, multi-actor and multi-scale planning, implementation and enforcement require that national and city governments have sufficient financial, human, and institutional resources available. In most countries in the global south these resources are very limited.

Moreover, cities around the world are highly diverse both within and between countries. Enormous differences exist in the types of challenges and the resources to cope with them, and the world's cities are developing differently. While some cities experience population increase and urban expansion especially on the African continent, other cities face stagnating or declining populations. Most of these are located in low-fertility countries of Asia and Europe.

This makes the SDG 11's universal targets and goals across geographies, countries, cities and population groups highly problematic and calls for decision-makers to recognize the fact that the formulation, planning and implementation of the universal goals and targets need to be appropriated differently within and across nations and cities.

State-centred goals and targets

Another concern with the SDG 11 is its limited focus on sub-national governance as well as the respective roles and relations of private and public stakeholders.

Rapid urbanization and urban population growth have led to the emergence of cities across the world with large urban areas characterized by the presence of multiple actors of governance. Cities are spun into a web of institutional, economic, and political constraints which create complex contingencies in the process of governing. The SDG 11's goals and targets will be implemented in huge and complex areas where states are but one of many other actors governing the city.

There is thus a need to focus on 'governance' instead of 'government' and engage a broad range of actors such as city and sub-city governments as well as the private sector, civil society and local non-state actors that play a role in governing the city.

However, multi-partner platforms also raise questions of the distribution of responsibilities. This demands clear targets and indicators and a clarification of roles across various levels of government and non-governmental actors to ensure that activities do not overlap or conflict.

City governments can promote sustainable development

While urban challenges may appear overwhelming, cities can play a leading if not decisive role in promoting sustainable development both locally, nationally and globally.

City governments are often closer to the local context and can formulate and adapt global policies to meaningfully correspond to the needs at the city and sub-city level. They have the potential to respond more promptly to the needs of their urban populations and readjust policies and strategies accordingly.

Because of city governments' proximity with the urban population, there is great potential for promoting inclusive participatory governance that invite representatives from civil society, local knowledge institutions, and urban residents to influence and enrich local decision processes.

GOAL 11: MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

11.1 By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums

11.2 By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons

11.3 By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries

11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage

11.5 By 2030, significantly reduce the number of deaths and the number of people affected and decrease by [x] per cent the economic losses relative to gross domestic product caused by disasters, including water-related disasters, with a focus on protecting the poor and people in vulnerable situations

11.6 By 2030, reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including by paying special attention to air quality and municipal and other waste management

11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

11.a Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning

11.b By 2020, increase by [x] per cent the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, resilience to disasters, develop and implement, in line with the forthcoming Hyogo Framework, holistic disaster risk management at all levels

11.c Support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials

Inclusive governance could encourage mobilization of the urban poor pushing for a type of governance where all residents have a say over the form and management of the city and have access to the public realm.

Promoting safe cities – the challenge with urban violence

The goal of the SDG 11 to promote safe cities is a novel and important overall objective to promote sustainable and equal cities. However, the SDG 11 pays little attention to fighting and preventing many cities' high levels of urban violence and the severe consequences for the urban poor.

While SDG 16 specifically aims to 'promote peaceful and inclusive societies' and prevent violence on a global scale, there is a need to look specifically at urban violence for a number of reasons.

First, cities and violence seem closely related. Much of the world's recent conflict, terrorism and civil disorder have occurred in cities such as São Paulo, Cairo, Baghdad and Mumbai. Cities are complex spaces that shape and contribute to particular formations of violent actors and forms of violence. For several decades we have seen the world's highest homicide rates afflict cities especially in Latin America but also in many African and Asian cities.

Secondly, urban violence and crime impose vast economic costs as it can discourage investment, divert resources towards law enforcement and health services for victims and can limit mobility and access to employment and educational opportunities.

Finally, urban violence disproportionately affects the poorest residents and makes spaces where they live and work highly difficult to intervene in.

This requires greater attention to how security can be achieved in complex urban environments. In the cities, security often is provided by a range of governmental, non-governmental, informal and sometimes illicit actors that both compete and collaborate in securing and controlling populations and territories in ways that sometimes go beyond the law.

This calls for a specific focus on how to plan, implement and enhance development projects in areas affected by high rates of urban violence.

SDG 11 is an important tool

Despite the universal framework and the highly ambitious targets and goals constituting SDG 11, it represents an important focus on the urban question and the challenges that the world faces today, and even more so in the future.

There is a need to develop realistic, locally defined indicators and outputs to fit the urban context of specific cities, but the SDG 11 is an important tool for further development of specific urban policies to promote more sustainable and equal cities.

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Coverphoto: A relocation housing project in the Chinese megapolis of Chengdu. The Chinese government plans to move 250 million rural residents into urban areas over the coming dozen years. © Panos Pictures, Justin Jin

