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Introducing a new Global Goal for Cities and Human Settlements

Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) aims at making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable by 2030. By putting direct focus on urban areas, and thereby recognizing the important role of urban actors, it launches a new era of international development.

Key messages

- Goal 11 (the "urban SDG") is one of the 17 Global Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and applies to all cities regardless of their vast differences in terms of socio-geographic, economic and cultural conditions.

- For cities and their local governments, the new goal has the potential to raise their profile in international dialogues and may help local governments access financial means to implement ambitious projects, which are needed to transform urban lifestyles and infrastructure towards sustainability.

- For the overall development agenda, SDG 11 is not only about cities, but rather a novel place-based approach to development including a specific attention to urban, rural-urban and regional linkages.

- In order for the new goal to become successful, the current national and global political landscapes will have to become more inclusive and supportive of local actions in cities. This requires new governance approaches, political and financial empowerment of local governments and other actors of urban change, as well as the careful choice of indicators and mechanisms to mobilize data and monitor progress.

- While the adopted SDGs represent "lowest common denominators" in order to be universal, many cities are already more advanced in their policies, plans and implementation towards urban sustainability – particularly those advancing Agenda 21 since 1992. These ambitious cities are urgently needed as pioneers to lead others, and they must be encouraged to continue to raise the bar.

What is the urban Goal?

For the first time in history, all United Nations Member states have adopted a common vision and goal for sustainable urban areas within a global development framework. The overall framework "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" was launched at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015 and includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 global targets to be reached within 15 years.

11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

What makes this SDG very special is that it is the only goal with a sub-national geographical character that embraces the transformative power of cities as hubs of innovation and opportunity, as well as the importance of agents of urban change - local governmens, civil society, business etc.

The Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals are a globally agreed set of goals to eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable develpoment by 2030. They follow on from the Millennium Development Goals and build on the sustainable development agenda that was first formally discussed at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012 (Rio+20).

Why is the urban SDG important for the development agenda?

The adoption of the SDGs has taken place in a time when the world is becoming ever more urban and interconnected, with over 50 percent of the global population living in cities. The future global achievements and failures will therefore depend on how people in cities manage their lifestyles and consumption within the interconnected urban-rural/local-global resource flows and chains of production. For that reason, SDG 11 is not only about cities, but rather a novel place-based approach to development with a specific attention to urban, rural-urban and regional linkages.

The urban Goal highlights the importance and potential of cities and local governments to find new solutions to old-standing problems:
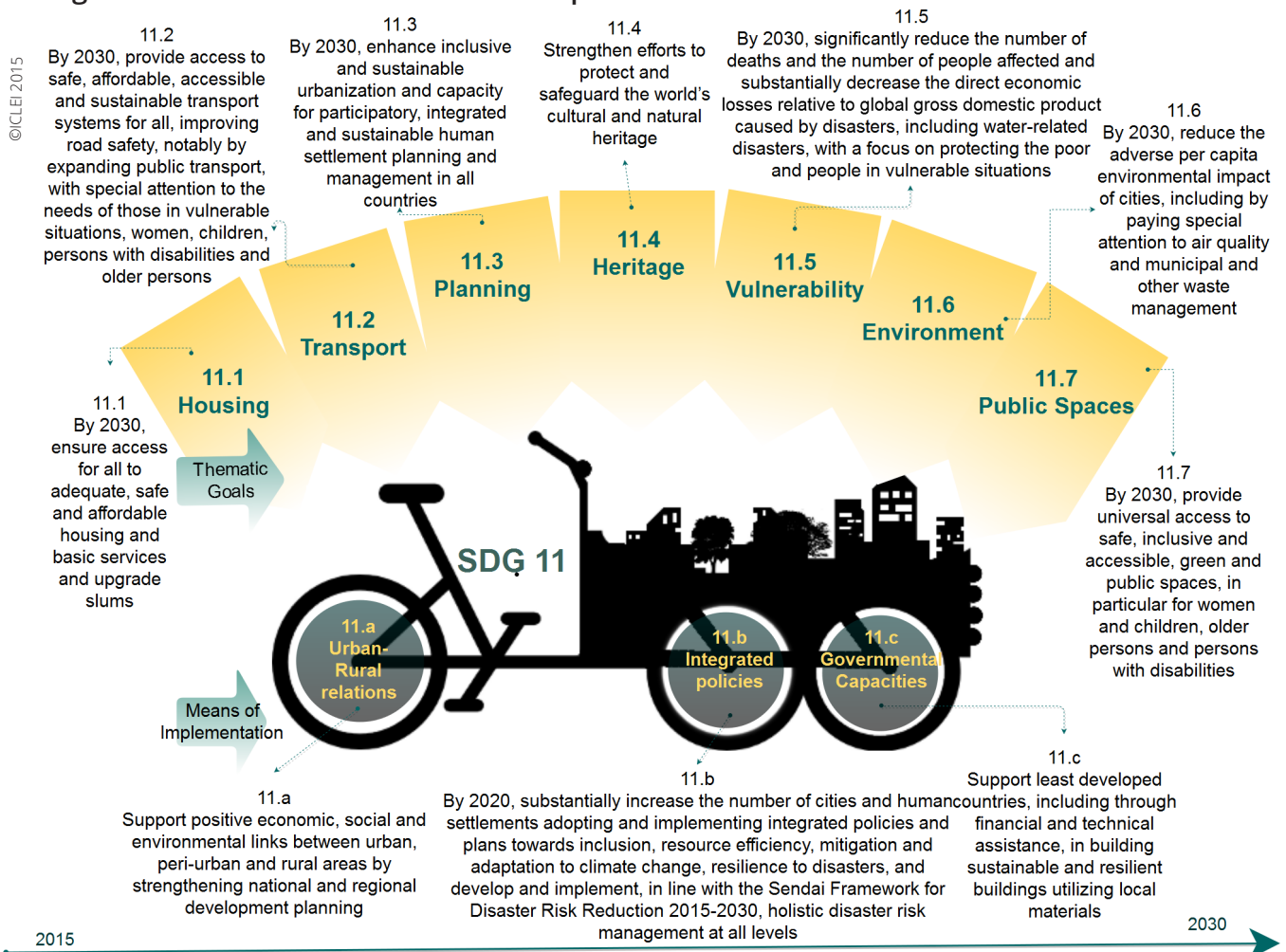
1. Nations need cities and their local governments to reach the SDGs. Most sustainability issues are to be found and addressed at the local level by local governments, communities, and businesses. Urban areas cause 70 percen of total worldwide carbon emissions, generate the greatest amount of economic wealth and are at the same time more likely to have stronger social inequality rates than rural areas. Accordingly, the future successes at the local level will largely determine the success of the overall sustainable development agenda.

2. Cities are dynamic systems with a multitude of actors. SDG 11 has the potential to involve and mobilize the wide range of stakeholders needed to address the interlinked and cross-cutting issues of sustainable development through creative solutions that address the societal, economic and environmental needs of our planet together. Cities are the most suitable platforms for such creativity and negotiation, as they bring together diverse groups of public actors, businesses, research, civil society and citizens to generate local solutions.

3. Accelerating and scaling up solutions. Not only are local solutions shaped by global events and developments, but existing local examples of SDG 11 also have the potential to inspire and lead the overall international development agenda. Many cities are already providing examples of ambitous and integrated projects initiated by local governments in public-private partnerships and cooperation with communities. Such local leadership is invaluable for scaling up good practices, and the urban Goal is needed to accelerate their replication and transform all our cities.

Targets to drive urban sustainable development

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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 substantially decrease the direct economic losses relative to global 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

11.3 Planning

11.4 Heritage

11.5 Vulnerability

11.6 Environment

11.2 Transport

11.7 Public Spaces

11.1 Housing

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

Thematic Goals

SDG 11

11.a Urban-Rural relations

11.b Integrated policies

11.c Governmental Capacities

Means of Implementation

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, substantially increase 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, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, 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

2015

2030

Why is SDG 11 important for *cities*?

1. Transformation of cities. Although many cities have established themselves as drivers of sustainable urban development, they are still large-scale resource consumers and major greenhouse gas emmiters. In order to achieve and go beyond the targets set out by the SDGs, urban areas need to be re-invented as places which produce resources rather than consume them – enhancing quality of life and promoting inclusion. SDG 11 has the potential to empower local governments and municipal leaders with transformational capital, which is required to shape sustainable lifestyles, production and consumption patterns both in the global North and in the global South.

2. Political empowerment. Cities cannot replace the nation-states in pursuing their responsibilities, such as for climate solutions or policies to reduce poverty, improve security, fight disease, and expand trade, but local governments can share the responsibility for addressing these issues at the local level. However, local governments do require autonomy and support from all levels of government to ensure that all decisions that can be taken locally or regionally can be executed and implemented quickly. For example, cities such as Copenhagen, Helsinki, and Toronto have all experienced increased regulatory powers, particularly in regard to energy, allowing them to pursue ambitious strategies and become leaders in urban sustainability.

3. Financial empowerment. Cities remain highly dependent on funds from national governments and grants to manage their tasks, develop sustainable infrastructure and fight inequalities. As it currently stands, the majority of local governments lack the buoyant tax sources that would produce revenue growth in line with their growing responsibilities due to the combination of rapid urbanization and increasing local impacts of climate change and disaster risks. As the SDGs will drive the direction of development funding and investment worldwide, Goal 11 has a potential to trigger more investments in urban areas and enhance the debate about economic freedoms and powers of local authorities.

4. The dawn of new data. With the strong emphasis of the 2030 Agenda on transparency and monitoring progress, SDG 11 has the potential to catalyze the development of local, bottom-up approaches to data collection and analysis. Intuitive, accessible data is essential for informed decision making and improving policy performance, transparency, and accountability. (see also ICLEI Briefing Sheet 06 on monitoring the progress of SDGs). Good data also provides cities with the viable creditworthiness required for multi-lateral funding.

What are the targets for cities?

The targets for SDG 11 are divided into two groups: seven thematic targets (11.1-11.7) describing which urban practices need crucial attention to make a difference, and

Table: Pioneering city examples

Example from the Global North	SDG 11 Targets	Example from the Global South
Barcelona, Spain Using solar energy supporting community energy self sufficiency	11.1 Housing	Curitiba, Brazil „Ecological Capital" is forerunner in Urban NEXUS planning
Suwon, Republic of Korea EcoMobility World Festival: One month. No cars.	11.2 Transport	Bogor, Indonesia Using transportation planning to achieve a low-carbon future
Växjo, Sweden Becoming fossil-fuel free through citizen involvement	11.3 Planning	Dongguan, China Tackling city growth traps
Nagoya, Japan Moving forward while respecting the past	11.4 Heritage	Cape Town, South Aftrica Protecting a world treasure
Copenhagen, Denmark Adapting to cloudbursts and flooding	11.5 Vulnerability	Kaohsiung, Chinese Taipei One year on from gas explosions
Seoul, Republic of Korea Fulfilling the Promise of Seoul	11.6 Environment	Mexico City, Mexico Turning trash into food
Bristol, UK Growing a European Green Capital	11.7 Public Spaces	Medellin, Colombia The Integral Urban Development Project
Vancouver, Canada Uniting municipalities with Regional Food System Strategy	11.a Urban-Rural relations	Belo Horizonte, Brazil Coordinated policy for food security
Sendai, Japan Role Model City in Making Cities Resilient Campaign	11.b Integrated policies	Rajkot, India First Pilot City of Global District Energy in Cities Initiative
Bonn, Germany Project 50 Municipal Climate Partnerships until 2020: Bonn partnerships with Cape Coast (Ghana), La Paz (Bolivien) and Linares (Chile)	11.c Governmental capacities	Recife, Brazil Learning from Copenhagen for Green Roof Law

Find additional examples of local sustainability actions in the ICLEI Case Studies series: www.iclei.org/casestudies

three targets on the means of implementation (11.a-11.c) (see the figure on page 2).

Means of implementation consist of (11.a) strengthening Urban-Rural relations; (11.b) Integrated policies and (11.c) Governmental Capacities. Each of these refer to the interdependent mix of financial resources, technology development and transfer, capacity-building, and the creation of a national enabling environment required to make progress towards the thematic targets.

Pioneering examples

For local governments, the 10 targets of the urban Goal establish an excellent starting point to ensure that no one is left behind; even those who have not been engaged with sustainability issues in the past. However, there are many examples of how local authorities already successfully work to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". Some of these started long ago without well defined frameworks, targets or indicators. Nevertheless, they already showcase that innovative urban management, planning and design strategies can be effectively established and maintained at the local level. To

illustrate the best practices of such pioneering work, the table on page 3 gives two examples of local actions for each of the SDG 11 targets, one from the Global North and one from the Global South.

The examples demonstrate a variety of themes that local and subnational governments, as frontrunners in urban sustainability, have tackled. To make these and many other examples transcend solitary lighthouse projects to become the new norm, local authorities require ongoing political willpower and empowerment from their national counterparts, a resource that the new Global Goal can help provide.

More about implementing SDGs in cities in other ICLEI Briefing Sheets from this series:

01: From MDGs to SDGs

02: Cities and the SDGs,

04: The importance of each SDG for cities

And more available at: www.iclei.org/briefingsheets

Further Reading

• United Nations (2015) Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform. Online. (https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld)

• Loewe, M., Rippin N. (7/2015) Translating an Ambitious Vision into Global Transformation: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Discussion Paper. Bonn. German Development Institute / (DIE). Online. (https://www.die-gdi.de/uploads/media/DP_7.2015_NEU2.pdf)

• Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments for Post-2015 Development Agenda towards Habitat III (2014) Key Messages and Process on Localizing the Post-2015 agenda. Online. (http://www2.dse.unibo.it/ardeni/Key%20Messages%20and%20Process%20on%20Localizing%20the%20Post-2015%20agenda.pdf)

• ICSU and ISSC (2015) Review of the Sustainable Development Goals: The Science Perspective. Paris, International Council for Science (ICSU). Online. (http://www.icsu.org/news-centre/news/top-news/review-of-targets-for-sustainable-development-goals-science-perspective)

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