

Research Report

Committee: United Nations Environment Program (UNEP)

Topic: Implementing strategies and guidelines for ecologically and socially sustainable urban development

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Introduction

Sustainable urban development has become more and more important over recent decades, as countries around the world move towards more urbanised societies. Currently, around 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas, with the figure expected to increase to 70% by the year 2050. Urban settlements account for some 80% of global economic output, and are also the main consumers of energy as well as large contributors to greenhouse gas emissions. In addition to environmental concerns, social issues are also crucial to take into account in order to develop more sustainable cities. Urbanisation has, according to the United Nations, left more than one billion people living in slums and other types of informal settlements. The opportunities, as well as challenges, that urbanisation brings with it makes it more important than ever to develop policies and programs which enable cities to develop in both environmentally and socially sustainable ways.

Background Information

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include Goal 11 which focuses on the sustainable development of urban areas. The year 2008 marked the first time that the global urban population was greater than the rural population with the United Nations calling this the advent of the 'urban millennium'. In addition to the individual goal included in the 2030 Agenda, the UN also recognises that SDGs 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 15, and 17 are significant to achieving urban development which is sustainable.

The sustainable development of cities hinges on two main factors, the actual environmental sustainability necessary for cities to be able to sustain themselves and limit their impact on

their environment, and the social policies needed to ensure all those living in urban areas have access to adequate services. The growth of cities often presents an environmental challenge as the construction of new buildings can be very harmful to the climate. Staple materials such as concrete have huge impacts on the environment, both in terms of their greenhouse gas emissions as well as the amount of natural resources required. This is why sustainable construction is a major focus in improving the climate footprint of dense urban settlements. It is widely acknowledged that without a shift away from concrete in construction, the goals laid out in the Paris Climate Accords will not be achieved. Another major concern for cities is their energy consumption. Many cities are faced with the dual problem of not having sustainable energy sources available to them and being stuck with infrastructure that lacks the efficiency needed to achieve net zero emissions. Social issues are also an important aspect of sustainable urban development. Cities must find ways to provide affordable housing and adequate public services in order to ensure that everyone living in cities is able to access basic necessities. SDG Goal 11 includes targets which are focused specifically on affordable housing, improved public transportation, as well as increasing inclusivity and accessibility in cities.

Questions for Delegates

As the topic is quite broad, delegates should be generally aware of urban development in the countries they represent and should also be aware of the national urban development policies of their countries. It would also be helpful for delegates to familiarise themselves with specific policies that have worked well which could be used as a basis for operative clauses in resolutions. As always, it is helpful for delegates to be aware of the political situations in the countries they represent as the ideological leanings of governments can often be used to deduce policy positions even if there are no specific ones.

Resources Used

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