

UN-HABITAT and Climate Change

In the view of UN-HABITAT:

Cities must influence the climate change debate.

Cities must be involved in climate change negotiations.

At the dawn of a new urban era with most of humanity now living in cities, UN-HABITAT is at the frontline of the battle against fast growing urban poverty, rapid urbanisation, unemployment, disasters and the scourge of climate change.

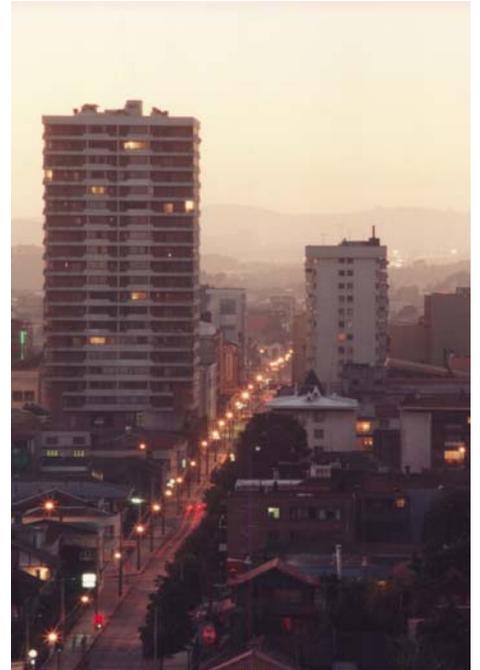


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No longer is the scientific evidence of climate change as a result of human activities questioned. It is also an accepted fact that cities are perhaps the biggest contributors to the causes of climate change – most greenhouse gas emissions come from cities. It is a fact too that cities consume most of the world's energy.

Today some 1 billion people, mainly the developing world, live in slums, and they are most vulnerable of all when it comes to disasters caused by climate change. All too often, they live along beaches vulnerable to flooding, near sites prone to landslides, near polluted grounds or shabby structures that would be destroyed the instant a hurricane or a tsunami hit causing untold destruction and loss of life.

How cities are able to cope with these impacts is directly linked to the capabilities of local authorities to govern, plan and manage their cities in general.

UN-HABITAT is one of the few UN bodies that works with organizations at every level, including local governments to build, manage, plan and finance cities without slums that are liveable places for all, and which do not pollute the environment or deplete natural resources.

It is therefore not only logical but necessary for UN-HABITAT to take on a role in dealing with climate change at the local level with a special focus on urban areas in developing countries and the needs of the most vulnerable.

UN-HABITAT's programmes in more than 150 towns and cities around the world, and its work to improve environmental planning and management, are having a measurable impact upon the lives of the urban poor. This includes initiatives such as better public transport systems and non-motorized transport.

The agency counsels prevention against disasters brought on by climate change, and is also working in many disaster zones around the world to help rebuild homes and lives.

A meeting of experts at its headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya in November 2007 reaffirmed the agency's mandate to deal with climate change at the local level. The experts representing research institutions, local authorities, the private sector and UN bodies were unanimous that UN-HABITAT participates in the climate change debate at the local level around the world.

Looking Ahead

UN-HABITAT will launch a Sustainable Urban Development Network in 2008 to help local governments strengthening climate change prevention measures in developing countries.

It also plans to establish new links with the private sector, and to strengthen existing partnerships with bodies such as the United Nations Environment Programme, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), the United Nations Development Programme, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the World Bank, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO).

Using the latest GIS satellite technology, the agency can also help towns and cities conducting vulnerability and risk mapping surveys. It can further provide new mitigation and adaptation guidelines for local authorities, help bridge the gap between research and practice, and help cities in training, capacity building and raising public awareness about climate change problems through city to city cooperation, tool development and policy dialogue at national and local levels.

A key to success here is collecting and sharing case studies on best practices. Another is promoting energy efficient buildings, helping prevent conflict over land, and encouraging the introduction of climate change courses into primary and further education.



Further information

The Urban Environment Section,
UN-HABITAT,
P.O. Box 30030, Nairobi, Kenya
Tel: +254-20-7623225
Fax: +254-20-7623715
E-mail: scp@unhabitat.org
www.unhabitat.org