

2023 HLPF Thematic Review

Expert Group Meeting

Hybrid format, 8-9 February 2023

Bilbao, Spain

Meeting Summary for the meeting on SDG 11¹

1. Introduction

The theme of the 2023 High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is “Accelerating the recovery from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels”. The 2023 HLPF will have an in-depth review of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 6 on Water and sanitation; 7 on Energy; 9 on Industry, innovation and infrastructure; 11 on Sustainable cities and communities; and 17 on Partnerships for the Goals.

The forum will consider the different and particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across all SDGs and the integrated, indivisible, and interlinked nature of the Goals. In preparation for the review of SDG 11 – and its role in advancing sustainable development across the 2030 Agenda, the Division for Sustainable Development Goals of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA/DSDG), the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) organized an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) to take stock of progress towards SDG 11 - make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

This EGM was organized back-to-back with UN-Habitat’s Expert Group Meeting on the SDG 11 Synthesis Report and was informed by it. Participants included specialists on urban policy and monitoring, water, sustainable energy, industrialization, science and technology, economics, human rights, health, culture and heritage, and poverty eradication. Experts represented academia, national and local governments, international organizations, and civil society organizations. The meeting was designed to bring together multi-disciplinary experts working on SDG 11 to consider how sustainable cities can contribute to the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda and how other various sectors can contribute to the achievement specifically of SDG 11.

This summary points to key messages that emerged from the EGM where experts focused on: 1) taking stock of progress for the range of targets included in SDG 11 including new developments since it was last reviewed at the HLPF in 2018; 2) examining recent trends and changes, and new opportunities for change; 3) identifying obstacles to progress and issues of concern, globally and across contexts; 4) building an integrated understanding of action toward SDG 11 that leverages synergies with other goals and targets; and 5) sharing knowledge about success stories, good practices and challenges and suggesting ways forward in terms of policies, partnerships and coordinated actions at all levels.

2. Stocktaking and challenges

Participants stressed that eight years into the implementation of SDG 11, progress has been mixed. While significant strides have been made on some targets of SDG 11, such as transport and national urban policies, vast gaps remain on the others, specifically on targets related to housing and slums, provision and access to accessible public spaces and waste management. Progress across cities, countries and regions was also varied and uneven, with some showing significant progress while others are lagging. Participants noted that parts of these mixed achievements are due to the fact that the commitments included in the New Urban Agenda, critically linked to the SDGs, have not been sufficiently implemented.

¹ The recommendations expressed in this report are a summary of the contributions made by experts in the meeting and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

Urban inequality and spatial fragmentation persist globally. There is a global stagnation of progress on upgrading slums and on access to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services for all. As a major manifestation of urban inequality, as of 2022, nearly 1.1 billion people lived in slums or slum-like conditions in urban areas². The number of slum dwellers continues to grow. Globally, 90% of world's slum dwellers are concentrated in Asia and Africa (2020). Central and Southern Asia account for 34% of all people living in slums, followed by Eastern and South-Eastern Asia with 29% of the total, and Sub-Saharan Africa with 22%³. Migrants and non-nationals are particularly pushed into slums and socially segregated from the rest of the urban population. An additional 2 billion people are expected to live in slums over the next 30 years, or 183,000 people each day - most of whom will be in developing countries⁴. Countries in and emerging from conflict have seen the biggest rise in both slum populations and homelessness, but cities in developed countries have also been grappling with income inequality, spatial exclusion and segregation, and social exclusion. Accelerating efforts to advance SDG target 11.1 is therefore becoming more urgent with more attention needed for secondary and intermediary cities where slum populations are rising at a disproportionate rate, and more focus needed on strengthening support for countries in conflict and post-conflict settings.

Regarding target 11.2 on sustainable transport, only half of the global urban population has convenient access to public transport, with further inequalities exacerbated by existing public transport modalities – especially the largely informal/ unregulated structures prevailing in many developing countries⁵. About 1.3 million people die each year as a result of road traffic crashes, most of whom are pedestrians, cyclists and motorcycle users⁶.

Urban areas are still expanding at faster rates than their population growth, although the rate has slowed down in recent years. According to data compiled from 815 cities for the period 1990 - 2020, the physical expansion of cities globally was faster than the rates of population growth⁷.

Regarding protection of world's cultural and natural heritage, there has been considerable improvements and adjustments in cities' policies and strategies that served to improve the understanding of the value proposition of culture to sustainable cities. However, it was recognised that the protection of heritage cannot only be focused on cities as important heritage sites can also be found in remote and rural areas as well. Global data collection on the main SDG target 11.4 only started in 2020, however, data collection and reporting are still in development in or remain challenging for many countries, with some able to only report partial data or have no data at all. The measurement of this target and indicator with multiple components should improve as more countries report and provide data, but more support should be provided to countries facing capacity constraints.

Regarding disaster preparedness and the target associated to them, the number of countries with local disaster risk reduction strategies nearly doubled between 2015 and 2021⁸. However, participants noted that the number of strategies does not convey their quality or the level to which they are put into action. Disaster preparedness will be ever more crucial going forward, given estimates that medium- to large-scale disasters will increase by 40 per cent from 2015 to 2030, largely due to impacts of climate change⁹. As disasters are set to rise significantly, so too will displacement to and from cities. There is an urgent need to include migration, displacement and human mobility considerations in these local strategies and to prepare urban governance for these changing population dynamics.

According to global estimates, in 2022, an average of 82 per cent of municipal solid waste globally was being collected and 55 per cent was being managed in controlled facilities¹⁰. Mismanaged waste is a source of

² Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report 2023

³ Upcoming UN-Habitat SDG Synthesis Report 2023

⁴ Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report 2023

⁵ Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report 2023

⁶ Upcoming UN-Habitat SDG Synthesis Report 2023

⁷ Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report 2023

⁸ SDG Progress Report 2022

⁹ SDG Progress Report 2022

¹⁰ SDG Progress Report 2022

greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, disease spread, and plastic pollution, threatening public and human health. Poor neighbourhoods in many countries, which are largely unserved with municipal waste management facilities, face the highest risk from hazards associated with poorly managed waste.

Whilst public spaces generally play a crucial role in making densities in cities work, the past few years have shown that they are immense assets in times of crisis and should thus be a vital component in cities' strategies in addressing present and future crises. Access to green spaces is important to urban dwellers and they have salubrious effects and ecological benefits. Nonetheless, at the global level, the share of urban area allocated to streets and open public spaces is less than 20 per cent, with open public spaces accounting for a meagre 3.2 per cent, which is about 4 times less than the share of land in streets¹¹. Coupled with inequitable distribution of these spaces across cities (with those in the more developed regions scoring better than those in the developing regions), many urban residents lack adequate and equitable opportunities to enjoy the benefits of such spaces, with the urban poor and marginalized groups likely to be adversely affected more significantly.

In 2019, ambient air pollution from traffic, industry, power generation, waste burning and residential fuel combustion resulted in 4.2 million deaths.¹² Cities – while not much better off than rural areas – are both sources and recipients of air pollution and experience levels of air pollution about 6 times the guidelines value recommended by the World Health Organization.

During the EGM, interlinkages between SDG 11 and other goals were addressed and urban development was reflected upon from the viewpoint of numerous SDG targets. For example, with SDG 2, about 70 percent of food supply is consumed by inhabitants in areas classified as urban and this is expected to increase with urbanization. Rapid urbanization which occurs mainly in low and lower middle-income countries is leading to deterioration in the ability of urban populations to access nutritious food and healthy diets due to increases in urban poverty, weak systems of social protection and inability of social services to their needs. It was also noted that diets are changing in urban areas where marketing has a stronger influence on food choices and supermarkets are more accessible. Diets are shifting towards increased consumption of food away from home with a larger share of processed foods with high salt, sugar and fat content, with well-known harmful health implications.

On interlinkages between SDG 11 and SDG 7 on energy, participants stressed that energy use in cities accounts for three-quarters of global final energy use. Heating, cooling and transport represent 83% of final energy demand¹³. Momentum towards net zero emission targets in cities however is growing with over 1,100 city governments having announced net zero targets. City net zero targets are most prevalent in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, followed by East Asia and North America. However, it was noted that some city governments still anchor their net zero pledges in policy documents, raising the need to support efforts that would turn goals and aspirations into concrete action. Additional interlinkages exist. For example, addressing the issue of household energy for cooking (SDG 7.1.2) – both in urban, especially in slums, and rural areas – would drastically improve air quality (11.6.2) and reduce its associated mortality (3.9.1).

An additional, persistent challenge is the lack of adequate data for measuring progress. For example, even for target 11.1, there are significant data gaps both for the indicator on slums as well as towards the broader target, such as data on informal settlement, forced evictions, homelessness, and housing affordability.

Participants also repeatedly highlighted the need to ensure that solutions developed today also address the needs of tomorrow. Participants acknowledged the presence of the youth-bulge in some parts of the world and also noted that one major shift that will have large impacts on the future needs of urban dwellers in many countries around the world is population ageing. This demographic change is a megatrend that needs to be considered in urban planning. Cities and communities cannot be sustainable and resilient if they do not prepare for future demographics, including ever growing proportions of older people, migrants and displaced

¹¹ Special Edition of the SDG Progress Report 2023

¹² SDG Progress Report 2022

¹³ REN21, Renewables in Cities Global Status Report (REC)

persons and persons with disabilities. This will, for example, require major shifts in how accessibility is integrated across urban planning and practice.

3. Crisis impacts and recovery

Cities have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic, accounting for 95 per cent of all reported cases around the world and thus being known as the epicentres of the pandemic. The pandemic has placed unprecedented pressure on local governments, requiring them to be agile, innovative, and responsive to the needs of their communities while confronting serious constraints such as diminishing revenue.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have not been felt the same in all cities and human settlements and they have differed widely between different population groups and areas within those cities and settlements. Some of the key factors accounting for the varied impacts include infrastructure, housing conditions, service availability, levels of accessibility, and labour market conditions, amongst others.

The pandemic forced local governments to take quick and decisive action to respond to the rapid spread of the virus. In majority of the cities around the world, they were the first line responders for public health, managing the logistics of setting up testing sites, distributing vaccines, and enforcing new health guidelines. Education was disrupted by the pandemic, and local governments had to also contend with school closures, virtual learning, and making sure all students had access to technology to continue their studies. Local governments also had to manage the impact of the pandemic on their workforce while maintaining at critical service provision. While some were forced to work from home during lockdowns, other workers (especially those in essential service roles) were needed onsite and had to face increased exposure risks and/or worked longer hours to keep public services running.

The pandemic had significant financial impact. In many cities, the pandemic caused a sudden drop in revenue when, among others, economic activities and public transportation ridership declined as people were forced to stay at home as businesses shut down, cities' tax revenue also went down, straining budgets of many local governments.

Participants also highlighted the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on urban informal workers and freelancers who are often particularly vulnerable. Where available, formally employed workers are often covered by unemployment, pensions, and other benefits, and non-working vulnerable groups such as children, older persons, and persons with disabilities may be able to access public services or social safety nets. However, low-income urban informal workers often have no access to social assistance or insurance. It is notable that a significant portion of urban informal workers are migrants, who already have limited access to protection mechanisms such as these and often work without legal status or documentation in the country or city where they work. In some countries, specific social protection schemes were established to fill this gap during the worst pandemic months with promising results.

The pandemic forced local govts to take bold decisions, and many cities took the opportunity to gear such decisions towards more sustainable choices, for example by supporting collective transport and non-motorized transport options. In many cities, walking and cycling increased significantly. However, the most visible impact in the early stages of the pandemic was the very strong decline in the use of public transport. Restoring trust in public transport and building back better became one of the core priorities in many regions and user numbers of public transport are still lower in many cities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also reinvigorated the debate on urban densities and the future of how cities and urban areas should grow, with high densities associated with increased risks and low densities associated to reduced urban efficiencies. There is no single value to prescribe a sustainable urbanization model based on SDG indicator 11.3.1, but each city should create a baseline upon which an assessment of the desired future and actions towards it can be analysed based on the indicator values.

In general, the pandemic also presented windows of opportunity for policy changes that should be utilized to the fullest. In numerous cities, inhabitants appreciated the open public spaces in a new way and local

governments found new ways of engaging people and of delivering critical services amidst serious constraints. The pandemic also spotlighted many areas for action and people who were being left behind, such as the housing needs of older persons, migrants and slum dwellers. The pandemic demonstrated that governments at all levels can move quickly and make drastic policy changes when the need arises. As the worst of the pandemic seems to be passing, some positive initiatives implemented during the emergency have been rolled back. There remains now the need to keep the momentum going and sustain the responses that worked for long-term impact on making cities more inclusive and sustainable.

4. Policies and actions to maximize synergies, mitigate trade-offs and drive transformation

The participants discussed and identified several key policies and actions that could accelerate progress towards SDG 11 and ensure that no one and no place is being left behind.

Invest in capacities for integrated urban planning and for ensuring policy coherence

The need to enhance integrated urban planning was repeatedly highlighted throughout the discussions to ensure the full utilization of synergies and mitigation of trade-offs at the local and regional levels. Urban policies should consider the functional geographies and relations addressing urban-rural linkages by means of integrated policies. It was recognized that the capacities for integrated planning are still missing in majority of cities around the world. Ideally, all sectors would be trained and empowered to consider integrated approaches and solutions, such as integrated and inclusive basic service provision. This will require dedicated financial and human resources.

Specifically, participants discussed the linkages between SDG 11 and SDG 6 on water and the role that integrated planning could play. It was noted that solid waste management is a critical component for planning and sustaining access to water and sanitation in cities. Currently there are negative interactions between these sectors such as solid waste clogging sewers. However, with integrated planning synergistic solutions can be found, such as through co-composting of organic and faecal waste. Other examples of synergies include slum upgrading programs where basic urban service provision includes unified water and waste services and increasing water efficiency through concepts such as sponge cities, blue-green cities and smart cities.

Interlinkages between SDG 11 and SDG 2 on food and agriculture were also discussed. It was noted that many factors shaping food systems operate beyond the urban scale and decisions made by cities and local government have wide reaching implications. Therefore, policy coherence across spatial domains and multi-level food systems governance is crucial. Integration of agrifood systems in urban and territorial planning was also referred to as an effective strategy to ensure an integrated sustainable urban development which considers challenges such as food insecurity and all forms of malnutrition. Well located urban agriculture, forests and green spaces can reduce the effects of climate shocks and improve overall resilience of the cities and protecting the natural resources.

Improve data collection to ensure that no one and no place is being left behind

While data availability has considerably increased, there is still a lack of both shared indicators and data to assess the needs and the effectiveness of actions, particularly in relation to marginalized urban communities, persons with disabilities, and the urban poor. In some cases, data used to show progress against some indicators does not adequately represent the needs of different population groups. In this respect, accessibility for persons with disabilities is often misunderstood, particularly in cases of access to transport and open public spaces. Accessibility is often measured only by distance instead of against existing policies, standards on accessibility, and user experiences. It was also noted that certain marginalized groups still prefer to “go uncounted”, such as undocumented migrants. Groups that have historically experienced discrimination, stigma, and abuse may be exposed to greater risk of persecution with additional data collection, if data privacy is not taken seriously and underlying discrimination is not addressed.

Regarding monitoring, it was also noted that urban data systems are still not harmonized, despite the progress made in areas such as the implementation of the Degree of Urbanisation, and hence the development and subsequent endorsement of the Global Urban Monitoring Framework (UMF) by UN Statistical Commission in March 2020 is a good starting point. Many city authorities and stakeholders have developed unique approaches to define their cities, organize their data, compute indicators, and report on progress towards realization of sustainability, which now require alignments with the UMF. These efforts will facilitate the generation of products that are easier to integrate with other outputs and also scalable or comparable among cities. However, it was noted that local governments face great difficulties in applying global indicators at the local level, and also experience lack of resources and capacities in choosing and developing the best indicators, as well as in gathering, analyzing and utilizing data. Co-operation mechanisms that bring convergence to all different urban progress monitoring systems, metrics, models, and tools can also create synergies in development of tools, methodologies, and databases.

Ensure participatory processes, including through mapping of marginalized groups

The need to ensure participatory processes and approaches echoed throughout the conversations. All population groups, including marginalized groups, should be represented in urban planning, service delivery decision-making and other processes of urban governance. This is well articulated under SDG indicator 11.3.2 but not many cities or local governments have embraced this global call for greater public engagement in urban planning and governance.

Active outreach and co-production of local solutions together with relevant communities can often make interventions more effective and targeted. In the sphere of food systems, mechanisms such as food policy councils or similar multi-stakeholder governance mechanisms can act as a consultative forum and provide advice to local governments, support policy, planning, implementation, and monitoring. In addition, community-based management of basic services such as water, wherever possible, can ensure that no one is being left behind.

When planning participatory processes, it was noted that open processes are not enough. There is a need to ensure that those with a stake in the process are truly able to participate. For example, digitalization and technological advances have allowed new ways of connecting with populations such as online consultations. However, technologies and platforms are not always inclusive of and accessible for older persons and persons with disabilities. Another specific group mentioned is people with dementia who often get ignored in participatory approaches. It was noted that one active policy tool for ensuring that no one is being left behind is for local governments to conduct relevant mappings to identify accessibility barriers and mechanisms for meaningful engagement with marginalised groups.

Use traditional and community knowledge more effectively

Traditional knowledge and community competencies should be leveraged to find locally suitable solutions, grounded on cultural practices and realities. Opportunities exist for documenting, contextualizing and applying traditional knowledge and management systems of services like water resource management, where suitable. Enhanced use of traditional local materials in the production of building products, for example, can bring numerous socio-cultural and environmental benefits. Traditional practices can also aid in creating culture-based solutions for climate change adaptation and carbon mitigation.

Listening to and leveraging the expertise, innovation, new ideas and skills of everyone in the city requires making it possible for all to contribute to the full range of opportunities and services that cities offer and viewing newcomers or traditionally “marginalized” communities as empowered agents of change who are already leading their communities towards prosperity. Opening up employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, re- and up-skilling and facilitating avenues to capture and upscale innovation and solutions put into practice by migrants and displaced people, older persons, persons with disabilities, youth, women and people of all genders is essential if we are to seize the full range of knowledge and use it most effectively.

Adopt a rights-based and a life-course approach

Participants stressed the need to adopt a stronger human-rights based approach to urbanization, urban planning and service delivery. The right to an adequate standard of living; food, water and sanitation; and a clean environment should be brought front and centre into policy discussions. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and other binding agreements on human rights should serve as guidelines in global discussions and local decision-making. The recent General Assembly resolution recognizing a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a human right should also be progressively realized in cities. Participants also made calls to develop a convention on the rights of older persons.

Considering the massive demographic changes in our cities, there is also a need to utilize a life-course perspective in urban planning and service provision. Recognising cities as melting pots of a multitude of cultures and age groups from local and migrant communities, culturally sensitive and human-rights based approaches must be developed. The quality of urbanization today does not only determine today's quality of life but will also impact the future quality of life, including of subsequent generations. A person born in inadequate and unsafe housing is at much higher risk to develop diseases, and to lack access to education, the labour market and health services.

Fully leverage nature-based solutions

Local governments should fully assess the opportunities for utilizing nature-based solutions (NBS) for improved health and well-being, reduced pollution, increased disaster resilience, climate mitigation and revitalized urban spaces, just to name a few potential areas. Participants discussed in-depth the potential of nature-based solutions for managing issues such as stormwater management, flood and drought resilience, urban greenery, biodiversity and liveability, as well as the need for linking NBS with integrated urban planning and management, including for water and sanitation and food systems.

Create smart incentives for the private sector, including for basic service provision

There is a need to involve all relevant stakeholders in basic service provision, and the role of the private sector was especially highlighted. The planning stage should already involve both informal and formal service providers. The private sector is an active actor in urban development, which can drive sustainable economic growth, provide smooth delivery of services but also have detrimental social and environmental impacts if sustainability is not prioritized. Developing smart incentives and business opportunities by engaging with private providers can be an effective regulatory approach to modify provider behaviour towards more sustainable solutions.

Harness the full benefits of the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs)

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) have emerged as an innovative tool by and for cities. The VLR global movement has skyrocketed since 2018: at present 200 VLRs have been produced by 162 local and regional governments worldwide¹⁴. The VLRs have proven to be a powerful accelerator of SDG localization, contributing to strengthening of overall national implementation of the SDGs.

VLRs are becoming the tool of choice by local and regional governments for SDG reporting, particularly contributing to three different areas. First, the VLRs have resulted in an unprecedented push for development of data at the subnational and city level. Provided that the production, collection and analysis of disaggregated data is crucial to better track performance towards the SDGs, VLRs have given cities the impetus to review and strengthen their data-related processes. This has been accompanied by improved horizontal cooperation between administrative departments for the sharing of relevant information as well as vertical coordination with national bureaus of statistics. Second, VLRs are reinforcing accountability and transparency at the local level as their development is often based on multi-stakeholder participatory processes. While facilitating the collection of non-traditional and qualitative data, inclusion and participation of local communities is essential to strengthen trust in public institutions as well as to create policies tailored to the specific needs and priorities

¹⁴ Numbers might vary depending on the definition of VLR adopted

of local communities. Lastly, the VLR process has been accompanied by an increased acknowledgment of local and regional governments' crucial role in driving development and pandemic recovery by their national counterparts. Through the increased understanding of the complementary nature of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and VLRs, local reviews have contributed to enhancing the national-local link for SDG implementation and reporting, substantially boosting multilevel dialogue and coordination for SDG implementation. In this regard, global and regional guidance for development of VLRs, taking into account regional contexts, has been recognized as an important element to support more cities to undertake VLR processes and contribute to more robust reporting and enhance national-local coherence.

Participants noted also the untapped potential of so called Voluntary Subnational Reviews, reviews prepared by national local government associations that provide a wider analysis of the subnational SDG efforts and challenges.

Several actions for enhancing the VLRs were identified:

1. VLRs are still too disconnected from policymaking. While some local champions have been successfully linking VLRs with local policies development, many others have yet not found the right formula to do so. More support is needed to make sure that the findings and recommendations from the reviews feed into the overall local planning and policymaking.
2. Local communities are yet not fully and systematically involved. Resources as well as time are often scarce to implement a full-fledged participatory process, nevertheless community involvement is a key element for the VLRs to serve as true accelerators of SDG localization. The leave no one behind principle should be at the basis of VLR development and supported with adequate allocation of time and resources for participatory processes.
3. The ability of local governments to fully align with the SDGs and localize their implementation is often hampered by lack of data. Recognizing the need for and the importance of disaggregated data, investments in data ecosystems at the national and local levels need to be encouraged. Civil society organizations, private sector and academia can also be used as potential sources of data.
4. Availability of adequate financial resources is also often indicated as a major obstacle to formulation of VLRs and localization processes. More international financing needs to be directed toward localization, while the efficient use of existing and endogenous resources needs to be encouraged.
5. The lack of resources at the local level also extends to human capacities and expertise. Capacity building is central to ensure sustainability of implementation efforts. National, regional and local governments need to be equipped with the adequate knowledge, expertise and tools to deliver on their mandate, including through practical guidance for the development of VLRs.

5. Means of implementation: Mechanisms and partnerships to accelerate progress

Participants discussed different solutions and multi-stakeholder partnerships for accelerating progress towards SDG 11.

Financing:

Local governments require significant financial resources to implement their SDG implementation plans, from improving public transport, and promoting green spaces to retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency and accessibility. Globally, fiscal autonomy of local and regional governments is often low and there is a need to diversify their funding sources. Innovative financing solutions, such as guarantees, green bonds, technology-based mechanisms or pooled financing to aggregate smaller projects and capture financing jointly by sharing the risk and interests, can complement tax funds and grants. The evolution and widening of the fiscal space of local governments depends largely on the enabling budgetary and fiscal framework legislated at the national level which sets the premise for local governments to manage and gather sufficient financing.

Resources should be assessed and reviewed, and financing plans made ideally in a coordinated manner between different governance levels. Participants acknowledged that national governments often also

struggle to find sources of funding for advancing sustainable development, and a dialogue on creating coherence and alignment between national and local priorities helps in ensuring cost-effectiveness of actions. Local and regional governments should also work with central governments to improve their borrowing powers and to explore innovative forms of financing local government, including through partnerships with the private sector.

Institutional arrangements and multilevel governance:

Local governments should set up appropriate governance structures and institutional frameworks to facilitate SDG implementation within government structures. However, it is crucial to remember that each local government functions within the national context and its given mandates and administrative, financial and political frameworks. SDG implementation can be led and monitored at the sub-national level through central government efforts, through local government structures, or by joint, multi-level structures and mechanisms. In most cases, joint structures can for example enable allocation of budget resources across territories and bring synergies from common reporting methods and overall understanding of implementation opportunities and challenges.

Local government associations and networks can often also support local governments' efforts in aligning their plans, strategies, indicators and budgets to the SDGs, coordinating with their local stakeholders and reporting on the progress made. They often act as coordinators between local constituencies and national governments and international organizations. This coordination and mutual support could be strengthened.

Partnerships:

Collaboration and partnerships between different levels of government, private sector, civil society organizations, academia, diaspora groups and other relevant actors are essential to achieve sustainable urban development. In general, local governments should engage in a dialogue with the different stakeholders to explore mutually beneficial ways of implementing the SDGs. Local governments can foster innovation among different stakeholders by supporting initiatives such as business incubators, innovation clusters and by providing spaces and seed funding for community innovation.

Additional efforts are needed to engage the private sector. It was noted that local governments can provide incentives for private sector stakeholders to engage in SDG initiatives, including through tax benefits, access to land, and other forms of financial assistance. In addition, local governments have a role to play enhancing private sector's understanding of the SDGs and their role in achieving them. Local governments should monitor and report progress of SDG initiatives in partnership with the private sector in order to measure impact and ensure accountability.

Capacity building:

Capacity building programs are needed to enhance the skills and knowledge of city officials, planners, and other stakeholders involved in sustainable urban development. Building endogenous capacities within local and regional governments is necessary for institution-building, policy analysis and development management. Such actions will enhance actors' ability to respond to long term challenges rather than concentrating only on immediate problems. To achieve this, specific knowledge and skills must be developed to perform tasks more efficiently and mind-sets and attitudes must still further be changed. For these purposes, information and knowledge exchanges and peer-to-peer networks have proven to be useful tools for sharing lessons learned between cities and different stakeholders. In addition to global networks and North-South twinning networks, participants highlighted the role that regional peer networks can play in enhancing learning among countries that share the same regional context and often key characteristics. Strategies to ensure that capacity building is a continuous exercise should also be put into place at all levels – from international organizations to local city levels.