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Sustainable Development and Planning: Integrating Environmental, Social, and Economic Consideration

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable urban development (SUD) is a balance of economic growth, social well-being, and environmental protection. Urbanization, technology and development take a toll on our climate. However, just as urban development is a prerequisite for a healthy ecosystem, and economic growth, a long-term sustainability plan must be integrated to ensure the continuous safety and protection of our ecosystem. Human activities have evolved and have greatly affected our climate which is a huge challenge. For these reasons and beyond, there is a need to continuously review and develop guidelines for the sustainability of urban development. These guidelines serve as a pathway for urban development framework. The guidelines are designed to help urban Projects achieve best practices and quantify their climate and development impacts on the ecosystem for sustainable development in urban areas. The design of these guidelines includes an assessment of key elements that align with the sustainability of our environment, and economic development. Guidelines help urban authorities to plan, design, implement, monitor, and quantify the performance of a large-scale urban Project following the best practices, this also empowers investor confidence thereby promoting investment inflow for economic growth. These requirements will help to reduce risks associated with the investments in the urban space by assuring that the Project follows good practice design principles, manages environmental and social risks, engages local communities, conducts robust reviews and delivers multiple development benefits thereby improving the risk-return profile of urban Projects and making them ready for investment.

Keywords: Sustainable urban development, healthy ecosystem, economic growth

INTRODUCTION

According to UN-HABITAT, Cities are responsible for approximately 67 per cent of global primary energy consumption and 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. The world is fast-changing, challenges like environmental degradation and climate change, demographic transition, digital revolution, migration and social inequalities are prominent and cities are often on the frontline to deliver solutions. Guidelines for sustainable urban development (SUD) identify and address the importance of driving the transition towards a sustainable way of living for all. Our environment is an important aspect of our lives. Guidelines for sustainable urban development is a requirement that enables cities to manage and govern their Projects better and continually improve their internal processes to maximise efficiency and protect the environment. These guidelines provide a framework to help urban authorities build capacity to efficiently plan, design, implement and monitor the performance of large-scale urban Projects.

Managing complex challenges like urbanization and climate change requires standard guidelines, broad collaboration and strong partnerships at all levels; government, citizens, experts, cities, industries and civil societies. An integrated and inclusive approach builds cohesion for sustainable urban development.

The world at large is constantly evolving, urbanisation has channelled a lot more activities and amenities to developed areas hence cities are responsible for higher global primary energy combustion and global greenhouse gas emissions. Guidelines for sustainable urban development serve as a pathway for maximising development, solving emerging and long-term standing issues in urban development and protecting our environment.

What is urban development?

Urban development is the process of planning and managing the growth of cities, to create a sustainable and livable environment with investment opportunities.

Urban development consists of constructing new buildings, improving living conditions, enhancing the capacity of city infrastructure and services, formulating policies to balance current needs with future population growth, analyzing social, economic, cultural, and political processes, rehabilitating, renovating, or maintaining existing buildings and lots more.

According to the World Bank, over half of the world's population now lives in cities, a figure expected to rise to nearly 70% by 2050, posing significant challenges for housing, infrastructure, and climate resilience.

The world is developing at an unparalleled scale. It is estimated that the urban population of developing countries will double to four billion in the next 20 years and the urbanized land area will triple. While rapid growth in urban development created new opportunities and economic growth, it also led to serious social, economic and environmental challenges.

In recent times, about one billion people live in urban slums and up to 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by violence. Between the period of 1980 till date, low-income countries accounted for 48% of fatalities and only 9% of disasters. Over the past decade, the number of people affected by natural disasters has tripled to 2 billion. These and more have posed serious environmental challenges to the ecosystem.

Emerging and long-standing urban development issues such as urban regeneration, city and regional planning, shrinking cities, urban sustainability, attracting investments, city marketing, and social segregation require the development of a strategic framework and challenge traditional approaches to urban policy and planning (Martina et al, 2020, pp 9).

The road to sustainable urban development

Over the past decade, world leaders, regulatory bodies, industries, elites, and scholars have stressed the impact of environmental degradation on climate change. Lots of talks, deliberations and meetings have been initiated. Countries are going into agreements to combat climate change. “The Paris Agreement” COP21 - COP28 Dubai, COP29 Baku all are meetings of country world leaders, representatives and regulatory bodies to discuss the way forward on environmental management and climate change.

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France on 12 December 2015. It entered into force on 4 November 2016 (United Nations, 2015). The Paris Agreement is like a wake-up call and call to action for a sustainable climate. Its major goal is to manage the increase in global average to below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and make efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above industrial levels. Implementation of the Paris Agreement requires economic and social transformation, based on the best available science. The Paris Agreement works in a 5-year cycle of increasingly ambitious climate action or ratcheting up carried out by countries since 2020. Countries have been submitting their national climate action plans known as national determined contributions (NDCs). Each successive NDC is meant to reflect an increasingly higher degree of ambition compared to the previous year (United Nations,2015)

The Paris Agreement gave rise to further meetings and alignment with goals to manage climate change. The COP28 UN Climate Change Conference in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, was the biggest of its kind. Some 85,000 participants, including more than 150 Heads of State and Government, were among the representatives of national delegations, civil society, business, Indigenous Peoples, youth, philanthropy, and international organizations in attendance at the Conference from 30 November to 13 December 2023. COP28 was particularly momentous as it marked the conclusion of the first global stake of the world’s efforts to address climate change under the Paris Agreement. Having shown that progress was too slow across all areas of climate action from reducing greenhouse gas emissions to strengthening resilience to a changing climate to getting financial and technological support to vulnerable nations – countries responded with a decision on how to accelerate action across all areas by 2030. This includes a call on governments to speed up the transition away from fossil fuel to renewables such as wind and solar power in their next round of climate commitments (United Nations, 2023).

The recently concluded climate change meeting held in Baku tagged COP29. The key outcome is the achievement of a finance deal which is a major goal, this will serve to provide a starting point for developing countries. Even so, the target of US\$300 billion per year by 2035 offers little help to frontline communities and falls short of the strong financial backing needed for the ambitious national climate plans required this decade to meet the Paris Agreement goals; however, it is major progress.

COP29’s challenges highlighted why a more inclusive approach to tackling the climate crisis is critical, with cities and local governments standing out as key partners in achieving global climate goals.

Initiatives like the Coalition For High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action are proving how cities can be central to effective national climate plans (c40.org).

The Key is taken from COP29.

New global finance goal: A target of US\$300 billion per year by 2035 is a step forward, but still falls short of the trillions needed annually. However, the roadmap from Baku to Belém offers some hope for bridging the funding gap.

Mitigation work program: Although the program focused on cities, buildings, and urban systems, it failed to deliver significant progress on reducing emissions and limiting global heating to 1.5°C. Fossil fuel interests blocked any real progress on mitigation and delivered a low-ambition outcome.

Global goal on adaptation: There was progress in defining indicators for the UAE Framework for Global Climate Resilience, with health highlighted as a key area for strengthening adaptation and resilience.

Carbon markets: After almost a decade of negotiations, countries agreed on rules for carbon credits under the Paris Agreement. While this is a positive step for reducing emissions and boosting investment in emerging economies, concerns about the integrity of these credits remain.

Loss and damage fund: The fund, launched at COP28, is now operational. New pledges from Australia and Sweden have raised its capital to US\$800 million per year, but this is still far below the US\$724 billion needed annually to support emerging economies in addressing loss and damage (c40.org).

From the key take-outs on COP29, it is obvious that COP29 took little steps in the right direction towards the actualization of the Paris Agreement on minimizing climate change with best practices on urban development.

The Way Forward

Sustainable urban development is a global issue that needs global attention. Urban cities are becoming saturated by the day hence; their daily activities currently contribute to 70% of global greenhouse emissions. Smart city infrastructure and attentive urban planning offer a pathway to building livable cities across the globe and healthy ecosystems at large.

Cities are critical to accelerating climate action and are where the mitigation and adaptation agendas intersect. While over 80 per cent of global economic activity is concentrated in cities, they are also on the frontlines of multiple crises. Cities acutely feel the impacts of pandemics and endemics, conflict and displacement, and climate change - all of which can exacerbate risks and compound inequalities. By supporting climate-smart development, governments and city leaders can avoid locking in unsustainable infrastructure, create much-needed jobs, and build inclusive economies, low-carbon, climate-resilient and sustainable. It is critical to equip countries and cities with access to urban climate finance, through both improved climate action planning and the prioritization and monitoring of impactful investments (worldbank.org).

To sustain livable cities requires thorough knowledge, investment and inclusive partnership. Urban and rural communities around the world increasingly feel the urge to tackle climate and environmental challenges associated with urbanization and increase their resilience to poverty and inequality, social exclusion, violence and fragility, as well as climate change and disaster risks for sustainable urban development. Building sustainable communities; whether in villages, cities, or countries and societies at large is critical to eliminating poverty and boosting shared prosperity in development.

The World Bank's concept of "**Sustainable Cities and Communities**" Disaster Risk Management, Resilience and Land Global Practice (GPURL) involves 4 key dimensions:

- Sustainable Communities are environmentally sustainable in terms of cleanliness and efficiency.
- Sustainable communities are resilient to social, economic, and natural shocks. They are well prepared for natural disasters, which are increasing in intensity and frequency due to climate change.

- Sustainable Communities are inclusive communities. They bring all dimensions of society and all groups of people—including the marginalized and vulnerable—into their markets, their services, and their development.
- Sustainable Communities are competitive communities that can stay productive and generate jobs for members of the community.

Drawing insight from above, it is therefore important to note that, emerging and long-standing urban development issues require the development of a strategic framework, and challenging the traditional approaches to urban policy and planning.

Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) as promoted under the EU cohesion policy coherently emphasises the importance of having a strategic framework in place.

The Gold Standard for Sustainable Urban Development

The Gold Standard for Sustainable Urban Development, are standard guideline and requirement, that is intended to function as a pathway to certification within the Gold Standard for the Global Goals Framework but is specifically tailored to urban Projects or programs. The Requirements are designed to help urban Projects achieve best practices and quantify their climate and development impacts to help attract investments for low-carbon development in urban areas. The design of the Standard hence includes an assessment of key elements that align with investor criteria. The Requirements help urban authorities to plan, design, implement, monitor, and quantify the performance of a large-scale urban Project following the best practices, thereby increasing investor confidence. These Requirements help to reduce the risks associated with the investments in the urban space by assuring that the Project follows good practice design principles, manages environmental and social risks, engages local communities, conducts robust MRV (measurement, reporting and verification) and delivers multiple development benefits thereby improving the riskreturn profile of urban Projects and making them “investment ready.” These criteria are also aimed at helping cities govern and manage their Projects better and continually improve their internal processes. The Requirements provide a framework to help urban authorities build capacity to efficiently plan, design, implement and monitor the performance of large-scale urban Projects (301 SUD).

These requirements are intended to serve as a guideline for:

- Local government, city government, regional government, municipal authorities, associations, infrastructure providers, service providers, project developers, advisors, consultants or broader program managers.
- Investors (public sector, private sector, impact investors), banks, donors, funds, and foundations.

The value proposition for these guidelines for target users includes the following:

Verified development outcomes for assurance and greater brand value: The guidelines outline that the Project contributes to at least three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It must make a positive impact on SDG 13 “Climate Action” and also contribute to two additional SDGs; these contributions must be monitored and reported annually. This key feature enables city authorities to prioritise local actions and align their Projects with the global development language of the SDGs. In addition, it assures investors that Projects contribute positively to global development goals. The annual MRV requirements also assure investors that desired outcomes from the investments are indeed achieved. This helps create strong brand value for the urban Projects, city authorities and investors as well to gain recognition for their efforts.

De-risking: The Requirements include the non-financial risk assessment criteria that are based on safeguarding principles recently updated by UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) after thorough public consultation and expert feedback process. All developers are expected to assess their Projects against these criteria and mitigate identified risks. The identified mitigation measures should also be monitored to track the progress and outcome. In line with the above procedures, it is expected that the Projects carry out comprehensive stakeholder mapping and consultations to incorporate their feedback in

the Project design. This approach incorporates a strategic buy-in from relevant stakeholders and mitigates significant potential risks in future, which may threaten investment and the overall project success.

Robust governance and management systems: The governance and management capabilities of urban authorities are of key importance to investors to establish confidence that the authority is capable of delivering a project design as intended. The guidelines include criteria to assess the governance capabilities and structure, including inter-institutional coordination, investment planning, track record of implementing similar Projects, and management systems (including designated roles and responsibilities etc.) of the designated authorities. From urban authorities' perspective, having such systems in place provides them with an important tool to manage their Projects and also will help continuously build capacities and improve their process flow for governing and managing projects effectively.

Project aggregation for cost efficiencies: This requirement acts as an aggregation tool for multiple Projects by improving the risk-return profile of the portfolio for the investor and reducing development and monitoring costs for urban authorities.

Access to results-based finance: This requirement sets how to assess contributions to SDGs and MRV of the outcomes that create an option for the Project to monetise outcomes and access result based finance like climate or health finance, where relevant.

Transparency and Ease of reporting: A user-friendly online platform to be developed to make reporting easier, transparent and accessible. This helps to make information publicly available on the Project's performance and outcomes.

ROADMAP FOR LOCALIZING THE SDGS: IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING AT THE SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL

This roadmap was published by the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional governments, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and UN Habitat, to help local and regional governments implement and monitor the SDGs. Support with delivering the 2030 agenda is structured in five parts:

- Raising awareness; getting to know the SDGs at the sub-national level.
- Advocacy; including a sub-national perspective in national SDG strategies.
- Implementation; localising the SDGs.
- Monitoring; evaluating and learning from experiences.
- Going forward, where to go from here?

This emphasises the importance of linking local indicators to those of the 2030 agenda and adapting them to each territory's needs and context. Furthermore, local and regional authorities should participate in monitoring and evaluating the SDGs at a national level, and the information gathered at a local level should be used in national SDG monitoring and reporting. Where possible, local governments should set up joint initiatives to create strong sub-national mechanisms. When resources are insufficient, national authorities should collect data from all the different territories in comprehensive matters to make informed decisions.

UN-HABITAT GUIDELINES FOR SUSTAINABLE RECONSTRUCTION AND URBAN REGENERATION.

The three urban development levels which are the focus of the Guidelines are as follows: 1. City level 2. Intermediary level, i.e. Neighborhood level or Man-Made Open Space level 3. Building level Moreover, this is further subdivided into the following time frames: Phase a: Assessment & Preparation Phase b: Planning & Design Phase c: Implementation, Construction & Operation.

Efficient Resource Utilization:

Life cycle assessment: Promote sustainable procurements.

Materials: Reduce waste, Upcycling / recycling / reuse Construction debris/waste management. Waste management (operational phase), Prioritize the use of local materials.

Energy: Energy modelling and simulation, Renewable energy, Energy efficiency, monitoring systems, Prioritize the use of local sources.

Water: Preserve water; reduce demand/reuse, monitoring systems.

Environmental Management And Climate Resilience

Land: Reduce manmade footprint, Brownfield recovery.

Ecology: Preserve/restore undeveloped land, Preserve/restore ecology, wetland Preserve/restore surface water, groundwater quality Preserve/restore habitat.

Climate Change Adaptation: Control floods, Control landslides/sinkholes, and Multifunctional infrastructure.

Climate Change Mitigation: Reduce embodied CO₂, Reduce operational CO₂ emissions, Heat island effect.

Sustainable Mobility And Accessibility

Mobility: Alternative transportation, public transportation, parking.

Accessibility: Wayfinding, Equity & social justice, Walkability & accessibility.

Integrative Social And Economic Resilience

Social Resilience: Provision of utilities, Participatory approach, Enhancing social networks, Diversity of land use, Provision of public open space, social inclusion, Transparency and accountability, public space and community amenities, Affordable housing.

Economic Resilience: Local participation in reconstruction, Economic development & capacity building Asset/facility management, Life cycle cost Affordability and feasibility, Access to agricultural land Access to employment Land tenure.

Education: Awareness of climate/environmental risks, Preparedness for climate and environmental risks, and Training for green energy jobs.

Health And Wellbeing

Social & mental wellbeing: Community needs and notions of wellbeing, Biophilic design, Healthy clean and comfortable environment.

Safety: UXO (Unexploded Ordnance) clearance, Accessibility of emergency vehicles, Disaster Risk Reduction, Public health and safety, Construction soundness, Mold & dampness prevention, Structural safety, and Construction site safety.

Comfort: Air quality & ventilation, Thermal comfort, Lighting, Noise, acoustics & vibration, Daylight & views.

Pollution: Air, Water and Soil Noise, vibration, acoustics and light Construction impact.

Heritage

Archaeology: Site assessment, Protection of archaeological sites, Rehabilitation of historic ensembles, single monuments and spaces of cultural practices.

Heritage: Heritage and Identity.

UNDERSTANDING MEASUREMENT, REPORTING, AND VERIFICATION OF CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

The historic Paris Agreement brokered in December 2015 established universal and harmonized measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) provisions for climate change mitigation. A common system of transparency now applies to all countries. MRV is central to effectively implementing the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) submitted under the Paris Agreement, which describe countries' mitigation goals and policies. Measurement is needed to identify emissions trends, determine where to focus greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction efforts, track mitigation-related support, assess whether mitigation actions planned under NDCs or otherwise are proving effective, evaluate the impact of support received, and monitor progress achieved in reducing emissions. Reporting and verification are important for ensuring transparency, good governance, accountability, and credibility of results, and for building confidence that resources are being utilized effectively (Neelam et al, 2016).

There are 3 types of mitigation-related MRV;

MRV of GHG emissions: This is conducted at national, organizational, and/or facility levels to understand an entity's emissions profile and report it in the form of an emissions inventory.

MRV of mitigation actions: (e.g., policies and projects) to assess their GHG effects and sustainable development (non-GHG) effects as well as to monitor their implementation. This type of MRV focuses on estimating the change in GHG emissions or other non-GHG variables.

MRV of support: examples; climate finance, technology transfer, and capacity building to track provision and receipt of climate support, monitor results achieved, and assess impact. Effective mitigation of climate change requires a clear understanding of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and their sources, and regular monitoring of mitigation strategies and their impacts. The practice of “MRV,” which integrates three independent, but related, processes of measurement or monitoring (M), reporting (R), and verification (V), is fundamental in this regard (Ninomiya 2012).

MRV includes the following steps and procedures (Dagnet et al. 2014):

Measure or monitor (M) data and information on emissions, mitigation actions, and support. This may entail direct physical measurement of GHG emissions, estimating emissions or emissions reductions utilizing activity data and emission factors, calculating changes relevant to sustainable development, and collecting information about support for climate change mitigation.

Report (R) by compiling this information in inventories and other standardized formats to make it accessible to a range of users and facilitate public disclosure of information.

Verify (V) by periodically subjecting the reported information to some form of review analysis or independent assessment to establish completeness and reliability. Verification helps to ensure accuracy and conformance with any established procedures and can provide meaningful feedback for future improvement.

APPLICATION OF VARIOUS TYPES OF MRV

MRV of GHG Emissions: MRV of GHG (Green House Gas) emissions entails measuring and monitoring the GHG emissions and removals associated with activities of entities such as countries, organizations, or facilities, reporting the collected data in a GHG inventory or other forms, and undertaking review and verification. The paper discusses MRV of emissions undertaken at the **National level**, which involves measuring, reporting, and verifying the total amount of GHG emissions and removals resulting from human activities in a country. These are often reported in a national GHG inventory categorised across four major economic sectors: energy; industrial processes and product use (IPPU); agriculture, forestry and other land use (AFOLU); and waste. **Organization level**, which involves building an organization-wide inventory of total emissions and removals from all sources (including stationary and mobile sources, and process and fugitive emissions) within the organization’s boundary. **Facility level**, which involves assessing total GHG emissions and removals from all sources within a single facility (e.g., power plant, factory, or waste disposal site), as opposed to an entire organization, to produce a facility-level inventory (Neelam et al, 2016). The emphasis on this type of measurement is centred on the role of government in setting rules and guidance for MRV emissions by these entities.

MRV of Mitigation: “Mitigation actions” refer to interventions and commitments, including goals, policies, and projects, undertaken by a government or another entity to reduce GHG emissions. Examples include national climate plans, nationally determined contributions (NDCs), policies setting emissions standards for vehicles, regional emissions trading systems, sustainable palm oil production policy, and rehabilitation projects to improve degraded land. MRV of mitigation actions includes estimating, reporting, and verifying their GHG and sustainable development effects, as well as monitoring their implementation. A mitigation goal is a commitment by an entity to reduce, limit the increase of, or enhance the removal of GHG emissions, or to reduce GHG emissions intensity by a specified quantity, to be achieved by a future set date. Mitigation policies refer to interventions to reduce GHG emissions made or mandated by a government, institution, or other entity, and may include: laws, directives, and decrees; regulations and standards; taxes, charges, subsidies and incentives; information instruments; voluntary agreements; implementation of new technologies, processes, or practices; and public or private sector financing and investment; among others. These are termed mitigation policies and actions. A mitigation

project refers to a specific activity or set of activities intended to reduce GHG emissions, increase the storage of carbon, or enhance GHG removals from the atmosphere. MRV of mitigation actions involves an assessment of the effects and implementation progress associated with mitigation actions (Neelam et al, 2016).

MRV of Support: This refers to climate finance, technology transfer, and/or capacity building. It includes monetary support— such as climate finance for developing a national emissions trading system, investments in low-emissions technologies, and funds toward organizing training workshops for energy auditors. The definition of support also includes non-monetary support— such as technical advice to design national energy efficiency standards or labelling schemes. For simplicity, this discussion limits itself to MRV of monetary support; often technology transfer and capacity building are not monetized (Neelam et al, 2016).

CONCLUSION

Drawing perceptions from the discussions above, it is of essence to note that building and managing a sustainable urban development requires collective efforts, standard best practices, lots of funding and compliance. The Paris Agreement is like a roadmap that guides and aligns all activities of sustainable urban development to a global safe environment. Sustainable urban development does not only account for a healthy, organised and accessible environment, it also accounts for economic development through attracting quality investors and investments which trickles down to job creation, capacity building, workforce maximisation and developed expertise through available learning experiences. In other words, it is safe to say that sustainable urban development is a primary pathway to empowerment and economic breakthrough.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In our fast-changing world, pressing challenges such as environmental degradation and climate change, digital revolution, demographic transition, migration and social inequalities, cities of course are expected to be on the frontline to deliver solutions. Their importance in driving the transition towards a sustainable way of living for all is recognised in the Urban and global agendas, such as Sustainable Development Goals.

Complex challenges like sustainable urban development can only be approached through strong and broad partnerships from the international to local levels between citizens, civil society, industry and relevant levels of government. To encourage cities to play crucial roles in closing the gap between citizens and public institutions, new forms of governance for better policy design and investments are a necessity for cities to foster cooperation and collaboration between urban and rural areas based on functional areas approach, long-term strategic planning, or involving citizens in all stages of policymaking. Government policy must centre on the cohesion of this process through strong inclusivity both in gender and expertise. While funding and policies are of great importance; measuring, monitoring and accountability on project progress is also of importance and must be upheld to a high standard.

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