

# Cities and climate change: Transforming constraints into opportunities

ENERGIES 2050

The role that cities can play in the international effort to tackle climate change is increasingly being recognised. After all, cities house the majority of the world's population, and as a result they consume huge amounts of energy and other resources.

While estimations vary on cities' collective carbon footprint, it is clear that they account for a large part of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions generated from energy use, particularly from buildings and transport. But as such an important contributor to climate change, cities can also be at the heart of the solutions, and this potential is gaining attention within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Subnational governments are a crucial part of the solution as they have capabilities and influence on a wide range of sectors that are important for GHG emissions (e.g. public transport, waste management, urban planning).

Cities are also major 'receptors' to the impacts of climate change. As highlighted by the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, "many global risks of climate change are concentrated in urban areas". This observation is particularly pertinent given that every week the urban population increases by about one million inhabitants, and more than half of these 'newcomers' live in urban slums, where the lack of resilient infrastructure leaves communities all the more vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Cities thus face a double challenge of keeping pace with urbanisation, as well as adapting to the changing climate.

Climate change is inextricably linked with development. While meeting basic needs of course remains the priority, it should be emphasised that activities targeting climate change mitigation can bring significant co-benefits for sustainable development too. To help cities design and implement their sustainable development strategies, including provisions for climate change mitigation and adaptation, the Institute of la Francophonie for Sustainable Development (a subsidiary body of the International Organisation of la Francophonie - a network of 80 countries) and ENERGIES 2050 have co-founded the 'Francophonie's Initiative for Sustainable Cities'. This takes a systematic approach to developing sustainable urban strategies that are consistent and comparable, yet also adaptable to each city's situation. As an illustration, one of the concrete actions underway through the initiative is a capacity building programme for architects and urban planners from 14 African countries on integrating energy efficiency and renewables into buildings and urban design.

Climate change mitigation in cities presents several challenges. Firstly, the very nature of cities complicates mitigation activities, with their diverse characteristics and the interrelated sectors and actors involved. Secondly, the GHG emissions profile of a city (the relative contribution



from different sectors to total emissions) varies a great deal from one city to another, making a 'one size fits all' solution virtually impossible. Thirdly, however willing subnational governments may be to take action on climate change, they often face considerable institutional, technical and financial barriers.

Concerning the financial barriers, international climate finance can provide part of the solution, for example through projects under the UNFCCC's flexibility mechanisms, such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM). Some promising examples of urban CDM projects have been implemented, for example Bogotá's TransMilenio bus rapid transit system and Mexico's sustainable housing programme. However overall, cities are so far hugely underrepresented among climate finance projects; particularly when compared to their high mitigation potential. It is in this context that the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) recently published 'Climate Finance for Cities and Buildings: A Handbook for Local Governments' to raise awareness about climate finance among local stakeholders. This handbook provides an overview of the main climate finance mechanisms, discusses their relevance in the urban context, and presents key considerations for their measurement, reporting and verification (MRV). ENERGIES 2050 is the lead author of this Handbook, which forms part of the NGO's broader efforts to implement the great transition towards a sustainable and equitable energy future ■

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

ENERGIES 2050 is a non-profit non-governmental organisation (NGO) working on the 'Great Transition' towards a more humane, plural and united society, bringing peace and respecting the common goods of humanity. Website: [www.energies2050.org](http://www.energies2050.org) Email: [contact@energies2050.org](mailto:contact@energies2050.org)

## MORE INFO

- The Francophonie's Initiative for Sustainable Cities: <http://bit.ly/1F9swCP>
- UNEP 2014: Climate Finance for Cities and Buildings: A Handbook for Local Governments: [www.unep.org/publications](http://www.unep.org/publications)
- ENERGIES 2050 at COP20: <http://bit.ly/1zc4PqW>