INTERVIEW with Stéphane Pouffary

Stéphane Pouffary is Chair of the UNEP-SBCI Advisory Board as well as Chief Executive Officer, Founder and Honorary President of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) ‘ENERGIES 2050’. Stéphane has been working in the international cooperation field for more than 25 years. He also conducts research on links between climate change, energy issues and citizen behavioural change at the Ethnology and Anthropology Laboratory of the University of Nice Sophia Antipolis, France. He works with several national and international institutions as well as several international NGOs and networks.

In your experience, what are some of the main obstacles to energy efficiency in the built environment faced at the international level and at a (developing) country level?

POUFFARY: The complex and varied nature of the built environment means that implementing energy efficiency measures can be difficult to standardise and replicate. Among different urban areas, the relative contribution from different energy consumers and sectors varies greatly according to factors such as city size, density, economic activity, location and urban planning. This means that the approach to energy efficiency must be tackled case by case.

Access to finance for implementing energy-efficiency measures also remains a challenge in the face of widespread budget constraints and varying levels of awareness and capacity among the stakeholders and decision-makers involved. At the international level, financing mechanisms to support energy efficiency have been established, but few are well suited to the urban environment.

What place do you see for Nearly Zero-Energy Buildings in developing and least developed countries?

POUFFARY: As energy-performance policy develops over time, the construction sector must evolve accordingly, and Nearly Zero-Energy Buildings form a key part of this evolution. For the construction of new buildings, it is imperative that adapted and progressive standards are established for thermal performance. Over time, construction practices must change to take energy performance into account throughout the entire construction chain. While there are already many pilot projects in developing and least developed countries, it is clear that progress could be accelerated with a suitable regulatory framework in place and appropriate support mechanisms.

What role do you see governments playing in promoting action on energy efficiency at the international level?

POUFFARY: Each actor has an essential role to play. It’s a shared responsibility for which states must play a leading and coordinating role. At the international level, it is important to work on methodologies capable of accurately demonstrating building performance while allowing for the context of developing countries and their heterogeneity. It is strategic not to focus solely on new buildings, since for many countries the existing building stock is already significant and often has low energy performance. It is also important to prevent the ‘locking in’ of high energy consumption in future by ensuring that more energy-efficient technologies and behaviours are established as soon as possible. Overall, buildings must be a key pillar in the transition towards low-carbon development.

What role do you see corporations playing?

POUFFARY: Corporations have a central role to play in this transition, as demonstrated by the many and varied initiatives already under way. Today we must continue to develop such...
activities, by bringing actors together and sharing good practice in order to accelerate the process.

What were some of the key outcomes from Rio+20 and the Climate Talks for Buildings and the Built Environment?

POUFFARY: There was a lack of binding commitments made at Rio+20 regarding the role of cities and the built environment or for enhancing cities’ capacity to take action, leaving much to voluntary action.

At the recent climate talks, while progress on agreeing emissions targets was largely postponed to 2015, support was shown for Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) and a New Market Mechanism, both of which have potential for funding action in the built environment. The first ‘Cities Day’ was introduced as an official side event, marking a milestone in recognition of cities at the international climate negotiations.

What tools/studies would you most like to see developed to further energy efficiency at the global and at the national (developing-country) level?

POUFFARY: Energy-efficiency initiatives already under way should be brought together to facilitate international knowledge transfer and develop replicable methods. This aims to help implement a sustainable urban strategy – within which energy efficiency is one of the pillars – by uniting the many existing initiatives under way in cities, to share best practice and to develop a toolkit of common methodologies and indicators.

The development of a New Market Mechanism under the UNFCCC presents an opportunity to develop much-needed tools such as standardised baselines, default values and a suitable MRV (Monitoring Reporting and Verification) framework.

What are the main aims of UNEP’s Sustainable Buildings & Climate Initiative?

The mission of UNEP-SBCI (Sustainable Buildings & Climate Initiative) is to provide a common voice for stakeholders in the building sector on the topics of sustainable buildings and climate change. It aims to:

- provide a neutral platform for international cooperation, dialogue and action;
- identify barriers and enabling measures, e.g. Common Carbon Metric;
- develop tools and methodologies, e.g. baselines using a lifecycle approach;
- perform pilot projects to encourage adoption of sustainable buildings.

ENERGIES 2050 and SBCI are working on an ‘Urban Carbon Mechanisms Handbook for Local Policy Makers’, which will present key carbon and climate finance mechanisms within the context of cities and buildings.

More information at: www.unep.org/sbci/