



Crafting indicators & a monitoring framework for urban sustainability and balanced territorial development at all geographical scales

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Side Event Report
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There is no doubt that the overall success of the Post-2015 Development Agenda hinges on the sustainable development of cities and other human settlements. This was made clear by the speakers at our side event, which revolved around the formation of an indicator framework for measuring development progress in the urban context. Representatives from a number of organizations, including UN-HABITAT, IFAD, the Government of Catalonia, and others, reminded those in attendance that cities and human settlements are where much of our success rests, where great dangers to the environment are created, and also where great opportunity lies dormant.

The panel included:

- *Dr. Eugenie L. Birch, University of Pennsylvania*
- *Mr. Raf Tuts, UN-Habitat*
- *Mr. Zak Bleicher, IFAD*
- *Ms. Mireia Cañellas Grifoll, Government of Catalonia – On behalf of nrg4SD*
- *Ms. Seema Parkah, Mission of the Republic of Singapore*

The primary questions for discussion were:

- *What are the critical elements to be measured across the SDG 11 targets? What are the challenges and the opportunities?*
- *What lessons can be learned from current indicators and monitoring mechanisms applied by governments? How are governments preparing for measuring and monitoring SDG11? How can geospatial technology help in crafting targets and monitoring their progress – particularly targets 11.3 on planning and management, 11.7 on public and green space and 11.a on rural urban linkages?*

Dr. Eugenie Birch stressed the critical importance of cities to the success of the overall Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). She mentioned that indicators for SDG 11 must make sense in the urban context, that they should revolve around the needs of people and for the delivery of services, including housing, transport, public space, and other crucial aspects of a healthy life. In some sense, it is important to see how the SDG 11 indicators can service the other goals and ultimately, shift the focus on the importance of the very spaces human beings occupy. It must be understood that urban indicators can help serve the framework as a whole and act as a catalyst for development for a wider population, not only for those living in urban environments.

Geospatial and satellite data can help us better understand territorial development at all geographical scales and provide us with the means to actually pinpoint how best to deliver services and to whom. According to *Mr. Raf Tuts*, with proper capacity building at all levels of government and through national ownership, geospatial data can be a means through which urban and rural sustainable development is achieved. Geospatial data can track the spatial

configuration of human settlements and provide a better understanding of the needs of communities. Ultimately, harnessing data with new technologies will not only be integral to the success of the SDGs, it will also be crucial to the successful monitoring and implementation of the HABITAT III New Urban Agenda.

Sustainable urban development must be measured in relation to rural development. **Mr. Zak Bleicher** stressed that the interlinkages between these two realities, urban and rural areas, are not only an important policy discussion that is finally gaining traction, but also a palpable reality. Cities cannot function without rural areas and rural areas depend on cities for a number of their economic and governance needs. Indicators for SDG 11 must not only be quantitative, but qualitative in the sense that there is a need to see how best to link real sustainable urban development to that of rural areas. There is a hope that data will be disaggregated across rural and urban areas throughout the post-2015 agenda, with a focus not only on infrastructure and services, but also on governance, information flows, ICT, and other issues.

A number of success stories from cities around the world show us that urban development need not occur in a vacuum. According to **Ms. Mireia Cañellas Grifoll**, relying on the expertise and knowledge of subnational and local authorities, national governments can utilize best practices to ensure the delivery of services as per global sustainable development policy. Local and subnational authorities can play a role in supporting national efforts to collect data, as well as build capacity and develop infrastructure. Therefore, partnerships and synergies between different levels of government are a key to the success of the sustainable development agenda as many cities and regions have already been able to implement policies that have served their populations. As stated by **Ms. Seema Parkah**, places like Singapore are using indicators that have helped them track their success and measure the livability of the spaces in which people reside. Thanks to these efforts, the backwater city that Singapore once was has been transformed into the economic powerhouse it is today.

During the *Q&A session*, participants asked questions on a number of issues, including on the needs of older people in the context of SDG 11 indicators, the apparent underrepresentation of rural communities at the UN, and the need for multidimensional indicators. Several of the panelists responded to these questions. It was noted that in terms of older peoples, social protections are critical. This is especially true for groups of older persons who are often ignored by policymakers, namely older farmers. On the issue of the lack of representation of rural communities at the UN, it was acknowledged that this is not necessarily the case. Since some countries are more rural than urban, it is often the opposite that is true: That urban communities are often underrepresented, due largely to political realities at the national level. On the question of multidimensional indicators, it is critical to have simple and clear indicators that can serve several targets. It is also important to be careful how data disaggregation is carried out. It seems that at the moment, work is done primarily in binaries, like urban vs. rural. If the focus on

binaries remains, many other issues will be missed, thus reducing the potential effectiveness of the indicators for SDG 11.

Ultimately, the panel made it very clear that sustainable urban development is the cornerstone of the entire Post-2015 Development Agenda. The majority of the world's population depends on policies that can usher in an era where cities are recognized as the core of development. As centers of governance, trade, finance, opportunity, and population growth, cities can and should be more than simply a single development goal and a few targets. Indicators for urban development are also indicators for general sustainable development and the time has come to act on this pressing reality.