

Cities, Regions and Built Environment Day 11 at Glasgow COP 26

The first thing to say of the Cities, Region and Built environment day on the 11th of November, the last full day of Glasgow COP 26. was that it should have been scheduled earlier in the two-week programme. Over half of the world's population live in cities. We know that urban buildings account for 40% of global carbon emissions each year and “the value chains of cities are attributable to 68% of all global annual greenhouse emissions, by UN estimates. The UN also estimates that 1.6 billion people living in cities will be regularly exposed to extremely high temperatures and over 800 million people living in cities across the world will be vulnerable to sea level rises and coastal flooding by 2050.” These numbers do not include rural populations who are already migrating to cities as a result of harvests failing due to climate change in countries where subsistence farming is a substantial part of the economy. The migration to cities is already increasing the informal communities who have no jobs, land tenure, sanitation, education, or housing.

Sadly, delaying the official Cities and Built Environment day plenaries and side events to the last full day of COP means many of the key issues, happening now in real time of the climate crisis, were not raised or considered for debate or negotiations, nor amplified in the press. Several experts I spoke to said there is a case for “no plans” as the climate crisis races ahead faster than plans can be formed - and engulfs the most vulnerable communities. That said, this was the first time Cities and Built environment was allocated a full day at any COP meeting. In the larger scheme of COP conferences this was dramatic progress, a day which the COP 26 presidency had promised would bring together national, regional and city level leaders, alongside the private sector, to deliver deep collaboration to accelerate climate action across the built environment over the next decade.

Fortunately, many did not adhere to the UNFCCC official programme and there were numerous pavilions dedicated sessions to cities, the built environment, urban planning, architecture and side events on urban adaption, mitigation and resilience throughout the two weeks of COP 26. For example: Accelerating climate innovation for cities and communities, Urban Resilience and the NDCs: How should the urban resilience practice evolve to help unlocking the full potential of the NDCs, Cities at the crossroads – The UN System helping cities to accelerate climate action, Shelter - UNFCCC GLOBAL INNOVATION HUB EVENTS AT COP 26 - urbanization in the global south, New dimensions of Water Resilience for the Urban Sector, Unlocking Net Zero in Cities through Sustainable Digital Transformation and Innovative Solutions, Advancing Equity in Cities—The Bedrock for Transformative Climate Action, Innovate 4 Cities Conference Presentation with UN Habitat. Meanwhile the Building to COP Coalition called for emissions from building projects globally to be halved by 2030, and to reach net zero life-cycle emissions for all buildings by no later than 2050.

1. For all countries to include full building decarbonisation targets, concrete policies and measures and related implementation mechanisms in their NDCs.
2. To have 1,000 cities and at least 20% of the largest built environment businesses by revenue committed to the UN's Race to Zero.
3. For the sector's stakeholders unite behind a single voice and ambition towards shared goals. Namely, that by 2030, 100% of new buildings must be net-zero carbon in operation and embodied carbon must be reduced by at least 40%; and by 2050, all new and existing assets must be net zero across the whole life cycle.

On Cities day, 11th of November COP 26, the London mayor, Sadiq Khan, chair of a global alliance of cities announced \$1bn for electric buses. Khan is chair of the C40 group of 97 major cities, representing more than 700 million people and a quarter of the global economy. On cities day Khan told the UN secretary-general António Guterres and other delegates that C40 had mobilised an international alliance of investors to deliver \$1bn (£750m) for zero-emission buses in Latin America. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/nov/11/sadiq-khan-cop26-cities-climate-electric-buses>

A key cities event relevant for CHEC took place early on in the Green Zone on November 2nd - Urban informality & inequality – a call for global climate justice. This event asked how do we strengthen climate change action to achieve climate justice by taking account of urban informal communities and inequality, alongside climate change vulnerability?

The event was organised by Cities Alliance <https://www.citiesalliance.org/> with the director Dr Greg Munro (formally of the CLGF), Emilia Saiz, Secretary General of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum <https://www.clgf.org.uk/> and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) which included IIED <https://www.iied.org/> and the director of human settlements David Dodman taking over the role of David Satterthwaite. This was one of the few events where women from informal communities, the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor, affiliate of Slum Dweller International (SDI) <https://sdinet.org/> and women from WEIGO, the Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing - a global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women <https://www.wiego.org/> had a voice alongside local government and academics for urban planning, UK FCDO, and the Deputy Director General, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany. The keynote speech was by Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr Mayor of Freetown in Sierra Leone addressing the impact of climate change on rural migration to cities and responses by academics who shape and translate the discussions into policies.

This event included several of CHEC's long term associates which provided a wonderful opportunity to re-establish important networks for CHEC, and discuss potential future projects with those who likewise champion community-led efforts for human ecology with the most marginalised communities across the Commonwealth and the Global South.

Other urban and cities events took place at UNFCCC innovation Hub, the Resilience Hub, the Capacity Building Hub, with the role of Cities water resilience work – Framework and action plans. and most importantly the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) the Multilevel Action pavilion – the Voice of Cities <https://www.cities-and-regions.org/multilevel-action-pavilion/> with ICLEI and UN HABITAT, UNDP, UNEP, local stakeholders and NGOs addressed the NDCs in cities and how to evaluate progress.

The nationally determined contributions (NDCs) are at the heart of the Paris Agreement and the achievement of these long-term goals. NDCs embody efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change and mitigation including transparency. A few presentations of NDCs for cities focused on community-led efforts, including diversity in the regions, and championed public transport, while others did not. Those of us attending COP 26 heard from the indigenous people, and youth, women, yet if a country does not have the political will or finance then the NDCs of cities do not address and priorities engagement with indigenous people, informal marginalised communities and civil society, and their voices, and their efforts will not be addressed. Equally, the lack of human rights will block their efforts from inclusion.

In this respect COP 26 provided a good platform to learn and network with those who are working on leading edge urban solutions to climate adaptation and resilience. IIED hosted an event with Climate Investment Funds, International Development Enterprises in the Resilience Hub called **A global tour of local government authorities implementing an inclusive locally-led adaptation.** “Approaches from Cambodia, Zambia, Nepal, Bangladesh, The Gambia, Mozambique, Mali and Senegal showcased how local government authorities are successfully implementing inclusive climate adaptation at the local level – and in doing so, addressing the root causes of climate vulnerability and inequality.”

Some organisations and UN agencies had more prominence in the urban and cities sector to advise on NDCs globally than others. If an organisation and agency is approved as an implementation partner by the Green Climate Fund, <https://www.greenclimate.fund/about/timeline> it means they are eligible to work on programmes in urban capacity building in many countries (green transition energy projects, the provision of green climate resilient infrastructure etc.). For example, UNEP DTU (based in Denmark) <https://unepdtu.org/> can work in countries receiving funding from the Green Climate Fund and provide research-based advisory services to assist developing countries deliver on the Paris Agreement in cities and sustainable development goals. UNEP DTU led a large capacity building event at COP 26 on carbon neutrality in cities through sustainable energy transitions - to show case their work on district heating and cooling, and building energy systems - with many government energy ministers in the audience. In contrast, UN-HABITAT (<https://unhabitat.org>) and other organisations with a long history of urban work for equitable cities with inclusive participation and evaluations in the state of the world’s cities report are not yet accredited by the Green Climate Fund ! Therefore, UN-HABITAT is not included in these efforts. This is how urban knowledge and implementation can get stuck in siloes and why increasing green finance accreditation will enable better integration of efforts for adaptation and resilience in cities.

There were many examples where climate finance for cities and climate justice for marginalised urban communities were challenged. We all saw the marches of young people shouting “climate justice.” There were many discussions on the need for more locally driven urban solutions, more climate education, more partnerships, and more finance for urban climate resilient infrastructure. There was also inspiring community-led examples of models that were working; countries making the effort to explore locally- led climate finance to include civil society engagement in their urban NDCs. In these models the voices and efforts of indigenous people, those most marginalised, youth - - and the work of NGOs like CHEC and others have more opportunities to provide human ecology solutions for adaptation and resilience in cities and the built environment. It is important for CHEC to know of these innovative solutions and examples some of which are listed below:

An event with IIED, and the Huairou Commission <https://huairou.org> a women-led social movement of grassroots women's groups from poor urban, rural, and indigenous communities, working in over 45 countries brought together stakeholders from local urban communities, social movements and NGOs with institutions financing climate action, giving them opportunities to highlight innovative strategies and partnerships to connect their priorities into public decision-making processes and the major barriers to impacting global policy and financial institutions.

Yet another event hosted by Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative, World Resources Institute, Climate Finance Group of Latin America and the Caribbean asked how can governments from Africa, Asia and Latin America increase funding for resilience through their national budgets? This session explored some of the domestic financing sources and mechanisms that governments have tapped into, to finance climate resilience.

Finally, an event called **Getting money where it matters – new initiatives for scaling-up locally led urban adaptation**. More than 50 organisations have endorsed the principles for locally-led adaptation in 2021, committing to reforming top-down approaches for delivering climate finance, to enabling locally-led interventions, where decisions are made at the lowest appropriate level to deliver finance to communities at frontline of climate change. Central to this is connecting national and local actors as well as collaboration across actors and sectors.

<https://www.iied.org/significant-new-support-for-locally-led-adaptation-principles>

The session announced new actions from national governments and development partners to scale up locally-led adaptation globally in accordance with the principles. Danida, Sida, USAID and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs are the latest donor agencies to endorse eight principles for locally-led adaptation, developed to help ensure that local urban communities are empowered to lead sustainable and effective adaptation to climate change at the local level.

Reflecting on all the city events over the two weeks of COP 26, very few cities and the built environment addressing climate adaptation and resilience at COP 26 included the principles of urban spatial planning for healthy cities. Only recently published, the new international WHO and UN-Habitat publication on healthy urban planning by Marcus Grant has yet to be implemented across the world. Marcus is a health and spatial planning specialist, a member of the Supporting Healthy Inclusive Neighbourhood Environments Health Integration Team (SHINE HIT) and an Expert Advisor to WHO's European Healthy City Network. His source book is endorsed by the director general of WHO Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and the executive director of UN-HABITAT Maimunah Mohd Sharif and is awaiting development funding for implementing capacity building for global cities.

<https://www.bristolhealthpartners.org.uk/latest-news/2020/06/08/who-and-un-habitat-launch-a-sourcebook-for-healthy-urban-planning/1323>

There may be an opportunity for CHEC to collaborate with Marcus on a CHEC journal for healthy cities, human ecology and climate crisis in preparation for COP 27. Considering this was the first COP meeting with a dedicated day to Cities, Regions and the Built Environment, there will be a great deal more focus on cities for COP 27 which will take place in Egypt next year – and getting urban planning for healthy cities on the agenda may well be something CHEC can contribute to.

Footnote: During COP 26 the UK Government launched an Urban Climate Action Programme (UCAP), which will provide £27.5m to at least 15 cities in developing countries across a three-year period. Germany signalled its support for the initiative post-launch, so there may well be more funding added. Cities including Lagos, Johannesburg, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Lima, Bogota and Mexico City will be among those set to benefit from the initial funding, which will be used to decarbonise public transport systems and energy systems, improve climate risk assessments and make waste management more sustainable.

