



THE GLOBAL GOALS
For Sustainable Development

This review of the 2030 Agenda is part of an analysis commissioned to IIED by Cities Alliance that aims to help a range of urban development actors understand how six global agreements can support the advancement of sustainable urban development.



International Institute
for Environment
and Development

The 2030 Agenda

In September 2015, 193 national government representatives adopted the [Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) at the UN General Assembly.

It provides the most comprehensive and visionary global agenda to date: its 17 SDGs and 169 targets set a clear framework for tackling the economic, social and environmental aspects to achieve sustainable development.

Strengths

With SDG 11 to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable,” cities are prominently reflected for the first time in an international agreement.

There are many other SDGs with an urban and territorial dimension, such as poverty, gender, water, sanitation, electricity, education, health, and peaceful societies.

Better urban development and good urban governance are needed to achieve the 2030 Agenda. Both contribute to sustainable consumption and production and sustainable use of oceans, seas, and terrestrial ecosystems (SDGs 12, 14 and 15), for example, and both are fundamental to achieving economic success, industrial development, and resilient infrastructure (SDGs 8 and 9).

Challenges

There are a range of specific areas in which the 2030 Agenda inadequately engages with critical issues for urban development. For instance, it greatly understates the scale and depth of urban poverty due to higher living costs in urban areas with a universal poverty line of USD 1.90 per person a day.

Similarly, health risks that are larger for low-income urban dwellers are not reflected within the statements about universal access to quality health care. Overall, the 2030 Agenda fails to account for how contexts and the necessary responses in rural and urban areas differ.

The 2030 Agenda takes note of the role of subnational actors in paragraph 34: “We recognise that sustainable urban development and management are crucial to the quality of life of our people. We will work with local authorities and communities to renew and plan our cities and human settlements so as to foster community cohesion and personal security and to stimulate innovation and employment.”

Local governments and civil society representatives, as well as urban development specialists, were directly engaged in the negotiation process and to some extent had their priority concerns reflected in the agenda.

Beyond these realities, there is still insufficient recognition of key roles of local and regional governments and urban civil society in addressing most of the SDGs. It remains an agenda focused on national governments, goals and monitoring. For example, progress on the SDGs is reviewed at the High-Level Political Forum through Voluntary National Reviews prepared by member states. Very often, reporting and recommendations are informed through national data, neglecting implementation at the local level due to lack of disaggregated data in many countries.

It is estimated that 110 out of 169 SDG targets require the direct meaningful engagement of local government and actors. To be successful, it will be vital for each country to specify roles and responsibilities, as well as enabling conditions for implementation at the local level. The breadth and ambition of the 2030 Agenda is such that it necessarily requires inter-governmental collaboration, both between sectors and governance tiers.