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New Report Highlights Raft of Inspiring Examples of Transformative Actions by Cities and Local Governments

Policies Can Be Replicated and Upscaled to Help World Realize Green Economy, Says Report

Rio de Janeiro, 16 June 2012 – A raft of transformative and inspiring policies by cities and local governments, which can assist in creating a sustainable 21st century, were spotlighted in a new report released today by ICLEI – Local Government for Sustainability and the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).

Global Environment Outlook 5 (GEO-5) for Local Government cites dozens of policies, from Cap and Trade systems in Tokyo to environmental management in Windhoek, Namibia, that show transformative action at a local level can feed into global goals and slow or halt environmental degradation

The report says that local government has played a central role in sustainable development and shaping the transition to a Green Economy, and makes recommendations that can support their work and help transfer their successful policies to other cities and countries.

The study is a companion report to GEO-5, a recently released comprehensive assessment of the state of the environment coordinated by UNEP.

The GEO-5 report cautions that if humanity does not urgently change its unsustainable patterns of production and consumption of natural resources, then governments will preside over unprecedented levels of damage and degradation.

Cities and local governments, which already experience many environmental strains, will face further challenges as a result, particularly in face of growing populations and urbanization, which GEO-5 identified as a key driver of environmental change.

Energy security, access to water and sanitation and biodiversity can all be adversely affected by growing cities unless local governments factor them into their planning for cities sprawling ever outwards.

Despite the challenges, cities and local governments have been at the centre of efforts to respond to environmental change even as the global and national response remains weak.

“The world is rich in local policies, initiatives and projects, and in the absence of strong international action, their responses represent beacons of hope,” said UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner. “For example, climate change was a focal point for local action even before the introduction of international climate mechanisms.”

GEO-5 said that meeting an ambitious set of sustainability targets by the middle of the century is possible if current policies and strategies are changed and strengthened. Many of the examples of success in the report were carried out at a local level in the world’s cities and towns, where over half of the global population resides.

ICLEI builds on these case studies in the report for local authorities, which highlights the best policies and calls for cities and local governments to continue to take action. To speed-up realization of sustainable development and the internationally agreed goals, local government must be supported by global and national leadership on the environment.

“Cities and local governments play an important role in providing examples that can be replicated, and so their contribution to meeting goals and targets should be recognized as crucial,” said Konrad Otto-Zimmermann, Secretary General of ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. “They are already showing that radical changes are possible, and world leaders can build upon these achievements at Rio+20.”

Some of the examples of successful policies and actions by cities and local governments highlighted in the report follow:

- A public-private partnership in Pangkalpinang, Indonesia, has transformed an old tin-mining area into a botanical garden with new ecological services, including water supplies, for local communities
- Tokyo has developed a Green Cap and Trade System in addition to Green Buildings programme to reduce carbon emissions by a quarter by 2020, compared to 2000 levels
- Bonn, Germany, is promoting the purchase of sustainable goods and services, acting as a catalyst for the greening of supply chains beyond the city limits
- Bogota, Colombia, has pioneered creative and integrated land-use planning and is well-known for its bus rapid-transit system
- Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, has applied integrated coastal management by establishing urban development boundaries – setting aside critical areas and designating non-developments zones
- San Jose, United States, has introduced a green building policy to reduce energy and water consumption in new residential, commercial and industrial construction projects
- The city council in Windhoek, Namibia, introduced an environmental management plan to protect the water supply at the Goreangab Dam from contamination by a burgeoning informal settlement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The report identifies local authorities as playing a crucial role in implementing multilateral environment agreements, facilitating the transition of cities’ economies to green urban economies and also setting more ambitious sustainable development goals and targets.

It makes the following specific recommendations:

- Global goals, which should be measurable, need to be complemented by regional, national and local goals

- National governments need to be locally responsive by amending institutional, procedural or other arrangements and by providing the legal, technical or financial support required on the ground
- Where goals, targets and national directives are absent, local governments should still take action to support the development of national-level objectives
- Local capacity and enabling conditions are needed to promote sustainable urban development, particularly where rapid urbanization is taking place
- Organizational, institutional, legal and political structures and processes that promote planning and implementation are needed to prevent environmental degradation and build urban and community resilience.

Notes to Editors

- The full GEO-5 for Local Authorities report is available here: <http://www.unep.org/geo/pdfs/geo5/UNEP-ICLEI-GEO-5.pdf>
- **GEO-5** is the most authoritative assessment of the state, trends and outlook of the global environment. The report was produced over three years in a process that involved more than six hundred experts worldwide, who collated and analyzed data from every continent to build up a detailed picture of the world's wellbeing. For more information, including the full report and press release, go here: <http://www.unep.org/geo/geo5.asp>

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