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Convention on
Biological Diversity

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS: KEY IMPLEMENTERS OF THE THREE RIO CONVENTIONS

Local governments are important contributors to both the environmental problems faced by humanity and their solutions. Cities, which are managed by local governments, contain high concentrations of humanity that exert a disproportionate impact on the environment. Local governments are best placed to implement localized remedial action on the ground, including the awareness-raising of their citizens; their collective local contribution is therefore significant. The importance of local governments is increasingly being acknowledged in the context of multilateral environmental agreements, including the three Rio conventions - a necessary step to foster support for their crucial role.

Local governments as key implementers of the three Rio conventions

Urban areas make up less than 3 per cent of the Earth's ice-free land surface, yet they are home to the majority of its human population and exert a disproportionately large impact on its limited resources (Girardet, 1999; Grimond, 2007). Urban areas face particularly serious environmental challenges: they experience high levels of biodiversity loss (McKinney, 2006; <http://www.cbd.int/authorities/>) and have a disproportionate impact on, and susceptibility to, climate change (UN-Habitat, 2008). In addition, desertification resulting from climate change could lead to further stress as entire communities are driven towards cities (<http://www.unesco.org/mab/doc/ekocd/chapter12.html>). Moreover, each of these factors exacerbates the others.

Plans and policies, often formulated at the national or international levels, are typically put into action at the local level. Furthermore, local governments are directly responsible for the management of urban areas, with mandates including land-use planning, transportation, waste management, water services and licensing of businesses, all of which affect the environment. Local governments may interact with, assist and represent other spheres of government, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and academic institutions at the local level. As they occupy the level of government closest to the populace, they are uniquely positioned to raise environmental awareness among producers and consumers.



The green city of Edmonton, Canada

Box 1: Local government

Local governments are responsible for administering smaller areas than are national and federal governments and function within the institutional and geographical scope of the latter.

Many local government activities already respond to the challenges that drive overarching multilateral environmental agreements such as the three Rio conventions. By supporting local action and partnering with local governments, national Governments and others can increase the relevance of the conventions and the efficacy with which they implement them. Similarly, the efficacy of actions at the local level can be vastly increased through support and partnerships and by setting

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goals that aim to achieve the objectives of the three Rio conventions simultaneously.

Local government actions to achieve the objectives of the Rio conventions

Preserving catchment areas and wetlands: Water catchment areas and the river courses that deliver water to dams for human consumption, especially in cities and other densely populated areas, depend on healthy ecosystems, which prevent erosion of slopes and siltation of rivers, regulate water flow and improve water quality. According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, climate change is expected to increase the intensity and unpredictability of precipitation while decreasing its frequency, making these ecosystem services even more critical. Local governments may be responsible for, or influential in, the management of these ecosystems, including the control of water extraction.

Preservation of coastal ecosystems: A disproportionate majority of cities, and of the world's population, is located in coastal areas (UNEP, 2006; UN-HABITAT, 2008). If they remain intact and healthy, coastal ecosystems such as reefs and mangroves can buffer the effects of extreme weather events, which are expected to continue increasing in severity and frequency due to climate change. The protection of coastal ecosystems can produce positive spin-offs for the economy through tourism. Hotel chains in the Riviera Maya region of Mexico, for example, are collaborating with municipal and state government to replant mangrove forests to stave off coastal erosion and protect the shoreline from future extreme weather events (<http://www.cbd.int/doc/newsletters/news-biz-2007-03/?articleid=125>), thereby preserving the beaches that attract tourists.

Education of consumers: Due to the disproportionately large impact of city dwellers on the planet, their environmental awareness is critical. The linkages between biodiversity, climate change and desertification mean that messages on these topics naturally lend themselves to simultaneous delivery. Nowhere are such messages more important than in schools; in recognition of that fact, cities such as Zagreb, Croatia (City of Zagreb Biodiversity Report, 2009) actively support regular environmental education programmes and extracurricular activities in elementary and secondary schools, even in the face of staff shortages. Sustainable procurement: According to ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability, a sizeable proportion of public procurement in the average city is conducted by local governments themselves (www.iclei.org). By making strategic and informed choices, local governments can favour products and services that are appropriate to the implementation of all three Rio conventions. For example, São Paulo's Municipal Secretariat for Environment collaborates with the Greenpeace Friends of the Amazon Cities programme (City of São Paulo Biodiversity Report, 2009), which aims to promote municipal legislation that eliminates timber of illegal origin from all municipal purchases.

Management of biodiverse green open spaces: Local governments are typically responsible for the management of green open spaces and street trees in urban areas. While the primary aim is usually beautification, biodiversity and soil health can benefit depending on the species selected. Studies have shown that well-vegetated cities are less prone to the heat island effect caused by reflective surfaces in built-up areas - a phenomenon that is expected to worsen with climate change (www.urbanheatislands.com).

Control of invasive species: Cities are transport hubs and therefore the primary points of introduction for invasive species (Floerl et al., 2009), which have an impact on native species and ecosystems as well as human health (e.g., through disease and pest species). This makes control of invasive species particularly pertinent in cities. It is predicted that many invasive species, some of which are directly responsible for desertification due to their interference with soil biology and water tables, will benefit from climate change (Dukes and Mooney, 1999). In Walvis Bay, Namibia, which has an average annual rainfall of just 20mm, the fragile biodiversity is being displaced by invasive alien species. This trend is compounded by soil degradation caused by overgrazing and over-abstraction of groundwater. Draft management and operational plans have been prepared in response to these threats (Walvis Bay Biodiversity Report, 2008).

Encouraging urban agriculture: When sustainably managed, and if competition between agriculture and biodiversity is strategically avoided, agriculture in and around cities can contribute to biodiversity, climate change adaptation and combating desertification. Locally produced food with short supply chains requires less transport to cities, improves food security and, if well managed with the assistance of local governments, decreases the probability of poor land-use practices that result in desertification. City administrators in Bonn, Germany, are working in cooperation with the Chamber of Agriculture and local farmers to increase organic farming in the city and promote nature conservation and species protection (Bonn Biodiversity Report, 2008). Furthermore, diversity of agricultural varieties is a form of biodiversity that contributes fundamentally to food security.

Recognition and support of the role of local governments in implementing the Rio conventions

Local governments have only recently been recognized as key implementers of the Rio conventions. The degree and nature of their involvement varies between the three conventions.

Local governments and the Convention on Biological Diversity

After pioneering work by the Cities and Protected Areas Specialist Group of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), more than 300 local governments at the 2006 ICLEI World Congress voted for the establishment of an ICLEI biodiversity workstream, which became the Local Action



Local government leaders gathered at the Mayors Conference side event at CBD COP 9

for Biodiversity programme. The programme is an ICLEI/IUCN partnership in which local governments are engaged to enhance local biodiversity management. This partnership sparked another: the Global Partnership on Cities and Biodiversity, which was proposed in Curitiba, Brazil, in 2007 and was officially launched at the IUCN World Congress in Barcelona in 2008. Chaired by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, its purpose is to coordinate leading players with the common aim of facilitating the role of local governments as key implementers of the Convention. Since then, partners have facilitated a number of relevant meetings and declarations¹ to further this cause.

In 2008, local leaders met at a side event held on the margins of the ninth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and later pledged their support for local-level implementation of the Convention at the high-level segment of the meeting. Decision IX/28 on promoting engagement of cities and local authorities,² adopted partly as a result of their support, marked the first time that local governments were officially recognized by the parties to one of the Rio conventions. Similarly, it is planned that at the forthcoming tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan, a side event, the City Biodiversity Summit, will be followed by local government representation at the high-level segment. Local authorities will pledge their support for the adoption by the Conference of the Parties of a proposed plan of action on cities, local authorities and biodiversity with the intention of complementing decision IX/28 with guidelines on how national Governments can support and facilitate actions by local governments.

Members of the Global Partnership have also produced tools to complement advocacy. Singapore has led the development of the City Biodiversity Index,³ a set of indicators enabling cities to measure their biodiversity management performance. The ICLEI/IUCN Local Action for Biodiversity Programme, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and the Convention on Biological Diversity are developing

two guidebooks,⁴ one to assist local governments in implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity and the other to guide national Governments in their support of local implementation. Both the City Biodiversity Index and the two guidebooks will be launched at the City Biodiversity Summit and will be featured during other events taking place during the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention.

Local governments and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

With support from partners, including the United Nations Environment Programme, ICLEI has ensured the presence of local governments at events relating to the Framework Convention on Climate Change since the first meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, in 1995. Local governments have subsequently constituted the largest observer delegation at Convention meetings. The first Municipal Leaders' Summit on Climate Change and the Urban Environment, at which the international campaign Cities for Climate Protection was launched, was convened in 1993, preceding the entry into force of the Convention in 1994 and the adoption of the binding emissions reduction targets of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. Furthermore, the first local government to act effectively to tackle climate change was the city of Toronto, Canada (Kousky and Schneider, 2008). In 2005, the year the Kyoto Protocol entered into force, two new local government networks were established: the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, comprising some 40 cities with ambitious plans for climate change mitigation, and the World Mayors Council on Climate Change, a political alliance of like-minded and dedicated mayors concerned about climate policies.

In response to, and in parallel with, the Bali Road Map, adopted by the Conference of the Parties to the Convention in 2007 at its thirteenth meeting, ICLEI and United Cities and Local Governments established the Local Government Climate Roadmap to follow international climate negotiations and advocate for the recognition of the key role of local governments in the development of a strong, comprehensive and global post-2012 climate agreement. In the development of the Bali Road Map, the key role of local governments in mitigation and adaptation actions worldwide was recognized by Parties, which supported references to local governments in the draft negotiation text for a comprehensive climate agreement at the thirteenth meeting. Nevertheless, the Copenhagen Accord, which replaced that text as the outcome of the meeting, lacks any reference to local governments. A number of draft decisions were, however, submitted by the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention and are expected to serve as the basis for negotiations in the lead-up to the sixteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, which will take place in Cancun, Mexico, in 2010. The role of local governments in adaptation and capacity-building agendas is recognized in the draft decisions. There is currently strong local government support for a decision to be taken by the Conference of the Parties on concrete action on climate change. To capitalize

on this momentum, the Local Government Climate Roadmap has been extended until the seventeenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties, which is to be held in South Africa in 2011.

Local governments and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

The text of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification indicates repeatedly that local involvement and actions are crucial to the implementation of the Convention; other Convention publications also underscore the importance of local action. Furthermore, the Convention's national action programmes are regularly developed in coordination with local governments. Many actions related to the implementation of the Convention are linked to land management, which is closely related to local actions and the role of local governments. Kazakhstan's national action programme, for example, includes the coordination of the activities of local governments, land users, farmers and non-governmental organizations. Although many local governments are involved in the implementation of actions related to the Convention, their direct involvement and participation in discussions related to the Convention could enhance its implementation and help coordinate the implementation of the three Rio conventions at the local level.

Looking ahead

The local level is optimal for direct and tangible implementation and cooperation with partners. Furthermore, local governments are able to implement solutions to current environmental crises that suit their unique circumstances. Using their own experience and expertise, and with the technical assistance, networking opportunities, profiling and advocacy efforts of organizations specializing in these areas, their efforts can become increasingly effective. Multi-faceted local government initiatives to achieve the objectives of the three Rio conventions simultaneously are complemented by the increasing activities of organizations and other partners working with them. As recognition of local governments and support for their activities increases over time, their capacity to assist their countries in implementing the conventions should increase proportionally.

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- 1 Curitiba Declaration on Cities and Biodiversity (online): www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/biodiv/mayors-01/mayors-01-declaration-en.pdf; Cities and Biodiversity Bonn Call for Action (on line): www.iclei.org/fileadmin/template/project_templates/LABbonn2008/user_upload/Press/BonnCal_FINAL_29May08.pdf; Erfurt Declaration - Urbio 2008 (online): www.fherfurt.de/urbio/httpdocs/content/ErfurtDeclaration_Eng.php; Durban Commitment (online): www.iclei.org/fileadmin/template/project_templates/localactionbiodiversity/user_upload/LAB_Files/Durban_Commitment_14_Aug2008.pdf; Towards Aichi/Nagoya: Second Curitiba Declaration on Local Authorities and Biodiversity (online): www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/city/mayors-02/mayors-02-declaration-en.pdf; Nagoya Declaration - Urbio 2010 (online): www.jilac.jp/URBIO2010/lib/exe/fetch.php?media=nagoya_declaration_urbio_2010.pdf.
- 2 <http://www.cbd.int/doc/decisions/cop-09/cop-09-dec-28-en.pdf>.
- 3 www.cbd.int/doc/groups/cities/user-manual-singapore-index-2009-11-21-en.pdf.
- 4 ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (2010). *Local Action for Biodiversity Guidebook: Biodiversity Management for Local Governments*; and UN-Habitat and the Convention on Biological Diversity (2010). *Supporting Local Action for Biodiversity: the Role of National Governments*.

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