

# CHALLENGES



RAPID  
UNPLANNED  
URBANIZATION  
INCREASED PRESSURE  
ON ENVIRONMENT



GLOBAL WASTE  
CARBON EMISSIONS



RESILIENCE  
CITIES ARE  
VULNERABLE



EQUALITY

SUSTAINABLE  
URBAN FUTURE



PROMOTE  
SOUND URBAN PLANNING

SUSTAINABLE  
LIFESTYLES

# SOLUTIONS



INVEST IN  
RENEWABLE ENERGY

INNOVATION

PROTECT CITIES

# 11

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## Sustainable Development Goals - Their role in Sustainable Urban Future

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### **Abstract:**

The need for Sustainable Cities and Communities is a crying call for the future of the continuation of human settlements. Ideal city, according to goal 11, should be inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. However, while succumbing to the demands of wanton urbanization, we should not ignore the cradles of our indigenous communities, whose timeless traditional knowledge in building resilient spaces have stood the test of time and may give vital pointers towards building sustainable cities of the future. To withstand the many threats our cities are facing now and would face in the future, it is imperative to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the UN which reflect the same. These cities and communities promote social, gender as well as economic equality at all levels and indicate a clear intent to protect cities today and push them towards sustainable growth amidst the rising uncertainties, to build healthy and liveable built environments. The Sustainable Development Goals, the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, adopted by all the United Nations Member States in 2015 is described as a “plan of action for people, planet and prosperity” (UN, 2015).[1] It represents 17 thematic areas that cover the objectives of economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability.

### **Keywords:**

Urban Future, Sustainability, Resilience, Equality

Cities are dynamic machines in themselves creating a universe of their own, fuelled by continuous growth, the ambitions of people migrating to cities for a better life, and new horizons for millions who look for a better future in this era of globalisation. According to the UN, by 2050 half of the world population will be living in cities. The threat of urban sprawl and uncontrolled growth looms over the world. As a reaction, in 2015, all nations of the UN penned down a 17 goal blueprint (Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs) for the world to look up to — focusing on “improving health and education, reducing inequality, and spurring economic growth”. Out of these 17 SDGs, six (6) are related to increasing urban sustainability, liveability and resilience. They are, starting with the primary Goal 11 - Sustainable cities and communities, and is in concurrence to some other goals, namely, Climate Change and Sustainable Cities and Communities [goal 13], Innovation, Industry, Infrastructure and Sustainable Cities and Communities [goal 9], Inclusive Societies and Sustainable Cities and Communities [goal 16], International Economic Parity and Sustainable Cities and Communities [goal 10], and, Gender Equality and Sustainable Cities and Communities [goal 5]. Here we discuss the role each of the SDGs mentioned in context to the role they can play in creating a more sustainable urban future.

We begin with Goal 11, Sustainable cities and communities, which directly addresses the relevance of cities and local governments in fighting poverty and achieving sustainable development by 2030. The quality of life in cities is intrinsically tied to how natural resources are managed and used. This goal aims at building resource efficient cities that combine

productivity and innovation while promoting sustainable lifestyles within communities, thereby lowering social and economic losses as well as reducing environmental impacts. The goal targets providing safe, resilient and affordable housing and access to green public spaces for all, and protecting cultural and natural heritage. It seeks to enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation overall. Moreover, it aims<sup>1</sup> to reduce the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities with specific focus on air quality, municipal and other waste management. One of the primary threats to Sustainable Cities is of course climate change, which is estimated to be to the extent of causing seas to gobble up major coastal areas globally including sizable parts of cities like Jakarta, Mumbai, Chennai and Calicut. So quite rightly, the UN addresses the same in SDG 13.

Goal 13, Climate change aims to take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. This goal targets to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, and plan low emission development pathways. [2] This can be achieved by building inclusive approaches to achieve political, economic, environmental and societal objectives related to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Local governments can promote comprehensive low emission development strategies, including plans for carbon neutral transportation systems, smart grid networks, and exploring green construction techniques in this context. Moreover, amendment of building codes, zoning bylaws, adoption of standards governing construction of buildings, and infrastructure that is more resilient to climate change risks can help achieve this goal. It can also target climate risks derived from a lack of basic infrastructure and amenities for

all, especially the poorest urban residents in the cities.

However in the midst of all this, development has to go on for the progress of nations and their citizens' well-being, so Goal 9 dealing with innovation/infrastructure, industry and innovation, is what we overview next.

Goal 9, infrastructure, industry and innovation, aims to build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation. City or spatial planning and design define the conditions for infrastructure and can trigger technological and social innovation. Infrastructure and industrialization gaps are growing between and within cities. Flourishing areas with ample green spaces coexist beside severely deprived neighbourhoods with inadequate housing, scarce services, and infrastructure. The focus of this goal is to increase resilience through an optimal mix of green, blue and gray infrastructure and an adaptable design that anticipates potential shocks and stresses. Cradle-to-cradle construction (full life cycle planning) is promoted to increase the sustainability of infrastructure and buildings. The objectives of this goal include promoting education, knowledge-sharing, scientific research for sustainable business practices, and planning and implementing local policies for disaster risk prevention. By 2030, this aims to upgrade infrastructure and retrofit industries to make them sustainable, with increased resource-use efficiency and greater adoption of clean and environmentally sound technologies. [3]

The afore-mentioned SDGs do not stand a chance of any meaningful impact unless socially and economically equal, inclusive, strong societies with strong institutional support are created, and that is what the next three SDGs outlined, namely, SDG 16,10 and 5 shall highlight.

Goal 16, Inclusive societies/ peace, justice and strong institutions aim to build effective, responsible, and inclusive institutions at all levels to ensure access to justice for all. Cities provide a wide range of capacity-building possibilities at all levels of the government, as well as forums for conversation and democratic decision-making. In urban areas, peace and integration are intrinsically linked to the transparency and accountability of local governments and institutions. Inclusive spatial planning and urban design accompanied by effective local institutions, are important frameworks for a peaceful society. Conflict-stricken areas demand urgent local actions and resources to relieve affected populations and mediate further conflict. Eventually, this can result in sustainable regeneration of deprived communities. This goal directs towards building safe and peaceful living environments and targets socially deprived neighbourhoods in reducing violence and conflicts. It also identifies new forms of participatory decision-making which has been demonstrated as an effective strategy towards sustainable growth of cities. [4]

Goal 10, International economic parity / reduced inequalities, aims to reduce inequality within and among countries. The income distribution between regions is greatly affected by the distribution of cities and rural areas. The majority of today's inequalities, on the other hand, are the product of poor economic development and planning, as well as uncontrolled urbanisation. Poorly managed urban processes can widen

economic gaps between people and create even more inequality and social fragmentation, rather than significantly reducing poverty. Inclusiveness, universality and sustainability of economic development will have to address this problem. Such initiatives can target human settlement planning that distributes new arriving dwellers, while maintaining social cohesion. [5]

Goal 5, Gender equality, recognizes that gender equality is a critical element in achieving sustainable development. It aims at ending discrimination and violence against women and ensuring that they have equal opportunities in life that men have. Cities offer opportunities for social, economic, cultural and political participation that facilitate gender empowerment. Yet, due to the prevalence of gender inequalities, women and girls often benefit less from urbanization and urban spaces, often based on discriminatory grounds over which they have little or no control. In illegal settlements, where levels of vulnerability disproportionately affect women, youth, and children, these inequalities are particularly pronounced. Addressing such issues in cities has a direct impact on breaking vicious circles of social exclusion. This goal can encourage local governments to enhance responsive urban planning, smart and mixed use of land and public places that are geared equally towards both genders and includes all age groups.

Thus, even though all the afore-discussed SDGs have a few overlapping components, all are contributing to the common goal of a sustainable as well as resilient urban future. In the coming decades, urbanization rate would increase manifold, thus it is more imperative for a sustainable and resilient future. Sustainability and Resilience of cities is possible only when social as well as economic equality exists in an inclusive society, which does not differentiate on the basis of caste, creed, sex, region, religion, etc. So in a way, the United Nations has created a holistic framework to guide efforts towards a sustainable urban future. An ideal city, according to goal 11, should be Inclusive, Safe, Resilient, and Sustainable. Although this is true, the pandemic has reinforced the need for cities to be socially, economically inclusive and equitable in all respects. It's imperative that decision makers and urban planners realize the same and start implementing sustainable principles in future cities they help mold.

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