



Committee: United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

Topic: The question of sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11)

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I. Committee Background

The United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is a specialized subsidiary committee of the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It was established on July 9th, 2013 and is responsible for the United Nations (UN) policy on sustainable development. Furthermore, it is directly linked to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, also known as the Sustainable Development Goals, which are a set of targets established to “end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere” (Sustainable Development Agenda, UN, 2019). The committee meets annually under the guidance of ECOSOC, and every four years with the General Assembly. The HLPF primarily evaluates the progress of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopts intergovernmental political declarations and serves as a platform for partnerships between governments and non-governmental organizations (Sustainable Development, UN, 2019).

II. Topic Information

A) History of the Topic

Sustainable Development Goal number 11, “Sustainable Cities and Communities”, aims to make cities around the world “inclusive, safe, resilient and

sustainable” (SDG Fund, 2020). Currently, an estimated 4.2 billion people, which is more than half of the world’s population, reside in cities. Yet, the United Nations estimates that by 2050 this number will increase to 6.5 billion (Goal 11, UNDP, 2020). More and more people are moving to urban areas in search of employment and better living conditions (English-Online, 2019). The rapid growth of cities has led to the creation of mega-cities, which are metropolitan areas with a population of more than 10 million people. The majority of the world’s megacities exist in developing countries. Some examples include Jakarta, Indonesia with a population of 31 million people, and Delhi, India with 27 million people (World Data, 2019). Thus, the size of these megacities is expected to increase over the next fifty years. However, they currently face multiple challenges which include extreme poverty, crime and air pollution (SDG Fund, 2020).

Poverty is one of the most pressing issues impacting megacities around the world. According to Planning Tank, poverty in urban areas is caused by a combination of overpopulation, lack of quality education and qualifications, and a lack of affordable housing. This has resulted in large sprawling areas called slums to pop up all over megacities (Jagannath, Planning Tank, 2019). UN-Habitat defines a slum as a “highly populated urban residential area consisting mostly of closely packed, decrepit housing units in a situation of deteriorated or incomplete infrastructure, inhabited primarily by impoverished persons” (UN-Habitat, 2007). The majority of these are located in informal settlements on the outskirts of megacities. They often lack quality housing, sanitation, drainage, access to water, and officially recognized addresses. Moreover, living in slums can severely affect a person’s health and well-being. For example, water-borne and respiratory diseases such as cholera and pneumonia are common due to cramped living conditions and insufficient drainage and sewage systems (Krieger and Higgins, American Journal of Public Health, 2002). Even so, the UN estimates that over one billion people live in slums or informal settlements (Goal 11, UNDP, 2020).

Additionally, crime is a growing challenge in megacities. According to the World Economic Forum, criminal acts are common in megacities, especially those in developing countries, because the cities are often “overwhelmed by the scale of urbanization.” For instance, the favelas or slums in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil lack basic needs such as clean drinking water, adequate housing, etc. due to the country’s inability to invest in urban development. As a result, there is a high demand for basic necessities and this creates competition among the population leading to the creation of gangs and the higher occurrence of crimes such as theft and assault (Sampaio, WEF, 2015). Furthermore, megacities have also had a significant negative impact on the environment. A study by the European Commission found that “megacities are a hotspot for higher greenhouse gas emissions that can have a devastating impact on the wider environment” (European Commission, 2011). Nonetheless, according to the United Nations, sustainable development cannot be achieved without “significantly transforming the way we build and manage our urban spaces.” Making cities sustainable means “creating career and business opportunities, safe and affordable housing, and building resilient societies and economies. It involves investment in public transport, creating green public spaces, and improving urban planning and management in participatory and inclusive ways” (Goal 11, UNDP, 2020).

B) Current Issues

Canada: According to National Geographic, Canada has some of the world’s most sustainable cities. These include Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver (Lopez, et al., National Geographic, 2015). Currently, more than 82% of the country’s population lives in cities. In its annual voluntary national review, the government of Canada identified the lack of sustainable homes and buildings in cities as an issue related to goal number 11 that had to be immediately addressed in order to provide all

Canadians with safe and affordable living spaces. In 2017, the country introduced a CAN\$40 billion, 10-year National Housing Strategy in order to enable more Canadians to have “a place to call home by promoting diverse communities and building housing that is fully integrated—close to transit, work and public services—into the community.” In relation, the nation has also pledged to improve the long-term sustainability of homes and buildings by providing citizens with credits and loans to retrofit existing homes and buildings and improve the energy efficiency of appliances and equipment used in them (Canada, Voluntary National Review, 2018).

France: France has made major strides in achieving goal number 11. In its voluntary national review, the country outlined its three major plans in order to improve the lives of its citizens residing in cities such as Lyon, Marseille and Paris. The housing energy renovation plan aims to provide cities with funds in order to renovate 500,000 housing units a year and reduce energy consumption by 38%. Furthermore, through the “Breathable Cities in Five Years” initiative, the country is helping regional authorities for a “five-year period with funding of up to €1 million per action and grants for the purchase of clean vehicles.” Finally, the French government has dedicated €40 billion under its social and urban development policy to finance the renovation of the most “run-down neighbourhoods” in order to improve housing and access to basic necessities (France, Voluntary National Review, 2016).

Israel: According to its voluntary national review, Israel’s population will reach 11 million by 2030 and 15 million by 2048. It is also one of the most densely populated countries with approximately 93% of its population living in cities. The government of Israel has focused on providing affordable housing for all of its citizens and eliminating homelessness. The country has recognized that homeownership is often not obtainable for most citizens, even those with steady and well-paying jobs.

Moreover, housing prices over the past decade have rapidly increased in the nation due to rapid population growth. In order to improve the situation and achieve goal number 11, Israel has pledged to build 2.6 residential units by 2040. These units would be subsidized by the government and be located in areas with public spaces such as parks, close to public transportation and ensure that even low-income households could enjoy high quality and safe housing (Israel, Voluntary National Review, 2019).

C) UN Action

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has taken the lead on addressing Sustainable Development Goal number 11 within the UN system. In order to achieve goal number 11 by 2030, the UNDP has formulated a plan which focuses on creating sustainable cities by improving the environment and promoting clean energy. The UNDP promotes and provides support to UN member states in implementing nature-based solutions, such as the “sustainable management and protection of land, rivers and oceans” so that “countries have adequate food and water, are resilient to climate change and disasters, shift to green economic pathways, and can sustain work for billions of people through forestry, agriculture, fisheries and tourism.” Additionally, the committee has raised leveraging billions of dollars in financing for the use of clean energy, especially in megacities. The UNDP has partnered with cities and industries to “increase the share of renewables in countries’ national energy mix; establish solar energy access to people displaced by conflict; fuel systemic change in the transport industry, and generate renewable ways to light homes for millions of people” (Six, UNDP, 2020). In connection, UN Environment has also been working with governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) across the world to support goal number 11 through the development of “sustainable, resilient, resource-efficient urban areas, integrating a 3D strategy – decoupling, decarbonizing and detoxifying – into urban planning and infrastructure decision-making” (UN Environment, 2020).

III. Essential Questions

1. What are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)?
2. What are the main aims of Sustainable Development Goal number 11, “Sustainable Cities and Communities”?
3. Does your country have any megacities? If so, which ones?
4. What is causing large portions of the population to migrate to cities? What impact has this mass migration had on the quality of life in cities?
5. What are some of the most pressing issues related to megacities? Is your country currently working on addressing any of them? If so, which ones and how?
6. What is your nation doing to achieve Sustainable Development Goal number 11? Has it been successful? Why or why not?

IV. Quorum

- Afghanistan
- Brazil
- Canada
- China
- Egypt
- France
- Germany
- India
- Iran
- Israel
- Japan
- Kenya

- Malaysia
- Mexico
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Russia
- Saudi Arabia
- South Africa
- South Korea
- Syria
- Turkey
- United Arab Emirates
- United Kingdom
- United States

V. Resources

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