

Open Working Group on SDGs

Key messages of Norway/Denmark/Ireland on Sustainable cities and human settlements, sustainable transport

- **Urbanisation** is one of the **defining features of the 21st century**. In less than four decades 70 % of the world's population is expected to live in urban areas. Hence '**Cities are where the battle for sustainable development will be won or lost**', as the Secretary-General's High Level Panel put it. As 60 % of the expected urban area by 2030 still remains unconstructed, there is great potential for addressing the challenges of this rapid urbanization through forward-looking sustainable urban planning and design.
- **The urban dimension is – as we see it – cross-cutting**: It is closely linked to our overall ambition of eradicating poverty, achieving inclusive economic growth, improving the living and working conditions of people and ensuring sound urban environment. The cities of the world are likely to be a key arena when we want to address challenges such as **homelessness and slums, clean and sufficient water and clean air, sanitation and waste, health, education, empowerment of women and youth, sustainable energy and climate change**. In order to ensure sustainable cities, we need an integrated approach to these challenges. The post 2015-process will fail, if we fail to address urbanisation.
- Rapid urbanisation is driven in part by the lack of sustainable livelihoods for rural populations; and sustainable cities also depend on a functioning rural sector for food supply and ecosystem services. We need an innovative focus on the synergies between urbanisation and rural poverty reduction.
- **Urbanisation** may generate a number of **challenges** and as such add to the problems we want to solve. At the same time – because of their advantages of scale, proximity, knowledge and investment potential – the growing cities of the world offer a number of **opportunities**:
- **Take energy**: Around 40% of urban dwellers in the developing world do not have access to energy – yet around 75% of total global energy generated is consumed in cities. Cities also contribute significantly to global greenhouse gas emissions – yet cities have the greatest potential for public-private investments in renewable energy and energy efficient infrastructure.
- **Take health**: Outdoor air pollution is a large and growing problem in many cities, resulting in respiratory disease and millions of premature deaths annually. However, measures to reduce emissions of black carbon and other air pollutants are well known, and more easily implemented in cities than in rural areas. And it may be easier to develop well-functioning health services in urban areas. We also stand a better chance in densely populated communities to succeed in raising the awareness and funds that are needed to replace biomass for cooking with sustainable solutions – thereby reducing the indoor air pollution that claims millions of lives every year, mainly children under five and women.

- **Take waste management:** A vast amount of resources are used and discarded in cities. Waste from cities contains many valuable resources, but insufficient waste collection and management results in environmental degradation and health risks. On the other hand: Waste collection and treatment can be much more efficient in cities than in rural areas, and the potential for recovery and recycling is substantial.
- **Take gender:** Women and girls are frequent victims of violence in cities around the world. Many do not have equal rights to land and property and are excluded from the social and economic security this provides. And too often women are excluded when plans are made and decisions taken. But the same cities offer opportunities to address this situation, such as improved access to sanitation and safe public transportation to schools, work places, shops and markets. Cities furthermore represent opportunities for social mobilisation and women's empowerment. Involving women in decision-making and integrating gender equality in urban planning may improve overall development outcomes in cities and beyond.
- **Take transport:** A key consideration for cities is sustainable transportation. Growing populations in extensive urban areas often face problems of local air pollution, noise and waste of time and resources, while emitting greenhouse gases. Large populations also require efficient transportation systems, and more urbanized areas may in fact give the economies of scale for an extensive public transportation system – addressing many of the problems related to road transportation. Accommodating pedestrians and bicycles, as well as ensuring smooth transitions between modes of transportation, is important.
- **Take climate change adaptation:** As the global climate changes, societies must adapt. Cities have hard surfaces and may have vulnerable buildings and infrastructure, including informal dwellings and slums being built in non-suitable areas. To safeguard people, nature and infrastructure from floods, storms, heat waves, landslides and wildfires, we must plan and build climate robust cities. Changes in infrastructure in cities once built are slow and difficult.
- **Ecosystem benefits:** Ecosystems support human welfare within and beyond cities. Failing to maintain functioning ecosystems around and inside cities leave the urban population vulnerable. Based on multi-scale involvement of actors, actively **maintaining** functioning urban ecosystems can significantly improve human health and well-being by e.g. cleaning air and water, contributing to food security, climate change mitigation and adaptation and providing recreational benefits. As land use change is the largest driver of biodiversity loss, higher density settlements represent a large opportunity to maintain the free services from ecosystems.
- The MDG Target 7(d) on improving the lives of slum dwellers was in fact met some 10 years prior to its deadline. But the challenges are still there – even bigger than they were 10 and 20 years ago.
- **Economic growth and public-private investments**, together with good governance, are essential ingredients for sustainable urbanisation. Sound national and local urban policies and well-functioning local democracies can pave the way for the holistic urban planning that is needed. The role of the – **largely urban – private business sector** is crucial to achieve inclusive economic growth and development.

- Urban planning must address how we can bring people and places together, creating cities that focus on accessibility and protection of areas of special natural, ecological and heritage value. If well planned, **cities can deliver adequate housing, education, health care, infrastructure, transport, water, sustainable energy and reduce the ecological footprints** and increase resilience more efficiently than less densely settled areas.
- Releasing the positive potential of urbanisation requires **strengthened partnerships involving local and national governments, civil society, community-based organisations, international organisations, academia and not least private sector entities in the urban sphere.**