Accelerating progress toward the SDGs through city–led initiatives

May 2021

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C/Can
City Cancer Challenge

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASCO	American Society for Clinical Oncology
C/Can	City Cancer Challenge Foundation
CDIA	Cities Development Initiative for Asia
CRO	Chief resilience officer
CWRA	City Water Resilience Approach
FAO	U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization
GEF	Global Environment Facility
ICLEI	International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives
LMICs	Low- and middle-income countries
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
R-Cities	Resilient Cities Network
SCIP	Sustainable Cities Impact Program
SDG(s)	Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SISHA	Strategic Human Settlements Area Program
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme

INTRODUCTION

With the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) fast approaching, work toward achieving them must intensify and accelerate. As this report demonstrates, cities are uniquely placed to lead the charge.

Two-thirds of the world's population is expected to live in urban areas by 2050, with the majority of urban growth expected to take place in cities within low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Many are already feeling the strain, with inequality growing as already stretched city systems, critical infrastructure and government institutions approach capacity. Growing urban areas also have a huge environmental impact, with increased emissions, solid waste, and demand on energy.

But cities can also act as levers for SDG-focused interventions, amplifying their impact and ensuring resources move faster and go further. Cities are granular enough to coordinate people and resources, but also big enough to generate systemic, long lasting change, and institutions often have core competencies in policy areas that underpin SDGs related to housing, climate change, transport, health, and more. They are also often home to untapped networks and pools of expertise. And by targeting places where people congregate for work, health care, education and social interaction, city-level initiatives are able to improve the wellbeing, safety, inclusion and economic opportunities of bigger populations more quickly and effectively.

Cities are widely recognized as playing a growing role in achieving the 2030 Agenda. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) argues that sustainable development will be impossible without transforming the way cities are built and managed. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also predicts that 65% of SDG targets will not be reached without proper engagement of and coordination with local and regional governments. So while SDG 11 — to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable — is a goal in its own right, it also has a catalytic role to play in driving progress across the rest of the development goals.

There are challenges, however. The needs of local stakeholders are complex and it can be difficult to identify and engage the right community. Many city institutions operate in a top-down or siloed manner, and capacity is often stretched in underserved cities in LMICs.

> The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic underscores the critical role of cities as first responders, with over 90% of cases occurring in urban areas. Devex survey findings indicate 83% of respondents agree that cities are playing a key role in the COVID-19 response.

To realize their potential, city-level initiatives must therefore be equipped with the right strategies, resources, partnerships and expertise. Urban communities must also lead the charge and own the initiatives that could benefit everyone living within their borders and in neighboring communities.

To identify the success factors behind city-led programs, Devex and City Cancer Challenge Foundation (C/Can) conducted a series of in-depth interviews with development professionals leading successful city-level initiatives in LMICs. We sought out leaders and program implementers from city-led initiatives in the SDG space with a strong focus on innovative approaches and meaningful impact.

We also collated insights on common challenges and best practices in implementing city-led approaches to the SDGs, showcasing key lessons learned through in-depth case studies. The activities of these initiatives include gamifying urban design, operating peer-to-peer networks for urban food resilience, scaling city-level environmental protection on a global scale, and much more. Findings were also supplemented with an online survey of nearly 800 professionals and development practitioners in LMICs to understand perceptions and trends around cities as agents of change for the SDGs.

Among the insights gained, findings confirmed that results are stronger and more sustainable when city-led programs are driven by data and a deep understanding of contexts and on-the-ground needs. Initiatives that leverage local expertise and knowledge boost capacity and strengthen city ownership in the long term, while engaged communities generate smarter, tailor-made solutions. Working across sectors in a whole-of-systems approach improves efficiency, boosts resilience and allows multiple, interlinked SDGs to be tackled simultaneously. Bringing together various stakeholders within and beyond individual cities also fosters cooperation and knowledge exchange. This facilitates replication in other locations as well as opportunities for co-funding and multisectoral partnerships. Finally, planning for sustainability and scalability from the beginning is crucial for sustaining gains and accelerating progress toward the SDGs.

With only nine years to go, and significant ground lost during the pandemic, the development community and its partners cannot rely on old approaches to achieve the SDGs. Only by working faster and smarter — and tapping into the transformative potential of cities — will we deliver for the communities we serve.

METHODOLOGY

While this report is not a exhaustive assessment of the existing literature around city-led initiatives to achieving the SDGs, we hope that it contributes to ongoing conversations around the importance of city-led initiatives by capturing perceptions and findings through the survey and interviews, as well as highlighting good practices and examples from the ground.

Defining city-led initiatives

For the purpose of this report, we define city-led initiatives as development-related projects or programs that were conceptualized, proposed, designed, implemented and/or maintained by city-level actors, including but not limited to government actors, nongovernmental organizations, civil society groups, the private sector, and individuals within the community. This report excludes discussions on projects that are merely implemented in the city context, but lack community engagement and participation.

Meet the interviewees

To inform this report, Devex and C/Can conducted in-depth interviews with 21 development professionals working on city-led initiatives in LMICs. The interviewees comprise individuals working in global city networks, multi-donor funding institutions, foundations, city-level government agencies, corporations, U.N. agencies and other traditional global development donors.

Position Type

Program Implementer — 48%

Strategy head — 42%

Technical specialist — 10%
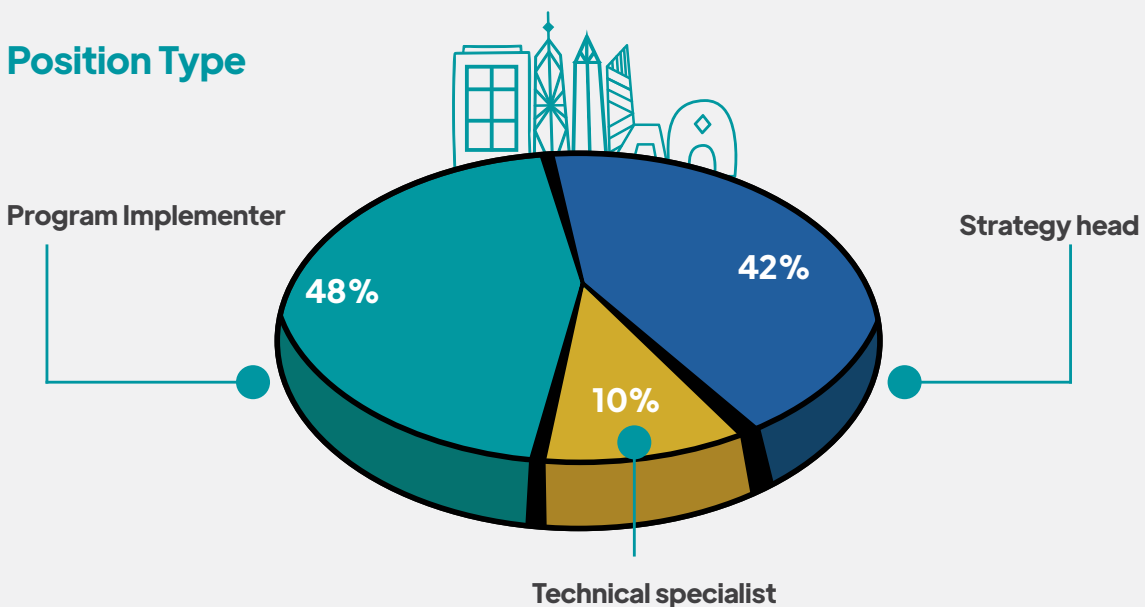
Sector Expertise

57%
Urban Development

19%
Health

10%
Environment

5%
Education

24%
Sustainability

14%
Water, Sanitation
and Hygiene (WASH)

10%
Food and Nutrition

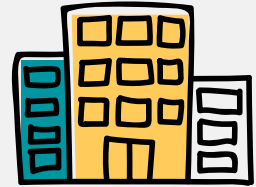**5%**
ICT4D

19%
Public Spaces

10%
Capacity Building
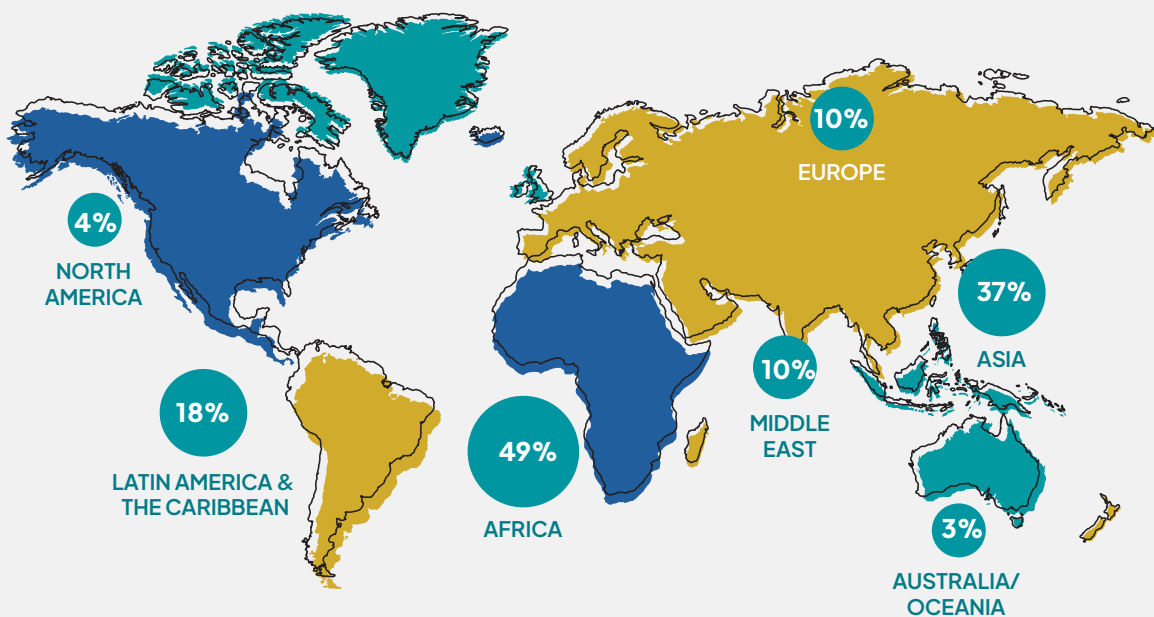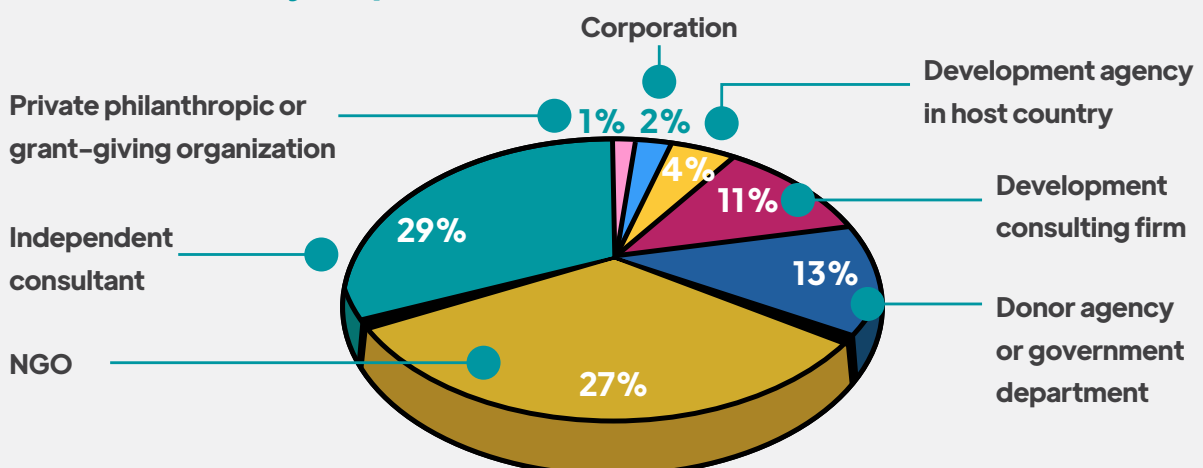
10%
Infrastructure

5%
Climate Change

Online Survey

Devex also conducted an online survey from March 17 to April 5, 2021. This attracted responses from 790 international professionals with experience in city-level interventions.

Where do respondents have the most experience?

10% EUROPE

4% NORTH AMERICA

37% ASIA

18% LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

10% MIDDLE EAST

49% AFRICA

3% AUSTRALIA/ OCEANIA

Where do survey respondents work?

Corporation

Private philanthropic or grant-giving organization — **1%** **2%** Development agency in host country

Independent consultant — **4%**

29% **11%** Development consulting firm

NGO — **13%** Donor agency or government department

27%

Case study profiles

- [City Cancer Challenge Foundation](#) (C/Can) is a multi-sectoral initiative supporting cities to take the lead in the design, planning and implementation of cancer care solutions. C/Can's approach is built on the core principle that cities can drive impact at national level by crafting data-driven solutions with the support of a network of global, regional, and local partners that reflect an understanding of the unique local context. C/Can supports cities around the world as they work to improve access to equitable, quality cancer care.

- The [Global Space Programme at the United Nations Human Settlement Program (UN-Habitat)](#) has been working in over 88 cities to promote transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action. In partnership with Microsoft, the public space program is helping urban poor and marginalized communities design public spaces through the [Block by Block program](#). By utilizing the video game Minecraft, the program's participatory approach has so far revitalized 100 public spaces across different communities.

- The [Resilient Cities Network (R-Cities)](#) is a global network of over 100 cities that brings together urban experts, city governments and community stakeholders to build partnerships and facilitate knowledge and resource-sharing among members. By deploying the City Water Resilience Approach (CWRA), the network utilizes multi-stakeholder collaboration to craft a long-term water resilience plan to address water supply shortages.

- [ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI)](#) is a global network working with more than 2,500 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in over 125 countries, ICLEI influences sustainability policy and drives local action for low emissions, nature-based, equitable, resilient, and circular development. CITYFOOD is a flagship initiative of ICLEI's Global Food Program, launched in partnership with RUAF Foundation in 2013. The [ICLEI-RUAF CITYFOOD Network](#) is a global platform which allows cities and regions to engage and collaborate with experts and partners to learn and build capacity for advancing sustainable and resilient territorial food systems.

- The [Cities Development Initiative for Asia (CDIA)](#) is a multi-donor trust fund managed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Established in 2007 by ADB and the German Government, CDIA receives funding support from the governments of Austria, France, Germany, Switzerland, and the European Union. CDIA is implemented by ADB and Agence Française de Développement (AFD) with the overall mandate to link secondary cities' projects and vision to downstream financing. In Indonesia, CDIA recently completed project preparation studies and provided capacity development support under the Slum Improvement in Strategic Human Settlements Area (SISHA) program. The project seeks to convert 3,000 hectares of informal settlements into more livable spaces.

- The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is an umbrella international organization for cities, local and regional governments, and municipal associations throughout the world concerned with representing and defending the interests of local governments on the global stage. To build capacity among city-level groups and organizations, UCLG developed Training of Trainers modules to localize expertise for the achievement of the SDGs.

- The Global Environment Facility (GEF) is a multilateral trust fund that provided more than $21 billion in grants and mobilized $114 billion in co-financing for environmental action in 170 countries. The GEF's Sustainable Cities Impact Program (SCIP) currently works with 51 cities across 17 countries to support initiatives that tackle systemic drivers of environmental degradation. Its integrated approach prioritizes innovative solutions that increase urban sustainability and resilience while also generating benefits from climate change mitigation and biodiversity conservation. The SCIP also supports knowledge exchange between cities through a global platform.

KEY FINDINGS

As cities continue to play a pivotal role in addressing social and environmental issues around the world, city-led initiatives should play an elevated role within national and global efforts to achieve the SDGs.

Top 3 advantages of a city-led approach to the SDGs:

75%

Community-owned initiatives are more sustainable

53%

Solutions are more inclusive and collaborative

44%

More opportunities for peer-to-peer collaboration and learning

But what makes these community-driven interventions in the urban setting successful? What are the key challenges, and how are cities and their counterparts in the development community working to address these bottlenecks?

Here are the key takeaways based on Devex's survey, interviews and additional research.

1

Effective data use drives strong awareness of city needs

"Data is fundamentally important because it allows you to measure how the city is changing, and understand the key points and areas that you have to address."

Asher Lessels, *Task Manager for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)*

Data-informed solutions are central to achieving the global goals on time, with SDG Target 17.18 calling for greater support to developing countries to increase the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable disaggregated data by 2030.

Designing city-level initiatives without understanding the needs of the community often leads to short-sighted programs that fail to address the most pressing issues in a sustainable manner.

In some cases, the lack of a data-driven approach causes the communities that most need support to be overlooked, whether due to vested political interests or a narrow focus on profit. "To understand what a community needs, you need to speak to the right people," noted Graham Alabaster, Chief of UN-Habitat Geneva Office, United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat).

Conducting pre-feasibility studies to identify gaps at the city level is essential for creating tailored and informed approaches that address the major issues in the right communities. This involves building knowledge of the local context, exploring existing initiatives to avoid duplication, and learning best practices from other groups working in the community. Studies should also take stock of the wider ecosystem, considering factors that may limit the capacity of city leaders and local actors to drive programs.

City-level data should then be integrated into assessments to help program leaders determine priorities. To paint a fuller picture of the local scene, that data should be gathered from a variety of sources and, where necessary, through "non-traditional" means. In contexts where quantitative data is lacking, qualitative information that integrates audiovisual elements with impact storytelling – for example through photographs, narratives or recordings – can also inform decision-making, noted Solophina Nekesa, Professional Officer for Urban Systems at ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI).

> **"A data-driven needs assessment to determine the key gaps in delivery of quality cancer care services in a city is a foundational step in the C/Can model. Building on experience running data collection processes in seven cities, we have developed a new data portal to support the collection of high quality, systems-level data in a way that is inclusive, transparent, secure, and compliant with relevant global and local data regulation."**
>
> *Dr. Silvina Frech*
> *Head of Sustainability, C/Can*

"The quantitative information will give you your skeleton, but the qualitative information will give you the flesh," agreed Katrin Bruebach, Global Director, Programs, Innovation and Impact at the Resilient Cities Network (R-Cities). "That will allow you to understand why things happen or why they are not happening."

For example, with the Block by Block project, UN-Habitat conducts city-wide assessments using the KoBo Toolbox, an open source and offline application that allows users to download georeferenced data in the form of questionnaires or pictures via a smartphone or computer. This enables stakeholders to gather data around a planned public space and its 400-meter radius — including perceptions, noise levels, and other observations.

56%

of survey respondents identify adequate human resources and city-level capacity for data collection as the top enabler of data-driven approaches

Data should also be leveraged to ensure initiatives remain focused on their broader development goals. For example, R-Cities' City Water Resilience Approach (CWRA) applies qualitative and quantitative indicators to each of its goals and subgoals to track progress towards achieving the SDGs, and SDG 6.2 in particular on access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene.

Top 3 enablers to ensure city-led initiatives are data-driven:

56%
Streamlined data collection and reporting mechanisms in public sector institutions

56%
Adequate human resources and city-level capacity for data collection

46%
Data sharing platforms and networks

Cities' own capabilities around data generation and analysis should be also supported to encourage program sustainability.

"In cases where cities do not have the data or they have the data and it's all spread out, it requires a bit of legwork," said Joris van Etten, Senior Urban Development Specialist at the Asian Development Bank (ADB). "But the moment that you are able to show how the data come together to tell your story, that becomes an inspiration to the cities to keep doing that, to try and build these data centers to pull all the information together and visualize them."

The community should also be involved in data collection and interpretation. As well as increasing community buy-in and ownership, this makes the information more broad-reaching and contextual. It also means data are more easily digestible for decision-makers and anyone utilizing them in the future.
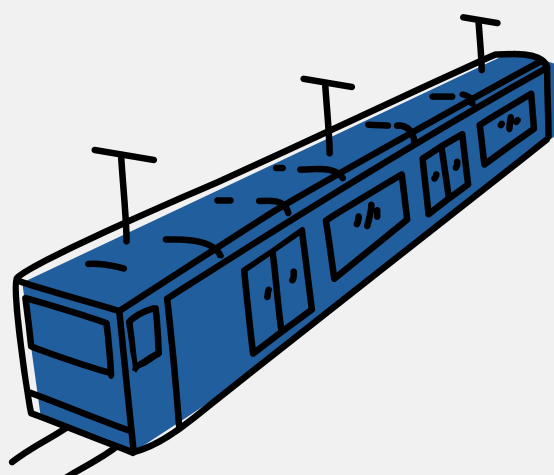
Case Study:
Harnessing data in multidisciplinary health care

City Cancer Challenge Foundation (C/Can) takes a multidisciplinary, data-driven approach to support cities in their planning, design and delivery of cancer care. Leveraging partnerships with all levels of government, civil society, academia, medical experts, private sector, caregivers and patients, C/Can supports cities to improve equitable access to health care to make health coverage more inclusive and sustainable.

Rather than determining interventions for each city, C/Can starts by creating a multi-sectoral group of local decision makers and health practitioners that guides and oversees the city process from the outset. The group leads a comprehensive, systems-wide needs assessment questionnaire that collects more than 1,100 data points on the quality and capacity of cancer care services in the city, as well as the extent to which patients are placed at the center of care. This generates robust data to identify cancer care gaps.

"It's a data-driven process," said Rolando Camacho, Global Technical Lead for C/Can. "Local stakeholders collect, process and analyze all the results coming from that needs assessment, and based on that they establish the priorities, which are then translated into projects. We don't assess, they assess. We support and guide them, but we don't interfere with the priorities or decisions of the city."

Having the needs assessment already in place "has been really helpful, because we're not starting from scratch and the local teams have already identified the areas that they want to work on," added Vanessa Eaton, Director of International Education at the American Society for Clinical Oncology (ASCO).

In Cali, Colombia, 186 health professionals and health advocates representing 24 public and private institutions and over 180 cancer patients and caregivers participated in the city needs assessment. Based on the findings, key barriers to delivering equitable access to quality cancer care were identified including the lack of a multidisciplinary approach and an absence of patient management guidelines. The needs assessment findings in Kumasi, Ghana; Asuncion, Paraguay; and Yangon, Myanmar revealed similar gaps.

As a result, technical groups in each city have now designed projects to adapt locally appropriate guidelines for management of the most common and curable cancers, starting with cervix and breast cancers. They have also set up multidisciplinary teams to manage patients with those cancers, bringing together cancer care specialists from areas ranging from pathology and surgery to palliative care and blood donation to collaboratively choose the best treatment option for each patient.

In Kumasi, the city-wide needs assessment also revealed the need for a fully resourced cancer registry. C/Can has helped cancer care institutions in the city attract resources, political support and new development partners, said Fred Awittor, City Manager at C/Can.

"We were able to acquire office space for the cancer registry because we involved the right people in our City Executive Committee from the beginning of our assessments," Awittor said. "The Kumasi Cancer Registry is now in a much stronger position to collect and manage quality, relevant and timely data. Thanks to the efforts of leaders in Kumasi, Ghana and the C/Can network, the needs of the city have been translated into reality, which will further advance access to cancer care for the people of Kumasi and beyond."

Cali, Colombia

Asuncion, Paraguay

Kumasi, Ghana

2

Engaged communities generate smarter, tailor-made solutions

" **Rather than having a top-down policy, it's important that the cities understand what the citizens really are after. We engage urban communities to discuss what their biggest goals are and we help them overcome challenges along the way."**

Peter Defranceschi, *Global Food Program Coordinator, ICLEI*

The principle of leaving no one behind runs through the 2030 Agenda, with SDG 11, for example, stipulating that cities be made inclusive.

According to the Devex survey, three quarters of city-level development professionals believe that initiatives are most sustainable when they are locally owned. Without input from local communities, projects will likely neither meet their needs nor win their support.

Communities are not homogenous, however, and finding spokespersons who can accurately represent the needs of specific minority or marginalized groups, for example, can be challenging. And while local communities know their surroundings best, they often lack access to platforms for voicing their concerns or ideas, especially if they come from marginalized groups.

As ICLEI's Nekesa said, "absence of community buy-in affects the long-term sustainability of initiatives, as well as the opportunity to adapt or craft any project to the local context."

So while securing community trust takes time, it is critical for any city-level engagement. Initiatives are also more likely to succeed long term if local stakeholders are involved in their design and throughout the implementation process.

There's a specific target in one of the SDGs that focuses on public space: SDG 11.7, or universal access to safe, inclusive, and accessible green and public space for all by 2030 — especially for women, children, persons with disabilities, and the elderly. At UN-Habitat we're looking at how we can actually include marginalized groups to make sure that these public spaces are really accessible and safe for all."

Cecilia Andersson, Director, Global Public Space Programme, UN-Habitat

"When people want to impose their ideas on others, sometimes that drives them away instead of bringing them in. Sometimes, a more top-down approach tends to put a divide between you and the community," noted Brian Capati, Urban Development Specialist and Project Manager at Cities Development Initiative for Asia (CDIA). "So we make it a point to always listen to what they need."

Awareness-raising with local government is also important. According to Christelle Lahoud, Programme Management Officer at UN-Habitat, "if you create a good public space but the community is not involved, then it won't work. And if the community creates a public space but the government is not on board to maintain and manage it, you risk having complex and segregated spaces that are not inclusive."

Case Study:
# Co-creating safe, inclusive public spaces with Minecraft

UN-Habitat through the support of the [Block by Block Foundation](#) uses the videogame Minecraft to help the urban poor and other marginalized communities co-design inclusive public spaces that meet their needs. In workshops facilitated through UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme, communities use the game as a tool to visualize public space planning and create site designs that are then presented to decision makers.

One of the first pilots for Block by Block was in Haiti following the country's devastating 2010 earthquake, where many low-income households had been pushed to the outskirts of port town Les Cayes and needed re-integrating. But because many groups often go unheard at community meetings, UN-Habitat wanted to find a way to prioritize them.

"We tapped into the voices of youth and children to see how they would design a space using Minecraft," said Cecilia Andersson, Director, Global Public Space Programme, UN- Habitat. This focus on inclusive community engagement has since expanded, with children, youth, women, the elderly and people living with disabilities often working in mixed groups at workshops so they can support each other as they articulate their needs. "It doesn't matter whether you're computer literate or not," Andersson noted.

For instance, in Vietnam, elderly people were initially reluctant to participate in the workshops because they were unfamiliar with the game, shared Tran Thi Kieu Thanh Ha, a project manager for implementing partner HealthBridge. "So they were paired with young people to help them plot their designs on Minecraft."

Expressing needs and ideas through the video game also removes the pressure to speak candidly to authority figures, at least in the beginning. Through the workshop, community members take pride in their designs and become more empowered to communicate their proposed projects to local decision makers.
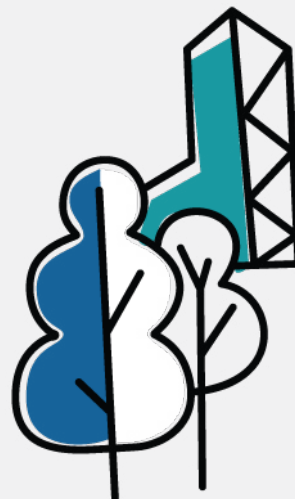
But getting buy-in from the larger community can be challenging. In Vietnam, some of the needs identified were inclusive playgrounds, parklets, and community gardens in Hoi An and Tan Mai, and street market upgrading in Hanoi. Because these were new ideas to the general populace, they were not readily accepted by local authorities, and even faced pushback from other local residents. Through the Minecraft workshops, the designers — women, children and street vendors — were able to present and visualize the improvements and suggested changes, which helped convince the community.

UN-Habitat has now supported the creation of 100 public spaces using Minecraft, including one in Hanoi to address girls' safety during the daily walks to school through dangerous, poorly lit areas. Local schools used Minecraft to redesign their routes, adding lighting to streets and tunnels, as well as signage. Their proposals were then presented to local government officials and civil society organizations, who approved and helped implement the plan. It was vital to the program that the designers presented their public space designs to local authorities so that they could also voice their concerns and aspirations, shared UN-Habitat's Lahoud. "So we're bridging this dialogue between those groups of people who often do not speak to each other."

Hanoi, Tan Mai

Hoi An

Vietnam

"Using Minecraft to involve the community in designing public space is an innovative and creative approach compared to formal community meetings where only seniors or people with high positions in the community have chances to speak up."

Tran Thi Kieu Thanh Ha, Project Manager, HealthBridge

3

Multi–sectoral approaches catalyze systemic change

> **"** Collaboration throughout project implementation is important if you want to achieve sustainability of solutions in the future. You can incorporate various stakeholder voices by making adjustments to solutions and responding to their needs."

Asher Lessels, *Task Manager for Latin America and the Caribbean, UNEP*

Achieving the SDGs requires cross- collaboration and a whole-systems approach, where partners from diverse groups and sectors bring their own perspectives and expertise. SDG Target 17.16 specifically calls for multi- stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources. However, identifying, engaging and connecting all stakeholders so that projects receive the resources and political backing they need can be challenging.

In order to develop a strong food systems approach, it was important for the ICLEI-RUAF CITYFOOD Network to engage stakeholders across a variety of subspecialities — from school feeding programs to urban agriculture to food waste management — in a way that was integrated horizontally. Getting the right stakeholders on board was key to formulating, running, and maintaining the successes borne out of the initiative. But "different cities govern food differently and face unique challenges that require the right people on board to craft inclusive programs," said ICLEI's Nekesa.

ADB's van Etten also noted that as local governments cannot borrow directly from ADB in many countries, they must rely on the support and cooperation of the national government. However, the silos that exist between government departments at the national and city levels make the simultaneous engagement of government departments challenging. And while single-sector approaches are

96%

of survey respondents agree that collaboration between city-level actors and national, regional and global institutions is essential for ensuring impact and sustained results

ineffective for addressing interconnected issues in cities, at the national level too, ministries are often not accustomed to collaborating with each other.

Effective multi-stakeholder dialogue brings all actors to the table — state and non-state — so that everyone has a voice and a personal stake in the initiative. This ensures there is shared expertise, knowledge, and benefits to all stakeholders. Creating city-level councils focused on individual issues such as food or health, can help engage the right groups and secure representation.

In the C/Can model, a multisectoral City Executive Committee of 12-15 individuals representing civil society, government, academia, professional associations, and public and private hospitals, guides the process to determine needs, identify the right partners, and oversee processes to ensure solutions meet local needs. "By bringing together all these different stakeholders, they're able to hold comprehensive discussions about their often complicated health systems," said ASCO's Eaton.

Bringing local authorities and communities to the same table also increases the likelihood that solutions to the most immediate problems in the community will be found and that legislative and policy changes can be made to address longer-term concerns.

"This critical breaking down of the barrier between local authority and community is what it's all about," added UN-Habitat's Alabaster. "If bylaws are in line with what the people are doing and what they've suggested, they're more likely to be followed." Identifying local government champions can support this process, helping facilitate communication and providing key points of contact between stakeholders. For instance, C/Can engages a local city manager as the focal point person for efforts related to activities in the city, a role that includes connecting city leaders with global and local partners.

Top 3 challenges in getting all relevant stakeholders involved in city-led initiatives in LMICs

70%

Conflicts of interest and corrupt practices

60%

Lack of trust between different stakeholder groups (e.g. private sector, academia, civil society, government)

56%

Lack of leadership and unified representation among different stakeholder groups

Case Study:

Coordinating multiple stakeholders through local champions

Climate change is a major stressor in Cape Town, South Africa, with historically low rainfall levels culminating in a severe drought from 2015 to 2018. To build the city's resilience to water-related shocks, R-Cities piloted the City Water Resilience Approach (CWRA) in Cape Town, a program that assesses gaps in water systems within the city to help design city-wide action plans to improve water resilience.

To drive cross-cutting innovation and coordinate diverse stakeholders, R-Cities provides support to an urban resilience champion called the Chief Resilience Officer (CRO). This is a top-level advisor, appointed by the Council of the City of Cape Town, who reports to the city leadership and is responsible for leading, coordinating, and developing the city's resilience strategy and policy. In addition to working within local government to foster collaboration across different agencies and stakeholders working in the city, resilience officers are pivotal for information and knowledge- sharing, acting as a bridge between the R-Cities network and local authorities.

The Council of the City of Cape Town established a department of resilience as a unit that could work transversely across the municipality. The director of resilience led the first ever in-city deployment of CWRA. Implementing a strategic response to the Cape Town water crisis involved bringing a multitude of voices to the table — and skillfully navigating the priorities of different stakeholders involved.

Diversity ensures that certain groups have less chance of dominating the discourse, said Gareth Morgan, Director of Resilience at the City of Cape Town, but "different groups have different understandings of what water means to them — for example, water as economic growth, water as culture, and water as dignity."

The director of resilience acts as a trusted partner to all concerned, ensuring that CWRA is led and deployed independently of the city's Water and

71%

of survey respondents believe that having highly committed city-level authorities is the most crucial element for ensuring successful city-led initiatives

Sanitation Department, which has a strong engineering approach to water. This allowed the group to create a more holistic understanding of water in the city.

Substantial engagement from a wide range of stakeholders from different sectors was vital to a meaningful outcome of the CWRA tool. While 40 stakeholders were involved in the overall project, breaking them out in smaller groups of 6-8 people made sure that discussions were more productive and less intimidating. The involvement of a skilled facilitator also helped surface different opinions that led to overall project success.

The number of cities now deploying CWRA is growing, with Cape Town representatives regularly called upon to speak to stakeholders in other cities about how to embark on the journey. When Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Kigali, Rwanda rolled out the CWRA in 2020 and 2021 respectively, the city of Cape Town shared its experiences and lessons learned in breaking down silos within the city government to develop a cross-sector water resiliency strategy and effective new legislations and policies.

> **"Cities often work in silos. The Chief Resilience Officer acts as the collaborator and communicator to bring all these experts and various stakeholders together."**
>
> **Katrin Bruebach,** *Global Director, Programs, Innovation and Impact, Resilient Cities Network*
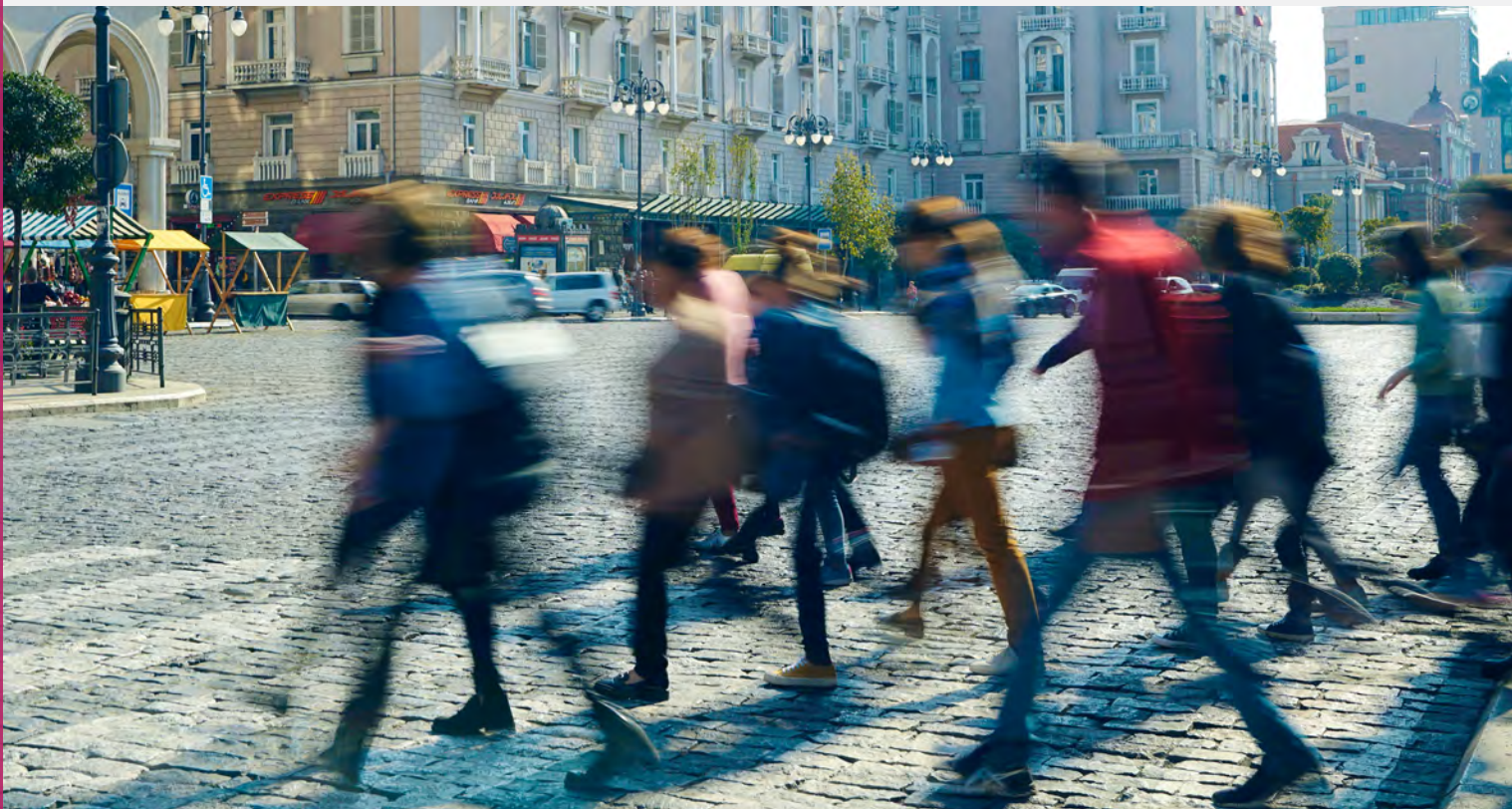
Leveraging private sector partnerships for innovation and scale

According to 73% of Devex survey respondents, involving the private sector in city-level program design and implementation is essential for creating meaningful and sustained results.

For UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme, working with private sector partners like Microsoft has been instrumental to the success of the Block by Block initiative, with the resources, expertise and research they provide helping push forward the program.

Because of the successful implementation of Block by Block, other private companies became interested in joining the initiative, said UN-Habitat's Lahoud. "Ericsson, for example, supported the piloting of a virtual reality prototype of the Block by Block approach in a community in Johannesburg. We can really scale beyond the initial work that we started because of these private entities."

Top 3 contributions that the private sector can make towards the achievement of program goals:
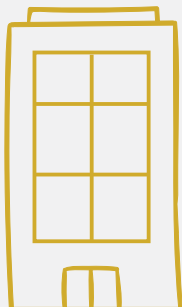
68%
Innovative solutions and technology

63%
Funding for development activities

48%
Sector expertise

The partnership has also allowed Microsoft to tap into UN-Habitat's other relationships to identify new partners for future projects. "The U.N. brings real credibility to the work that we are doing," said Deirdre Quarnstrom, Vice President, Microsoft Education Experiences at Microsoft. "Having an organization with such a long history of credibility associated with it helps demonstrate the sustained impact and legacy of the Block by Block program."

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) similarly utilizes public-private partnership models, leveraging private sector data platforms to inform waste management or transportation planning projects." In China, we have a strong focus on transit-oriented development where we help design cities so that people travel less in order to reduce emissions," said Aloke Barnwal, Senior Climate Change Specialist at the GEF. Through a collaboration with a bike sharing platform to provide data to local transport authorities, they were able to determine areas in need of last mile connectivity, which in turn informed the development of metro stations and bus sheds. "This way, people can use their bikes for shorter trips and then easily access public transport when necessary," he added.

Interacting with such a broad range of partners brings great benefits but also requires a robust process to ensure that all partners have an "alignment of interest." C/Can's Constructive Engagement Framework provides a framework for stakeholders to align their interests to deliver maximum, balanced and legitimate benefits for all – while addressing any improper activities, including real or perceived conflicts of interest, that may arise.

4

Exchanging knowledge and skills boosts local capacity

" **It is important to identify the immediate stakeholders in need of project implementation support. Through stakeholder assessments, we identify their goals and the specific roles they play toward the successful implementation of the project, and we try our best to provide capacity assistance."**

Kathleen Jovellanos, *Capacity Development Specialist, CDIA*

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that capacity building is a crucial aspect of the implementation of the SDGs. While each SDG contains targets relating to means of implementation, SDG 17 covers capacity building in more depth. Specifically, SDG Target 17.9 aims to "enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the sustainable development goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation."

As cities become increasingly responsible for leading responses to social, economic and health challenges – as witnessed during the COVID pandemic – capacity gaps in LMIC city-level institutions have grown.

This can hinder program implementation, with the GEF, for example, experiencing program delays due to city officials needing to prioritize immediate tasks over longer-term objectives.

"Institutional capacity at the city level is still very low," said the GEF's Barnwal. "Officials often do not have sufficient time to invest in programs and integrate sustainability."

63%

of survey respondents working in urban development identify lack of capacity among city-level stakeholders as the biggest challenge when implementing city-level initiatives in LMICs

Identifying such gaps helps determine how much and what kind of support city-level institutions need. Gaining a better understanding of the local landscape also aids in identifying opportunities for empowering local governments and other stakeholders.

To ensure capacity building activities are tailored to the specific needs of stakeholders and different levels of government, project preparation studies are an essential part of the CDIA process, according to CDIA's Capati. These can be in the form of a feasibility or pre-feasibility study, depending on the context and specific need of the city.

Peer-to-peer learning and the exchange of knowledge through fora involving city representatives, city twinning or global summits, and other activities that convene stakeholder groups is also vital. For Kathleen Jovellanos, Capacity Development Specialist at CDIA, getting city-level partners on the table to share their experiences in project implementation, including the difficulties they encountered, the partnerships they formed, and the innovative solutions they employed, is a good way to encourage cross-community learning.

Leveraging networks and resources in this way to share challenges, solutions and lessons learned facilitates the replication of initiatives in different contexts.

> **"C/Can's approach to capacity building prioritizes and leverages local knowledge and experiences rather than imposing solutions from outside without contextualization, and includes expert consultations, twinning arrangements, peer exchange, scientific visits, knowledge sharing and consensus building meetings."**
>
> **Dr. Silvina Frech,** *Head of Sustainability, C/Can*

Case Study:
Peer–to–peer learning and resilient food systems

As with other SDGs, the goal to end hunger (SDG 2) requires complex, holistic approaches that address every aspect of food security — including health, agriculture, the environment, economic development, and livelihoods. Strengthening food systems requires expertise from an entire spectrum of stakeholders — from food producers and their distribution chains to nutrition specialists. This can make it difficult for cities to craft effective solutions against hunger and malnutrition on their own. Peter Defranceschi, Global Food Program Coordinator at ICLEI, noted the lack of a systemic food systems approach as a clear challenge to achieving the SDGs.

"It's still common to see issues such as food waste, health or climate resilience tackled separately. Although the goal is to reduce CO2 and greenhouse gas emissions, rarely do you see food system policies incorporated when solutions are being planned out, even if food has a carbon footprint that can be much bigger depending on where you are and where your food comes from," he shared.

To facilitate a holistic approach to urban food systems, ICLEI supports various cities globally by providing a platform for peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange. The ICLEI-RUAF CITYFOOD Network fosters capacity building by connecting cities to expertise in a range of areas, such as food safety, improved nutrition, effective food distribution and procurement as well as economic support of food actors.

To mobilize local government actors and local food systems stakeholders, the City-to-City Food Exchange and the link up with regional and global initiatives areis are key activities within the network, providing opportunities for learning exchange through tapping into local working groups and organizations that are already working in the food space. This helps surface best practices and build trust among different stakeholders, said ICLEI's Nekesa. The City-to-City Food Exchange has been "key in co-learning and sharing between cities on opportunities, challenges and solutions."

For instance, Arusha, Tanzania is primarily dependent on food produced beyond its borders, with the quality of transport infrastructure, markets, and other supply chain systems presenting barriers to the city's food security, especially in ensuring the safety and quality of food imported to the city. In order to shape an integrated food policy for Arusha, the city partnered with Antananarivo, Madagascar to learn from its policy development process. The exchange provided an opportunity for local government officials to visit food system stakeholders working in food production, processing and distribution, with Antananarivo also learning from Arusha's approaches to revenue collection and waste management.

For ICLEI, the challenge is in sustaining the momentum of cities within the CITYFOOD Network through continuous engagement and learning on the platform. To this end, ICLEI Africa provides consistent opportunities for knowledge exchange for African member cities, through activities such as city dialogues at the inaugural U.N. Food Systems Summit (UNFSS) and peer-to-peer learning between cities via the #AfricanCITYFOODMonth platform.

Launched with the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and RUAF Foundation, the platform supports cross-sector knowledge sharing about urban food systems. #AfricanCITYFOODMonth, which has turned virtual in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, features a series of city-to-city showcases and learning exchanges to reflect upon the outcomes of city dialogues and offer opportunities for sharing and co-learning between cities.

Arusha, Tanzania

Antananarivo, Madagascar

City-level capacity building in practice

SDG 17 articulates the importance of capacity building as an essential element of any successful development initiative, enabling stakeholder institutions to effectively implement programs. Here are some ways capacity building activities have been implemented at the city level:

- In Indonesia, CDIA conducted a project preparation study to assess gaps and provided capacity development support in five cities, including Banjarmasin, Cirebon, Makassar, Palembang and Sorong, under the SISHA program. By providing cities with research and capacity development support, CDIA prepares government and nongovernmental institutions to effectively deliver on project goals, allowing city leaders to access and maximize donor support. CDIA has since handed over the SISHA program to ADB for further support under the Livable Settlements Investment Project.

- Responding to city-wide assessments in Kumasi, Ghana, local technical groups supported by C/Can designed a project to establish multidisciplinary teams and develop resource-appropriate guidelines for cancer management in the city. A partnership with ASCO brought external training on the development of multidisciplinary care and facilitated the consultation of guidelines with international experts.

- The United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) developed a series of Training of Trainers modules to concentrate on various issues related to the localization of the SDGs. This methodology was developed to provide local and regional governments, as well as their national associations and local partners, a practical guide for embedding SDG targets into their activities. In Chefchaouen, Morocco, UCLG implemented this methodology to raise awareness for SDG localization within the municipality, involving over 40 community leaders and municipal staff to assess the impact of 63 projects belonging to the city's Communal Action Plan and municipal budget.

- The WHO's Urban Health Initiative pilot project is evaluating and mapping the sources and health impacts of air pollution in Accra, Ghana, and building the capacity of policy-makers, the health sector and other stakeholders to better incorporate health considerations in city policies.

5

Planning for program sustainability and scale amplifies impact

" **Our theory of change is if you ensure that the systems within the city are strong, then the community's challenges will naturally be addressed in a much more sustainable manner."**

Aloke Barnwal, *Senior Climate Change Specialist, Global Environment Facility*

City-led initiatives that create lasting impact within the community and are easily replicable in other locations can accelerate progress toward the SDGs. But to ensure sustained impact and reach scale, city-led initiatives must first contend with challenges within the community, from transitioning between city leaders to securing adequate financial support and backing for the program. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has derailed progress toward the SDGs and continues to threaten recent gains not just in the health sector but across a range of socio- economic areas including quality education, decent livelihoods, and food security.

Planning for sustained impact is crucial for enabling programs to withstand environmental and economic shocks. It also ensures the continuity of programs beyond project durations and city politicians' terms.

To create sustained results, broader, longer-term thinking should be incorporated into strategies, with risk-mitigation measures and clarity around development goals embedded from the start.

Building local ownership and working with local champions can also keep initiatives going and extend their impact. By transferring and exchanging knowledge with key actors in the community, whether

60%

of survey respondents say city-level governments can best contribute towards the success of city-led interventions by supporting long-term planning for sustained impact

government institutions, local nongovernmental and civic organizations, or even the program beneficiaries themselves, cities can sustain and build on the initial gains from city-level initiatives.

Programs should also look to replicate successes on a larger scale to reach more communities and better attain global development targets. This requires obtaining commitment and buy-in from multiple stakeholders and the aligning of city objectives with national and regional priorities.

Local resource mobilization to support sustainability is increasingly becoming a topic for consideration as part of broader discussions on program implementation. For example, UN-Habitat, together with Microsoft and the Block by Block Foundation, have contributed over $7 million in participatory approaches and implementation of projects since 2012, and have raised around $10 million in co-funding from private and public organizations. This is to encourage city stakeholders to invest in the maintenance and operational costs of public space projects, according to UN-Habitat's Lahoud. "We want the municipalities to understand the value of public spaces in order to invest and secure funding to co-create more inclusive, accessible and safe public spaces with and by the community."

> **"Our work involves a lot of capacity building, facilitation and encouragement of behavioral and procedural changes in local government. Success lies in the ability of the stakeholders to transfer learnings to their work environment and thus sustain meaningful impact of different projects over a long period of time."**
>
> **Solophina Nekesa,** *Professional Officer for Urban Systems, ICLEI*

Top 5 enablers of sustainable impact within and beyond the community:

56%
Strong city-level leadership

46%
Robust public policies or an enabling policy environment

52%
Sustained funding

41%
Strong national/ regional cooperation among state actors

51%
Strong civic engagement

Case Study:

Building long–term results and global impact for climate action and sustainable development

Reducing the environmental impact of cities is a key component of SDG 11. Programs aimed at tackling environmental degradation or climate change can however lose impetus due to their complexity or struggle to replicate in different contexts.

To address this, the GEF has since 2014 shifted its focus toward recognizing cities as complex systems and addressing problems more holistically rather than targeting individual sectors or issues. Its Sustainable Cities Impact Program (SCIP) tackles environmental degradation in 51 cities across 17 countries by utilizing evidence-based land use planning, investments in integrated solutions, sustainable financing and business models, and knowledge creation, exchange and policy advocacy.

As part of its strategy, the GEF develops long-term policies and masterplans to ensure sustained impact across its programs. "From the very beginning, we review all our projects with a sustainability lens — how they've articulated sustainability, how the project will function even beyond our project period," said the GEF's Barnwal.

Working at the city level, the GEF's partner organizations achieve sustained results by ensuring that the expertise needed to continue the program is built into the community.

Transitioning implementing staff into employment with the city government or other community-level organizations is one way to do this.

"That internal knowledge is maintained," noted Lincoln Lewis, Urban Development Analyst at the World Bank's Global Platform for Sustainable Cities, which partnered with the GEF to help seven Chinese cities incorporate sustainable transit-oriented development principles into future urban plans. "Those people know the context well and continue to interact and work on this topic in the city."

To reach scale, projects are also designed with easy replication in mind. In the GEF's Asuncion Green City project in Paraguay — which takes a multi-stakeholder approach to mobility and transport, solid waste management, and green urban areas — its partner UNDP, along with national institutions,

has documented everything from which tree species are appropriate for planting in the area and how to implement urban green infrastructure to its participatory process for designing and building sustainable bicycle lanes.

"Any municipality can take all the guidelines and manualsthat and implement them very easily within their communities," said Alejandra Kemper, Project Coordinator at UNDP.
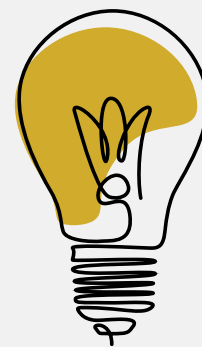
In cases where replication of programs may not be practical, or when program resources are limited, reaching scale can also be achieved by focusing on cities that could have a clear positive impact on the broader region. "We select cities that are of regional importance — cities like Kigali, or some cities in Indonesia, which are global cities that attract people. If we demonstrate good solutions there, the scale will automatically be achieved," added Barnwal.

The GEF's current SCIP (2018-2022) follows its Sustainable Cities Integrated Approach Pilot program (2014-2018) and expands the organization's support to a total of 51 cities across 17 countries. Since 2014, GEF has mobilized around $310 million of its resources in grants, along with $4 billion in co-financing from funders including national and local governments, the World Bank, African Development Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, and the Asian Development Bank.

China

Beijing
Shijiazhuang
Tianjin
Ningbo
Nanchang
Guiyang
Shenzhen
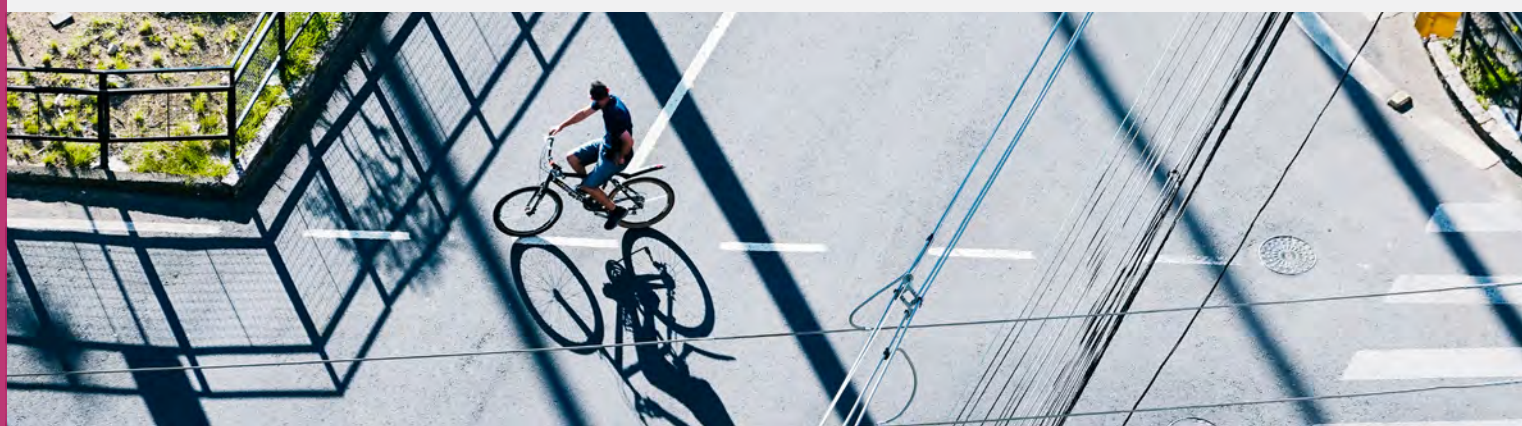
CONCLUSION

With this report, Devex and C/Can set out to contribute to the discourse around the important and unique role that city-led initiatives play toward achieving the SDGs. Drawing on in-depth interviews with specialists in city-level interventions and a survey of the broader Devex development community, the report aimed to contribute context and color to existing work on the topic, while highlighting best practices and lessons learned from innovative case studies.

Among the report's findings, it confirmed that as cities continue to grow, so too does their role as agents of change that can amplify and accelerate the impact of resources focused on attaining SDGs related to health, housing, climate change and more. The report also however underscored the hurdles to implementing city-level interventions, such as capacity gaps at city-level institutions and challenges around identifying and engaging the communities whose input, buy-in and contribution through project design and implementation is vital.

The report identified many enablers of success that are common to impactful city-led interventions. These include the importance of embedding city-level initiatives within broader national and international multilateral efforts to drive scalability and sustainability. Securing the endorsement of local champions in city governments and taking a multi-sectoral approach to cities' often interlinked challenges were acknowledged as key. The report also highlighted the value of peer-to-peer learning and knowledge sharing, both via city networks and partnerships with innovative private sector actors, and of informing solutions with both quantitative and qualitative data.

With the deadline for the SDGs less than a decade away, efforts to identify and implement such best practices, and to improve and scale up current initiatives, must intensify.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special thank you to our contributors and collaborators: