

Bridging Cities: Rethinking International Cooperation for Sustainable Urban Futures

2025 High-Level Meeting of the Development Cooperation Forum Side Event

Date and Time: Tuesday, 11 March 2025, 9am-11am EST

Venue : Virtual event (Zoom)

Background

Cities play a pivotal role in addressing global challenges such as climate change, rapid urbanization, and economic inequality. While international cooperation has strengthened global frameworks like SDG 11, the New Urban Agenda, and the Paris Agreement, many cities—especially in developing regions—struggle to translate these commitments into tangible local actions. Challenges such as financing gaps, governance misalignment, and limited technical capacity continue to hinder sustainable urban development.

This side event will explore how international development cooperation can better support cities in achieving sustainability, resilience, and inclusivity. Bringing together urban practitioners, financial experts, sustainability leaders, and governance specialists, the discussion will focus on practical strategies for financing urban development, strengthening multi-level governance, and ensuring that sustainability policies are implemented effectively at the local level.

Objectives

1. Examine the role of international cooperation in supporting sustainable cities.
2. Identify governance challenges and solutions for bridging global policies and local implementation.
3. Explore financing mechanisms that empower cities to access funding for urban sustainability.
4. Highlight best practices in climate resilience, community-driven development, and placemaking.
5. Provide actionable recommendations for improving multi-level collaboration in urban development.

Agenda

09.00-09.05	Moderator, Chhaya Bhardwaj, Alexander Humboldt International Climate Protection Fellow		
09.06-09.25	“The Role of International Cooperation in Urban Sustainability” Fransiska Tirtoadisurja, United Nations Representative for Business Innovation Research Dev (consultative status to ECOSOC)	20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bridging global frameworks (SDG 11, Paris Agreement) with city-level implementation.• Strengthening multi-level governance to empower cities and achieve SDGs at local-level.• Accessing financial and knowledge-sharing mechanisms for cities.

09.26-09.45	“Community-Led Development and Inclusive Urban Planning” Former Technical Advisor, UNDP, UN-Habitat, World Bank and Ministry of Housing Indonesia	20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory urban planning and community-driven housing solutions. • Lessons from slum upgrading and post-disaster urban resilience projects. • How international cooperation can support grassroots urban initiatives.
09.46-10.05	“Informal Settlements, Infrastructure, and Policy Alignment” Dr Ninik Suhartini, Urban and Regional Planning Lecturer at Institut Teknologi Bandung	20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding informal urbanism and its role in urban sustainability. • Improving infrastructure delivery through evidence-based governance reforms. • Strengthening capacity-building efforts to bridge research and policy implementation.
10.06-10.25	“Financing Sustainable Urban Regeneration and Development” Luis Obregon, Local Government Advisor	20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unlocking financial mechanisms for sustainable urban regeneration. • Blended finance, public-private partnerships (PPPs), and municipal funding strategies. • Developing a case for investment in towns/cities.
10.26-10.45	“Integrating Sustainability in Urban Development” Muhammad Shoaib, Sustainability Consultant at SOCOTEC USA	20 minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveraging green finance for sustainable construction and smart cities. • Scaling up nature-based solutions and circular economy models in urban planning. • Aligning city planning with net-zero and ESG investment strategies.
10.46-11.00	Discussion, Q&A and closing	15 minutes	

Expected Outcomes

- Policy recommendations for strengthening international cooperation in urban sustainability.
- Identification of best practices in financing, governance, and climate adaptation for cities.
- Stronger collaboration frameworks between local governments, development institutions, and sustainability experts.
- Increased accessibility to international funding and technical assistance for city-level implementation.

Conclusion

Sustainable cities are key to achieving global climate and development goals, yet they often lack direct access to funding, decision-making power, and implementation support. This session will provide practical solutions and policy insights on how international cooperation can be more inclusive, responsive, and actionable for urban development. By fostering cross-sector collaboration, innovative financing, and evidence-based policy reforms, cities can become more resilient, sustainable, and equitable in the face of global challenges.