Urban Pathways

Pathways for Urban Development: Key Issues for Low-carbon Cities

New Urban Agenda

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Urbanisation is increasing rapidly, particularly in developing and emerging economies, which creates great opportunities, but also poses significant challenges. Cities currently account for about 70 percent of energy consumption and about 80 percent of energy related Greenhouse Gas Emissions, while only covering 2 percent of the earth´s land. The integration of urban energy, transport and resources sectors is vital for the success of global climate change mitigation efforts (UN 2016a).

The New Urban Agenda provides a great opportunity to delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement. Urban basic services such as urban energy, mobility and resource management can make a vital contribution to achieving sustainable development objectives and reducing urban Greenhouse Gas Emissions (UN 2016b).

The New Urban Agenda closes the gap between the overarching frameworks and their concrete reference to a dimension for implementation: It provides the physical and geographical reference to these frameworks – urban areas which stretch far beyond municipal boundaries and constitute an urban-rural nexus. It also provides the social, economic and environmental rationale – access, equality and the provision of development opportunities to all urban beneficiaries. These are the city dwellers and all other "users" of urban areas, regardless of the varying purposes of their stay in urban areas, like economic exchange, administration, education, health, visits and tourism.

The New Urban Agenda is now an integral part of the success of global climate change and sustainable development agendas, which recognises cities role as powerhouses of the global economy, drivers of innovation and centres of social interaction. The Conference of the Parties in 2015 (COP 21) achieved a remarkable consensus on climate action and emphasized the role of cities in implementing climate action measures. The target of limiting global warming to 1.5 C above pre-industrial levels will not be feasible without decisive action at the local level.

As part of the effort to show implementation action a number of initiatives were launched such as the Urban Electric Mobility Initiative (UEMI), the Global Fuel Economy Initiative, Global Energy Efficiency Accelerator Platform, Business Alliance for Water and Climate. There are great opportunities for towns and cities to participate in these and similar initiatives to boost local climate action.

Critical preconditions for the delivery of urban services are a human-centred, inclusive and multi-level governance approach, integrated urban development, applying the principle of subsidiarity and appropriate legislative frameworks and enforcement mechanisms and ensure coordinated action. To support this, intra- and inter-city learning and capacity building can help to leap-frog to sustainable solutions.

International efforts to implement the New Urban Agenda need to focus on all levels of governance and decision-making, to ensure that all multilateral and bilateral organisations, local authorities as well as national governments conform to and adopt the Urban Agenda. The New Urban Agenda stressed the point that access for everyone to all urban basic services is an essential precondition to enable the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Delivering appropriate water, energy and mobility as well as access to jobs, social opportunities, health and education to everyone requires concerted action from the national, regional and local levels. The principle of subsidiarity was emphasised by the New Urban Agenda considering that local infrastructure and policy decisions need to be enabled by the provision of sufficient funds from the national level.

Urban services, such as water, electricity and heat, waste treatment and transport are vital enablers for social and economic development and with

that the key to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Access to these services should be regarded as basic human right.

The New Urban Agenda showed that the human right to adequate housing and water, and the corresponding obligations of states and governments are vital to achieve core human development objectives. Mobility plays a particularly important role in this context as it provides access to jobs, social activity, health services and education. Implementation strategies for urban services need to consider different regional and socio-economic conditions and applicability of technological solutions. Policy and governance at all levels of government play a critical role in supporting and promoting efforts to deliver on the New Urban Agenda.

Delivering on the New Urban Agenda: co-benefits and coalitions

Energy, climate and urban development policies generally require a consensus on the need for policy intervention and a strategic, coherent, and stable operating environment. Policy interventions that help delivering on the New Urban Agenda, such as taxation of fuel and electricity use, are highly visible and politically sensitive. They require a strong political commitment to appear on the policy agenda and to remain in place as they rely on investments that are only cost-effective over the medium to long-term (IPCC, 2014).

Developing consensus can be difficult because urban development is complex and multifaceted and policy interventions can have unintended consequences. Linking and packaging policies is vital to generate synergies and co-benefits between measures can help aligning objectives of different political, institutional and societal actors. An integrated policy approach that creates consensus and coalitions among diverse stakeholders and interests can help to overcome implementation barriers, minimize rebound effects, and motivate

people, businesses, and communities. This type of integrated policy approach is especially critical because current GHG reduction measures alone can make important contributions but cannot achieve the levels of reduction needed to shift to a 1.5 C pathway (IPCC 2014).

Decision making on urban development and infrastructure investments is as complex as cities themselves. Rarely ever will a single measure achieve comprehensive climate change impacts and also generate economic, social and environmental benefits. Many policy and planning decisions have synergistic effects, meaning that their impacts are larger if implemented together. It is therefore generally best to implement and evaluate integrated programs rather than individual strategies. For example, by itself a public transport improvement may cause minimal reductions in individual motorized travel, and associated benefits such as congestion reductions, consumer savings and reduced pollution emissions.

However, the same measure may prove very effective and beneficial if implemented with complementary incentives, such as efficient road and parking pricing, so travellers have an incentive to shift away from individual car travel (Lah, 2015). In fact, the most effective programs tend to include a combination of qualitative improvements to alternative modes (walking, cycling, ridesharing and public transit services), incentives to discourage carbon-intensive modes (e.g. by efficient road, parking and fuel pricing; marketing programs for mobility management and the reduction of commuting trips ; road space reallocation to favour resource-efficient modes), plus integrated transport planning and land use development, which creates more compact, mixed and better connected communities with less need to travel. Hence, a vital benefit of the combination of measures is the ability of integrated packages to deliver synergies and minimise rebound effects.

A number of studies emphasize that an integrated approach is vital to reduce greenhouse gas emissions cost-effectively in urban areas (IPCC 2014). While emissions reductions can be achieved through several means, such as modal shift, efficiency gains and a shift to renewable energies, it is apparent that the combination of measures is a key success factor to maximise synergies and reduce rebound effects.

Delivering on the New Urban Agenda: Governance and institutions

Policy agenda setting and policy continuity is affected by political consensus, which is a result of political and institutional relationships. These relationships, including the interactions between different levels of government (e.g. local, state, federal, supra-national) and acknowledge of scientific consensus on climate change policy, vary greatly between key political and societal actors in different countries.

Political stability greatly affects the ability of governments to deliver on policy objectives. Policy environments and the exposure to volatility varies between countries and changes over time, which affects implementation of sustainable urban development and climate change mitigation measures and results in significant differences between countries' progress reducing GHG emissions. Changing political environments means that policy environments are also influenced by a level of uncertainty. Hence, a shared set of methods and values are generally considered vital for setting the policy agenda, usually delivered through knowledge communities.

The political and institutional context in which policies are pursued is a vital factor for the success or failure of implementation. Institutional aspects, such as the presence/absence of an environment ministry at the national level or environment department on the local level, and their respective roles in the process are likely to have an effect on the implementation of (primarily) climate related

transport measures. The legal power, budget and political influence of these agencies are equally important (Jänicke, 2002).

As a measure for continuity and to support broad societal coalitions, participation of diverse political and public stakeholders can be vital for the long-term success of policy and infrastructure decisions. The policy environment, or context in which decisions are made, is as important as the combination of policy decisions and infrastructure investments that make up a low-carbon transport strategy (Justen et al., 2014). This policy environment includes socio-economic and political aspects of the institutional structures of countries. These structures help build coalitions, but can also increase the risk that a policy package fails because one measure faces strong opposition (Sørensen et al., 2014). A core element of success is the involvement at an early stage of potential veto players and the incorporation of their policy objectives in the agenda setting (Tsebelis and Garrett 1996).

Urban Pathways: Supporting Low Carbon Plans for Urban Basic Services in the context of the New Urban Agenda

The Urban Pathways project will make a direct contribution to the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. The project is funded by the International Climate Initiative of the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) and is implemented by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy and UN Environment.

The project will:

- develop national action plans and concrete local implementation concepts to boost low-carbon urban development in key emerging economies - India, Brazil, Kenya and Viet Nam
- make an active contribution to achieve global climate change targets to a 1.5 Degree stabilisation pathway by unlocking the global emission reduction potential of urban energy, transport and resource sectors of 3.7Gt CO2 emissions by 2030
- establish a facility in close cooperation with other organisations and networks active in this area to support national and local governments

The plans will include an assessment of:

- political, technological, socio-economic and financial viability

The local implementation concepts will be:

- developed into bankable projects, focusing on the access to urban basic services to create a direct link between climate change mitigation and sustainable development goals

This process will be:

- replicated regionally with policy development and implementation support and advice on stakeholder engagement and financing mechanisms

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