Goal 11 Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

Cities Will Play and Important Role in Achieving the SDGs
By Kristie Daniel

A vision for cities has never been more important than it is today. More than half of the world’s inhabitants live in cities and this migration trend is expected to continue. By 2050 more than two-thirds of the world will be urban dwellers. India alone is expected to double the number of city dwellers by adding 404 million new people to cities over the next 35 years.¹ Therefore, it will be under the auspices of cities where we will succeed or fail in achieving our goals of poverty eradication, equality, climate change reduction, and ensuring healthy lives. It will be the cities that determine if we achieve inclusive economic growth or yield to greater inequality. It is in cities where people will seek opportunities for higher education and employment. And, it will be cities that determine if we will continue our steadily increasing usage of the world’s resources or if we can realize a more sustainable path. This is why sustainable development goal (SDG) 11, “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”, is so important. Success in achieving the targets under SDG 11 sets the stage for achieving targets in many of the other SDG goals. We can examine just two of the targets as an example.

Target 11.2: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with
disabilities and older persons.
Transportation is a key development issue and target 11.2 is important to achieve safe, resilient and sustainable cities. However, achieving target 11.2 will also be necessary if we are to address some of the targets in SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives) including reducing non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Active transport can help achieve the NCD target by providing safe, comfortable, and attractive places to walk and cycle. City dwellers can walk or cycle to destinations in order to achieve the necessary physical activity that reduces their risk of NCDs. Walking and cycling are both affordable and accessible ways for the vulnerable, including women and the poor, to move about cities. In addition, active transport can contribute to achieving the target of halving the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic collisions. Fully 65 per cent of the 1.2 million deaths that occur each year worldwide due to road accidents involve pedestrians; 35 per cent of those deaths are children. Providing safe spaces for pedestrians will therefore significantly reduce this number.²

While the benefits to health are obvious, sustainable means of transportation will also determine how easy it is to access other key services in the city, such as education and employment, and is therefore connected indirectly to SDG 1 (Eradicate poverty) and SDG 4 (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education). Finally, efficient transportation systems can support SDG 5 (Gender equality) by ensuring that they meet the unique needs of women. Unfortunately, the transportation systems in cities are often built to address the needs of men with little consideration of the needs of women. When compared to men, women move about cities at different times, for different reasons, in different ways, and have fewer financial resources; they are less able to afford many of the transportation
options available to them. A well-designed transportation system that supports walking, cycling and public transit use will allow all people to fully participate in community life and creates safer, cleaner, healthier, and more social places.

How we achieve target 11.2 is important. The focus of the target is on expanding public transit. Public transit is a necessary component to moving people throughout a city. However, it is disappointing that the two most sustainable, healthy, affordable and accessible forms of transportation were not specifically included: walking and cycling. Shorter distances, where many of people’s day-to-day activities are conducted, can easily be walked or cycled if safe and comfortable infrastructure is provided. In 2012 the world’s largest development banks made a funding commitment of US $175 billion over 10 years for sustainable transportation. This is a key investment commitment and it is important that a portion of that funding be allocated to walking and cycling infrastructure either as part of public transit projects or as stand-alone projects.

Target 11.7: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities

Public and green spaces offer opportunities to enrich health and the quality of life for all people living in cities. Improving our physical and psychological health, strengthening our communities, and making our cities and neighbourhoods more attractive places to live and work are just some of the benefits. Target 11.7 will contribute to the NCD target in SDG 3 (Ensuring healthy lives) by providing places for people to be physically active. Green spaces, in particular, can help contribute to SDG 7 (Ensure energy for all) by lowering city temperatures. The increase in hard surfacing and the reduction of green spaces is
resulting in higher temperatures in cities than in the surrounding countryside. Green spaces help to balance this effect by cooling the air, providing shade, and absorbing air pollutants.\(^4\) Lastly, green and public spaces provide the physical places necessary for the poor to earn a living through vending products and services, which contributes to SDG 8 (Economic growth).

In spite of the important role that green and public spaces play, they are often threatened by the migration to cities. As land becomes more precious, green and public spaces are converted to residential housing and businesses. This is why target 11.7 that addresses green and public spaces is so important. Without strong commitment from Governments to preserve, protect, and value these spaces they will be lost forever.

There are many challenges ahead in achieving SDG 11. Cities will need solid implementation plans and support in order to realize the targets. Innovative solutions are needed to help create people-centred cities where citizens are involved in influencing how they live and interact with their community. Civil society can play an important role in bringing together local people and Governments. For example, HealthBridge’s partner in Hoi An, Viet Nam developed a community engagement process to design and build parks and playgrounds, which resulted in both community fundraising and participation in building new playgrounds. The lessons learned from this process are forming an integral part of the Parks Master Plan being developed by the city. SDG 11 can go a long way towards contributing to the SDGs. Like many other goals, the identified targets need to be tangible, concrete and measurable. We’ll need to clearly define what is meant by “access to green space” and determine how “access for all” to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transportation systems is to be
measured. The targets have the potential to impact real change across many of the SDGs—let’s make sure they have the power to make a difference.

**Notes**


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