

# Climate Change and City Diplomacy

Assessing the benefits of  
cities as primary actors  
in multilateral decision making

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in collaboration with  
the Geneva Graduate Institute

**GENEVA  
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Assessing the benefits of cities as primary actors in multilateral decision making

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 - CITIES: THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3 - CITIES AND CLIMATE POLICY IN ACTION</b>	<b>20</b>
A. Case Study 1: Geneva, Switzerland	21
B. Case Study 2: Freetown, Sierra Leone	26
C. Case Study 3: Quezon City, Philippines	31
<b>CHAPTER 4 - DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>46</b>

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the discourse around climate change has been booming within the last decade, its nexus with city diplomacy is an under-researched gap. Cities are known to be large contributors to the climate crisis, still, their role in advancing the issue as a primary actor is overlooked. However, research has shown that urban areas hold significant potential in implementing climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies on the ground, therefore significantly contributing to advancing international goals on the matter (Bulkeley, 2021). This research aims to fill this gap, positioning cities as powerful actors better suited to find targeted solutions for the climate problems they face. It therefore analyzes city diplomacy in the context of climate change as an important path to giving cities a meaningful platform in multilateral decision making as well as encouraging the further development of city to city connections. For the purpose of this report, city diplomacy will be understood as the different mechanisms through which local governments engage with international actors with the objective of better achieving their own policy objectives and positioning themselves in the global stage.

The **central objectives** of this research are:

- To analyze current environmental policies and their monitoring systems within cities.
- To discover the major challenges cities face in enacting the climate policy they desire and provide potential solutions on how to face them.
- To assess what ways cities participate in formal and informal city diplomacy partnerships.
- To understand the ways in which knowledge is exchanged and networks are enhanced between the actors of local environmental policy, within themselves and on the international stage with the multilateral system.

The report covers three case studies selected on the basis of geographic and economic diversity, as well as access to information. The selected cities include Geneva (Switzerland), Quezon City (Philippines), and Freetown (Sierra Leone) and their review was guided directly by the aforementioned objectives.

The examination of the case studies allowed for the following **main findings**:

- The political will to act on climate change is persistent amongst all case study cities analyzed, and being closer to the issue, cities can effectively target the root of the problems as a primary actor instead of acting on blanket solutions currently offered through the multilateral system.
- Although local governments align their plans, programs and projects to regional and national priorities, the politicization of climate change creates barriers that prohibit cities from accessing funding and support when their local governments differ from that of the region/nation.
- The lack of communication between city entities and within themselves, and among IGOs working alongside the cities, leads to fragmentation and dependency cycles where the roles of involved parties is unclear.
- Citizen participation has tried to fill the gap left by slow and inefficient national bureaucracy by using methods of bottom-up tactical urbanism to provide solutions by the people and for the people.
- Across income levels, all case study cities claim lack of funding as a primary problem - especially in their lack of ability to control funding because it is funneled from the nation down and not directly given to them.

On the basis of the previous analysis, the research team developed the following **recommendations**<sup>1</sup> addressed to city governments, national and subnational governments, and international institutions. The aim of these recommendations is to provide guidance as to how these actors can mitigate current challenges in local-global partnerships for climate change.

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<sup>1</sup> The operational specifications of the recommendations can be found in the body of this report.

### *General recommendations*

- Formalize city activities by creating a platform/webpage to make information publicly visible to enhance transparency and boost knowledge sharing.
- Prioritize quality data gathering and integration of technical expertise by employing climate technicians, who can build proposal packages for external funding in the required scientific language.

### *Recommendations for city governments*

- Build spaces for knowledge exchange and utilize currently available city diplomacy mechanisms to showcase past achievements and objectives.
- Establish specialized municipal entities in charge of handling city diplomacy matters.
- Involve civil society in all stages of the policymaking process.

### *Recommendations for national / subnational governments*

- Integrate city representatives into diplomatic activities and support local governments in seeking global collaboration.
- Bolster financial and legislative autonomy for local governments.
- Separate climate as a non-partisan issue through the creation of specialized units working specially on climate issues and appointing experts.

### *Recommendations for international organizations and institutions*

- Strengthen the role of cities as primary actors in multilateral decisions by acknowledging their role and promoting a bottom-up approach to climate change.
- Increase visibility of cities through the creation of collaborative channels. An existing model being the Forum of Mayors.
- Create feedback mechanisms for gathering input regarding needs in cities.
- Enhance collaboration within the intergovernmental organization system itself in order to leverage partnership opportunities and interlinked agendas.

## INTRODUCTION

Climate change is an alarming threat that largely affects urban centers, but is paradoxically perpetuated by current urban lifestyles. To maintain global temperature to 1.5°C or below, cities have to achieve net-zero emissions by mid-century (Corvidae et. al., 2021). Although the topic of climate change is becoming more mainstream, the role of cities in combating this crisis still remains understudied –in particular, the intersection between climate change and the emerging field of city diplomacy. This report will make use of the concept of city diplomacy, understood as the institutions and processes through which cities engage with actors on an international stage, as a theoretical framework that will allow for the further discussion of the challenges that local governments face in collaborating with international actors to enact effective climate change policy (Plujim, 2007). From there, the paper will strive to understand the role cities play and the impact they can have when treated as primary actors within multilateral bodies. The report hypothesizes that as a smaller, more localized, unit of focus, the city is able to provide more targeted climate change solutions.

Due to a lack of academic definition in social sciences, the research team has decided to refer to “primary actors” as autonomous entities with power to engage in decisions and subvert traditional hierarchical structures. For this purpose, the report will conduct an in-depth analysis of three cities that have actively participated in implementing local-level climate interventions, namely Geneva (Switzerland), Freetown (Sierra Leone), and Quezon City (The Philippines). The examination of these case studies will be guided by the following **research questions** and will then allow for a discussion on how participation in and promotion of city diplomacy can lead to an increase in the efficacy of climate action policy implementation.

- What is the current state of environmental policy implementation and monitoring for the city?
- What are the greatest challenges that the city faces in implementing desired climate action?
- To what extent does the city participate in formal or informal city diplomacy mechanisms?
  - What formal and/or informal mechanisms exist for knowledge exchange, networking and policy integration among the actors of local environmental policy and city diplomacy?



The report is then **structured** around an initial contextual analysis of city diplomacy and climate change topics, followed by the breakdown of the selected case studies, along with their comparative discussion and a series of final recommendations developed by the authors.

The main **contributions** of this report will be:

- Three constructive case studies with a detailed overview of the city-level governance structures, extensive analysis of the city's climate policy, existing partnerships and programs that it has currently and previously worked on, as well as main challenges and possible solutions.
- Collection of primary data through interviews to validate desk research and gain first-hand knowledge on the topic from city diplomacy and urban development experts, including UN-Habitat experts, local officials, civil society members and other available specialists to increase the availability of data in the field of climate change and city diplomacy.
- A final list of recommendations, provided post the analysis of primary and secondary data sources, that can be utilized by relevant stakeholders.

# CHAPTER 1 - CONTEXT

## CITIES: THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION



Phathu, C40 "Illustrating the  
Future We Want"  
Johannesburg, South Africa

## CHAPTER 1 - CONTEXT

### CITIES: THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

#### **City diplomacy and the implementation of climate change policies on the ground.**

Nowadays cities consume 78% of the world's energy resources and produce more than 60% of global greenhouse gas emissions (UN-Habitat, 2022). Still, estimates suggest that within the span of the next decade, the world will experience more urban expansion than all of its history. Urban areas are not only major pollutants, they are also highly susceptible to the impacts of global temperature rises. Numerous cities around the world have already started to experience the effects of major droughts, flooding, and intensified tropical weather events (Seto, Guneralp and Hutyra, 2012). For all of these reasons, local governments have started to realize the importance of climate change mitigation and adaptation for the future livelihoods of their territories, and have begun to develop policy accordingly (Hodson & Marvin in Bulkeley (2021), p. 94).

From their own trenches, city leaders have started to develop long term climate plans and strategies, making public pledges for emissions reduction, and implementing interventions in a variety of sectors, ranging from renewable energy, electric mobility, and more (C40 & McKinsey, 2017). One of the most important ways in which cities have steered climate policy is through a phenomenon that experts have called *climate change experiments* (Bulkeley & Castán Broto, 2012). This term refers to small scale pilot projects – often innovative and replicable in nature – put forward by local governments to intervene in urban socio-economic systems in order to make them more environmentally sustainable (Castán Broto, 2017). Small projects produce visible results in the short term and are easier to finance and implement for governments (Reckien et al., 2018). Moreover, they provide the opportunity to test the feasibility of new technology without much risk, start public conversations, and attract media coverage. Despite the clear benefits of this strategy, cities have struggled to scale experiments once their initial phase has concluded (Smeds and Acuto, 2018).

All these efforts spearheaded by cities have made significant contributions to global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, it has become clear that cities cannot implement systemic change one-sidedly. Now that the debate around the role of cities in the climate crisis has evolved, traditional state-centric views of international relations have been

challenged and these new dynamics hint to a new era of decentralized international cooperation (Backstrand et al., 2017).

City diplomacy functions as the materialization of such decentralization. It was thanks to the rising visibilization of local governments as relevant entities in the international arena that the concept emerged, along with the notion of *paradiplomacy*. During the second half of the 20th century, these two terms competed to provide a hegemonic understanding for the activities that cities engage in with actors outside of national boundaries. However, due to the close relationship that the concept of *paradiplomacy* held to US federalism during the 1970's –and its inclusion of regional actors– major players in the field have almost exclusively arrived at 'city diplomacy' as the preferred term employed in all organizational outputs (Kosovac et al., 2020). Still, the limits of this field are subject to debate both in academia and practice, with questions being raised as to what activities are included within it and to what extent they can be compared to traditional diplomatic approaches in international relations. For this report, the concept of city diplomacy will be utilized as the most adequate and precise terminology to capture the scope of the research. In this manner, it will be defined according to van der Pluijm (2007) as “the institutions and processes by which cities, or local governments in general, engage in relations with actors on an international political stage with the aim of representing themselves and their interests to one another.”

### **From informal to formal local cooperation dynamics.**

In recent years, cities have grown to recognize climate change as a deeply complex issue connected to matters of economic development and social justice (Bulkeley, 2021). Along this path, cities also realized that they are unable to implement sufficient action by themselves. In response, local governments have chosen to engage in informal and formal strategies that allow them to leverage knowledge and resources from international institutions. Informal strategies include those established on a symbolic level, without necessarily having written documentation. In contrast, formal cooperation dynamics are characterized by documented and procedure-responsive ties that are subject to continuous evaluation.

The most prominent mechanisms that cities have used for this purpose, as identified through previous literature review, include:

- **Bilateral alliances:** sometimes referred to as sister cities alliances, these initiatives consist of city-to-city agreements through which both parties exchange knowledge and best practices, sometimes going as far as to execute joint projects. More often than not, they are reduced to diplomatic ceremonies and superficial sharing events (Kihlgren Grandi, 2020).
- **Participation in multilateral spaces:** from the Paris Agreement negotiations to COP summits, cities have actively campaigned to be granted a voice in spaces of traditional multilateral cooperation. Still, cities continue to participate in these events as observers and monitoring actors but not in the decision-making processes (Backstrand, et al., 2017).
- **International Cooperation:** although cities struggle to find their place in multilateral decision making, they have enjoyed the support of important international cooperation actors. These institutions provide funding and technical assistance directly to local governments and support the execution of small-scale and large-scale projects alike.
- **City networks:** city networks have become one of the preferred pathways that cities choose to pursue international cooperation. These platforms, often coordinated by a specialized secretariat and funded by member cities, provide local governments with access to knowledge, individualized technical support, and the possibility to network with possible funding partners (Acuto and Leffel, 2020). The amount of city networks present in the international stage have vastly grown in recent years, managing to secure legitimacy at important multilateral negotiation spaces.

### **Enhancing the effectiveness of local climate action through multilateral cooperation.**

Despite the fact that in the last decade cities have engaged in climate-related action at an unprecedented rate, there are still many gaps that need to be filled to ensure that their policies are effective in achieving global targets (Bulkeley, 2021). Likewise, cities report important challenges in engaging in international partnerships, which must be mapped and addressed by all parties involved (Acuto et al., 2021).

a) *Amplifying the impact of local climate change policy.*

As it will be later introduced through the selected case studies, cities are often able to succeed in gathering the political will to take action on climate change. However, even after accomplishing this difficult task, they still encounter a series of obstacles that impede them from executing meaningful policy.

Some of these obstacles include:

- **Strong patterns of centralisation:** estimates by the Coalition for Urban Transitions show that local governments have authority over only 35% of the potential for greenhouse gas reduction (CUT in C40, 2021). The level of jurisdiction that cities enjoy over climate issues varies according to the patterns of centralisation of their national governments.
- **Lack of funding opportunities:** calculations suggest that the required funding to reduce 90% of city-level emissions stands around \$1.83 trillion, or 2% of the global GDP. This would in turn generate annual savings worth \$2.80 trillion by 2030 and \$6.98 trillion by 2050 (World Economic Forum, 2021). The economic benefits of sustainable transition are clear. However, in many instances cities are not eligible for certain streams of financing and receive little financial support from national governments. Moreover, the authority of local governments to take part in public-private partnerships is sometimes limited by national regulation.
- **Reduced access to quality data:** local governments face important challenges in developing quality data bases. Collecting data is a resource and time heavy endeavor and, oftentimes, municipal offices lack the technical capabilities to properly carry it out. In addition, gathered data is still not widely shared among national and international actors, and sometimes not produced in such a way that is horizontally and vertically comparable (UN-Habitat, 2022).

b) *Improving cooperation and coordination among local, national and international actors.*

C40 research suggests that 90% of greenhouse gas emissions at the city level can be reduced by 2050 with currently available technology (C40, 2021). However, only 18% of the actions that cities must take in order to meet 1.5° targets can be accomplished by the power of local governments alone (C40 & Arup, 2020). The rest of these will require cities to leverage cross-sector and multilevel partnerships, capitalizing on diverse sources of

knowledge and funding. Some of the most important challenges identified in this regard include:

- **Reduced financial and human resources:** although some cities have developed successful comprehensive approaches to international cooperation – by setting up specialized departments within their municipal structure or establishing lasting ties with global actors – others lack the human and financial resources to do so. For instance, the city of Los Angeles has set up a Mayor's Office of International Affairs entrusted with the responsibility of building and maintaining relationships with international actors in line with the city's interests (Mayor of Los Angeles, n.d).
- **Sustained political will and the case for city diplomacy:** many major cities around the world have established their role as leaders in the realm of city diplomacy. The mayors of London, Paris, Freetown, Barcelona, among others, have pursued an ambitious global agenda, arguing in favor of placing cities at the table of multilateral decision making. Large-size urban centers, especially in the global south, have yet to discover the many benefits that city diplomacy activities can bring to their cities and miss out on possible opportunities for assistance and funding.
- **Isolated and siloed projects:** even when cities are able to partner with an international institution, such as C40 or the GIZ, funding tends to be provided for a limited and usually short amount of time. When only small-scale or short term interventions are financed, cities are unable to mainstream successful policies into other sectors, therefore underperforming in the systemic change that is needed to combat the climate crisis.

# CHAPTER 2

## METHODOLOGY



Erick Ramos, C40 "Illustrating the  
Future We Want"  
Vancouver, Canada / Puerto Rico



## CHAPTER 2 - METHODOLOGY

### Research Framework

The research project uses a qualitative approach with the base unit of analysis being the city, referring to city governance and policy mechanisms. As a theoretical framework, the report relies on academic literature on the topic of city diplomacy, studying the role that cities play on the international stage as it pertains to climate change. The paper then hypothesizes that local experiences demonstrate the wide potential that cities hold in complementing global efforts to address climate change. Through an analysis of three case studies, this report evaluates successes and challenges in the implementation of local environmental policy. The research team argues that a smaller unit of focus, like the city, is more effective at targeting the root of climate change problems as opposed to the current blanket solutions offered when nations are primary actors.

### Data Sources

The research process has relied on:

- a) Academic literature review: systematic comparison and analysis of arguments and ideas put forward by current authors in the fields of city diplomacy and climate change.
- b) Analysis of secondary data: examination of published reports from international and intergovernmental organizations, UN agencies, city networks, local and national governments, among other actors.
- c) Semi-structured interviews: held with city government officials, multilateral organization employees, city network professionals, and civil society members.

### Criteria for selection of case studies

- Access to information and data for the team, proximity to relevant institutions, and ease of access to interview candidates.
- Recommendations provided by the partner organization, considering their accessibility to country offices, and potential interview candidates for data collection.
- Membership to relevant organizations, such as C40 in the case of Quezon City and Freetown.
- Level of economic development of the cities, looking to include different income classifications according to World Bank standards: low income (Freetown, Sierra

Leone), low-middle income (Quezon City, The Philippines), and high-income (Geneva, Switzerland) (Hamadeh, et.al., 2022).

- Susceptibility to climate risks, such as extreme weather climate events (WEF). human-made environmental damage, urban floods, urban heat, and rising CO2 levels.

The presentation of the three case studies will follow the same structure: (1) the current state of local environmental policy, (2) past, present and foreseen climate related partnerships, and (3) main challenges faced, as well as possible solutions. However, their discussion will not cover the same policy areas as each local government has adopted different priorities according to their own context.

### **Limitations**

- a) **Specificity of cases:** although the mentioned case studies were selected with the purpose of covering a diverse range of local realities, the report acknowledges that conclusions drawn from their analysis are not representative of the experience of all cities.
- b) **Perception bias:** the report acknowledges that inputs received from interviewees is subject to a variety of individual biases, including the possibility of their professional standing affecting the depth and breadth of information shared with researchers.
- c) **Data gap:** the majority of the data collected on case studies was derived from government based sources, which could possibly misrepresent, fragment or omit information due to political reasons.

# CHAPTER 3 - CASE STUDIES

## CITIES AND CLIMATE POLICY IN ACTION: A LOOK AT THREE CASE STUDIES



Charlotte Ager, C40 "Illustrating  
the Future We Want"  
London, England



"Presentation of the Habitat III Regional Report for the UNECE Region." Habitat III, September 13, 2016.  
<https://habitat3.org/events/presentation-of-the-habitat-iii-regional-report-for-the-unece-region/>.

# Geneva, Switzerland

Mayor: Marie Barbey-Chappuis



## MAIN CLIMATE ISSUES

- Urban Heat
- Rising CO2 Emissions



## DEMOGRAPHICS

- Population: 203,951
- Land Area: 15.93 km<sup>2</sup>



## TOPOGRAPHY

- End of large river basin
- Landlocked

## CHAPTER 3 - CASE STUDIES

### CITIES AND CLIMATE POLICY IN ACTION

#### **Geneva, Switzerland**

Geneva, Switzerland is a mid-sized city with a population of just under 204,000 inhabitants and is the capital of the Swiss canton bearing the same name. Located at the basin of Lac Léman, Geneva is highly susceptible to climate change not only due to its physical geography by the water but also due to rapid urbanization. However, “International Geneva” as it is sometimes referred to, is home to over 30 international organizations and over 300 non-governmental organizations positioning the city perfectly for collaboration.

#### *A. Current Environmental Policy*

Environmental action remains a priority for the city of Geneva, in particular within recent years as climate policy has moved to the forefront of political campaigns. Through interviews with both city official and chief of climate projects, Julie Perrenoud, and civil society member of NGO “actif-trafiC”, Thibault Shneeberger, the common thread of the need to address rising CO<sub>2</sub> emissions was apparent. Madame Perrenoud, who joined the city office in 2014, said that sustainable development and climate change was just beginning to be a big topic in the city government upon her arrival (Julie Perrenoud, 2022). In 2019, the canton of Geneva declared a climate emergency and released an action plan called the Cantonal Climate Plan for 2030 (“Plan Climat”, 2022). Upon the declaration of the climate emergency, the city council passed a resolution, R-242, as a response to look into the issues of the climate within Geneva (“R-242” , 2019). The resolution found carbon neutrality and a reduction of all greenhouse gasses to be the most prominent path in reducing climate change - citing a goal to reduce greenhouse gasses by 60% by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 (“Climate Emergency”, 2021). In her interview, Madame Perrenoud stressed that a priority must be placed on overall CO<sub>2</sub> *reduction* as opposed to mere *adaptation* (Julie Perrenoud, 2022). The new municipal climate strategy released in February 2022 lays out an ambitious 30 goals and 78 measures divided into 9 strategic thrusts (“An Ambitious and Essential”, 2022). Within the strategy, the city calls for action on the governmental, business, and individual level.

While solidarity between the city and other entities is happening in the form of round tables to support participatory planning, the process is slow. To push for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction quicker than through the bureaucratic avenues of the municipality, civil society has taken action into

their own hands. Organizations like *actif-traffic* are fighting for the reduction of car traffic and the addition of pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure around the city. In 2011, the city won a vote for safe bike lanes on main roads, but as of 2022 this has still yet to be fully implemented. Despite official permissions, the city remains slow in implementing and funding promised projects. However, Monsieur Schneeberger pointed out that in the case of the city of Geneva, the power for legislation is ultimately in the Canton (Thibault Schneeberger, 2022). Although the city can implement some of its own strategy, the canton has far more power.

### *B. Partnerships - Present and Future*

The city of Geneva's current participation in city diplomacy is minimal and often informal. In the interview with Madame Perrenoud, she mentioned how the city actively reached out to other major cities in Switzerland, namely Lausanne and Zurich, for advice on enacting policy. She described how she hopes to have more continuous talks with fellow cities but there is no formal mechanism in place yet. Moreover, much of the current city to city relationships are Swiss exclusive, despite drawing inspiration from the climate strategies of Paris, Brussels, and Montréal (Julie Perrenoud, 2022). However, the city is home to the Geneva Cities Hub which actively supports city networks and aims to give cities a voice on the multilateral stage. This Hub is funded directly by the city, canton, and nation together. While the Hub does not directly foster new partnerships it does act to facilitate spaces where cities can meet and collaborate with the Geneva-based IGOs. For example, the annual Forum of Mayors is the first platform of its kind that caters to city officials specifically to give them a platform on the multilateral stage. Recommendations from the Forum are then used to influence the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management in drafting and adopting tailored and targeted instructions for UNECE member States ("Forum of Mayors", 2020). The Forum provides city officials a platform to discuss all types of issues, but climate remains a popular topic discussed throughout.

A more formal mechanism that does exist within the municipality is the city's Agenda 21-Sustainable City Service –an office within the municipal government dedicated specifically to issues of sustainability. Within the service, is also a department called the "Ville Solidaire Delegation" (City Solidarity Delegation), which aims to have active collaboration between the city and international actors for financing development projects ("Service Agenda 21", 2021). Madame Perrenoud spoke about how finance is key to the city's climate strategy, yet the climate strategy does not have apparent connections with the city

solidarity delegation. The city of Geneva wants a collaborative approach to climate action from the citizen level all the way to larger government and intergovernmental bodies, however the most apparent stakeholders of the written strategy remain simply as the city, Canton of Geneva, and the federal government.

Aforementioned Monsieur Schneeberger, spoke about round table discussions hosted by the city in an effort to increase participatory planning (Thibault Schneeberger, 2022). This informal mechanism allows for an open space for civil society to provide input on current and future policies.

### *C. Challenges and Solutions*

Throughout the research and interviews, two major problems became apparent in Geneva's ability to implement climate strategy. Firstly, finances remain a problem for major projects and secondly, creating formal partnerships has been lackluster. These two problems are not unique to the Genevan case study, but Geneva is in a privileged position to address them. Given their already large platform on the international stage, Geneva has a particular opportunity to set an example of what city diplomacy can look like and how it can advance climate policy.

Finances are always an issue as funds are most often filtered through the nation and the canton before finally reaching the city level. While an ideal solution is to have funding from multilateral institutions marketed directly for the city, Geneva can also take advantage of their push for a circular economy. Madame Perrenoud already stated that the city of Geneva was invited to speak in Amsterdam regarding their circular economy approach, so continuing on this path will only offer the opportunity for more connections in the future (Julie Perrenoud, 2022). The circular economy pushes the city to use the resources it already has to design sustainable solutions from the start. Further, the circular economy solution involves civil society entrepreneurs and other partnerships to find collaborative sustainable solutions.

While creating formal partnerships may be intimidating, Geneva is perfectly positioned to raise their voice and take advantage of "International Geneva." The Geneva Cities Hub is already doing a great job at providing cities a platform, but the city of Geneva needs to be in conversation with IGOs outside of just the Forum of Mayors. Having IGOs be welcomed at

the round table discussions in Geneva and vice versa of welcoming the cities in conversations at the IGOs is critical for city-inclusive solutions.

Lastly, it is critical that the city of Geneva allow civil society to help. The people in the streets have the power and willingness to enact change and the government must allow them to do so. Monsieur Schneeberger and actif-traffic push for “tactical urbanism” which enables provisory action, from both the citizens and the government, to test what an ideal city would like (Thibault Schneeberger, 2022). Following the potential success of these projects, the provisory can turn into the permanent. For example, the addition of bike lanes during Covid-19 was a provisionary action that has become popular and permanent. Ultimately, with a topic as pressing as climate emergency, the city does not have time to wait and must form partnerships to push for quicker and lasting change.





"Habitat Supports Sierra Leone Urban Planning Capacity Building," UN-Habitat, August 20, 2021. <https://unhabitat.org/news/23-aug-2021/un-habitat-supports-sierra-leone-urban-planning-capacity-building>.

# Freetown, Sierra Leone

Mayor: Yvonne Aki Sawyerr OBE



## MAIN CLIMATE ISSUES

- Urban Heat
- Flooding



## DEMOGRAPHICS

- Population: 1.27 million
- Land Area: 81.48 km<sup>2</sup>



## TOPOGRAPHY

- Shares border with the Atlantic Ocean
- Coastal

## **Freetown, Sierra Leone**

Freetown is the largest city and the capital of Sierra Leone. Freetown is locally governed by a directly elected Freetown City Council, headed by a mayor who is also directly elected. The current mayor is Yvonne Aki Sawyerr OBE who was sworn-in in 2018. Flooding is a major problem in the city and annual average losses from damage from floods is as high as 2.5 million USD (FCC, 2019). Urban heat also poses a major challenge for policy interventions. Over 35% of the population lives in informal settlements that are made of zinc which makes them vulnerable to lethal amounts of heat (FCC, 2019).

### *A. Current Environmental Policy*

The Transform Freetown project is the most significant program being implemented at the city-level. The project was implemented in 2019 and focuses on eleven priority sectors grouped into four clusters— residence, human development, healthy city, and urban mobility. The development of the plan involved consultations with various relevant stakeholders and communities (FCC, 2019). Under the Transform Freetown plan, the city government set out to tackle various issues that expose Freetown to climate risks. The city has so far planted 550,000 trees under their 'Freetown the Treetown' initiative that set out to plant a million new trees having secured funding to plant the remaining 450,000 trees. The progress can be monitored through their TreeTracker app and the survival of the trees is checked by community growers every month (FCC, 2020). The city also successfully installed a new drainage system and continued its flood mitigation and urban farming initiatives. The city is also developing a city-level Climate Action Plan which will be aligned with the national plan. Freetown also became the third city in the world, after Miami-Dade and Athens, to appoint a Chief Heat Officer (FCC, 2020). We learned through our interview with Victoria Gonsior that the development of Freetown's policies is heavily influenced by the goals set by Sierra Leone's Medium Term National Development Plan 2019-2023.

Various international commitments are also considered when drafting city-level environmental policies for Freetown. Sierra Leone's Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement are considered when the impact of different projects is analyzed (FCC, 2020). As a member of C40 Cities, Freetown is a signatory to the Clean Air Accelerator which guides cities to address air pollution levels through substantive policies and programmes targeted towards the main sources of pollution. The city is obligated to publicly report on the annual progress, relative to the city's targets and the progress on achieving the commitments set out under this accelerator (C40, 2020). Freetown is also a part of the

Urban Nature Accelerator which aims to increase green spaces in cities and update climate action plan adaptation actions to reflect nature targets (C40, 2020).

#### *B. Partnerships - Present and Future*

Freetown has been rapidly making progress in its environmental protection policies for the city. The Freetown City Council (FCC) has garnered national and international support for their endeavors in prioritizing the environment on their policy agendas. The city has collaborated with the national government in aligning their respective climate strategy as part of the National Adaptation Plan (Government of Sierra Leone, 2020). The city of Freetown also regularly collaborates with the Environment Protection Agency (EPA) which has facilitated the development of FCC's environmental management. FCC also gets technical and research assistance from the EPA. The EPA assisted FCC in developing their report on common air pollutants in the urban western area of Freetown along with designing and implementing sustainability guidelines for NGOs and civil society organizations. EPA also supported FCC in the development of waste management policies, guidelines, and legislations (EPA, 2017). The national government of Sierra Leone also approved and backed the Transform Freetown Plan which was implemented in 2019. From our interview with Ms. Mariama, we learned that Mayor Sawyerr places a huge emphasis on data collection in order to monitor public participation. The process of designing the policies under the Transform Freetown plan was an inclusive one. Community members, private sector representatives, NGOs, voluntary sector, community based organizations, and other development institutions were consulted during the planning stage ensuring transparency and inclusivity (FCC, 2020).

Mayor Sawyerr has garnered immense international recognition for her efforts towards climate change in Freetown and has been invited to join several international policy-making and research platforms. Freetown has also gained international support for their efforts towards putting climate adaptation and mitigation as an intrinsic part of their policy development process. The city is an active member of C40 Cities, a global network of Mayors taking action to confront the climate crisis of the world. Beyond this, the City also participates in various specialized networks within C40 to share best practices and knowledge, for example, Air Quality Network, City Business Climate Alliance, Sustainable Waste Systems Network, Urban Flooding Network, etc. Freetown also collaborated with the Government of Japan for installing a new drainage system in 2022 and with UN-Habitat to expand its urban farming initiative (FCC, 2022).

Freetown City Council is also a member of Global Parliament of Mayors which is an international city-level network for Mayors to share experiences, expertise, and best practices to various global challenges like climate change (FCC, 2022). The FCC also holds membership for Bloomberg Partnership for Healthy Cities which is a prestigious global network of cities dedicated to helping cities to overcome health challenges arising from noncommunicable diseases and injuries (FCC, 2022). Freetown has maintained active partner city relations with Kingston-Upon Hull in the UK and Charleston, South Carolina, USA for the last three years. Freetown and Kanifing, Gambia collaborated recently for practical knowledge exchange on issues common to both municipalities like waste management, affordable housing, revenue mobilization, climate change, market infrastructure, and public transportation (FCC, 2022).

### *C. Challenges and Solutions*

Through the interviews with Mariama Whitmore and Victoria Gonsior, we were able to get a deeper insight into the problems that the city of Freetown faces when designing and implementing their climate change policies.

The one thing that we kept hearing was the lack of financial sources that the city has access to. Funding from development funds and development institutions usually goes to the national government. The legal framework of Sierra Leone makes it difficult for the money to be dispersed quickly and efficiently to relevant stakeholders, making the process riddled with bureaucratic barriers. Within the current framework, it is also difficult to incentivise the private sector to get involved for partnerships. For example, Freetown is currently looking into a mass transit cable car system which is a public-private partnership. The project is still being developed as cities cannot enter into a public-private partnership without approval from the national government. Recently, the city came up with an innovative financing mechanism for the second phase of its 'Freetown the Treetown' initiative. The city aimed to finance tree planting through the sale of digital impact tokens under which proceeds from the sale of each token would cover the cost of growing one tree over a three year period and planting one new tree. The city should look into more of such dynamic and innovative financing mechanisms in order to reduce reliance on cash flows from development funds which are not sustainable in the long-run.

In order to design targeted policies and implement them efficiently, the city needs continuous support from the national government which has larger human and financial

resources. In order to plan the Freetown Peninsula Area a Memorandum of Understanding of collaboration and partnership was signed between FCC and Western Area Rural District Council in 2020 under the central government's guidance and support. Tackling a global issue like climate change requires understanding and collaboration between different stakeholders which needs to transcend political allegiances.

The city can also benefit with increased collaboration with various international organizations and city networks. These organizations have access to large financial resources and technical expertise. International organizations that specialize in environmental affairs and policies, bring in refined and sophisticated policy building expertise and can be used and adapted by city officials to efficiently utilize limited resources and develop impactful policies that can merge public demand with environmental needs given in a particular localized context that can benefit cities like Freetown that struggle with mobilizing human resources. International organizations need to get more proactive and increase engagement with city-level officials and local leadership in order to establish visibility. During our interview with Mariama, she mentioned that she would be happy to collaborate with UN-Habitat but she had not heard of the organization before we reached out to her.



Photo credit Michael Edwards

# Quezon City, Philippines

Mayor: Josefina "Joy" Belmonte

## MAIN CLIMATE ISSUES



- Poor air quality
- Extreme weather
- Flooding



## DEMOGRAPHICS

- Population: 2.9 million
- Land Area: 161.1 km<sup>2</sup>



## TOPOGRAPHY

- Within the catchment area of five rivers
- Undulating Terrain

## **Quezon City, Philippines**

Quezon City is the largest municipality with regard to population and land cover within the Metro Manila area in the Philippines, home to 21.95% of the total population of the National Capital Region (“Largest Philippine City,” n.d.). With the rapidly growing population, there is over utilization of carbon sources as the city suffers from poor air quality (Raza et al., 2016). Moreover, another looming threat to the city is the increase in natural and extreme weather-related disasters exacerbated due to rapid urbanization.

### *A. Current Environmental Policy*

To combat localized issues the governance structure in the Philippines has seen a trend towards decentralization<sup>2</sup>, particularly in policy-making (Sicat & Maddawin, 2018). The Philippines enacted a Local Government Code in 1991 that formalized territorial and political subdivisions such as cities to enjoy meaningful local autonomy, enabling them as self-reliant communities and making them more effective agents in attaining national goals (LGC, 1991).

Local counterparts, however, still face barriers to autonomous decision-making primarily due to financial constraints. As mentioned by an UN-Habitat professional Maria Adelaida Antonette M. Cea, in the Philippines, after a 2022 resolution, the country has attempted to address inequality in financial resources among local government units. The Mandanas Ruling in 2022 acted as a step toward enhancing transparency and accountability to improve decentralization by increasing the share of national government tax revenue transferred to local governments and a mechanism to strengthen social delivery (World Bank, 2022).

However, financial empowerment alone is insufficient to achieve results. The local government units also require capacity-building support and guidance during this transition period through knowledge sharing mechanisms and training. As mentioned in the interview with Madame Cea, a robust national strategy along with a knowledge sharing mechanism is necessary for cities to achieve their climate goals.

The mitigation commitments of the city’s plan aim to reduce GHG emissions by 30% until 2030 and will continue to pursue carbon neutrality until 2050. They identified the three leading causes of increased emissions (LCCAP, 2021). Firstly, 60% of the city's overall carbon

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<sup>2</sup> In the given context, decentralization can be defined as the transfer of planning, decision making or administrative responsibility from a centralized government to its local counterparts (Olsen,2007).

emissions are due to static electricity due to fossil fuel and electricity usage—secondly, 21% from transport and lastly, 19% from waste disposal (LCCAP, 2021). The other relevant bodies responsible for city climate-related projects are the National Climate Change Action Plan and the National Framework Strategy on Climate Change (LCCAP, 2021).

Quezon City is also situated within several catchment areas of rivers and creeks. The City has five river systems and over 4 tributaries, making about 78 areas and 35 communities within the city prone to flooding when these rivers overflow (UNDRR, 2021). The local Disaster Risk Reduction Management Plan (LDRRMP) under the Disaster Risk Reduction Management Act No. 10121, underscores top agendas for the Committee to work on regarding disaster management. However, the body is separated from the overall climate plan leading to planning difficulties when considering the impact of climate change and its implications for disaster frequency and fire hazards (Republic Act 101211, 2009).

Therefore, there needs to be more communication between the urban planning ministry and the city's climate plan. According to an official interview, the lack of collaborative efforts between critical committees poses significant barriers to formally preparing future mitigation approaches to tackle the effects of climate change in the future.

#### *B. Partnerships - Present and Future*

The city-level governance in Quezon city has actively drafted an enhanced local climate change plan explaining the town's climate-related commitments from 2021 to 2050 (LCCAP, 2021). Moreover, the city is also one of 17 cities that received technical assistance for climate action from the C40 Cities Finance Facility program.

Other partnerships include a national level network in the Philippines known as League of Cities, connecting all the cities of the country and works to provide capacity development of mayors. UN-Habitat has also launched initiatives to facilitate knowledge sharing between League of cities in the Philippines, with other cities in South Korea and the creation of Urban Ecosystem-based Adaptation tools for leaders to access. Recently, the Quezon City local government, in collaboration with C40 and the United Kingdom government's UK Aid, has launched a collaboration to accelerate the achievements of the climate action plan. The partnership prioritizes technical assistance and actions related to energy efficiency in government, commercial, and residential buildings. Other initiatives to be implemented



include the extension of the city's bike lane network and the creation of more walkable corridors (ICLEI, 2022).

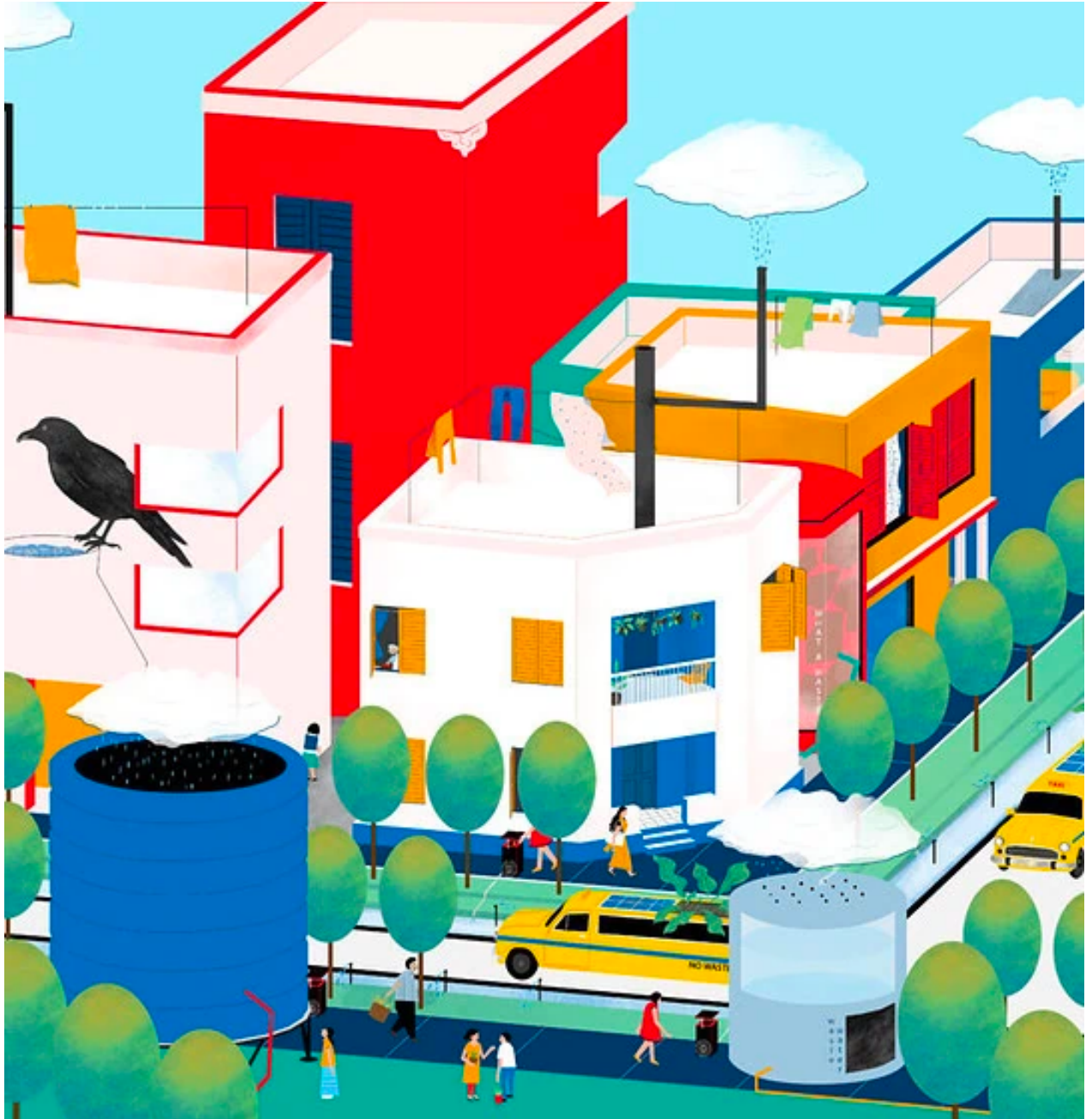
### *C. Challenges and Solutions*

Three significant challenges are prevalent in Quezon City, and some exist at a country level. First, a lack of corroborated efforts between relevant ministries. As mentioned above, there needs to be more communication between urban development and the city climate plan (Republic Act 101211, 2009). According to Madame Cea, urban planners focus on their mandate, which only sometimes overlaps with climate action. Therefore, creating better communication channels between critical decision-makers within a constituency is essential to tackle the effects of climate change in the future. For instance, UN-Habitat has provided the different ministries with a platform to engage in more knowledge-sharing through regional events.

Secondly, funding barriers exist concerning the accessibility of climate finance. Funding is primarily accessed only by national governments, and the bureaucratic red tape makes it difficult for local counterparts to access this source of external financing. The cities require assistance from networks such as C40 and multilateral organizations to support them in packaging funding proposals, building up the narrative and the rationale that the planners can use to gather funds, and designing projects using adequate language and technical know-how. Moreover, to counter bureaucracy, budgets should be assigned to different actors according to the intervention. For instance, large projects should be funded through the national governments, while specific ones should be financed through cities. There are many political steps to make this funding route accessible, such as approval from congress. Another critical source of financing is the private sector, which could be done by providing incentives through the ministry of finance through tax concessions etc.

Lastly, the need for capacity building and training of leaders and staff, as there is limited expertise. For instance, Angeles City in the Philippines underwent workshops to validate and update its first climate plan (UN-Habitat, 2022). Through the training, the technical working groups also learned how to interpret climate data and use assessment tools such as the Climate and Disaster Risk Assessment of the Housing and Land Use. Such an exercise can be extremely useful if implemented in Quezon City.

# CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS



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## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

This section outlines key commonalities and differences, along with meaningful conclusions derived from the comparative analysis of the selected cities.

#### **Motivations and drivers behind climate action**

Although the motivations of cities to enact climate policy are context-specific, the analysis of the case studies showed susceptibility to environmental disasters and public opinion as common thread drivers behind their policies. In line with the thesis of Kalafatis (2018) and Reckien et. al. (2018), it is clear that cities also pursue climate change policies for reasons beyond addressing required objectives. In the case of Geneva, interviewees explained how popularity among voters acted as a main motivator for local politicians to integrate these objectives. Similarly, Ronald Jackson, head of Disaster Risk Reduction at UNDP, brought attention to the concern that local governments hold towards the economic impact that climate change could bring to their cities in the future.

#### **The challenge of politicization and cross-level policy alignment**

Furthermore, subjects such as climate action are susceptible to becoming highly politicized. There is a constant risk of bureaucratic barriers when enacting climate policy. These barriers can also prohibit funding assistance to cities to fulfill their agenda, leaving climate action by cities on the whims of politicians in power. For instance, Geneva is not able to produce enforceable legislation as this power is held by the canton. Although the canton and the city are in political alignment, the national government is not and so the execution of large scale projects becomes difficult.

Another recurring issue highlighted by interviewees was the lack of coordination among government committees, leading to fragmented efforts instead of systemic approaches. For example, in Quezon City, Madame Cea from UN-Habitat mentioned the lack of communication between the Urban Development Commission and the Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability Department of the city, leading to an inefficient Disaster Management Plan. Similarly, in all three cases, local governments attempted to align their plans, programs and projects to regional, national, and international priorities. Quezon City, for instance, forged a partnership with C40 to prepare a Climate Action Plan intending to deliver on commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and achieve Philippine's

national goals under the Paris Agreement. Equally, the city of Geneva cooperates with Swiss national standards and meets or exceeds the national average for a majority of their environmental indicators, such as CO2 emissions (Office fédéral de la statistique, 2022).

Throughout this process of policy alignment, the selected cities have found that their own interests and concerns are not adequately integrated into nation-wide assessments and that the national government has not sufficiently supported cities in their sustainable transition. Patterns of centralization that restrict local authority in modifying regulation, managing budgets, and engaging in diplomatic activities are evermore harmful to this effect, further constricting the spectrum of action that cities can take in addressing climate change.

### **Integrating civil society into policy design and implementation**

Due to the slow process of bureaucracy, citizen participation through civil society engagement has been a key factor for the success of local climate policy as seen in the three case studies. This dynamic speaks to the importance of bottom-up approaches in policy making, placing impacted communities at the center of the conversation and, therefore, developing relevant and context-appropriate programmes (Kihlgren Grandi, 2020). Interviewees working with or within the case study governments explained that city officials have felt the pressure from civil society and thus integrated participatory processes into their strategic sustainability plans. In Geneva, for example, Thibault Scheneberger of actif-traffic ripped up gravel in the street to add a community garden. While this action was legally questionable, its outcomes greatly pleased the community. This act of tactical urbanism was a success of the people's power, and best of all, free to the city.

### **Increased needs for financial and technical support**

One of the main challenges that the case study cities face is access to adequate funding. All three of them experienced barriers in accessing direct financing for projects at the city level, being obligated to then rely on their national governments for resources. To combat this issue, cities have partnered directly with other cities abroad. For instance, Zurich provided financial assistance to Freetown as part of a city-to-city collaboration to regenerate its Central Business District. However, such mechanisms are limited, and most funding windows can still be accessed only by national governments. Geneva, being the highest income city of our sample, was not in need of external partnerships to secure resources for its projects at the same rate that the other examples did, but Julie Perrenoud of the city government still cited lack of funding as a primary issue. Ultimately, partnerships provide an

excellent mechanism for knowledge exchange and also enhance the financial capacity of cities by providing different funding avenues

### **Positive but challenging experiences in engaging with international actors**

The experience of the case study cities in cooperating with international actors has been overall positive. By partnering with city networks and other international institutions, local governments have been able to secure financing for projects, improve execution, conduct evaluations, pilot innovative technologies, among many other important achievements.

Researchers have vehemently argued for the importance of city networks as key actors in local representation in multilateral negotiation spaces, as well as sources of valuable information and concrete resources that cities can utilize to reach beyond their national confines (Acuto & Leffel, 2021). The reviewed case studies show this argument to be true. Both Quezon City and Freetown, as members of C40, directed significant municipal resources to complying with the network's data and policy standards, at the same time utilizing their membership as a vehicle to request financial and technical support in the enactment of policies and programmes that align with their own objectives. On the other hand, C40 has provided numerous opportunities for these cities to showcase their achievements in global events and therefore have access to wider audiences through which they could encounter possible opportunities for collaboration and influence global debates around their priority topics. Although the city of Geneva has not yet demonstrated an equally active participation in city networks, interviewed officials stated that the local government recognizes the potential that these bodies hold in furthering municipal objectives and their will to steward projects, such as the mentioned Geneva Cities Hub, to increase their engagement. This dynamic goes to show the high value that cities attribute to city networks and access to information, international platforms and technical support as main drivers of participation.

When going about international partnerships, interviewees laid out important challenges. For instance, the city governments, while being financed for a project through an international partnership, are still at risk of falling into a dependency cycle and being cut off financially before achieving the anticipated results. This issue can be combated by simultaneous investments made in capacity building and training of internal staff to become self-sufficient with regard to technical knowledge can be a long term solution to ensure project continuation.

All of the aforementioned obstacles represent important setbacks in the pathway to a successful urban sustainable transition but can be mitigated by strategic and collaborative action. Patterns identified in previous academic research, as well as parallels drawn from the selected case studies, suggest that enhancing the role of cities in multilateral debate and cooperation could represent an important step forward in the long term. For instance, opening up traditional international policymaking spaces to cities would allow them to leverage discussions on global priorities to push national governments to concede additional authority to their local counterparts. Similarly, if given a more meaningful platform, cities would be able to voice their concerns directly in front of possible partners, therefore increasing their possibilities to secure funding to pursue the policies best suited for their specific context. And finally, advancing the global debate on the multilevel nature of climate change policy would improve national-local policy alignment benchmarks, giving authority to local governments to make decisions regarding urgent matters and therefore allowing for a more rapid response from all actors involved.

# FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS



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## FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the previous discussion and the analysis of the three case studies, the research team has developed a series of recommendations addressed to city governments, national and subnational governments, and international institutions. These recommendations will provide guidance as to what measures can be implemented in order to mitigate the aforementioned obstacles that cities face in contributing to local and international efforts in climate change mitigation and adaptation.

### General recommendations:

- *Formalize city diplomacy and cooperation activities:*

Although there must be room for informality, as it gives flexibility to city officials to work according to their own expertise, it is important for cities to follow a strategic approach. Internally formalizing strategies and processes allows for municipal teams to be better prepared. While externally, formalization legitimizes the role of cities in traditional international relations and widens the window for further cooperation.

This process of formalization will allow for local governments to improve internal coordination and long term follow up of commitments. City governments can operationalise this by creating a platform/webpage/website to make information publicly visible to ensure better accountability frameworks and an efficient knowledge-sharing. For instance, C40 has set standards for member cities to share climate data and also frequently update their portal to provide clearly synthesized publicly visible city specific data.

- *Improve collection and availability of climate data:*

Cities, state governments, and international organizations must prioritize quality data gathering specifically focusing on comparability and sharing. For this same purpose, each actor should employ climate technicians, who are versed in the gathering, processing, and analyzing of data and who can build proposal packages for external funding in the required scientific language. For instance, as part of the Transform Freetown project the state employed various technicians and climate experts to successfully collate information to build proposals and design projects.



## Recommendations for city governments:

- *Build platforms for knowledge sharing:*

City governments should actively reach out to other cities to propose the formalized exchange of knowledge and best practices and document successful strategies across the board. Cities should individually and collectively utilize available city diplomacy mechanisms to showcase past achievements and voice future policy objectives with the purpose of attracting possible partnerships from international actors. Bigger cities with higher visibility can lead the curating of networks when sharing common agendas with smaller cities to echo these issues on a national and international level. For example, the Philippines government has built a national level network as mentioned in the case study known as League of Cities, connecting all the cities of the country and works to provide capacity development and knowledge sharing for mayors.

- *Establish specialized committees:*

In accordance with their own financial capabilities, local governments must create specialized municipal entities in charge of handling city diplomacy matters. These departments will develop long-term plans, maintain partnerships, engage in capacity building activities and systematize knowledge. In addition, they should assist in smoothing communication between city departments, as well as their national government. An example to support this, would be from Quezon City, as they currently have specialized units focussed on climate change mitigation and adaptation.

- *Involve civil society:*

Regardless of minimal funding, local governments should leverage civil society organizations by increasing their participation in all stages of the policymaking process. Having close ties with the public, these organizations can act as a strong tool to mobilize citizens and increase awareness regarding local climate change issues. At the same time, civil society organizations employ active citizens who are passionate about the cause and willing to lead the implementation of projects. This recommendation can be executed by building pathways of formal partnerships with the civil society, through co-producing research, co-engineering projects and organizing high level discussions nationally and in smaller cities. For instance, in the

interview with Thibault Schneeberger from actif-traffic mentioned the city of Geneva conducts timely roundtable discussions for civil society organizations to assess their needs.

### **Recommendations for national / subnational governments:**

- *Integrate city representatives into diplomacy activities:*  
National ministries of foreign affairs should include city representatives into diplomatic activities, especially related to international climate cooperation such as the Conference of the Parties (COP), with the purpose of supporting local governments in seeking collaboration opportunities with global actors. This would aid in communicating the issues faced by their constituencies in global debate platforms, as well as highlighting accomplishments.
- *Bolster financial and legislative autonomy:*  
National legislation must be modified to give city governments increased jurisdiction over their own regulatory frameworks, especially, regarding the use of their finances. Such change must include autonomous control over policy making, implementation, project design, partnerships, and budget allocation. Cities can also look into innovative crowd-funding mechanisms to sustain their climate-action projects. One way for cities to raise funds is to issue digital “impact tokens” such as the case for Freetown the Treetown project for which they utilized tokens to unlock investments for projects with a positive environmental and social impact.
- *Separate climate as a non-partisan issue:*  
Climate issues must be moved into a non-partisan/independent sector within the national governing body to depoliticize risks and ensure that party differences between local and national governments will not influence collaboration or funding. National Governments can create an independent body/committee managing all issues related to climate change mitigation, adaptation and planning. The hiring or appointment of these officials must be transparent, and those hired must not be directly affiliated with a political party.

## **Recommendations for international organizations and institutions:**

- *Boost the role of cities as primary actors in multilateral decision making:*

Currently, cities lack a seat on the global multilateral system. Therefore, a mechanism should be put into place to allow cities to sign and commit to international agreements formally. For instance, currently, the Paris Agreement only requires member states to put forward their best efforts through “nationally determined contributions” (UNFCCC, 2015). However, cities fall under the gambit of non-party stakeholders allowed to put forward recommendations, but not as primary actors, which alienates them from the more extensive decision-making process.

A successful example of cities looking to participate in international accountability mechanisms is the recent proliferation of Voluntary Local Reviews in the framework of the 2030 Agenda. Although not designed to be developed by local governments initially, this document has been re-adapted by many cities worldwide to showcase their efforts in aligning with sustainable development goals. The practice has since then been heavily endorsed by international organizations and city networks, including UN-Habitat.

- *Increase visibility of cities:*

Organizations that work in climate and environmental policy should actively make efforts to make themselves visible for city-level leaders by including urban issues in their plans, and projects. Urban issues that are directly impacted by climate change activities should be incorporated in existing or new programs implemented by international organizations and institutions. Through conferences such as the Forum of Mayors, international organizations can increase the visibility of cities and their leaders to showcase their efforts effectively.

- *Create feedback mechanisms for cities:*

International institutions should allow for cities to provide their input in which areas they require more assistance. The feedback should be public information to allow for collaboration between entities having similar issues. For instance, Freetown has conducted its own voluntary local review to showcase the work undertaken by the city but there is currently no formalized mechanism for cities to provide inputs, or ask for support on concerns they might be facing (UN-Habitat, 2021).

- *Enhance collaboration within the intergovernmental organization system itself:*  
International institutions working on similar issues or already implementing programmes which are complementary to each other should leverage partnership opportunities and utilize organizational expertise to further interlinked agendas. Organizations can enhance collaborative activities by curating technical cluster programs between organizations working on common agendas and provide their specialized expertise on the topic. For instance, the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) utilizes the expertise of 5 different UN organizations such as UN-Habitat, UNDP etc.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The analysis put forward by this report showcases challenges between local governments and international institutions, ranging from a need for municipal capacity building, national-local policy integration, funding opportunities, among others. Findings show that the initial hypothesis on the wide potential that cities hold in complementing global efforts while addressing climate change holds true and, thus, the report provided a series of recommendations meant to aid interested parties in developing more effective approaches.

Future possibilities for building on the topic would be to include more detailed case studies for knowledge sharing, particularly for the Global South which would increase the diversity, overall quality and quantity of data available.

As the study showcases the lack of corroborated efforts between internal government agencies, future research can also work towards adopting a systems approach to deliver on global needs for climate change. Academics such as Acuto also suggest working towards creating accurate methodologies and enhancing science-policy interactions through research. On a similar note, Butcher et al. (2022) observe, as a shortfall in current research, the lack of recognition and representation of marginalized voices in urban studies, including their intersection with international relations topics.

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## **INTERVIEWS**

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- Maria Adelaida Antonette M. Cea (Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, UN-Habitat) in discussion with authors, October 2022.
- Mariama Whitmore (Partner at Hastings P3M Consulting) in discussion with authors, August 2022.
- Ronald Jackson (Head of Disaster Risk Reduction - United National Development Programme, UNDP) in discussion with authors, November 2022.
- Thibault Schneeberger (Coordinator of actif-traffic) in discussion with authors, October 2022.
- Victoria Gonsior (City Consultant - Freetown, C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group) in discussion with authors, August 2022.