



Global Perspective: Local Governments Transcending their Borders to Fight Climate Change

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Introduction: Cities and Climate Change

Cities around the world are on the frontlines of climate change: not only are they the primary global emitters of greenhouse gasses (GHGs), but included in their ranks are some of the most susceptible places in the world to the effects of climate change impacts, from sea-level rise, to rising temperatures, droughts, and extreme storms. While occupying only 2% of the earth's surface, cities consume 75% of the planet's resources and currently generate around 70% of GHG in sectors such as industry, transport, housing, and waste¹.

This has serious implications both locally and globally. On one hand, rapid urbanization has paved the way for strong economic growth and poverty reduction—cities currently produce a large share of the wealth for their nation states and regions. On the other hand, unprecedented rates of population growth and the related stresses, such as increased demand for energy, water, housing, and other municipal services, are placing tremendous burdens on local governments.

Rapid urbanization also results in rapidly changing city demographics and boundaries. Many cities are expanding horizontally, creating new urban corridors or mega-regions. Pre-existing city boundaries, governance structures and institutions, and social and economic networks can quickly become inefficient and outdated. The fragmented governance arrangements in many metropolitan areas make efficient planning, management, and urban financing for area-wide service provision extremely difficult².

Added to these strains is a lack of capacity and resources available at the local level for gathering and analyzing climate data. This forces many cities to rely on national data, which generally describe climatic averages across the country and can be quite inaccurate for any particular location³. What's more, to inform their planning processes for urban infrastructure, climate adaptation, and disaster risk reduction, many local governments must rely on historical climate data that do not reflect the new realities of climate change⁴. Inability to measure historical climate patterns and, more importantly, project future effects of climate change makes it nearly impossible to leverage climate change data and mainstream it into local policy⁵.

Premise: From Local to Global, Working Together is the Best Way to Affect Change

Cities and counties by themselves are seldom able address regional issues; consequently they often work together to deliver services such as transportation and waste management. However, coordination on climate policies that span beyond their borders remains relatively uncommon⁶. It is imperative that local governments take a more prominent role in setting regionally relevant climate policy. Climate change action requires cooperation and integration across all jurisdictions. It is not enough to develop policies that apply solely to traditional city jurisdictions and to rely on traditional urban structures in this process. Metropolitan-wide policies and coordinated approaches across both local and international borders will be necessary to implement successful climate strategies.

A strong example of this can be seen in Southeast Florida. In 2009, four counties representing 5.8 million people (Broward, Miami-Dade, Monroe, and Palm Beach) recognized the value of collaborating to address a challenge they all faced: climate change. In the absence of state or federal leadership, the counties came together to form the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact, solidifying their commitment to adapting to climate change and developing resilient strategies.

The Compact embodies a new form of regional climate collaboration designed to allow local governments to set the agenda for adaptation while providing a means to attract the attention of state and federal agencies to engage with technical assistance and support⁷. While the Compact began as an unfunded effort, its success has drawn planning funds from the state and funding from the Kresge foundation. It has created a model nationally recognized for its ability to overcome the social, political, and technical challenges of working across city and county boundaries.

On the other side of the world, on the east coast of South Africa, the city of Durban took notice. Durban is the third-largest metropolitan city in South Africa, and its extensive beaches draw tourists from all over the world. However, being a coastal municipality has its drawbacks; Durban is highly susceptible to coastal erosion and other impacts of climate change. Like southeast Florida, Durban grapples with sea-level rise, flooding, and storm-water management.

Durban has been a global leader in ecosystem-based adaptation at the municipal level. Building on the city's local success, Dr. Debra Roberts, in collaboration with colleagues from all over the world, formed the Durban Adaptation Charter (DAC). The DAC was formed at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) seventeenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) in Durban in December 2011. The charter commits local governments to assist their communities in responding to and coping with climate change risks to reduce vulnerability.

Yet even with the success of the DAC, Durban struggled with how to mitigate the adverse effects on their environment that originated outside of the municipal jurisdiction. Interested in how they might regionalize their efforts to mitigate sea-level rise and increase biodiversity and ecosystem services, Durban looked to ICMA's CityLinks™ program.

CityLinks, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, provides assistance to city officials in developing and transitioning countries that allows them to draw on the resources of their U.S. and international counterparts. Partnerships facilitated through the program give cities the opportunity to find sustainable solutions tailored to real needs. CityLinks is based on the premise that cities learn best from other cities. The key to efficient service delivery, economic growth, community health, and political stability is a well-managed city.

In this case, CityLinks facilitated exchange visits between the city of Fort Lauderdale and Broward County and Durban to explore the benefits and challenges of collaborating with nearby jurisdictions to implement regional climate adaptation strategies. As a direct result of the exchange visits, the city of Durban has established its own Central KwaZulu-Natal Climate Change Compact modelled on that of the Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact.⁸

As a next step in supporting global implementation of the DAC, CityLinks fostered a partnership between Durban and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. The creation of this regional hub is currently providing cities in the region with a platform to learn from each other through workshops and other knowledge-sharing events where local government professionals can increase their capacity to address urban climate change at local and regional levels.

Back in southeast Florida where the initial partnership that sparked this chain of events began, Fort Lauderdale and Broward County formalized the DAC with full support of their commissions after becoming its first U.S. signatories. The region is enacting the charter's principles and utilizing its ability to serve as a knowledge network of local governments committed to climate change.

The idea of city-to-city exchange is not a new idea; it has been around for many years, with serious practice beginning after World War II. Exchanges have evolved to become more complex, adding strategic and longer-term objectives⁹. Over the years, ICMA has found that this type of peer-to-peer learning can result in lasting partnerships that last beyond the city-to-city technical exchanges and lead to significant action at the local government level. This method of addressing climate governance allows all those involved to walk away with an increased understanding of their partner city and new insights into the practices of their own.

Global communities create local opportunities

Cities and other local governments have become a force to be reckoned with on the global stage. As economic engines of the countries in which they reside, their policies and practices have impacts far beyond their geographical borders. Now, more than ever, they have the ability to connect with, collaborate with, and learn from other cities around the world. Though climate change is a global issue, its impacts are felt most strongly at the local level and it is simply too big to face alone. In light of this, ICMA is contributing to innovative climate governance models that create global communities through exchanges and city-to-city partnerships. This allows for technical capacity building as well as increased cultural understanding, resulting in a wealth of opportunities at the local level.

¹ Asia Pacific in the Era of Climate Change: Building Urban Resilience in Asian Cities – CDIA Concept Note. Cities Development Initiative for Asia (CDIA). 2011.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Cities and Climate Change: The role of institutions, governance and urban planning. Report prepared for the World Bank Urban Symposium on Climate Change. Bulkeley, H. et al. University of Oxford. 2009.

⁶ Ibid

⁷ <http://southeastfloridaclimatecompact.org/who-we-are/>

⁸ Durban Adaptation Charter 2013 Annual Report

⁹ Beyond Smart Cities: How cities network, learn, and innovate. Tim Campbell. Earthscan. 2012.

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