

Thematic Track: Planning Cities for a Sustainable Future at the World Sustainable Development Summit 2021

At the [World Sustainable Development Summit \(WSDS\) 2021 - New Delhi \(teriin.org\)](https://www.teriin.org) the thematic track on Planning Cities for a Sustainable Future was organized on 12th February 2021 from 1.45 – 3.30 pm IST. The session was sponsored by the Strategic Partnership for the Implementation of Paris Agreement (SPIPA) project along with the EU International Urban Cooperation India (IUC-India). The SPIPA project is funded by the EU and the German Federal Ministry of the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU). The session provided a platform for focused discussion on various urbanization challenges in India, and the planning and management approach that can be undertaken to address them. The session discussions aligned with the “EU-India Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025” between the European Union (EU) and the Government of India that encompasses ambitious objectives to support smart and sustainable cities, and promote investments in sustainable urbanization, climate action and disaster risk reduction.

Mr. Sanjay Seth, Senior Director, Sustainable Habitat Program, TERI started the session by highlighting that cities in India are facing several urbanization challenges including air pollution, high levels of noise, improper waste management, and poor water quality that pose serious threats to the quality of life. Climate change impacts, such as extreme weather events also disrupt urban services and damage to infrastructure facilities. Thus, cities must seize the opportunity to resolve these divergent challenges for a sustainable future. He emphasized the fact that cities are growth drivers and at the same time consume a lot of resources, hence the key is to strike a balance between development and environment for planning sustainable, smart and inclusive cities.

Mr. Hitesh Vaidya, Director, National Institute of Urban Affairs (NIUA) elaborated on the three key initiatives of the Government of India including Aatma Nirbhar Bharat, Vocal for Local and 5 trillion economy target enabling Indian cities to be self-sufficient. He briefly explained the Climate Smart Cities Assessment Framework initiated by NIUA in 126 cities of the country for creating a database on aspects, such as waste and water management, green buildings, mobility, air quality and urban planning to promote resilience building and climate action planning.

Mr. Michel Mouchiroud, Partner Instrument Coordinator, EU Foreign Policy Instruments, Regional Team Asia & Pacific, Delegation of the European Union to Thailand detailed out the second phase of global corporation programs on urban action and the role of the EU as a global player in achieving sustainable development. He also elaborated on various good practices like the European Green Deal, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the importance of multi-lateral corporation between countries for developing resilient cities. He emphasised the fact that ‘how we plan cities today will decide how the future generations are going to live’ in this planet considering the present rate of urbanisation. He also explained about the ‘Global Convent of Mayors’ (GCOM) initiative for building climate-resilient cities through scientific approaches and city-level climate action plans. At present more than 10,000 cities around the world are part of this network with 22 cities from India.

Mr. Jostein Nygard, Senior Environmental Specialist, World Bank emphasised the importance of air-shed based approach for better Air Quality Management at the city level. He pointed out that pollution sources outside the city influence the air quality within the city limits and Urban Local Bodies have very limited jurisdiction over such sources of pollution.

Dr. Michael Bucki, Head of Section, Counsellor, Delegation of the European Union to India highlighted the EU Clean air policy framework following a comprehensive and transparent approach. He stated that to ensure transparency, real-time air quality data from 4000 Air Quality monitoring stations are made available to the public. He also stated that under the EU

clean air policy framework, cross-boarder consultations among member states and consultations with all relevant stakeholder ministries, NGOs, civil society organisations, Industry associations and researchers are organised regularly on various aspects related to air quality and wellbeing.

Mr. Banchhanidhi Pani, IAS, Commissioner, Surat Municipal Corporation, Gujarat highlighted that Surat has been consistently working for sustainable development through local economic and social initiatives. He explained the geographic, demographic and social characters of the city as well as the past challenges faced by the city, such as floods in 1968 and 2006. As part of the city-to-city partnership initiative between the European Union and India, Surat has initiated an innovative project, named Water Plaza for rejuvenation and development of river Tapi. He concluded that with social cohesion and flood resilience initiatives, Surat has paved its way to resilient and sustainable development.

As part of the panel discussion moderated by Ms. Kamilla Kristensen Rai, Counsellor, Delegation of the European Union to India. Ms. Sriparna Iyer, Key Expert, EU–India Urban Partnership Support Project briefly explained the need to revisit our existing Urban and Regional Development Plans Formulation and Implementation (URDPFI) Guidelines and modal building bye-laws to make our cities resilient. Ms. Parul Agarwala, Country Programme Manager, UN-Habitat India, highlighted the need for strengthening city- city partnerships for the implementation of planning policies and schemes at the grass-root level. Ms. Vaishali Nandan, Project Director, GIZ India, described that all the sectors in the cities such as water, waste etc. are inter-connected to each other and the planning initiatives should be integrated, rather than just working in silos. Mr. Emani Kumar, Executive Director, ICLEI South Asia, elucidated the need to have a holistic approach for making cities resilient. He explained how the public-private partnership model can become an important instrument in the timely implementation of innovative schemes for the sustainable development of cities. Ms. Rupali Deshmukh, Senior Coordinator, Business Development and Marketing, IVL Swedish Environmental Research Institute outlined three tools including Eco-governance, innovations, and community engagement for creating long-lasting and sustainable solutions.

The video recording of the session is available at: [Thematic Track: Planning Cities for a Sustainable Future - YouTube](#)