Cities can spur significant climate and economic benefits through targeted low-carbon investments

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Tree-lined streets in Johannesburg, South Africa Credit: Pixabay

Six major emerging economies—China, India, Indonesia, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa—could collectively cut emissions by up to 96% from key urban sectors (buildings, transport, materials use, and waste) by 2050, leading to $12 trillion in economic returns based on cost savings alone, as well as delivering millions of new jobs, according to a new report published today by the Coalition for Urban Transitions.

The report, Seizing the Urban Opportunity, highlights the vital role of cities as engines of national economies and livelihoods. It comes at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way people live in cities, underscoring that this is the time to rethink cities' roles and invest in their recovery. The pandemic exposed economies and communities around the world to economic, social and climate challenges, with cities and the urban poor particularly hard-hit.

The report makes clear that cities cannot do this on their own—national governments hold the key to urban transformation, given their scale, access to resources, and control over many policy realms. According to past research by the Coalition, local governments have primary responsibility for less than one-third of urban emissions reduction potential and national or other higher-tier governments have primary authority over the measures required to achieve two-thirds of the global urban emissions reduction potential.

Commenting on the findings of the report, Manuel Pulgar-Vidal, Global Leader, Climate & Energy, WWF International and Coalition Senior Ambassador, said: "The opportunity for cities to be a meaningful part of tackling the climate crisis cannot be understated. This new report, inspired by best in class examples from six countries, shows how national governments everywhere can significantly enhance to their economic and climate goals by investing in low-carbon, resilient and inclusive cities. Ahead of COP26, this must be an urgent call to for governments to ensure cities are included in their national climate plans

and long-term strategies."

Across the six countries studied, implementation of the report's solutions, using currently available measures, could collectively support:

- Climate benefits, including cutting annual emissions from key urban sectors (buildings, transport, materials use and waste) by 87–96% by 2050 beyond their initial NDC commitments under the Paris Agreement.
- Economic benefits including economic returns with a net present value of over $12 trillion by 2050, based on energy and material cost savings alone.
- Development benefits including potentially supporting millions of new jobs in 2030: 15.2 million in China, 8.2 million in India, 2.3 million in Indonesia, 4.5 million in Brazil, 650,000 in South Africa, and 500,000 in Mexico.

Nick Godfrey, director of the Coalition for Urban Transitions, said: "Cities need national governments to lead the way by including them in stimulus spending and enacting national policies that make them more resilient. Looking at six major economies, we find it is possible to not only accelerate the required shift to net-zero emissions by focusing on cities, but also to drive shared prosperity."

Amina J. Mohammed, U.N. deputy secretary-general, said: "National governments can work with urban leaders to unlock the enormous potential in cities and in the urbanization process. Greater national support for urban action is essential to cut carbon pollution in key sectors including energy, transport, construction and land use."

Nigel Topping, high level champion for climate action COP26, said: "The run-up to COP26 in Glasgow represents a critical period for the world to put itself on track for a more prosperous and resilient future.

Cities can deliver 58% of the energy-related emission reductions needed to keep the global temperature increase to 1.5°C, so they are a vital piece of the climate action puzzle."

Sharan Burrow, general secretary, International Trade Union Confederation, said: "National governments must prioritize sustainable urban infrastructure now to create millions of decent jobs in the near and long term as we recover from the pandemic."

The report highlights opportunities in each of the six countries and offers recommendations tailored to each nation's specific context. For example:

- China's economic success story is built on cities, which are home to three-fifths of its population and produce 90% of GDP. While Beijing has taken major steps to build resilience and reduce air, water, and land pollution, its cities still struggle with congestion, pollution, sprawl, and severe climate impacts. Successful implementation of the report's solutions could result in an 89% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from China's cities by 2050, economic returns of $7.7 trillion by 2050, and 15.2 million new jobs in 2030. The report's recommendations include helping smaller cities become more climate resilient and putting sustainable cities at the heart of implementing the nation's recently announced 14th Five-Year Plan.
- Almost 58 million Indonesians live in low-lying coastal zones, 82% of them in urban or quasi-urban areas. While efforts are being made in several cities to work with local residents to manage flood risks, protect ecosystems, and build capacity for climate adaptation and mitigation, many residents still lack basic services and flood risks remain an urgent concern. Successful implementation of the report's solutions could result in a 96% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from Indonesia's cities by

2050, economic returns of $2.7 trillion by 2050, and 2.3 million new jobs in 2030. The recommendations include restoring and protecting ecosystems such as mangroves and coastal peatlands, which could both reduce land subsidence and flood risks and avoid large amounts of emissions and pollution from fires.

Professor Lord Nicholas Stern, chair of the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at the London School of Economics said: "By 2030 nearly a billion people will be added to the global urban population—and trillions of dollars will be invested in urban infrastructure—in the decade where global CO_2 emissions must be reduced by around half for the target of holding temperature increase to 1.5˚C. Focusing on compact, connected, and clean cities—where it is easier to move, breathe and work productively and greenhouse gas emissions can be far lower than in existing urban structures—will be at the heart of achieving climate ambitions and finding a new path to strong, sustainable, resilient, and inclusive growth."

More information: Seizing the Urban Opportunity: How national governments can recover from COVID-19, tackle the climate crisis and secure shared prosperity through cities. urbantransitions.global/urban- … e-urban-opportunity/

Provided by WWF

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