

Sustainable cities and human settlements, Plenary Statement made by ICSU (International Council for Science)

7th session of Open Working Group on SDGs, 6th January 2014, New York

Opening statement

This is a statement on behalf of The Science & Technological Community.

ICSU wants to highlight the following in the discussion around a standalone goal or mainstreaming urban sustainability in the SDGs process.

First of all, we agree with previous speakers that with the rapid urbanization across the globe, particularly in Africa and Asia, it would be a missed opportunity if urbanization is not included, and all the opportunities linked to action at the local municipal level missed out in the SDGs process.

However, we want to strongly emphasize it is important that we focus on sustainable urbanization rather than sustainability of individual cities per se. Too often sustainability and resilience are used addressing specific narrow geographical locations, but these concepts are properties of systems and not of locations.

When designing a goal we need to apply a systems perspective and address the urbanization process and the multiple connections, such as flows of energy, food, water etc., between urban and rural areas. This also has to be reflected in the indicators. A promising development is the work on scalable indicators that may allow the involvement of local groups, citizen science, indigenous groups and other representatives of civil society in monitoring and reporting on the SDGs.

ICSU views a goal on sustainable urbanization as crucial for the overall goal of global sustainability"

Closing statement

ICSU again wants to emphasize the need of taking a systems perspective and that we should focus the efforts on developing a goal on sustainable urbanization.

Failure to include an urban SDG would be a missed opportunity to involve the enormous potential of actions taken by local governments and the local level in efforts to achieve an overall global sustainable development.

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