



USA SUSTAINABLE CITIES INITIATIVE (USA-SCI) ALIGNING GLOBAL & CITY-LEVEL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

Sustainable development (SD) describes society's commitment to three interconnected objectives: economic development, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an effort to operationalize the concept of sustainable development, and to ensure every country in the world is moving towards a shared vision of the future. They are clear, quantifiable benchmarks of progress, which will be adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015.

With over 50% of the world's population living in urban areas, cities are crucial to the fulfillment of sustainable development. They are also testimony to the universal nature of our challenges; cities like Baltimore face massive challenges of poverty, loss of jobs, deterioration of infrastructure, and social exclusion, whilst New York City, in the words of Mayor Bill de Blasio, has become a "tale of two cities," with gaping divisions between the rich and poor. NYC, like many other cities, must also address the challenge of climate change adaptation and resilience, and fulfill their commitment to cut emissions sharply as part of the world's need to abide by the 2-degree Celsius limit on human-induced climate change.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide an opportunity to address these profound challenges at the city level through clear and compelling goals, participation of all stakeholders, targeted long-term policies, and public-private investments.

'By defining our goal more clearly, by making it seem more manageable and less remote, we can help all people to see it, to draw hope from it and to move irresistibly towards it.'
President J.F. Kennedy, June 10, 1963

SDSN and Climate Nexus are working in partnership with leading academic institutions to support the technical process of developing long-term SDG-based strategies in select US cities, including New York, San Jose, and Baltimore. These cities will be global pioneers: the first to develop SDG-based city-level development strategies that will serve as a model for cities worldwide.

Key stages of the project will include:

1. An inclusive dialogue, across communities, on the relevance of the SDG process and how SDGs can be made responsive to city-level development challenges and opportunities;
2. The articulation of clear and compelling goals, specific to the city, yet aligned with the global SDGs, covering poverty, jobs, security, education, health, housing, infrastructure, low-carbon energy and environmental protection (See Box 1);
3. The operationalization of the goals, through carefully developed targets and indicators;
4. Identifying good practices and encouraging their scale-up;
5. The preparation of a long-term strategy for the fulfillment of the identified goals.

Box 1: An example of possible goals for a city

By 2020 (X), 2025 (Y), and 2030 (Z), this city SHALL:

- (1) Have achieved [X, Y, Z] secondary completion rates for all young people
- (2) Reduced the youth unemployment rate to below [X, Y, Z] percent
- (3) Created [X, Y, Z] net new jobs for 25-34 year olds
- (4) Reduced the obesity rate from the current level to [X, Y, Z]
- (5) Reduced the rate of adult-onset diabetes from the current rate to [X, Y, Z]
- (6) Implemented universal coverage of early child development programs and Pre-K
- (7) Adopted a sustainability plan accounting for future climate change
- (8) Adopted a metropolitan smart energy plan leading by 2030 to a [X] percent drop in CO2 emissions and by 2050 to a [X] drop, relative to 2005
- (9) Attracted an increase in population in the city by [X, Y, Z] thousand.

To be successful, each city-level process must be *goal-oriented, multi-stakeholder, investment-led, and knowledge-based*. Goal-oriented means that sustainable development should be pursued in the context of clear, time-bound, and quantified SDGs. Multi-stakeholder means that SDG implementation requires the active participation of government, business, civil society, academia, and social (not-for-profit) enterprises. These stakeholders should be interacting collaboratively on the basis of standards of efficiency, equity, and participation. Investment-led means that achieving the SDGs requires a long-term public-private investment strategy integrating investments in business capital with complementary investments in infrastructure, human capital, natural capital, and social capital. Knowledge-based means that technical expertise across sectors—including academia, business, government, and civil society—should support the sustainable development investment strategy and policy frameworks.

This project is not a one-off intervention. The SDGs provide a long-term and sustainable approach to city-level planning, with clear common objectives continuously pursued irrespective of political cycles. But to ensure full ownership of this agenda goals must be developed through an inclusive, participatory dialogue. They must act as the common language of both government and citizens, and represent a shared ideal to be pursued at the city-level but also within each community. Everyone will have a role to play to ensure their attainment.

SDSN, Climate Nexus, local academic partners and community organizations are kick-starting this endeavor by highlighting the unique opportunity afforded by the global discussion on sustainable development, as well as by providing: a common platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue; educational materials and tools for awareness raising; technical assistance for developing quantitative targets and indicators; as well as international profile and media attention.