

WE LOVE CITIES

A growing numbers of cities are demonstrating their willingness to lead in the transition to a sustainable future.



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Earth Hour City Challenge 2014 Winner: Cape Town

This decade is the first in history in which more people live in towns and cities than in rural areas. And, as the world's population grows, the proportion living in cities is set to increase further, especially in the global South. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity.

Increasing consumption, resource use and waste in cities is driving the world's growing Ecological Footprint. However, with good planning and governance, cities can meet people's needs much more efficiently than less densely populated areas. Over the next three decades, tremendous investment will take place in urban areas.

“CAPE TOWN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE EARTH HOUR CITY CHALLENGE ALLOWED US TO LEARN FROM OTHER CITIES, PUSHING US TO THINK MORE CREATIVELY. WITH THE HELP OF OUR RESIDENTS, THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND OTHER CIVIC ORGANISATIONS, OUR CITY WILL CONTINUE TO FIND LOW FOOTPRINT SOLUTIONS THAT IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE AND BUILD A THRIVING, DYNAMIC ECONOMY AT THE SAME TIME.” COUNCILLOR GARRETH BLOOR, CITY OF CAPE TOWN MAYORAL COMMITTEE MEMBER

This provides a window of opportunity to redirect financial flows toward creating healthy, sustainable cities. Smart choices made at all levels now could improve the quality of life for hundreds of millions of people, and massively reduce the footprint of our lifestyles.

While cities are responsible for more than 70 per cent of our planet's energy-related carbon emissions (UN HABITAT, 2011), they also have the potential to become centres of renewable energy production and energy efficiency. In Cape Town, where heating water accounts for 40 per cent of household energy, a scheme aims to help residents install 60,000-150,000 solar water heaters in five years. The 2014 Global Earth Hour Capital has also initiated projects such as retrofitting more than 43,000 streetlights, replacing 1,328 traffic lights with low-energy LEDs, and introducing smart meters.

Many other major cities offer incentives for residents and businesses to install rooftop solar power. Shanghai, WWF-China's Low Carbon Pilot City, is launching a local incentive for residents and businesses to install distributed solar power: on top of the national incentive of 0.42 yuan per kWh the city will provide an

Box 9: WWF's urban initiatives

Conservation outcomes are closely linked to production and consumption patterns, which are largely driven by the demands of urban societies. WWF's work for sustainable cities (wwf.panda.org/sustainablecities) is an integral part of its efforts to build a future in which we all live well in harmony with nature and within the capacity of one planet – a “one planet future”.

- WWF's **Earth Hour City Challenge** aims to mobilize action and support from cities in a global transition toward a 100 per cent renewable and sustainable future, and to stimulate the development and dissemination of best practices for sustainable urban development.
- **We Love Cities** is a social media platform on which citizens are invited to express support for the climate actions of finalist cities in the Earth Hour City Challenge and to post suggestions for how their cities can become more sustainable. Within only two months in 2014, it collected more than 300,000 expressions of support and suggestions.
- **Urban Solutions** is a global inventory of learning cases, providing 100+ real examples of how cities are approaching the need to minimize their Ecological Footprints and protect ecosystem services and biodiversity.
- **Low Carbon Cities** is exploring low carbon development models in China in order to learn from and replicate successful experiences.

additional subsidy of 0.4 yuan (US\$0.07) per kWh for household installations and 0.25 yuan for business installations (Shanghai DRC, 2014). Chicago is aiming to become a leader in residential and commercial rooftop solar development, as part of its goal to reduce carbon emissions by 25 per cent below 1990 levels by 2020.

The transport sector is responsible for more than 25 per cent of world energy related carbon emissions (Baumert, 2005), and traffic pollution is a huge problem in many cities. But areas of high population density lend themselves to sustainable transport solutions.

In Stockholm, more than three-quarters of citizens use public transport, supported by initiatives such as a congestion tax, walking school buses, cycling education, and city planning for biking and “walkability”. Up to half of Copenhagen’s residents cycle to their place of work or study – cycling is considered a distinct traffic category with its own separate road area. Vancouver has reversed transport trends by banning new highways and investing heavily in public transport. One in three drivers in Seoul – 820,000 people – has joined the city’s No Driving Day programme, contributing to better air quality, less traffic congestion and greenhouse-gas emissions cuts. Participants who register to leave their cars at home for one day each week are rewarded with reduced tolls and parking charges and other incentives.

Cities are also increasingly taking responsibility for water management. Some are actively protecting forests, wetlands and catchment areas vital to local water supply. Mexico City’s reforestation programme is planting 2 million trees per year to help secure its water supply, and protected natural areas now make up almost 60 per cent of the federal district. Others are improving water security through collecting rainwater and recycling: water-scarce Singapore, for example, receives more than half of its water supply from rainwater collection (20 per cent), recycled water (30 per cent) and desalination (10 per cent).

Globally, urban farming supplies nearly 15 per cent of all food: many cities have introduced policies to support local food production – which can help reduce transport and greenhouse-gas emissions; provide employment; improve the urban environment; and reduce pressure on natural ecosystems. In Shanghai, for example, municipal government policy has led the city to produce more than 55 per cent of its vegetables and 90 per cent of its green-leaf vegetables locally. Belo Horizonte in Brazil has radically increased local and organic food production, improving poor residents’ access to nutritious produce, reducing childhood malnutrition and increasing income for local farmers (World Future Council, 2013).

Urban farming is also an example of the increased “greening” of cities. Measures like planting trees and flowers, enhancing green spaces, and restoring waterways and wetlands are bringing

>25%

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social, economic and environmental benefits. Mexico City aims to create 10,000m² of new green roofs annually, to improve air quality, regulate humidity, reduce temperatures and provide new biodiversity resources. In many places, urban habitats are becoming important havens for native plants, insects, birds and animals: 20 per cent of all bird species live in cities (Conniff, 2014).

Cities can also take a lead in protecting biodiversity and the natural environment far beyond their own boundaries by addressing consumption. Sendai in Japan has been a front-runner in developing green purchasing regulations: its municipal institutions make more than 90 per cent of their purchases from a recommended list of green products, and the city has helped set up a Green Procurement Network involving around 3,000 public, private and voluntary sector organizations, including all of the largest cities. Ghent in Belgium promotes a meat-free day each week to help reduce agriculture’s carbon emissions and environmental impact, and to encourage improved human health and animal welfare – an idea that has been adopted by cities such as Helsinki, Cape Town, San Francisco and Sao Paulo.

All of these examples show that we have a choice. Urbanization does not have to mean ever-increasing pollution, sprawl, high-impact lifestyles and overstretched services. Wise investment, planning and governance in cities today could secure healthy, sustainable communities and lifestyles for more than half of humanity.



Preserve natural capital: Natural spaces in and around cities provide vital ecosystem services, including clean air and water, flood protection, biodiversity habitat and recreational values.



Produce better: Nearly 15 per cent of the world’s food is supplied by urban farming. Cities are also increasingly generating their own renewable energy.



Consume more wisely: Cities are centres of consumption – but smart urban development and better consumption choices can also help people live more sustainable lives.



Redirect financial flows: US\$350 trillion will be spent on urban infrastructure between 2005 and 2035 (WWF, 2010). This provides a window of opportunity to turn cities from being threats to becoming solutions for global footprint reduction and biodiversity protection.



Equitable resource governance: Well-governed, forward-thinking and well-designed cities are more sustainable along every dimension. Good governance rewards itself.

For references and further details, see wwf.panda.org/urbansolutions