

LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENT ASSEMBLY



SIDE EVENT
81ST COMMISSION SESSION OF
ESCAP

22 APRIL 2025, 12:45-13:45

MEETING ROOM H

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE CENTRE

BANGKOK, THAILAND

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BACKGROUND

“Cities are hubs of innovation and human ingenuity — and potential centres for transformative action to implement the Sustainable Development Goals and build a zero-carbon, climate-resilient and socially just world.” – UN Secretary General António Guterres

The triple planetary crisis, encompassing biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution, places immense pressure on cities and regions worldwide. In a highly urbanising and disaster-prone Asia-Pacific region, cities and local governments are at the core of evolving challenges. At the same time, they are best placed or actors to drive solutions and innovations. Local and regional governments play a crucial role in achieving global agendas, including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Given the theme of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)'s 81st Commission Session on *“Regional cooperation for resilient and sustainable urban development in Asia and the Pacific”*, the position and participation of local and regional governments in this regional process is essential.

The Asia-Pacific Local Government Coordinating Body, through the United Cities and Local Governments Asia Pacific, organised the side event “Local and Regional Government Assembly” to determine the enablers of resilient and sustainable urban development in the region and adopt the Joint Statement of Local and Regional Governments to be delivered in the plenary session of the Commission Session.

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SUMMARY

Mr. Dakila Carlo Cua, President of UCLG ASPAC, President of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP), and Governor of Quirino Province, in his video message, welcomed the participants and emphasised that local and regional governments are co-creators of global solutions. He remarked that regional cooperation is a necessity to respond to the increasingly complex challenges faced by local and regional governments.

“It is important for local leaders to be here because if we don’t speak up, we will not be heard.” Dr. Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi, Secretary General of UCLG ASPAC, facilitated the Assembly. As part of the context setting, she reported on the result of the Local and Regional Government Assemblies held at the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction held on 14 October 2024 in Manila, the Philippines, and the Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD) held on 24 February 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Local government leaders discussed their perspectives on the pathways for resilient and sustainable urban development.

“We are very important stakeholders in the global equation of addressing all the different issues that are faced globally and regionally.” Mr. Powes Parkop, Governor of Port Moresby, underscored the important role of local and regional governments in implementing actions to achieve resilient and sustainable development and in responding to challenges on the ground. He acknowledged the importance of sharing experiences and escalating the experience together at the regional and global level.

Dr. Ani Ahmad, Mayor of Ampang Jaya Municipal Council, made several recommendations. To facilitate knowledge exchange and experience sharing, she proposed creating a comprehensive list of guidelines on urban management and coordinating study visits, supported by appropriate funding, to showcase best practices. She noted that ESCAP could contribute by providing partial funding or collaborating with the respective local authorities for this initiative. To address the issue of securing funding, she underscored that accessing information on development and infrastructure funding from international organisations is crucial. She proposed a multi-faceted approach including: 1) conduct training workshop that covers

identification of funding sources, eligibility requirements, and effective proposal writing techniques; 2) develop online resource hub that consolidates information on available funding opportunities, application guidelines, and best practices; 3) establish a mentorship programme that pairs local authorities with experienced professionals or organisations that have successfully secured funding for personalised guidance and support throughout the application process; 4) facilitate networking events with international funding bodies to help local authorities build relationships, ask questions directly, and gain insights on the expectations of funding agencies; and 5) work closely with state government to advocate streamlined communication between local authorities and funding organisations.

“For collaboration to be meaningful, we should find meanings in it. When we find meanings, we begin to understand, and we can go to the next level which is commitment.” Mr. Tevita Boseiwaqa, Chairman of Suva City Council, emphasised the importance of incorporating culture, and moral and religious values, into knowledge to find meaning and improve commitment on collaboration. To foster horizontal and vertical synergies, he remarked that those involved should be empowered through process review and by having coordination, communication, and reporting plans. To ensure the no one is left behind principle of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), he proposed affirmative action provisions on financing. He added that local governments should be empowered to improve their ability to generate funds.

“To build resilient cities and communities, there should be collaboration that crosses borders, synergies that break silos, and finance that is accessible, simple, and reaches the ground.” Mr. Bhupender Kumar Attri, Commissioner of Shimla Municipality, shared how they have benefitted from international programmes and organisations that provided access to technical support on climate assessment, emission inventory, and integrated action plan. He proposed a one-stop platform on climate finance that can connect cities with donors and train cities to write bankable proposals.

“It is essential to bridge the gap between national frameworks and local realities. When local voices inform national strategies, we create policies that are more responsive, inclusive, and effective.” Mr. Mohd Yushanizar bin Md Yusoff, Deputy Director of City Planning Department of Kuala Lumpur City, stated that regional cooperation becomes powerful when it is built on mutual learning and shared responsibility. He said that many local and regional governments continue to struggle with limited fiscal autonomy and access to funding. To make financing more accessible, there is a need to support local authorities in strengthening their financial management system, building credit worthiness, and developing bankable project pipelines. He added that it is essential for international financial institutions to simplify their process that often exclude smaller and less resourced cities.

“Shared tools, shared data, and shared purpose don’t just strengthen collaboration—they unlock resilience and drive sustainable urban progress.” Ms. Joyce Sy, Planning Officer of the City Government of Makati, discussed how Makati led the pilot and expansion of SDG self-assessment monitoring across cities in the Philippines. This approach was combined with peer-to-peer learning, co-development of local indicators, provision of technical support, and convening of regional dialogues with national and academic partners. This effort fostered policy coherence, strengthened local ownership, and bridged local efforts with national goals.

Mr. Victorino Aquitania, Regional Director of ICLEI Southeast Asia, highlighted the potential of Southeast Asia to shape development models along a sustainable lens. There is a need for a paradigm shift in urban development, one that should lead to fully embrace sustainability and the institutional, political, and normative changes that this will take. He challenged city and local government leaders to take initiative, seek out support and cooperation from within and outside their countries, improve their own capacities, establish a vision for a sustainable city, and take part in the power of local action for global change.

Ms. Norliza Hashim, Chief Executive of URBANICE Malaysia, encouraged cities to be part of a network and participate actively. Networks open a lot of opportunities on capacity building, partnership, and funding. She mentioned the need to establish a shared platform that is simple and flexible, and advocated for policy reform and alignment.

Dr. Bernadia Irawati Tjandradewi, Secretary General of UCLG ASPAC, briefly presented the proposal for the APLG Joint Platform with the aim of consolidating and connecting the knowledge, tools, and learning resources for local governments in the Asia-Pacific region.

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JOINT STATEMENT OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNMENTS

Local and regional government leaders and representatives from urban, rural, and island localities in the Asia-Pacific region convened for the Local and Regional Government Assembly (LRG Assembly) on 22 April 2025, which served as a side event of the 81st Commission Session of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

Building on the outcome of the LRG Assembly held at the 12th Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development on 24 February 2025 in Bangkok, Thailand, and the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction on 14 October 2024 in Manila, the Philippines, we reaffirm our commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and Paris Agreement on Climate Change. We propose the development of a regional roadmap for local and regional governments that links these commitments into integrated local actions, especially in the context of Asia-Pacific vulnerabilities to disaster and climate change.

We note that the theme study of the 81st Commission Session on Urban Transformation in Asia and the Pacific: From Growth to Resilience made the following recommendations: enhance regional cooperation for resilient and sustainable urban development; adopt integrated national urban policies to bolster multilevel governance; strengthen subnational and local data collection and reporting to promote evidence-based urban policies; plan for urban demographic changes with strengthened spatial planning and inclusive social policies; and pursue a diversified and innovative approach to urban financing. We emphasise the need for multi-stakeholder partnership and to involve local and regional governments in the process of localising these recommendations.

We acknowledge the recognition of Voluntary Subnational Review (VSR) and Voluntary Local Review (VLR) as tools for national and local government integration. Through the years, the number of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) involving local and regional governments have increased around the world. More local and regional governments are engaging in sustainable development goals (SDGs) monitoring and reporting. We encourage the establishment of a regional peer-learning mechanism, which can provide technical and financial support and facilitate exchange of innovative solutions, to scale up VSR and VLR initiatives and systematically link them to the VNR process.

We commend the development of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 national roadmap in the region. This undertaking can support the adoption and implementation of national urban policies. We advocate the replication and regional sharing of experiences on SDG 11 roadmaps and urge governments to co-create national urban policies with local and regional governments and local communities, including the youth.

We recognise the urgency in addressing the climate emergency at the local level. We underscore the ambitious targets and potential of local and regional governments on reducing carbon emissions and fostering climate resilience. We encourage the development of national multilevel governance frameworks, ensuring dedicated roles, funding, and representation for local and regional governments in both the development and implementation of nationally determined contributions (NDCs). We also call for the full recognition and integration of local climate action plans (CAPs) into national climate strategies and NDC updates. Furthermore, city enabling environment assessments reveal varying needs on fiscal decentralisation, public engagement, and capacity building that should be addressed according to national and local contexts.

As frontliners in public service delivery and the closest level of government to the people, we reiterate the need to provide direct access for local and regional governments to development and climate financing. Local actions that need immediate attention should not be delayed by the bureaucracy of business-as-usual. In this context, we call for the reform of financing systems for climate and urban development, including housing, to ensure direct access windows for local and regional governments, and explore the creation of regional climate finance platforms that can better respond to local priorities and accelerate implementation on the ground.

Inclusive governance that ensures equitable participation of local and regional governments and engagement of civil society and marginalised groups for a resilient and sustainable Asia-Pacific is essential. We look forward to a continuous dialogue with all levels of government and all stakeholders to strengthen regional solidarity and amplify diverse local voices towards our common goal for a better future.

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STEPS TAKEN AFTER THE ASSEMBLY



Mr. Powes Parkop, Governor of Port Moresby, delivered the Joint Statement of Local and Regional Governments in Agenda Item 3 (Regional cooperation for resilient and sustainable urban development in Asia and the Pacific) on 22 April 2025. The video is available on the [ESCAP CS81 video on UN Web TV](#) (2:19:54-2:23:37). The statement is also uploaded to the [ESCAP CS81 website](#).

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CONCLUSION

The Local and Regional Government Assembly completed its objectives to identify the enablers of resilient and sustainable urban development – 1) greater involvement of local and regional governments in national urban policymaking and VNR process; 2) replication of SDG 11 national roadmaps; 3) development of national multilevel governance frameworks on climate resilience; and 4) provision of direct access to and capacity building on development and climate financing to local and regional governments. These were conveyed through the Joint Local and Regional Government Statement at the plenary session of the 81st Commission Session of ESCAP.

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