

Global Platform for Sustainable Cities - 2nd Annual Meeting

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Opening Remarks by

Naoko Ishii, CEO and Chairperson, Global Environment Facility

(as delivered)

Welcome to everyone.

It's a pleasure to join you today for the second annual conference of the Global Platform for Sustainable Cities.

It was last year, March of 2016, in Singapore when we launched the first ever annual meeting of GPSC together with many of you. It was a moment of determination and enthusiasm. It took place soon after the historic climate meeting in Paris where 700 mayors got together to declare their commitment to be frontrunners in the fight for climate change.

We all hoped GPSC could serve as a platform for mayors who take on this challenge by offering cutting edge knowledge for designing integrated urban planning and by exchanging lessons learned among mayors and experts.

Since then we have made a lot of progress. I am particularly happy to see so many cities beyond the original 23 participants some of which are from developed countries.

I would like to deeply thank the World Bank who has led the GPSC program with partners such as C40, WRI and ICLEI. My special thanks goes to Ede, who has been a central figure to promote this agenda in a very inspiring manner. Without his vision and commitment, we would not have been here in this way.

I would also like to thank our host, the Government of India. I would like to congratulate them for launching the Indian National Platform for Sustainable cities. GPSC supports five Indian cities, namely Jaipur, Bhopal, Vijawada, Guntur, and Mysore, which are part of Prime Minister Modi's 100 Smart Cities. We are very pleased with the potential that GPSC helps achieve India's ambition for sustainable cities.

Despite all the progress, we need to recognize the challenges mounting day by day. In recent months, extreme weather events – from devastating floods in Asia and the Hurricanes hitting the Caribbean – reveal the sheer fact that the way current cities are built they cannot handle the immense pressure caused by those extreme weather events. And that more cities will face more challenges in the future as the climate will continue to change. Systems thinking is urgently needed to build cities and their infrastructure in a way to increase resilience to cope with challenges they face.

It is said that 90 trillion USD in infrastructure will be built over the next 15 years. Much of this 90 trillion will be in cities. The key question ahead of us is how to avoid the lock-in effect of building infrastructure the wrong way and to make sure every dollar is spent in a sustainable, integrated and holistic manner.

Cities have direct control over policies of vital systems; such as system-level management of infrastructure development, natural resources, and setting environmental standards. They are in charge to deal with the transit system, roads, markets, waste management, water supply, wastewater treatment, building codes, and others. Mayors, you are very powerful! We hope the GPSC helps you address these challenges.

There are different plausible approaches to understanding urban solutions. One approach emphasized integrated urban development, which aims to unleash cities' potential through three angles:

- Sequence urban investment in a way that cities can address the cross-cutting and enduring issues first.
- Integrate urban form – density, land use, and connectivity, with the planning of infrastructure systems.
- Collaborate among different stakeholders and across different sectors.

We understand there is no silver bullet, but a clearly defined strategy such as integrated urban development can power cities to become engines of transformative change toward a green, inclusive, people center direction.

At the GEF, we are in the middle of negotiations with donors about our investment strategy for the next four years. We have put an ambitious sustainable cities program at its heart. I am very thankful for Ede who came to Addis to provide a very convincing sales pitch to donors for the expansion of this program.

We face the challenge together but also share opportunities. I sincerely hope that GPSC brings together diverse partnerships of many stakeholders around an integrated approach which all of us need.

I am looking very much forward to working with all of you on this exciting agenda in the months and years ahead!