

The World Mayors Summit on Climate

Beatriz Bugada Bernal*



Rodolfo Angulo/Cuartoscuro

The World Mayors Summit on Climate in Mexico City. In the front row, Bertrand Delanoë, mayor of Paris; Marcelo Ebrard, mayor of Mexico City, and Antonio Villaraigosa, mayor of Los Angeles.

Climate change is one of the most important points on the international political agenda and the agendas of many of the world's cities. The new challenges it poses in terms of policy design, industrial processes,

production-consumption patterns, and for civil society, are monumental. Cities are facing more and more frequent devastating climate events forcing authorities and inhabitants alike to plan a way to deal with them effectively before it is too late.

More than half the planet's population lives in cities; they consume two-thirds of the world's energy and generate more than 70 percent of its CO₂ emissions. This makes cities the main contributors to the creation of greenhouse gases (GHG) and an important part of the problem. But it also

* President of the Citizens' Environmental Monitoring Observatory and Mexico City government World Mayors Summit on Climate ambassador for the dissemination of the Mexico City Pact objectives in her area of activity.

makes them part of the solution for climate change. If urgent measures are not taken, by the year 2030, energy consumption in the cities will increase 73 percent, and CO₂ emissions, 76 percent, according to International Energy Agency estimates.

Among the direct sources of GHG emissions in urban centers are energy generation itself, public lighting, vehicles, transportation, industry, and the burning of fossil fuels for domestic use. Emissions generated by transportation are increasing 2.4 percent every year; this includes not only an increase in CO₂, but also carbon monoxide, lead, and nitrogen oxides dumped into the atmosphere.

Industry, for example, is responsible for 43 percent of global CO₂ emissions through the burning of fossil fuels. To this, we have to add the significant reduction of green areas in urban centers, decreasing the capacity to absorb these gases, as well as many cities' very deficient waste management, causing the release of gases like chlorofluorocarbon (CFCs) and methane into the atmosphere.

IMPACTS AND VULNERABILITY

On the other hand, cities are also highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change because of their geographical location (most are in coastal areas, exposed to rising ocean levels), the large number of people who live in them (which is increasing with migration), and the vulnerability of many social groups that live in them (in unequal conditions of development).

Both their potential for suffering damage due to climate change and their capacity to adapt are directly associated to a series of factors. One of the most important involves their infrastructure, since the absence or unequal distribution of basic services like drainage and water supply can increase the risks of flooding and landslides in the case of extreme precipitation. Their high population density makes them more vulnerable to environmental emergencies, since it increases the number of potential victims and therefore, the social cost associated with climate change.

The productive structure is another element that should be evaluated, since many urban communities depend for their subsistence on a single predominant activity, like agriculture or fishing, and climate change can be devastating for their economy and eventually for the food supply. Health conditions are also essential, since the disasters linked to climate

The signatory cities of the Mexico City Pact have a strategic role in fighting climate change as centers for economic, political, and cultural innovation, and for managing large quantities of public resources, infrastructure, investment capital, and knowledge.

change (storms, flooding, air pollution, and heat waves) make their citizens more vulnerable to infectious diseases.

Finally, water-supply capabilities are also important because they relate directly to weather conditions, specifically to the amount of rainfall. With a larger population, water consumption increases substantially; in addition, floods can contaminate water sources and even treatment plants.

For all these reasons, we can say that cities' heterogeneity makes evaluating their vulnerability difficult. However, clearly, the most critical conditions can be found in cities with the poorest populations who live in the most ecologically fragile surroundings. This is the case of many cities in developing countries, among them, Mexico.

MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION MEASURES

What can cities do in the face of these challenges? Some measures that can be implemented are simple, like fostering public awareness about the effects of climate change, creating more green areas, and promoting the use of bicycles and low-fuel-consumption public transport. Others require political will, legislative support, and large public investments; these are the ones known as mitigation and adaptation strategies.

Mitigation measures aim to reduce GHG emissions, including the elimination of carbon by using sink holes (systems that extract GHG from the atmosphere and store them), and involve the energy, transport, industrial, residential, forestry, and agricultural sectors, among others. Adaptation measures include activities to decrease cities' vulnerability and increase their recovery capability in the face of the impacts of climate change.

Given the magnitude of the problems, right now, measures for adaptation seem much more urgent than mitigation strategies, above all in cities in the poorest, most vulnerable countries that are already feeling severe effects of climate change. This is even more the case when, according to the

The most important issue on the agenda of most NGOs is environmental protection; thus, the participation of the mayors and the activities they can promote through the public are key for the success of any strategy to fight climate change.

specialists, the effects of mitigation (emission reduction) will not be perceived until the second half of the century. This does not mean that it is not important to continue fostering measures to reduce GHG emissions, or that climate policies should be limited to choosing between mitigation and adaptation. In any case, it shows the urgency of having adaptation strategies with immediate effects, above all in the places that are most vulnerable because of their high population density.

Among others, adaptation measures include early warning systems, systems to detect climate change hot spots, and risk management. An important range of actors and sectoral interests are involved in this task, including agriculture, tourism, and the leisure industry; human health; water supply; coastal management; urban planning; and nature conservation.

To increase cities' adaptive capabilities, it is fundamental to introduce the analysis of climate change impact on urban development planning by including adaptation measures in plans for land use and infrastructure design, as well as in developing strategies for improving their response to natural disasters and establishing a link between climate change, disaster risk reduction, and urban management.

THE WORLD MAYORS SUMMIT ON CLIMATE

Mexico City hosted the first World Mayors Summit on Climate (WMSC) on November 21, 2010. The meeting was convened by the World Mayors Council on Climate Change (WMCCC), the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), and Mexico City's Federal District government.

The summit's main objective was to establish an international mechanism for local governments that would be a platform for promoting cooperation, commitment, and agreement among the largest number of cities possible in order

to fight global warming through concrete, effective actions to mitigate GHG and adapting to its effects on cities. The mechanisms for achieving this are the Global Cities Covenant on Climate (the Mexico City Pact) and the establishment of a carbon Cities Climate Registry (cCCR).

The WMSC was the result of a series of previous actions by cities around the issue of climate change. Among them are the signing of the World Mayors and Local Governments Climate Protection Agreement and Action Plan (2007), the Copenhagen World Catalogue of City Commitments to Combat Climate Change (2009), the Dunkerque 2010 Call for Climate Action (2010), the Bonn Declaration by the Mayors Adaptation Forum (2010), and the Climate Summits of Major Cities of the C40.

THE MEXICO CITY PACT

The Global Cities Covenant on Climate, or Mexico City Pact, is a voluntary agreement on commitments in which the signatory cities underline their strategic role in fighting climate change due to being centers for economic, political, and cultural innovation, as well as for managing large quantities of public resources, infrastructure, investment capital, and knowledge. The covenant contains a preamble and a series of commitments to promote strategies and actions aimed at mitigating GHG emissions and adapting cities to the impacts of climate change.

The preamble refers to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) GHG-reduction considerations, establishing the need to limit the increase in global temperature to less than 2 degrees Celsius by the end of this century. The recommendations underline the need for mayors' commitments and actions to be measurable, reportable, and verifiable (MRV) in order to be recognized and get support from multilateral funding agencies. This commitment to establish MRV actions is undoubtedly one of the most important points since it is fundamental for establishing clear, independent, and effective management, monitoring, and control indicators to make it possible to review results and evaluate the advances *vis-à-vis* the commitments made. All this must take place in a transparent, participatory framework that guarantees the right to access to information and accountability, and that makes it possible for the different actors who participate in the strategy, including civil society, to have an effective impact on it.

The pact's specific agreements are formulated in 10 points. The first establishes the fundamental commitment: "Reduce our local greenhouse gas emissions voluntarily." To achieve this, the mayors agree to promote "measures, policies, laws, plans, and campaigns to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases in our cities, taking into account our individual resources and capacity to do so."

Points two and three lay out mitigation and adaptation measures, stipulating that the mayors will "adopt and implement local mitigation measures designed to achieve our voluntary reduction targets," promoting "sustainable transportation, proper waste management, [and] energy efficiency." In addition, they will "develop local adaptation strategies to address the local impact of climate change" through the design of "appropriate local adaptation plans and ...operational mechanisms that improve the quality of life of our inhabitants, in particular the urban poor, who are [the] most vulnerable."

To ensure that the actions will be MRV, the mayors will register them in the carbonn Cities Climate Registry (point 4) to contribute on-going information on line to make sure the efforts are transparent. The details of this registry will be discussed further on in this article.

The mayors' pact also deals directly with the issue of financing. Point 5 commits them to "seek the creation of mechanisms that allow direct access to international funding for local climate actions," for which they will seek support from national governments and different multilateral funding agencies. In a WMSC informative document, the convening organizations report that to this end, they have the support of the World Bank, which will organize a Workshop on Financing for Climate Actions in Cities. The inclusion of financial mechanisms to be able to achieve these objectives is perhaps the most important element for guaranteeing this instrument's success.

In the covenant's remaining points (6, 7, 8, 9, and 10), the mayors agree to establish a pact secretariat to follow up on the actions; seek alliances with multilateral institutions and national governments for local climate actions; promote alliances and cooperation among cities; and disseminate the pact's message, in particular, encouraging and inviting leaders of other local governments to join it.

The mayors' commitment to promote the inclusion of civil society in the fight against climate change is fundamental because today, the most important issue on the agenda of most NGOs is environmental protection, and their participation

and the activities they can promote through the public are key for the success of any strategy to fight climate change.

THE CARBONN CITIES CLIMATE REGISTRY

When they signed the Mexico City Pact, the mayors committed themselves to register their climate actions in the carbonn Cities Climate Registry (cCCR), to turn over their official documentation as part of a system of regular reports on their GHG reduction commitments, as well as their portfolio of mitigation and adaptation actions. All this would go through the on-line infrastructure that the Bonn Center for Local Climate Action and Reporting has developed for this purpose.

The cCCR is the mechanism intended to guarantee transparency and accountability. It includes two sections: the first is for cities that want to implement adaptation and mitigation measures and that, when they signed the covenant, committed themselves to taking their first steps, like preparing their inventory of emissions, designing and implementing a climate action plan, and adopting local legislation to favor GHG emissions reduction. The second section is for those who have already implemented climate actions and want them to be MRV.

The cCCR has been on line since October 2010, and the initial registry has been open to the cities since November 22. The agreement was that the cities would have eight months after the signing of the pact to present all the information required.

CONCLUSIONS

Urban residents face a monumental challenge with regard to climate change. By 2030, cities will be the home to almost four billion people. Making them more resistant to the climate and taking GHG reduction actions must be the priority today for all local authorities. If they do not do this, the risks are enormous and the damage could undermine the economic and social progress achieved up until today. The World Mayors Summit on Climate and above all, the results it gets, are what the mayors of the world are betting on to deal with the challenges. The urgency is clear, and public participation is key. If the WMSC and the Mexico City Pact manage to consolidate their objectives and send a clear, strong message to the heads of state that now is the time to act and commit themselves, they will have fulfilled their aim. **NMM**