



# ICLEI at Rio+20



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The Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 20-22 June 2012. ICLEI has been involved in the Rio+20 process in three ways:

**Advocacy.** ICLEI has followed the preparations and negotiations of the outcome document closely and is the only Local Government Organization which has been present and actively engaged at every single UN preparatory meeting from May 2010 to June 2012. In addition, ICLEI has made a number of substantive contributions. ICLEI has also acted as Local Authority Major Group Co-Organizing Partner (LAMG OP) for the Rio+20 Secretariat.

**Global Town Hall.** ICLEI organized the Global Town Hall as an arena for presentations, dialogues and debates on a sustainable urban future. We invited our sister Local Government organizations, relevant UN agencies and international partners to join. The Global Town Hall was conceived as a crystallization point for local governments and their partners to reflect on the themes of Rio+20, green urban economy and institutional framework for sustainable development.

**Participation in partners' events.** ICLEI's political leadership as well as senior staff members participated in a variety of side events organized by our international partners.

## ICLEI's evaluation of the outcomes of Rio+20

Human civilization on earth is under threat. The global trend of climate change and related trends of increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events, sea-level rise etc. as well as the trends of natural resource decline and biodiversity loss are causing concern. Everyone we met and heard from was of the opinion that we need to change course towards an inclusive, green economy, and that we have to act rapidly and go for radical solutions.

Everyone agreed that not only cities and communities will be the main victims of these unfavorable trends, but cities are key to turning our economy green and our civilization sustainable.

We had hoped that the Rio+20 summit would result in decisions by the governments assembled in Rio which would trigger the development of an inclusive, green economy and establish a global institutional architecture endowed with competencies and powers that would ensure the safeguarding of human living conditions and ecosystems services.

We now see that all the good will, energy, brain capacity and money that went into the Rio+20 process have resulted in dozens of pages of paper, which contain hardly any commitment by governments. Instead, national governments reaffirm what they had already resolved long ago, list non-binding intentions, and acknowledge the activities by other actors such as local governments.

It remains unclear who should be in charge and accountable for taking decisions on the transformative actions needed, and for rapid implementation.

Do cities have to step in where governments are failing to take effective action? Cities are cooperating internationally without borders, without customs, without military forces. They can address the issues of the future without the global power play that we see going on at inter-governmental level. We have once more seen governments defending national interests rather than working together on a common global agenda. We suspect that the mechanisms, rules and routines of international diplomacy are outdated and incapable of designing and bringing about a sustainable future.

Will the United Nations want to include local governments in the mechanism of decision shaping and even decision making, or shall local governments create their own voluntary institutional frameworks for commitments and accountability? They have actually started doing so. Twenty years ago, with Agenda 21 being adopted by the Heads of States and Governments at the Rio Earth Summit, Local Agenda 21 was spearheaded by ICLEI and may be regarded as a global success story of moving towards sustainability. In contrast, not many countries can demonstrate a national success story of having implemented a national Agenda 21. Similarly, it took nations 13 years to get from the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change to the entry into force of the rules for implementation, the Kyoto Protocol. In contrast, it took local governments only 8 months until ICLEI convened the first municipal leaders summit on climate change and initiated the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign which involved about thousand local governments in local climate action planning. In 2010, Mayors signed the Global Cities Covenant on Climate (Mexico City Pact), committed to voluntary climate action and accountability, and established the carbonn Cities Climate Registry as a global reporting platform. In 2011, Mayors signed the Durban Adaptation Charter, thereby making commitments to climate change adaptation action.

The most remarkable outcome of Rio+20 may indeed be the global and regional, voluntary commitments. We think it's good to get all relevant actors committing to sustainability action. But Rio+20 failed establishing an accountability framework with a performance reporting mechanism. Even the development of an accountability framework is left to voluntary action.

20 years ago cities were referred to as a problem rather than as part of the solution. Today cities are acknowledged as a major actor. The Rio+20 outcome document contains unprecedented reference to cities and local governments. However, we are missing a tangible commitment by governments to enhance the capacity of cities to take effective action.

Rio+20 failed addressing appropriately and resolving crucial issues, especially the elimination of perverse subsidies such as subsidies to fossil fuel.

We are proud that during the entire Rio+20 process we have seen ICLEI being elevated on the basis of its longstanding leadership in global advocacy, developing solutions, accelerating action, spurring change, and paving pathways towards local sustainability.

## ICLEI continues driving agendas for sustainable cities

We have seen governments, businesses, research institutes, NGOs and media pay attention, or even focus, on cities. For example, the three Rio Conventions staged a cities day, and the Brazilian government organized a sustainability dialogue on cities.

ICLEI itself organized the Rio+20 Global Town Hall during the entire week from 18-22 June, which was attended by 5000 people. The Global Town Hall was hosted by the State of Rio de Janeiro and endorsed by UNDESA, UNEP and others. The program organized in partnership with many other organizations saw 24 sessions with over hundred speakers.

The culminating session of the Rio+20 Global Town Hall was the session “Sustainability Leadership for the Urban World 2030” with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon.

ICLEI held a successful official side event “Decisions we need for the city of 2030”, and ICLEI Mayors and staff were asked to speak at about 25 side events organized by partner organizations.

Another special moment, ICLEI President David Cadman addressed the opening plenary of the Rio+20 conference.

Our ICLEI World Congress 2012 in Belo Horizonte preceding Rio+20 saw more than 1400 ICLEI Members, partners, global strategists, academics, businesses and NGOs exchanging solutions and experiences and developing local sustainability strategies for the future.

At our World Congress 2012, we released the global review and case studies “Local Sustainability 2012- Taking Stock and Moving Forward” as well as Global Environmental Outlook (GEO) 5 for Local Governments, with UNEP.

At Rio+20 we launched the GreenClimateCities initiative and, together with partners, the Global Initiative on Urban Resilience.

We have been encouraged by Rio+20 to continue driving the *sustainable cities* agenda. Rio+20 has reinvigorated our strategy of supporting cities on the pathway to becoming resilient, resource-efficient, biodiverse and low-carbon, to turn their urban economy green and build smart infrastructure, with the ultimate goal of ensuring a healthy & happy community.