



Statement by Elizabeth Maruma Mrema
Executive Secretary, Convention on Biological Diversity
on the occasion of
World Cities Day

“Adapting Cities for Climate Resilience”

Most of the world now lives in cities.

But even for those living in rural areas, the lifestyle and modes of production and consumption are critically affected by urban needs and requirements for goods and services.

As engines of innovation and centres of decision-making, cities and the ways they govern themselves will have a tremendous impact on the sustainability agenda: from the post-2020 global biodiversity framework, to be adopted in 2022 at the UN Biodiversity Conference, to the assessment at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change’s COP 26 of how countries are faring in relation to the Paris Agreement.

Therefore, the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity have, since 2010, worked to harmonize policies and programmes by adopting a specific Plan of Action on the engagement of subnational governments, cities and other local authorities. A revised plan stands to be adopted at the next UN Biodiversity Conference later next year, as part of the so-called Edinburgh Process.

This multi-level governance approach building on the power of cities will help achieve proposed targets in the draft post-2020 framework such as target 7, that calls for a reduction on pollution, including plastics, and target 8 on climate change.

This year’s World Cities Day theme, “Adapting cities for climate resilience,” immediately recalls the indivisibility of the climate and nature emergencies facing us. Not only do urban citizens need parks, natural and open spaces for their health: food and water security and resilience to floods and droughts come from the green and blue “belts” around metropolitan areas.

The question of how cities are designed, and which materials and codes are used to organize the various urban structures and infrastructure, is extremely relevant. Approximately half a billion people will urbanize over the next ten years, the vast majority in developing countries. We will need to double urban infrastructure in the period; with the potential to impact almost a fifth of the world’s Key Biodiversity Areas.



The World Bank's Cities4Biodiversity initiative and the Global Environment Facility-8's expanded cities programme are welcome additions to this agenda. We also need to urgently develop new blueprints for green cities, as proposed in the World Economic Forum's BiodiverCities by 2030 initiative, and we need to expand on UN-Habitat's Guiding Principles for Urban-Rural Linkages. We also need effective metrics of impacts and dependencies such as the Singapore Index and the IUCN Urban Nature Index.

China is now the president of the fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the Convention. Three hundred million Chinese will urbanize in 10 years, making China one of the most significant players in urbanization. China's concept of an Ecological Civilization requires green cities at its base.

I look forward to the outcomes of the Edinburgh Process and the upcoming 7th Global Biodiversity Summit of Cities and Subnational Governments next spring, to be held parallel to the UN Biodiversity Conference, organized in cooperation with the city of Kunming and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability.

All cities would do well to adapt to climate resilience now, before it becomes too late.
