

Urban Development & the Green Economy

1. Introduction

The first Caribbean Urban Forum, a regional meeting held in Georgetown, Guyana in April 2011 aimed to create a dialogue on mechanisms to strengthen Caribbean urban planning and management. Participants in this meeting organised by the Caribbean Network for Urban and Land Management (CNLUM) and the CARICOM Secretariat included representatives from urban planning professional groups in the region and North America, four regional tertiary institutions, national civil society organisations, agencies involved in the urban sector and high level representatives from nine member states of CARICOM. Subsequent to a presentation by the CARICOM Secretariat on the green economy, the meeting agreed to explore the relationship between the Caribbean Urban Agenda, addressed previously as Item 7.1, and the green economy in its work programme. The output was to be integrated into an item called the Green Urban Economy.

The CNULM, in partnership with the Canadian Institute of Planners (CIP), the Jamaica Institute of Planners and the University of Technology (UTECH), Jamaica, have agreed to co-host a second annual Caribbean Urban Forum (CUF 2012), to take place March 14-17, 2012 in Kingston, Jamaica. The *Caribbean Urban Forum 2012 (CUF 2012) - Planning to Achieve the Vision ... Towards a Green Urban Economy* - will continue to advance the Caribbean Urban Agenda. The CUF 2012 will focus on the theme of the Green Economy in the context of urban development in the Caribbean. The event will also showcase examples of good planning practice from across the region, and serve as the launch pad for the Caribbean Planners Association (CPA).

2. Preparation of a Regional Position for Rio+20

Rio+20, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), is being organized in pursuance of General Assembly Resolution 64/236 ([A/RES/64/236](#)). The Conference will take place in

Brazil on June 4-6, 2012 to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Rio+20 will focus on two themes: 1) *Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication*, and 2) *Institutional framework for sustainable development*.

The current global economic growth patterns run the risk of irreversibly damaging the environment. The environment and the economy can no longer be considered in isolation. Green development is therefore seen as a win-win situation in that it contributes to economic growth through the use of affordable, clean and sustainable energy, while simultaneously reducing environmental degradation, providing employment, promoting equity and raising standards of living.

A UN Habitat Expert Group Meeting held in February 2011 explored linkages between the 'Green Economy' agenda and UN-Habitat's traditional 'Urban Agenda'.¹ The meeting recognized that cities will be the drivers of the green economy. Urban agglomerations foster economic productivity and technological innovation. Moreover, the density that often accompanies agglomerations offers the potential to maximize energy efficiency and environmental sustainability. Cities in developing countries offer particular potential for promoting green-collar job-creating sectors (e.g. manufacturing and sale of energy efficient technologies, recycling etc.). However, moving from potential to reality requires making available affordable green products and services to the poor and slum-dwellers. This requires strengthening the capacity of national and local governments in developing countries to facilitate the ***transfer of knowledge and technology*** and enable the development of policies conducive to green development. The Expert Group meeting also suggested that urban planning and land management interventions are key to the public policy response, including in cities with significant or dominant informal settlement patterns.

The relationship between decoupling growth from a historical dependence on abundant cheap natural resources and future urban infrastructure investments is what connects the "low carbon/green economy" agenda to the sustainable urban development agenda. Unless urban infrastructures are radically transformed to facilitate resource decoupling, global economic recovery and a new long-wave development cycle will be impossible.

¹ What Does the Green Economy Mean for Sustainable Urban Development? Expert Group Meeting, 17-18 February 2011, Tribe Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya.

While there are policies and activities supporting a green economy especially the work of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC), there is no clear CARICOM position on a green economy heading into the Rio + 20 meeting in 2012. Numerous instruments for enabling green cities are available (e.g. carbon trading). However, they need to be further examined and tested by CARICOM member states.

3. Priority Areas for the Green Economy in the Caribbean²

The March 2011 Caribbean Urban Forum held in Georgetown, Guyana highlighted a way forward for addressing *Green Urban Development and the Green Economy in CARICOM*. In seeking to practically apply the concept of a green economy in Caribbean urban centres, seven potential areas have been identified to play this role:

1. **Green architecture** – Designing new buildings and retrofitting old ones to be more energy efficient and use less water, both during construction and post-construction. Building codes, tax and duty free incentives, as well as loans can enhance incorporation. National Governments and Municipal Authorities, as “owners” of large amounts of public property should set the example. While these practices are not common in the CARICOM region they are fast becoming the norm in the developed countries of the North Atlantic.

2. **Procurement Policies** – Government procurement policies which link the acquisition of goods and services to sound environmental practices on the part of the bidder as well as supplier are gaining popularity within the Caribbean region. A draft regional procurement policy is currently under review by CARICOM member states.

3. **Energy** - Cities rely on energy sources beyond their boundaries, hence efficient distribution systems are necessary. Reducing energy consumption and adopting renewable energy systems both on a macro and micro level are important in greening the urban landscape.

4. Water Management – Minimize the loss of water during harvesting and distribution particularly from rural watersheds to urban centres. Pricing mechanisms should also encourage water conservation. Rain gardens, and on-lot storage systems for domestic water has reduced pressure on potable water supplies. Greening of the urban environment reduces the impact of urban flooding. The present initiatives of the CNLUM around integrated water management policies include inputs from Dutch partners as the Dutch are world leaders in this area.

5. Transportation – Reducing the number of cars and increasing the efficiency of mass transit can reduce pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. There is a need to provide infrastructure to facilitate cycling and walking, being mindful of the security implications in the Caribbean urban context. This policy area is closely connected to general urban planning and management. The city of Curitiba in Brazil is a well known example in the South where integrated urban planning, waste management and public transportation policies have led to reduced air, water and land pollution, reduction in traffic congestions and travel times while reducing the use of fossil fuels and the emission of green house gases.

6. Waste Management – Implementation of recycling policies and converting waste to energy.

7. Vegetation and Landscaping – Green spaces provide a range of ecosystem services, such as filtering air, habitat for wildlife, carbon storage etc. as well as recreational benefits. Incorporating green spaces into urban design requires consideration of the entire urban form and layout as well as appropriate land use policies.

8. Urban Structure and Form- The very structure and form of the urban areas have implications for the green economy. Similarly to trends in developed countries, the region needs to develop integrated urban and transportation policies that promote more efficient use of land and reduce sprawl. Alternative sources of energy and energy efficiency are important, but reducing the demand for urban transportation through better urban policy and planning is critical. The “New Urbanism” approach driving urban policies throughout Europe and most of North America espouses compact urban form that promotes higher building density and mixed land use and reduces the need for transportation. High quality public transportation reduces the need for automobile usage even though there are no restrictions on car ownership.

In order to make the transition to a green economy, enabling factors such as: (i) effective governance, (ii) clearly established planning regulations, (iii) timely and relevant data collection and sharing, (iv) financing, among other incentives must be present. Education and training are vital enablers. Research and teaching within our colleges and universities should equip architects, engineers, and planners with the necessary knowledge and skills to design green buildings and cities. The state in partnership with the private sector will need to provide strong leadership in facilitating the transition into a green economy.

Some of the potential barriers that may inhibit regional progress towards creating a green economy include: fragmented or sectoral approach governance, insufficient grassroots participation in governance which limit local buy in and support, the high cost to switch from a 'brown economy' to a 'green economy'. Vested business interests and risk aversion may also create reluctance on the part of corporate as well as state entities to switch to a green economy.

Given the importance of tourism to the region's economy and general reliance on fossil based fuels, there have been positive initiatives towards the use of alternative energy and other green technologies in the region. Creating the enabling environment to transition to a green urban economy would build upon these initiatives by enhancing administrative efficiency and foster economic growth and competitiveness in the region.