

Sustainable Cities



It is our duty in Palestine and in the Arab world to collaborate with other economic blocs in the world to move into a new era where we compete to invest in low carbon projects, far removed from the conventional polluted cities that are harming the environment and Mother Earth.



By Hazem
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A sustainable city is a city whose development tackles three complementary dimensions, namely: economic, social, and environmental. Building sustainable cities means building inclusive,

resilient, and sustainable communities – inclusive in terms of community participation in the planning and oversight of infrastructure sub-projects and environmentally sustainable in terms of cleanliness and efficiency, resilience to social, economic, and natural shocks, and prepared for natural disasters due to climate change. If designed properly, cities can minimize the effect of climate change, preserve the environment, and build a prosperous economy that can reflect positively on people's lives and happiness.

If the world wants to prevent further global warming, then cities have to work on significant emissions reduction, proper ecosystem management, and atmospheric pollution reduction. This means that cities have to be transformed from traditional conventional cities into those that are sustainable. Cities have to move to low carbon investments to create jobs with cleaner air, and they have to pay attention to their transport system and their industries, as both these sectors consume a large amount of energy and produce high carbon emissions. This calls for serious commitment on the part of the ruling authority to set policies that encourage environmentally friendly investments that are far-removed from historical urban forms. It is time for cities to move to green infrastructure and services, starting with green buildings for the public sector, such as hospitals and schools.

Initially, there is a need to increase the capacity of Palestinian governmental and nongovernmental institutions, as well as local government units, to be able to deal with projects related to climate change and the environment. Currently, municipalities take into consideration environmental and social

safeguards when implementing infrastructure projects that are funded by the Municipal Development and Lending Fund (MDLF). New infrastructure development programs would include concepts such as climate change and sustainable development embedded in the programs that would be implemented in all municipalities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Certain cities in the West Bank are facing rapid growth, but they still cannot find comprehensive solutions to key issues such as traffic congestion, timely trash collection, water shortages and pollution, and operating costs. This is a significant challenge in developing a quality urban environment, which most if not all Palestinian municipalities find impossible to achieve nowadays. Not to forget the overarching



■ World Bank's Integrated Cities and Urban Development (ICUD) Project.



■ Children's playground in a public park.
Photo by Ngoc Tran, Shutterstock.



problem of the Israeli military occupation that threatens everything the municipality can achieve in this regard. Municipalities, like the central Palestinian government, do not have control over their natural resources and borders. According to the World Bank, 74 percent of the West Bank and Gaza Strip is urban. When moving among cities, it is not easy to distinguish when you leave a city and enter another one due to indistinguishable borders. That is why proper sustainable planning needs stronger coordination between adjacent cities and villages. This task has never been easily accepted by local government units since they have been accustomed to planning individually and autonomously. Coordinating policies, plans, and development strategies among neighboring local government units will help utilize the land more efficiently, manage the resources more effectively, and give a chance for holistic urban planning, such as investment in public transport and the creation of public green space. The Palestinian population and urban areas are growing on an annual basis, thus the need to plan professionally is no longer a luxury. Urban growth provides some good opportunities, but it can also

pose serious economic, social, and environmental challenges. If cities want to serve their citizens, improve their livelihood, and enhance their economic development, they must plan well for sustainable development.

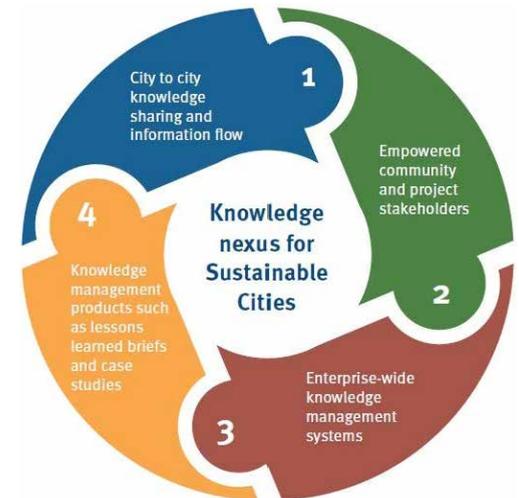
The deficiency of sewage systems in Palestinian cities is a major problem, particularly within the context of environmental and sustainable development. In the southern West Bank, there is a strong need for a joint sewage system plan across a number of municipalities that exist in one urban area. Due to the high cost, few municipalities are able to invest in a sewage system from their own resources, despite its high priority for citizens and the sanitary and environmental danger inherent in free-flowing wastewater. According to a report by B'Tselem, the prolonged neglect of around 100 million cubic meters a year of untreated wastewater has caused

severe hazards in the West Bank and is liable to pollute the mountain aquifer, the most important and highest-quality water source for Palestinians. Wastewater from tens of settlements is not connected to wastewater treatment facilities, thus millions of cubic meters of wastewater flows as raw wastewater into West Bank streams and valleys, causing serious environmental problems.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began in early 2020, the resilience and responsiveness of municipalities to the crisis has become an urgent issue to address. The MDLF, through its communication with the donor community and support from the Ministry of Local Government, was able to design and launch a new

municipalities' strategic development and investment plans that the municipalities prepare and publish every four years to coincide with the election of a new municipal council. All municipal planning takes place with intensive community participation that is inclusive of the participation of women and youth, in addition to individuals with special needs. In July 2020, the Belgian government decided to increase the budgetary envelope for development cooperation in the Palestinian Territory to €10 million, to specifically focus on addressing environmental and climate-change challenges, and to contribute to developing more "green," resilient, and sustainable municipalities and territories.

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emergency program with a budget of more than \$50 million. The MDLF will assist the municipalities in the coming period to prepare their own resilience plans to deal with any unforeseen crisis that may arise in the future. These resilience plans will complement the

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