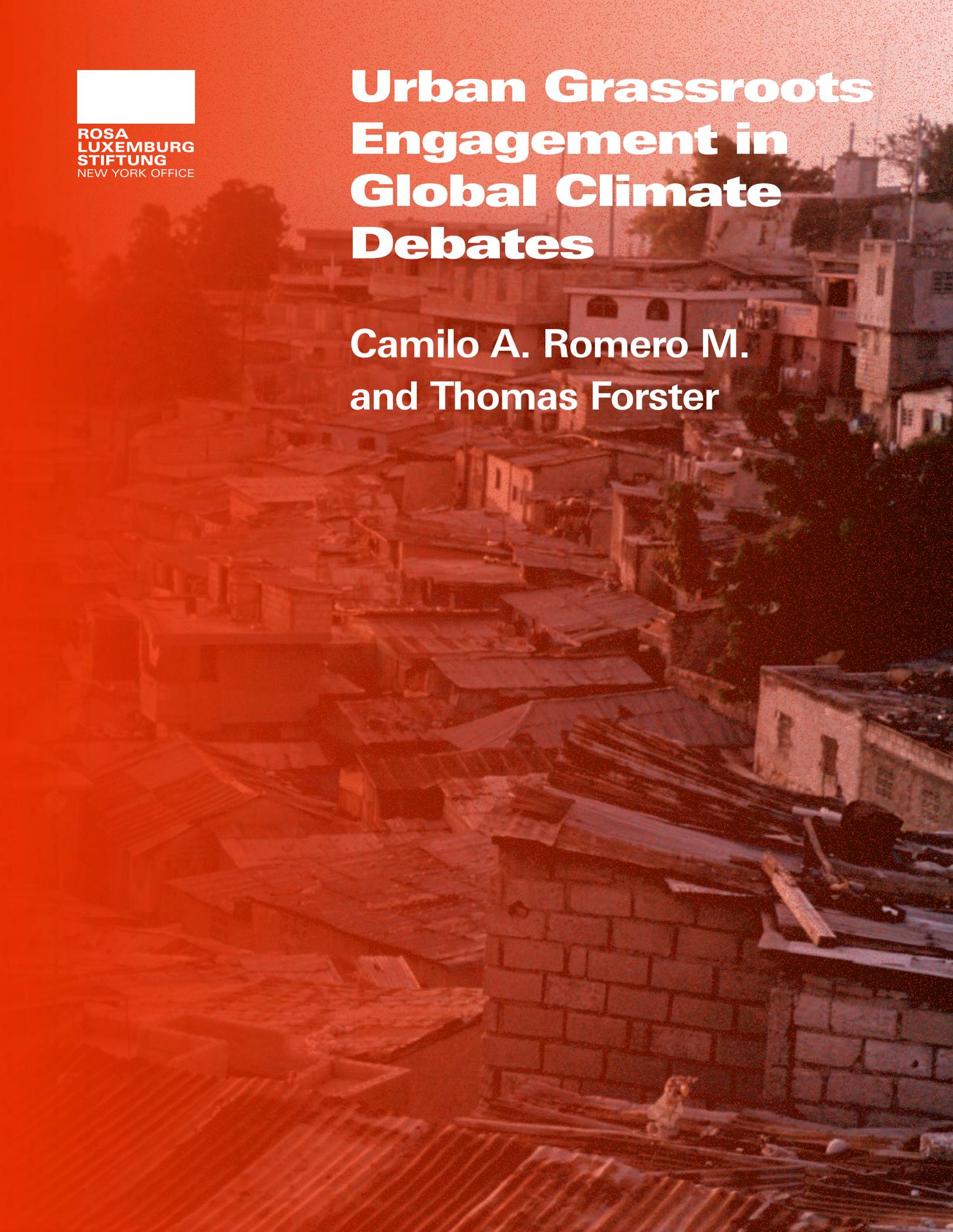


Urban Grassroots Engagement in Global Climate Debates

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

C40	Cities Climate Leadership Group
CAN	Climate Action Network
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CBO	community-based organization
CFS	Committee on World Food Security
COP	Conference of the Parties
CRC	Committee on the Rights of the Child
CSIPM	Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples' Mechanism
CSO	civil society organization
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GGA	Global Goal on Adaptation
GPR2C	Global Platform for the Right to the City
HIC	Habitat International Coalition
HIC-HLRN	Housing and Land Rights Network - Habitat International Coalition
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development
HNI	HomeNet International
ICLEI	Local Governments for Sustainability
IDWF	International Domestic Workers Federation
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPO	indigenous peoples' organization
LDCs	least developed countries
MGFC	Major Groups Facilitating Committee
MGoS	Major Groups and other Stakeholders
Misereor	German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation
NDCs	nationally determined contributions
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NUA	New Urban Agenda
NWP	Nairobi work programme
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
Regions4	Regions for Sustainable Development
RLS	Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDI	Slum/Shack Dwellers International
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UN	United Nations
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNEA	United Nations Environment Assembly
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHA	UN-Habitat Assembly
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlement Programme
WEDO	Women's Environment and Development Organization
WGC	Women and Gender Constituency to UNFCCC
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing
WRI	World Resources Institute
WUF	World Urban Forum
YOUNGO	Children and Youth Constituency to UNFCCC

Urban Grassroots Engagement in Global Climate Debates



Dharavi slums, Mumbai, India. November 2, 2022. (Photo by PUNIT PARANJPE/AFP via Getty Images)

Executive Summary

There is considerable consensus that urban areas face unique challenges from the climate crisis that make it necessary to deepen our understanding of these differences in order to tailor responses. “Evidence from urban and rural settlements is unequivocal; climate impacts are felt disproportionately in urban communities, with the most economically and socially marginalized being most affected.”¹ In cities, people living in slums, ghettos, informal settlements, townships, or camps are among the most vulnerable to climate change and more likely to experience loss of life, livelihoods, home, and territory. In cities, low-quality housing, lack of basic services, and low incomes are among the conditions that hinder poorer communities, in comparison to better-off groups, and their ability to reduce vulnerabilities and adapt to a changing climate. In addition to this existing adaptation gap between poorer and richer neighborhoods, city planning instruments to adapt to climate change often exacerbate inequalities. In broader terms, existing economic disparity and social injustice contribute to and exacerbates climate injustice, which in turn reinforces social and economic marginalization.

¹ Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

The exercise of public authority and decision-making over climate change and urbanization—along with other policy realms—is no longer tied solely to nation-states. On the contrary, it is now also exerted via international bureaucracies and regimes, such as the ones structured around the United Nations (UN) system, the Group of Twenty (G20), or international finance institutions, just to mention a few, where decision-making is an exclusive domain of (nation-)state actors.

Nevertheless, the global governance of responses to climate change—structured mainly around the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—attempts to regulate decisions and behaviors of both state and non-state actors in climate change actions. International regimes from other domains—such as biodiversity or urbanization—and other intergovernmental institutions aside from the UN convention treaty bodies all play a role in the global governance of climate change and overlap with the climate change regime structured around UNFCCC.²

While individuals and local communities are affected by decisions made beyond national levels, their capacity to participate and have influence on these decisions is limited. Ultimately, this is another gap, one of participation—that is, low-income urban dwellers often lack representation in the decision-making processes in the international realm that affects them locally, including those regarding the global governance of climate change and urbanization, both of which are relevant for marginalized urban communities.

This participation gap raises a question of democratic legitimacy in the international political system. If the system’s goal is to build more just, inclusive, and democratic societies, then it is both a political and an ethical imperative to elevate the voices of urban dwellers most vulnerable to climate change by strengthening their participation and representation.

To that end, this study maps entry points and pathways through which marginalized urban communities can enhance their participation in global climate change governance spaces, such as UNFCCC, and thus define their priorities and address their critical needs and challenges.

The report is organized in six modules:

1. **An overview of marginalized urban communities** and the challenges they face due to climate change.
2. **A review of the global urban-climate governance landscape** with a review of principal actors, from governments to civil society, and the decision-making spaces for which urban actors are mobilized at transnational levels.
3. **An overview of advocacy issues** in global urban-climate spaces and how urban issues have come into climate change debate through various thematic entry points.
4. **An overview of arenas for organized civil society engagement** in the UNFCCC and related spaces.
5. **Recommendations** for developing advocacy strategies for marginalized urban communities to influence climate debates.
6. **A review of persistent challenges** to urban civil society engagement that need to be overcome.

² Actors and domains of governance (2018)

Readers of this study may be familiar with the climate-change-related impacts and challenges for urban dwellers and/or the urban-climate governance landscape, the first two parts of the study. These readers may go straight to other sections on critical advocacy issues, entry points, and strategies.

This study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of elements constituting the “advocacy ecosystem” to enhance the participation of marginalized urban communities in international climate policy decision-making and implementation. Numerous interviews were conducted with climate activists, urban grassroots and environmental advocacy network leaders, officers of international organizations, and researchers. The interviews were complemented by desk research and informal consultations with experts.

From this research a global-urban climate governance landscape begins to emerge, comprised of the arenas and actors that shape climate change and urbanization policies at the international level. The study provides an overview of the work that urban grassroots organizations are doing in the international climate arena and identifies a set of themes and goals for advocacy. These issues range from strategic ones—demanding more democracy; halting the corporate capture of international decision-making spaces—to those more related to climate change, such as reframing marginalized urban communities’ historic demands and political agendas within climate change policy frameworks.

The study also identifies current arenas for action in the global-urban climate governance landscape that are windows of opportunity for developing advocacy strategies based on the needs of marginalized urban dwellers. In respect to the UNFCCC, there are several key arenas for action, which extend through 2023 and some into 2024. Among these are the debate on the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), which is related to the local adaptation agenda, and follow-up to the Koronivia work programme on food systems and climate change. Further arenas for action are identified in other decision-making spaces of the UN system, many of which are relevant for urban grassroots actors.

The study offers specific recommendations for those organizations committed to engaging in climate-related multilateral and transnational forums to advance the interests and representation of marginalized urban communities. Several pathways are suggested as key entry points for the development of advocacy strategies and as investment areas for strengthening the representation of urban social movement in the global-urban climate governance landscape. These key pathways include:

1. Bringing urban actors into existing UNFCCC-recognized constituencies and networks.
2. Building alliances with parties (national delegations), increasing their capacity to understand urban issues, and joining delegations that negotiate the decision outcomes of UNFCCC.
3. Engaging local and regional government networks and UN human rights rapporteurs.
4. Connecting networks of civil society organizations (CSOs) with think tanks and foundations for long-term partnerships.

In the coming years, the world will grapple with the interrelationships of climate change impacts, biodiversity loss, and economic and food insecurity. There will be an increasing convergence of global policy agendas—similar to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, as well as the three Rio Conventions: UNFCCC, the

Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)—and the focus will be on learning lessons from crisis response and recovery. If local communities are to build stronger social and economic safety nets for the people most vulnerable to climate change, their direct participation in climate solutions and ecosystem restoration solutions is essential, and they must work through inclusive mechanisms that are supported with policy and financing at national and international levels. It is our hope that this study will contribute to mapping the opportunities for this inclusion and engagement.

Selected Key Actors and Organizations in the Global Urban-Climate Governance Landscape

Organization	Description	Current Engagement in Climate-Urban Governance Landscape	Possible Initiatives
Climate Action Network (CAN)	One of the most prominent networks of CSOs engaged in climate discussions, open to all nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) that do not represent industry and are interested in climate change issues. With more than 1,800 organizations in over 130 countries, CAN is organized in 22 regional and national nodes.	Through its thematic working groups, CAN is actively engaged in a number of key processes of the UNFCCC. This includes the Koronivia joint work on agriculture, which is focused on the intersection of climate change and agriculture and the only sectoral workstream in the UNFCCC. This process is a window of opportunity to provide input in current climate discussions.	Advocacy strategy around the Koronivia process.
Global Platform for the Right to the City (GPR2C)	Informal network of civil society and local government organizations focusing on expanding the right to the city.	Mainly engaged in transnational spaces, such as the processes led by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), that work on global commons and the right to the city.	Leading organization of the Town Hall on Global Commons 2022, which produced the (Global) Commons Policy Paper (with contributions from HIC and WIEGO; see below).
Habitat International Coalition (HIC)	Independent international nonprofit coalition of organizations and individuals working in the field of human settlements. HIC members include more than 450 NGOs, civil society organizations (CSOs), and academic and research institutions.	HIC is starting to work on climate issues mainly through think tanks and foundations, such as the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and the German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation (Misereor). Through HLRN (see below), HIC is starting to engage in climate conversation, although its participation is very marginal and still at a conceptual level. HIC is engaged in the UN High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and UN-Habitat-related processes, as well as other transnational spaces such as the UCLG Town Hall Process. HIC has also participated in the consultation of the UN Special Rapporteur on Housing on climate issues.	Housing and Land Rights Network - Habitat International Coalition (HIC-HLRN).

Housing and Land Rights Network (HIC-HLRN)	Part of the HIC's coordinating structures, working to link marginalized urban communities' issues with climate justice, with a focus on housing and land rights, mainly in the Middle East.	The network is engaged in the discussion about the reform of UN-Habitat's stakeholder engagement mechanism. It is starting to engage in UNFCCC through links with other initiatives, such as the third West African caravan for the right to land, water, and peasant agroecology.	Knowledge products on climate justice and housing and land rights.
Huirou Commission	Global network that builds the capacity of grassroots women's organizations to wield collective influence for development that is sustainable, gender equitable, and pro-poor.	Huirou Commission is part of the Women and Gender Constituency at UNFCCC.	Participating in the coalition of the Locally Led Adaptation Principles.
International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)	Independent think tank working primarily in the Global South, at the intersection of social and environmental justice.	IIED is engaged in UNFCCC and UN-Habitat-related processes to shape decision-making processes, promoting community-led adaptation to climate change.	Lead role in the Locally Led Adaptation Principles.
Slum Dwellers International (SDI)	Network of community-based organizations of the urban poor in 32 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.	Through its former director (Sheela Patel) and IIED, SDI is increasingly engaged in UNFCCC by participating in events and dialogues.	Participating in the coalition of the Locally Led Adaptation Principles.
Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) / Sheela Patel	NGO dedicated to giving urban poor a voice in urban development. Founder Sheela Patel also founded SDI and was former chair of its board.	Patel is a policy champion for the urban poor in global climate discussion.	Patel is a Global Ambassador of the Race to Resilience and the voice of urban marginalized communities in several spaces, including high-level meetings and spaces.
Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)	Global women's advocacy organization aimed at promoting human rights, gender equality and the integrity of the environment. This organization does not have an explicit urban focus.	WEDO is the one of the coordinating institutions of the Women and Gender Constituency at UNFCCC, and it has developed close relationships with some of the parties to UNFCCC.	Established the Women Delegates Fund, for travel support and education for delegates from LDCs and SIDS to UNFCCC.
Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)	Global network focused on empowering the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy to secure their livelihoods.	While WIEGO tried to engage in the UNFCCC in the past, now its work is focused on climate change issues at the regional level (e.g., in Latin America). WIEGO is also engaged in processes with International Labour Organization (ILO) and UN Environment Programme (UNEP).	Established the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers, a networking process among waste picker organizations across the world.
United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)	Network of subnational governments, best understood as an advocacy organization for cities in multilateral and other global governance spaces, including those involving climate change. UCLG currently leads transnational decision-making processes in which urban grassroots have a strong representation.	UCLG is the secretariat for the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, a joint global policy advocacy initiative including most of the major international networks of local governments working in the areas of sustainable development and climate change. At UNFCCC, the taskforce is represented by the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency.	Initiated the UCLG Town Hall Process 2022 and World Congress. As part of the Town Hall 2022, UCLG is supporting the work stream on global commons, which is led by GPR2C.

1. Urban Marginalized Communities in the Face of Climate Change

Finding pathways and entry points for marginalized urban communities to become more fully represented in international politics entails understanding who makes up these communities and the ways in which these communities stand before the law and norms to which they are subjects in their countries. This relationship to the law and norms is essential if they are to be recognized as rights-holders and to acknowledge how their rights are violated, as well as to identify the structures of exclusion and the sociopolitical structures that produce them.

1.1. Who are the Urban Marginalized, and What Are Their Issues?

Marginalization is a process with simultaneous social and spatial dimensions. At the spatial level, in cities, marginalization has taken the form of slums, ghettos, favelas, informal settlements, townships, and camps. Although these terms come from different geographical and political contexts and identify different styles of settlement, all refer to the most visible and densely populated urban formations inhabited by the economically, politically, and socially marginalized.

Common characteristics of marginalized urban spaces include low-quality housing, crowded conditions, tenure insecurity, lack of public services and access to public infrastructure. This lack of infrastructure and services also entails harmful environmental processes, such as water and air pollution, which have direct and indirect repercussions on people's health and disproportionately affect marginalized urban dwellers.

Inextricably connected with these patterns of spatial marginalization are other social processes of marginalization that include exclusionary citizenship regimes—such as undocumented, sans papiers, refugees, asylum seekers, etc.—and social positions marginalized by class, gender, age, and sexuality.³

Both spatial and social marginalization shape urban dwellers' access to the city's spaces, resulting in blatantly uneven distribution and access to resources, but also in uneven distribution of environmental benefits and burdens. This imbalance is a long-standing issue of social, spatial, and environmental justice, for this distribution determines urban dwellers' potential to live a dignified and flourishing life. The unequal distribution of resources and burdens can also violate the most basic rights, including the right to the city.

The right to the city is far more than a right to individual access to the resources that the city embodies; it is also a collective right to change the city and shape the processes of urbanization.⁴ Marginalized urban communities often also have limited access to political and decision-making processes such as city policymaking and planning. This results in limited representation and lack of investment opportuni-

3 Aceska, A., et al. (2019)

4 Harvey, D. (2008)

ties, so that political marginalization further reinforces the economic marginalization of some urban communities.

Therefore, marginalized urban communities face issues related to both distributive and procedural (in)justice. The first refers to the fair and equal distribution of goods, costs, and benefits, including the environmental, “to all members of society, with an emphasis on improving the welfare of the least advantaged in society.”⁵ Procedural justice, meanwhile, refers to engagement and participation in decision-making processes or fairness in procedure or process.⁶ In this way, (in)justices that marginalized urban communities face are related not only to outcomes of decisions, but also to the institutional processes by which decisions are made, whose voices are heard, and what opportunities are available to influence the outcomes.

Economic marginalization is usually connected to poverty, which is typically defined as a measure of income. Considering income alone (as conventional urban poverty measurements do) can serve to assess people’s financial safety nets for bouncing back from disruptions, but this can present a very misleading picture of the scale of urban poverty and marginalized urban communities.⁷ Some more complex poverty measures include dimensions associated with housing quality and access to basic infrastructure, and these can present a more accurate picture of the scale of urban marginalization.

Furthermore, in the Global South, large segments of the urban population are employed in the informal economy: an estimated 50 to 80 percent of urban employment, depending on the city.⁸ Informal employment comprises over 75 percent in urban areas in Africa, over 51 percent of urban employment in Asia and the Pacific, and just under 50 percent of urban employment in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁹

These workers, and more often the ones in the most precarious forms of work, in turn reside in slums, favelas, and other informal settlements. Nearly all slum dwellers are engaged in informal employment.¹⁰

In the Global South informal economies and urban poverty are inextricably linked. This link enables a more concrete understanding of the communities and persons that remain at the margins in urban and peri-urban areas. Among the working poor in the informal economy are those whose activity is relatively visible in the public space, such as street vendors and waste pickers. A large proportion of informal workers in urban areas remain out of sight in private spaces, and are often not recognized as workers.

These groups include domestic workers and unpaid family workers, as well as home-based workers, which include people who perform jobs that feed into global value chains for the textile, manufacturing, and food industries. These workers are garment workers and embroiderers, incense-stick and cigarette rollers, football and kite makers, food processors, and many others.¹¹ Women form the vast majority of domestic, home-based, and unpaid family workers and tend to be concentrated in the more precarious forms of informal employment.¹² This points to existence of in-

5 Hughes, S., & Hoffmann, M. (2020)

6 Hughes, S., & Hoffmann, M. (2020)

7 Mitlin, D. (2004)

8 Chen, M. A., & Beard, V. A. (2018)

9 International Labour Organization (2018)

10 *Constrained opportunities in slum economies* (2013, November)

11 *Occupational groups in the informal economy* (n.d.)

12 Chen, M. A. (2012)

formality in two forms of highly feminized work: home-based work and care work.¹³

While there is an increasing recognition that the informal economy is integrally linked to the formal economy and a contributor to the overall economy—not, as previously thought, marginal or peripheral to the formal sector or to modern capitalist development. Nonetheless, workers in the informal sector remain in precarious work conditions, characterized by low earnings as well as lack of social protection and access to social services and infrastructure, among other problems. Informal workers also face higher risks, for they are less likely to enjoy economic opportunities and legal protections and are less able to exercise economic rights and collective voice.¹⁴ In this sense, urban informal workers stand at the margins of and are often excluded from the formal systems that help individuals and families to cope with crises and shocks, which are enshrined as norms and rights in legal systems.

The concentration of women in informal and precarious working conditions in cities points to an additional gender dimension to marginalization processes in urban areas. For example, a study in 2020 showed that “most women in slums engage in remunerative work that tends to be low-paid, temporary, strenuous, and exploitative, increasing their likelihood of becoming part of the ‘working poor’ (employed but earning less than US\$1.90 a day).”¹⁵ Additionally, unemployment rates for slum-dwelling women are significantly lower than for men, and when employed, women in slums are less likely to earn cash income.¹⁶ Furthermore, women are generally overrepresented in slums in Global South countries. For instance, in countries such as Gabon, Ghana, Guatemala, Haiti, and Lesotho, there are 120 (or more) women aged 15 to 49 for every 100 men living in slum conditions.¹⁷

These conditions show the multiple dimensions of distributional and procedural injustice that informal workers in urban areas face. Nevertheless, marginalized urban communities strive to defend and create their own environments in a context of multiple socio-environmental injustices as well as class, ethnic, racialized, and gender conflicts and power struggles. Urban mobilization has taken many forms, including civil society organizations, such as grassroots neighborhood organizations and housing associations, protest initiatives, and political movements for environmental and social justice.

Urban social movements and activism are an integral part of urban governance; to a lesser or greater extent depending on the setting, these groups and initiatives have the capacity to influence local politics and decision-making through legal tools and participatory practices.¹⁸ Urban social movements have also entered global realms of politics and decision-making with the development of networks of organizations and initiatives that advocate for the rights of urban inhabitants, guided by ideas of spatial justice and residents’ well-being. In this way, transnational urban advocacy networks have become part of urban governance at the international level as was seen in the successful effort to deliver an SDG for sustainable cities. In general, urban social mobilization at the international level has converged around different aspects of the “right to the city” (as a mobilization agenda) and demands around the democratization of international institutions.¹⁹

13 Delaney, A., & Macdonald, F. (2018)

14 Chen, M. A. (2012)

15 Azcona, G., et al. (2020)

16 Azcona, G., et al. (2020)

17 Azcona, G., et al. (2020)

18 Domaradzka, A. (2018)

19 Domaradzka, A. (2018)

1.2. The Urban Marginalized, Climate Change, and Climate Justice

There is already a substantial consensus among urban social movements regarding their demands on the international stage. These are centered on the promotion of human rights (in particular, the right to adequate housing and its cornerstones, such as security of tenure, as this right is often violated through forced eviction), and the recognition of other rights, such as the right to the city and habitat rights. These long-standing issues and struggles of marginalized urban communities are now playing out in the context of the climate crisis.

Climate change interacts with urban systems to produce patterns of risk and loss.²⁰ In other words, the risks that cities face are influenced by both urban change and climate change. Urban areas, settlements, and infrastructure face several climate change–related risks. In fact, since 2014, documented climate-related events and observed human and economic losses have increased for urban areas and human settlements.²¹

Among the main climate change–related risks in urban areas are temperature extremes, flooding, and water scarcity and security. Other risks include cold spells, landslides, wind, fires, and air pollution.

In terms of rising temperatures, cities are subject to the urban heat island effect,²² in which city temperatures are higher relative to surrounding areas, especially during the night. Within cities, even wealthy ones, low-income neighborhoods with fewer trees and parks can be much hotter than leafy suburbs. Continuing urbanization and increasingly severe heat waves will further amplify this effect, and the risks to cities, settlements, and infrastructure from heat waves will worsen.²³ In particular, tropical cities such as Sao Paulo and Nairobi, which are subject to year-round warm temperatures and higher humidity, are disproportionately exposed to extreme heat. Also, it is expected that of the 300 million people who will be exposed to super- and ultra-extreme heat waves in the Middle East and North Africa, 90 percent will live in urban areas.²⁴

Another crucial risk urban areas face is flooding. This is increasing in conjunction with continued increases in global surface temperature. In particular, Asian cities are highly exposed to future flood risks arising from urbanization processes. For instance, between 2000 and 2030, urbanization in Indonesia will elevate flood risk in river and coastal areas by 76 to 120 percent.²⁵

On the other hand, urban water scarcity is very likely increasing worldwide due to the interaction of climate drivers, urbanization processes, and changing patterns of water use. There is a high confidence that factors such as warmer temperatures, less precipitation, land use changes, migration to cities, and overextraction of surface and groundwater resources will increase the risks of water scarcity. Risks to local water security in cities are exacerbated by considerable projected urban expansion in drought-stressed areas (for example, across drylands of Western Asia and North Africa), as well as by exportation of water from local sources to distant locations and dependence on imported water from far-off sources.²⁶

20 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

21 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

22 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

23 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

24 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

25 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

26 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

Processes of urbanization and infrastructural investment can also exacerbate climate change–induced risks and losses in cities and settlements. For instance, rapid expansion of urban areas into natural and agricultural lands and coastal zones increases the exposure of urban populations to various hazards by placing new physical assets and people in locations with high exposure. In fact, climate change is already interacting with ongoing global trends in urbanization, creating regionally specific impacts and risk profiles.²⁷

1.2.1. The Uneven Impacts of Climate Change across Urban Dwellers

The evidence from urban and rural settlements is unequivocal: climate change impacts are felt unevenly. Or, put differently, “differentiated human vulnerability” leads to uneven social, spatial, and temporal patterns of loss and risk and experiences of resilience among persons and communities.²⁸ Human vulnerability is influenced by the adaptive capacity of physical (built) structures, social processes (including economic processes), and institutional structures such as organizations, laws, and cultural and political systems/norms.²⁹ Urban poverty, informality, planning, and migration are among the crucial urban processes that create differential vulnerability and risks.

Income levels and other variables determining economic resilience—such as employment, housing, health, and flood insurance, savings, and even security of tenure—have a great role in shaping both exposure and risk, and thus the vulnerability of individuals and households to climate change hazards.³⁰ With insurance and savings, for example, high-income households have the ability to absorb climate change–related losses such as flooding and recover the loss of materials and goods. For low-income families, however, the ability to recover from the same risks is significantly reduced. This “adaptation gap” refers to the differences between rich neighborhoods and their ability to afford strategies to reduce vulnerability in comparison to poorer communities, which are unable to do the same.³¹ Thus, low income and the lack of employment, insurance, and savings (all variables contributing to urban poverty) are frequently associated with higher levels of vulnerability, particularly in the Global South.

Informality is another pathway through which urbanization generates differentiated vulnerability.³² For instance, land ownership and lack of secure tenure hinder people’s ability to invest in permanent infrastructure that would cope with floods or other climate change–related risks. In general, informal settlements and slums are more vulnerable to water- and heat-related risk, as well as to the health impacts of climate change. Even where formal planning is the norm, this has often remained oriented toward enabling increased property values by adding new construction or structures that protect existing high-value physical structures, rather than enabling disaster risk reduction for all.³³

Migration, displacement and resettlement also play a foundational role in differentiated human vulnerability. While there is general agreement that climate change will result in population displacements and migration, views differ regarding the relative role of the climate versus other factors as a cause of movement, the potential

27 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
28 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
29 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
30 Huq, M. E., et al., (2020)
31 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
32 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
33 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

number of migrating people, and the relationship between social vulnerability and adaptive capacity.³⁴ Furthermore, while migration has long been a form of adaptation, a manifestation of economic, social, and education aspiration, and therefore likely to continue,³⁵ there is now evidence that both slow- and rapid-onset climatic events can trigger migration as well.³⁶ In this way, climate change will exacerbate existing patterns of migration through slow-onset climate events or prolonged environmental stress, such as repeated droughts; rapid-onset disasters such as floods and landslides; and land rendered permanently uninhabitable by sea-level rise.³⁷

The interplay between migration and vulnerability can be seen in the fact that people experiencing tenure insecurity and less-secure access to land are generally more likely to move (permanently) than those who own land and property.³⁸ Also, climate change–related risks such as droughts are particularly critical for people with resource-dependent livelihoods, such as farmers and fishermen, who may decide to move to diversify their livelihood.

In this way, social and economic structures that marginalize people spatially and socially (by race, class, ethnicity, gender, and citizenship regimes) all contribute in complex ways to shape the patterns of inequality of exposure and resilience to climate change risk, exacerbating climate injustices. In turn, the heightened patterns of risk and loss that marginalized urban communities experience exacerbate preexisting social and economic vulnerabilities.

Furthermore, in cities and settlements, adaptation interventions can displace ecological impacts to more vulnerable areas, transferring that vulnerability across space and time, or they can lead directly to socioeconomically exclusionary outcomes.³⁹ For instance, investment in massive coastal planning and flood control infrastructure in Jakarta, Indonesia, Philippines, and Brazil has caused involuntary community relocations. All these projects point to how an economic logic to adaptation can lead to excluding or complicating lower-income, informal, or minority communities' adaptation.

Moreover, informal settlements and informal economies are integral in managing urban resources for effective climate adaptation, yet for the most part these settlements and economies are not included in formal urban and national monitoring.⁴⁰ This exclusion has resulted in an incomplete understanding of city inhabitants' needs, capacities, and actions, and this feeds into policy.⁴¹ In this regard, political inaction for climate justice is particularly visible in contexts of informality. In the face of insufficient political will—often manifested as lack of prioritization of the issue and inadequate allocation of financial resources and staffing—and lack of inclusive, coordinated leadership, this inaction can be difficult to overcome, generating a “policy action gap.”⁴² Thus, adaptation plans and associated infrastructure implementation patterns are likely to exacerbate social injustices and inequality in cities and settlements.

In addition to the exclusion of informality from official climate action, technocratic approaches continue to shape local policy, undermining democratic and collaborative practices.⁴³ In many cases mainstream actions to advance development

34 Otto, I. M., et al. (2017)
35 Otto, I. M., et al. (2017)
36 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
37 Otto, I. M., et al., (2017)
38 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
39 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
40 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
41 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
42 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)
43 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

objectives reduce adaptation to “low-hanging fruit” and maintain business-as-usual practices without any fundamental transformation of the social, institutional, and economic systems that drive vulnerabilities.”⁴⁴

Global climate justice movements and policy research have largely focused on the historical responsibilities for emissions among wealthier and high-emitting nation states, the distribution of climate risks, and the economic and social well-being of populations affected by climate policies and interventions. However, a deeper understanding and articulation of the links between urban and climate justice questions is still needed. There remain questions of how decarbonization efforts can benefit the urban poor, how climate-induced risks are distributed in cities, and how cities can develop resilient, socially just, net-zero trajectories in diverse social, political, and economic contexts.⁴⁵

Similarly, although urban activists, including youth and indigenous and minority communities and NGOs, have been visible in global conversations, pressing for more far-reaching change,⁴⁶ as expressed by several interviewees, the articulation between the historical demands for justice of marginalized urban communities (such as access to housing, security of tenure, etc.) and climate justice is still at an early stage. This articulation is needed so that climate justice movements in urban communities can reframe policy discussions in cities and at the global level in ways that bring inequality and climate justice to the fore.

2. Global Urban-Climate Governance Landscape

Governing societies’ response to climate change has come to occupy an important space in international relations today. The architecture of this global political project has been more than three decades in the making and is arranged in complex settings, encompassing multiple institutions, such as international organizations, regimes, and norms.⁴⁷ This complex governance framework attempts to regulate decisions and behaviors of both state and non-state actors to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

The UNFCCCs institutional system is a central hub and an important focal point for governance initiatives at all levels. Nonetheless, the international climate governance system is not monocentric but polycentric, meaning that beyond the UNFCCC, multiple other centers of decision-making authority attempt to govern climate change action as well.⁴⁸ International institutions from other domains and sectors, such as sustainable development, biodiversity, land degradation, urbanization, and food, as well as other intergovernmental regimes, such as the G7 and the G20, overlap with the climate change regime structured around UNFCCC.⁴⁹ The three Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD) have increasingly interconnected around the convergence of climate change, biodiversity protection, and ecosystem restoration. Alongside intergovernmental or state-led decision-making spaces, a host of transnational actors and governance spaces have emerged to form a critical part of global climate change governance.

44 Aylett (2014) as cited in Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

45 Walnycki, A., et al. (2022)

46 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

47 Biermann, F., & Kim, R. (2020)

48 Actors and domains of governance (2018)

49 Actors and domains of governance (2018)

Furthermore, the landscape of global climate change governance has been subject to continuous processes of reconfiguration. One of these processes has been the mobilization of non-state actors, set in motion when it became clear that promoting climate resilience and pushing for decarbonization requires the alignment of non-state and intergovernmental action.⁵⁰ At the Paris Summit in 2015, non-state action taken by cities, regions, businesses, and civil society organizations became formally tied to the UNFCCC through the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action.⁵¹

This effort to accelerate climate action by facilitating exchange and cooperation among state and non-state actors denoted a shift to a more “hybrid multilateralism.”⁵² This multilateralism has been characterized by, among other things, an intensified and increasingly dynamic interplay between multilateral and transnational climate action, where the UNFCCC has taken a role as facilitator or orchestrator.⁵³ In this way, alongside intergovernmental diplomacy, transnational actors and transnational governance became core elements of global environmental politics and institutions.⁵⁴ This kind of governance is concerned with “how different organizations act in international arenas so that they gain sufficient authority to steer international policy.”⁵⁵ In order to govern, these initiatives seek to mobilize a wide range of discourses, tools, techniques, and practices.

The overwhelming majority of global governance sectors (e.g., trade liberalization, monetary policy, and security policy) continue to be strictly intergovernmental,⁵⁶ even though participation of non-state actors has been gaining momentum in a few areas of international politics. In general, non-state actors—such as local and regional governments, civil society, and the private sector—have increasingly demanded, and received, more active observer status in intergovernmental environmental processes and institutions, including the Rio Conventions. Over time, non-state actors have become institutionalized in intergovernmental climate change processes (as well as in other policy areas) in the form of “major groups,” “constituencies,” and “stakeholders.”

However, the mobilization of urban non-state actors, including grassroots organizations, has been more prominent in other parts of the global agenda, apart from the UNFCCC. This mobilization has occurred in decision-making spaces related to sustainable development, urbanization, food, labor, migration, and environment. The following sections provide an overview of selected actors and intergovernmental and transnational governance spaces, as well as of institutionalized participation mechanisms in spaces at the intersection of climate change and urban issues.

2.1. Selected Actors

International development policy delivered a consolidated view of cities and urban areas as strategic arenas for climate change action in 2015.⁵⁷ Alongside the institutionalization of the role of urban non-state actors to deliver climate commitments through the Marrakesh Partnerships, the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals—which included for the first time an explicit urban goal (SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable)—“emerged linked to a

50 Bäckstrand, K., & Kuyper, J. W. (2017)

51 Bulkeley, H. (2021)

52 Bäckstrand, K., & Kuyper, J. W. (2017)

53 Bäckstrand, K., & Kuyper, J. W. (2017)

54 Hale, T. (2020)

55 Broto, V. C. (2017)

56 Böhmelt, T., et al. (2014)

57 Broto, V. C. (2017)

radical change toward a pro-urban policy consensus in sustainable development.”⁵⁸

Box 1. Mechanisms for Non-State Actors’ Engagement in the United Nations

Over the last 30 years, mechanisms of public participation in the UN were built on a sectoral model of “major groups.” This was preceded by an earlier tripartite division of government, private sector, and civil society. The “major groups” model was adopted by UN member states in Agenda 21 in 1992. This agenda initially recognized nine sectors of society as the main channels through which citizens could organize and participate in international efforts to achieve sustainable development through the UN. These nine groups were Business and Industry, Children and Youth, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, Local Authorities, NGOs, Scientific and Technological Community, Women, and Workers and Trade Unions.

With the passage of time and across agencies and programs, the groups have changed and multiplied. For instance, in the HLPF (see Section 2.2) the original nine major groups have grown to 13 groups, under the name of Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS). Other UN processes, such as the UNFCCC, have mirrored the major groups model for their civil society engagement mechanisms. The UNFCCC has nine constituencies, embracing approximately 90 percent of admitted organizations in the climate convention.

The major groups framework has seen tensions and debates about its structure. These tensions stem from the interchangeable use of terms such as “major groups,” “civil society,” “stakeholders,” and “constituencies” in UN official documents. This use has led to a discussion about which actors are included in the civil society, especially questioning whether the associations for private sector interests and officials who represent local authorities should be considered part of civil society because they have fundamentally different roles, interests, and motives.

The model of major groups has been criticized, for it does not acknowledge the differences in power, interests, and motives among the different major groups. This concern remains in spaces such as UNFCCC, where non-state actors have expressed concerns about the term “stakeholder” and the equality that it implies. Referring to major groups or stakeholder participation as a whole to account for the participation of civil society has been seen to obscure the power imbalances among groups by implying that duty-bearers, rights-holders, and corporate interests are all equal stakeholders. These current multilateral systems have been dubbed systems of “multistakeholderism” or “networked multilateralism”--terms that, in their plurality, sound positive, but that gloss over one of the main dynamics, which is the obscuration of significant power imbalances.⁵⁹

The adoption of the Paris Agreement, in the same year, further underscored the importance of subnational levels of implementation for climate action.

All these landmarks of international policy helped establish frameworks of action for urban and subnational actors, elevating their role in climate change response as seen in all three COPs of the Rio Conventions in 2022. In particular, this framework served urban governments’ concerted efforts to establish themselves as actors on a world stage capable of governing climate change and developing an explicitly urban approach to climate change governance beyond sectoral framing. Other urban actors, such as civil society and the private sector, have also increasingly sought

58 Barnett & Parnell (2016) as cited in Broto, V. C. (2017)

59 Marmo, E. (2022)

to contest and shape both the role of cities as global climate leaders and the urban approach to climate change governance.

2.1.1. Parties or Member States

International agreements and treaties are formal understandings and commitments made by two (bilateral) or many (multilateral) countries. Multilateral treaties are negotiated through existing international bodies themselves created through multilateral negotiations. Treaties can be called conventions, protocols, pacts, or accords. The term “Parties” refers to states with treaty-making capacity that have expressed their consent to be bound by a treaty,⁶⁰ and thus choose to be subject to legal obligations. In this regard, the three Rio Conventions are agreements that are legally binding to the signatory Parties. In contrast countries in multilateral negotiations for normative (non-binding) global agendas such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with the 17 SDGs are “Member States” of the United Nations.

In each convention, Parties are divided into different groupings and thus have different obligations. For instance, in UNFCCC, there are 198 Parties (197 states and one regional economic integration organization), divided into three main groups according to their different commitments.⁶¹ One of these groups, the so-called Annex II Parties, which are industrialized countries that were members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 1992, are required to provide financial resources to enable developing countries to undertake emission reduction activities and to help them adapt to adverse effects of climate change. In addition to the division of Parties according to their commitments in the convention, Parties also group into negotiating blocs. For example, in the UNFCCC, aside from the five traditional UN regional groups, there are other groupings regarded as more important for climate negotiations, such as the Group of 77 and China, the Arab States, the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG), the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), and the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), among others.

In contrast to Parties, Member States are countries that belong to an international political or economic organization, federation, or confederation, such as the UN, G20, or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Member States are bound by the founding constitution or mandate of the organization or federation. Within the UN, there are intergovernmental organizations in the form of specialized agencies and programs, whose members are the member states of the UN. But the membership of intergovernmental organizations can vary and include other confederations as part of their membership, as in the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), for example, where the EU acts as a Member State in addition to the 193 countries of the UN.

2.1.2. Networks of Subnational Governments

Networks of governments other than Member States have been fundamental for cities and subnational entities to gain traction in international policy processes, including climate policy.⁶² Transnational municipal networks or networks of subnational governments currently represent one of the most common forms of transnational climate change advocacy. Also, these networks have played a crucial role in creating new climate change spheres of authority and diplomacy spaces (see Section 2.3 for more on these transnational spaces of emerging governance).

60 World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) (n.d.)

61 *What are Parties & non-Party stakeholders?* (2022)

62 Broto, V. C. (2017)

Transnational municipal networks have emerged in a variety of forms. They can be distinguished according to various factors that demonstrate their diversity. These factors are formation periods (e.g., after or before the Kyoto Protocol), form of emergence (e.g., the US Mayors Climate Protection Agreement), scale of operation (international, regional, or national), membership (actors involved and the nature of the actors establishing the networks), and policy orientation and approach to climate policy.⁶³

In early stages, transnational municipal networks served as a bridge for cities to access critical financial resources from private and philanthropic sources. More recently, many of these networks, such as Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Network of Regional Governments for Sustainable Development (Regions4), the Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI), and Cities Alliance, have taken on more programmatic functions, working with cities to strategize, plan, and incrementally improve their organizational functions in the face of climate change related issues.⁶⁴

Networks of local and regional governments perform a number of governance functions, among which are agenda setting, information sharing, capacity building, soft and hard forms of regulation, and policy integration across governance arenas.⁶⁵ In this manner, such networks can encourage the sharing of information about appropriate practices among urban areas, contribute to goal setting, and support experimentation and development of new policy instruments.⁶⁶ Alongside direct forms of governance that steer members toward explicit goals (by using incentives and soft regulations), city networks perform indirect governance functions that suggest that the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and beliefs are also critical means for transnational governance.⁶⁷

While transnational climate change governance networks often include representation from the Global South,⁶⁸ these networks are often skewed to the interests of larger cities and to cities in the Global North. According to some accounts, “transnational municipal networks are not (yet) the representative, ambitious, and transparent player they are thought to be.”⁶⁹ Most notably absent from these networks are other important urban actors, such as representatives of associations of marginalized urban dwellers.

From the perspective of civil society, a few city networks are seen as potential partners in the climate change–urban advocacy ecosystem. The first and oldest of these networks is UCLG, an advocacy organization for cities in all forms of global governance. UCLG tries to advance normative discourse supporting local democratic self-governance, representing local governments and developing policy recommendations, many of which relate to climate change.⁷⁰

Another important network for cities is ICLEI. This network of nearly 2,000 local governments provides its members with technical support in processes of governance, framing policy targets, and capacity building. ICLEI links climate change action with other sustainable development agendas (e.g., SDGs), especially mainstreaming biodiversity, where it works closely with Regions4, for example in the CitiesWithNature and RegionsWithNature platforms. However, ICLEI’s relationship

63 Broto, V. C. (2017)

64 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

65 Bulkeley, H., et al. (2014)

66 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

67 Bulkeley, H., et al. (2012)

68 Broto, V. C. (2017)

69 Bansard et al. (2017) as cited in Bulkeley, H. (2021)

70 Broto, V. C. (2017)

with urban grassroots organizations is not as strong as UCLG's.

Both UCLG and ICLEI consist of local government “members”—represented by mayors or other local government leaders—and operate at the global level. UCLG is the secretariat for the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, a platform that includes global, regional, and national networks of local and regional governments. The Global Taskforce has sponsored parallel forums in recent UN-FCCC Conference of the Parties (COPs), including other intergovernmental policy processes, including the HLPF for follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and follow-up to the New Urban Agenda (NUA).⁷¹

The Cities Climate Leadership Group (C40) is another one of the larger city networks in the global urban climate governance landscape, though, as a network of 96 mostly megacities, it has not had representation of many smaller and intermediary cities or urban social movements and marginalized urban communities. This network has a strong focus on sharing advanced technologies and accessing finance, presenting climate action as a way to advance economic growth and a green economy.⁷² According to an interviewee, C40 has money and influence at national levels. It is a network based on specific topics of exchange, and it is made up of like-minded cities, which leads to the exclusion of some cities. Together with other city networks, C40 has been pushing hard in the UNFCCC COPs for more prominent recognition of local and subnational governments, and it plays an important role in the debate between national and subnational governments in the convention (see Box 6).

Finally, the Cities Alliance is a hybrid arrangement involving state and non-state actors. In addition to national governments, its members include city networks (e.g., UCLG, ICLEI, and C40), CSOs (e.g., SDI and WIEGO), and multilateral organizations (e.g., UN-Habitat and the World Bank). In global climate spaces, the Cities Alliance does not belong to any official constituency, and the majority of its members have their own voices and agendas in these spaces, according to an interviewee. Moreover, ICLEI is the vehicle through which the Cities Alliance is involved in UNFCCC processes. Similarly, Cities Alliance is not officially engaged in transnational climate policy spaces, such as the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments, but, according to an interviewee, it is an ally.

2.1.3. Grassroots and Civil Society

2.1.3.1. Transnational Advocacy Networks

In the same way that subnational governments have sought to position themselves as global climate governors and engage in the relevant decision-making spaces, grassroots organizations have organized in the form of “transnational advocacy networks” to engage in global and regional governance spaces.⁷³ Urban grassroots networks have become one of the most dynamic set of actors in certain areas of international politics,⁷⁴ including climate change.

Grassroots and actors engaged in transnational advocacy are bound together by shared values and principled beliefs, a common discourse, and dense exchanges

71 The New Urban Agenda (NUA) was the main outcome of Habitat III in Quito in 2016. While it is not a legally binding agenda for UN member states, it is a blueprint for urban policy at national and subnational levels. The NUA also is the de facto blueprint for UN agencies and other organizations engaged in sustainable urbanization. For more on Habitat III see footnote 106 in Section 2.2.

72 Broto, V. C. (2017)

73 Keck, M. E., & Sikkink, K. (1998)

74 Rodrigues, M. G. M. (2012)

of information and services.⁷⁵ Civil society members of networks exhibit intellectual and emotional commitment to the issues at stake and share knowledge about them. In addition to principles and ideals, material interests also drive the engagements of grassroots groups in transnational advocacy networks. Since grassroots are directly affected by changes in the local environment, “they have a material interest in preserving their way of life and/or pursuing the betterment of their quality of life through environmental preservation.”⁷⁶

Furthermore, social groups that have traditionally been marginalized by domestic politics have, through engagement with these networks, found a channel to “project their plight and struggles beyond national borders.” As a result, marginalized groups have not only acquired allies and resources at the global level, but also transformed local demands into transnational ones.⁷⁷

These networks have organizational flexibility, a capacity to produce and disseminate information (that is, effective communication⁷⁸), and an ability to operate across national borders—all of which are important assets for influence in international environmental politics.⁷⁹ In international negotiations, individual representatives of these networks (sometimes referred to as “NGO diplomats”) can also perform many of the same functions as state delegates: they represent the interests of their constituencies, they engage in information exchange, they engage with negotiators, and they provide policy advice.⁸⁰ In this regard, transnational advocacy networks can impact the nation-state and international governmental organizations by “lobbying governmental officials in the formulation of environmental treaties and domestic policies, and the creation of environmentally related international lines of credit.”⁸¹

But the contributions of transnational advocacy networks to world environmental politics go beyond mere lobbying, persuasion, and provision of information. These networks also have the capacity to translate “the different social meanings of particular struggles—environmental preservation and indigenous rights, for instance—to stakeholders at different levels: local, national, and international.”⁸² They frame issues as both local and global such that actors at all levels begin to understand the local in terms of the global and vice versa. According to an interviewee, these networks not only shorten the distance between the local and the global, but also bridge a gap in terms of complexity among different actors.

This capacity to act as bridge—from local to global, and among stakeholders at different levels—is one of the distinctive contributions of networks to world environmental politics. This role gives these organizations a unique bargaining asset to negotiate with other international actors, including with Member State positions.⁸³

Local civil society networks that are part of these transnational networks are often considered to be closer to the people on the ground, and therefore capable of identifying the needs and representing the interests of the target population.⁸⁴ In a highly competitive funding market, however, and given the uneven power relations with donors, these organizations are compelled to adhere to certain norms and adopt particular practices set by the priorities of powerful funding bodies. In the process,

75 Keck, M. E., & Sikkink, K. (1998)

76 Rodrigues, M. G. M. (2012)

77 Rodrigues, M. G. M. (2012)

78 Betsill, M., & Corell, E. (2007)

79 Keck, M. E., & Sikkink, K. (1998)

80 Betsill, M., & Corell, E. (2007)

81 Rodrigues, M. G. M. (2012)

82 Rodrigues, M. G. M. (2012)

83 Manno, J. P. (2008)

84 Marx, C., et al. (2012)

these organizations' relationships with the communities they serve can be altered and weakened, and the "place-sensitive agency" attributed to advocacy networks can be put into question.⁸⁵

Transnational advocacy networks can also empower the local members of the network, and as a consequence, they can have an impact on local politics.⁸⁶ On one hand, grassroots actors' alliances with international organizations have given these actors voice and visibility in national and international arenas. On the other hand, it is also the case that international NGOs often possess more resources in comparison with domestic counterparts. Additionally, the mere participation of grassroots actors in transnational advocacy efforts does not necessarily lead to their empowerment, and "local groups are the ones who hold the key to a network's effectiveness."⁸⁷ The empowerment of local groups depends on the process of "localizing" a network's activism and on how this process affects local politics.⁸⁸

2.1.3.2. Transnational Advocacy Networks at the Intersection of Urban and Climate Issues

Urban grassroots and marginalized urban communities have struggled for decades to be included in decision-making processes and recognized by other actors involved in the production of the city. Over the years of struggle, these groups and communities have also identified the need and strategic value of connecting and exchanging experiences to increase their success.⁸⁹ In other words, successful advocacy often depends on organizations working together with others. By organizing in networks, certain urban social movements have shifted from operating at a local scale, as a community organization, to a global scale, in the process upscaling housing activism, for example, to be not only a citywide issue, but a global one. Now the traditional demands of transnational networks—in the realms of housing, land tenure, the provision of basic services, and an end to forced eviction—have become globally relevant in the context of the climate crisis.

Relatively few transnational networks operate at the intersection of marginalized urban communities' issues and climate change. Some of these networks have adopted an explicit spatial focus, orienting their activities to advocate for improving marginalized spaces in cities under umbrella issues such as slum upgrading and the rights of people in slums and informal settlements. Some of the most prominent networks in the current advocacy ecosystem are SDI, HIC, and the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights.

These three urban social movement networks—together with WIEGO—have historically participated in the global governance of urbanization and city-making processes, in spaces such as the biennial World Urban Forum (WUF) and the three bi-decadal Habitat conferences. Other networks with an explicit focus on urban issues also exist, but they are not officially constituted, and their membership is more informal. Among these is the Global Platform for the Right to the City (GPR2C).

The power of collective organizing is not unique to informal dwellers organized in transnational networks such as SDI.⁹⁰ Other networks have organized around informal laborers or explicitly adopted women and gender perspectives. While advocating for the rights of informal workers or women in urban areas, these networks have placed these discussions in the context of the climate crisis, raising questions

85 Marx, C., et al. (2012)

86 Rodrigues, M. G. M. (2012)

87 Rodrigues, M. G. M. (2012)

88 Rodrigues, M. G. M. (2012)

89 Roitman, S. (2017)

90 Herrle, P., & Ley, A. (2016)

of intersectionality around the impact of climate change on informal workers and women. These networks include WIEGO, StreetNet International – International Alliance of Street Vendors, RedLacre (Latin American and Caribbean Recyclers Network), and the Huairou Commission.

2.1.3.3. Other Transnational Advocacy Networks

In addition to urban grassroots networks, other networks have come together to pursue shared purposes with a focus on climate issues. The Climate Action Network (CAN) is one of the most prominent networks of CSOs in this regard. This network is open to all NGOs and CBOs that do not represent industry and are interested in climate change issues.⁹¹ With more than 1,800 organizations in over 130 countries, CAN is organized in 22 regional and national nodes, constituting one of the world’s largest environmental networks.

Engaging in multilateral processes is an important work stream in CAN. The network co-leads the environment nongovernmental constituency (ENGO) in UNFCCC. CAN also coordinates advocacy and communications as civil society observers in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the G7, and the G20.⁹² While CAN does not have an explicit urban focus in its working groups, some of these thematic working groups represent a space within which urban topics can find a foothold: for example, in working groups on adaptation, loss and damage, and agriculture.

2.1.4. Policy Champions

In policymaking processes, there is an important set of actors whose roles are crucial in promoting significant policy changes. These “policy champions”⁹³ or “policy entrepreneurs” are defined as energetic actors who work with others in and around policymaking venues, build trust within and between networks, and can effectively engage within negotiations to push for policy changes.⁹⁴

Not only are policy champions willing to use their positions for leverage and aligning problems and solutions that increase the likelihood of policy change, these risk-taking actors also work politically to frame topics along the policy process (agenda setting, policy formulation, and implementation) in a way that makes policymakers believe that the process provides an effective solution to a policy problem.⁹⁵ Policy entrepreneurs have different targets—these are the actor or person whose behavior the entrepreneur seeks to change—for different goals.⁹⁶ In addition to framing policy options, policy entrepreneurship can also engage in building support of state and non-state actors to scale up policy change to address climate change.⁹⁷

In the global urban-climate governance landscape, there are also individuals and small groups committed to policy and governance change that try to use their agency and position to build coalitions and influence policy at the intergovernmental level. In this governance space, these actors are often referenced as “ambassadors” or “commissioners.” These individuals are high-level advocates who have access to spaces where agenda-setting actors and other prominent figures take decisions.

91 Members (n.d.)
92 *Multilateral processes and advocacy*. (n.d.)
93 Rochell, K., et al. (2022)
94 Mintrom, M., & Luetjens, J. (2017)
95 Reimer, I., & Saerbeck, B. (2017)
96 Green, J. F. (2017)
97 Mintrom, M., & Luetjens, J. (2017)

In this regard, the relevance of high-level meetings for any advocacy strategy is connected to the role that ambassadors can play in such meetings. According to one interviewee, the ability of these individuals to influence donors, think tanks, and other agenda-setting actors can be instrumental in bringing forward the interests of the urban poor. Nevertheless, the question of who is invited to those meetings is often contentious and political.

Policy champions in urban-climate intergovernmental spaces can represent different stakeholder groups. The case of the C40 network and the role that the mayor of London played in convening that network is often cited as an example of a key policy entrepreneur.⁹⁸ According to an interviewee, there is also a “new generation of African mayors that are eloquent enough to bring messages into global climate change discussions.”

Other prominent figures have emerged among civil society actors, particularly within youth groups. In particular, a few individuals are widely recognized at the international level for seeking urgent attention to the needs of marginalized urban communities, and are on the radar of government, international agencies, and foundations. For instance, Sheela Patel, is a policy champion advocating for the urban poor in global climate discussions. She is currently one of the Global Ambassadors of the UNFCCC transnational initiative Race to Resilience, which is oriented toward non-state actors.⁹⁹

One of the policy champions interviewed, who works at the interface of social justice and climate change, expressed that her job is “to provide evidence and action and campaigns,” while also pointing out that current climate change actions and solutions are not working for marginalized urban communities. Much of her current role deals with the top-down structure of global climate governance. This policy champion has also been instrumental in opening the doors of national, bilateral, and multilateral institutions to consider the urban poor as constituency partners. This work was successful, she said, “when we had smart people on the other side who understood the real risks and challenges, and not bureaucrats who are pen-pushers.”

2.1.5. Global North Think Tanks and Foundations

In international policy processes, think tanks play a similar role to subnational governments and advocacy networks. Think tanks seek to provide policy advice and mobilize information and ideas toward the adoption of decision and policies in international policy arenas, in the process pursuing their special interests and values. In climate change discussions, these organizations tend to focus on the interface between science and policy.

Although think tanks often self-describe as nonpartisan, these organizations support different approaches, positions, and negotiation blocs based on political perspectives and considerations. Think tanks’ interests and values range across the whole political spectrum, from conservative to liberal, right to left, and reactionary to progressive political postures. The knowledge provided by these institutions to enrich decision-making can be skewed to support incrementalism or transformational approaches to climate change. Although this is natural in any political process, the problem is that sometime this is not made explicit, one activist pointed out in an interview: “Certain knowledge or even science is provided without saying, ‘My position is this one’ or ‘I’m part of that [negotiating bloc].”

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and Misereor

98 Mintrom, M., & Luetjens, J. (2017)

99 *Global ambassadors* (2022, August 8)

(German Catholic Bishops' Organisation for Development Cooperation) are among the most relevant think tank and foundations working with marginalized urban communities in the context of climate change at the international level.

One of the entry points for think tanks into global climate governance spaces has been through projects. Given that UNFCCC and other policy spaces provide opportunities for hosting side events and exhibitions, think tanks (as well as other non-state actors) have used these spaces to showcase their work. The showcasing of projects in climate negotiations (e.g., when negotiators reference a project) hinges on how projects fit into the goals of conventions and agreements and how they are relevant to negotiating points.

In this way, projects are formulated to fill the larger global policy frames, such as—in the case of climate change—adaptation, mitigation, and loss and damage. And projects start to address the political and technical demands in international climate negotiations, for these projects can be used to inform and support positions in the negotiations.

While projects have the potential to introduce new issues in climate negotiations, it is a challenge to introduce new items in the agenda through a project if this does not fit into existing policy or dialogue frames, or if it has no kind of demand within the negotiations. The relationship between the showcasing of a project and how it fits into policy frames points to how the components in the global climate change system are interlocked. This also shows how projects on the ground are shaped from the top, while projects from the ground or the local level face barriers to entering climate change policy spaces, when the demands of policy frames do not explicitly address realities on the ground.

Nonetheless, showcasing projects at climate conferences and other policy spaces has contributed to strengthening networks of non-state actors, thereby strengthening transnational approaches to climate governance. According to one interviewee, by highlighting projects in these spaces, other actors can learn from concrete experiences on the ground.

Projects and programs have also been crucial entry points for forming policy advocacy coalitions in climate spaces. For instance, IIED, as one of the most prominent think tanks working with an explicit urban agenda about climate change, has used its decade-long project work at the local level as an entry point to develop a more sophisticated advocacy strategy by building a coalition of different actors in climate negotiations. This coalition has based its advocacy work on the agenda of localizing climate adaptation finance, based in turn on the projects led by IIED in countries such as Tanzania and Kenya. Around this agenda, several actors—including governments; some of the most prominent urban grassroots advocacy networks, such as SDI; and other think tanks, such as the World Resource Institute—have come together to advocate for channeling climate funds to the community level at UNFCCC, with significant success.¹⁰⁰

One of the most critical roles that think tanks play in climate change conversations is as “knowledge brokers.” In climate negotiations, knowledge brokering contributes significantly to moving and shifting agendas. Think tanks and similar organizations act as brokers or interlocutors between parties that adhere entirely differently, facilitating knowledge exchange and sharing between parties. In this role, think tanks can reconcile differences in the approaches to climate change, particularly between state and non-state actors. For instance, the difference between techno-

100 *Scaling up support for locally led adaptation* (n.d.)

cratic and human rights approaches, often cited by social movements as a challenge faced when communicating with parties, can be brokered by think tanks. When representatives of think tanks come to negotiations, a researcher pointed out in an interview, they can help ensure everyone is on the same page.

Even though think tanks and foundations support various approaches, positions, and negotiation blocs based on political perspectives and considerations, according to an interviewee, some parties might perceive these organizations as “more objective” than grassroots advocacy groups. So it is important to consider the context to which think tanks are attached. For example, IIED is likely to have key contacts in the UK and other EU delegations in climate governance spaces.

2.1.6. UN Special Rapporteurs and Committees

UN Special Rapporteurs (who are a form of UN Special Procedures that include Special Rapporteurs, Special Representatives, Working Groups, and Independent Experts) are independent human rights experts with mandates to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. The system of Special Rapporteurs is a central element of the “UN human rights machinery,” and they cover all human rights: civil, cultural, political, and social.¹⁰¹ The Special Rapporteurs are either individuals or a working group. They are not UN staff members and are elected for a three-year mandate with no remuneration. As of October 2022, there are 45 thematic and 14 country mandates.

In the global urban-climate governance landscape, some Special Rapporteurs are important actors for advancing the issues of urban marginalized communities in the current climate crisis. The Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing has focused his work on promoting housing as a right and not as a commodity. Hence, most of this rapporteur’s work focuses on the conditions necessary for a person to be “adequately housed” under international law. These conditions correspond to security of tenure, availability of services, affordability, habitability, accessibility, location, and cultural adequacy.¹⁰² The right to adequate housing also contains freedoms and entitlements, which include the protection against forced evictions and the arbitrary destruction and demolition of one’s home; the right to choose one’s residence, to determine where to live, and to move freely; equal and nondiscriminatory access to adequate housing; and participation in housing-related decision-making at the national and community levels.¹⁰³

In 2022 the issue of climate change started to figure more prominently in the work of this Special Rapporteur, with a call for input on the right to adequate housing and climate change. In addition, the next thematic report of the Special Rapporteur to the Human Rights Council in 2023 will address the issues of housing and climate change. In 2009, a previous rapporteur on this right had addressed the question of climate change and housing, but since then a more robust international framework, including the Paris Agreement, has developed, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including Goal 11, was adopted. Other relevant rapporteurs for marginalized urban communities include the Special Rapporteur on the human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation.

2.2. Intergovernmental Spaces

The mobilization of urban non-state actors, including grassroots organizations and

101 *Special procedures of the Human Rights Council* (n.d.)

102 *The human right to adequate housing* (n.d.)

103 *The human right to adequate housing* (n.d.)

social movements, in international policy spaces has been more prominent in decision-making spaces related to sustainable development, urbanization, food, and labor, among others, rather than climate. Although these “global urban governance spaces” where urban grassroots movements have traditionally mobilized are not central to the worldwide governance of climate change, they overlap with, and are part of the global climate regime structured around UNFCCC.

Urban social movements and grassroots organizations have decades-long experience with mobilization in urban spaces, and this experience is crucial for entering into the climate change discussions structured around UNFCCC. The decision-making spaces relevant for engaging urban grassroots networks in global climate discussions comprise both the climate-related arenas where the mobilization of urban grassroots should be more robust and those “more urban” arenas where this mobilization already occurs.

These spaces include the central hub of the climate change regime, namely UNFCCC, as well as the other Rio Conventions. And those more urban spaces where urban grassroots’ networks have traditionally mobilized include both intergovernmental and transnational spaces, including the High Level Political Forum or HLPF (the follow-up mechanism and discussion space for the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals), the Committee on World Food Security (CFS), and the World Urban Forum (WUF), among others.¹⁰⁴

Unlike the Rio Conventions, some of these more urban-related spaces are not only state-led processes but have evolved into multistakeholder-led processes, allowing for more participation of non-state actors and civil society.

Likewise, transnational governance spaces structured around networks of local and regional governments—such as the UCLG World Congress and the Summit of Local and Regional Leaders—have become important decision-making spaces for the global governance of urban issues and for grassroots mobilization.

It is also important to note that the participation of urban grassroots groups in decision-making processes has historically been more substantial at other scales and levels of government aside from the global level, such as subnational (regional and local) scales. Hence the relevance of these transnational urban governance spaces convened by subnational actors for the urban grassroots engagement.

Urban grassroots actors sometimes perceive intergovernmental spaces—such as HLPF or WUF—as “not really changing much,” as an interviewee said, but for urban communities’ networks and organizations, these spaces do still have a value in terms of exchange, dialogue, and networking, so they remain relevant.

2.2.1. UNFCCC and the Rio Conventions

All three of the Rio Conventions—UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD—are important centers for decision-making regarding climate change, and they provide frameworks that shape climate policies. Of the three, UNFCCC has the highest political relevance and media interest. Unlike other processes that allow non-state actors to shape the process to some extent and in a more direct way (see ILO or CFS), UNF-

¹⁰⁴ Among the most relevant spaces for the mobilization of urban grassroots are the Habitat conferences—or, more formally, the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements. Most recently, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, or Habitat III, was held in 2016, and it adopted the New Urban Agenda. The Habitat conferences are a crucial decision-making space for urban issues—their main outcome is recommendations for national and subnational urban policy—but they were not included in this review, as they are held only every 20 years; the next meeting will take place in 2036.

CCC and the other Rio Conventions are completely party-led processes: the Conference of the Parties (COP) is the central body for decision-making.

The three Conventions have similar basic architecture and functioning. They are Party-led processes, with a supreme decision-making body, COP meetings, and subsidiary bodies (or, in the case of UNCCD, committees). In terms of non-state actors' participation, their functioning is also similar: constituencies (with observer status) represent the different groupings of civil society and the private sector, but they have only observer status and no right to vote, as the Parties do. These observers also have limited access to certain meetings. To access meetings and conferences in the three conventions, non-state actors must have accredited observer status, and in some cases, such as in UNFCCC, this accreditation process can take approximately one and a half years to complete.¹⁰⁵

Among these conventions, the UNFCCC plays a central role in the climate change regime, for it provides the foundations for state and non-state action to combat climate change. However, both the CBD and UNCCD, in the decisions of their governing bodies, attempt also to regulate the decisions and behaviors of different actors with important implications for climate change.

In each of these conventions, there is growing awareness of the inseparable connections between the climate and biodiversity crises and processes of desertification and land degradation. Also, the topics of the three Rio Conventions have become increasingly interlinked, illustrating how they are converging. For instance, the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, negotiated at the 2022 CBD COP 15, made explicit the connections of biodiversity and climate change in its Target 8.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, one of the UNFCCC-led initiatives, the Nairobi work programme (NWP), has within its thematic areas biodiversity and ecosystems. In its Global Land Outlook reports, UNCCD has also drawn connections between land degradation, climate change, and biodiversity.¹⁰⁷

The UNFCCC is made up of three different spaces, or “work streams.” The work stream of the convention itself, the work stream of the Paris Agreement, and the work stream of the Kyoto Protocol, which actually continue in parallel. The main difference between these three spaces is that not all the Parties to the convention are part of the Paris Agreement and the Kyoto Protocol. While 198 countries have ratified the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement and the Kyoto Protocol have been adopted by 196 and 192 parties, respectively. Furthermore, states that are Parties to the Paris Agreement have decision-making bodies for the agreement, known as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA), which is different from the COP. States that are not Parties to the Paris Agreement participate as observers in CMA.

Another critical difference between these three processes, all of which fall under the umbrella of UNFCCC, is that the commitments of the Paris Agreement (called nationally determined contributions, or NDCs) are exclusively addressed in the spaces for the Paris Agreement and not in the convention. In this manner, the discussions at UNFCCC—although inextricably connected—are separated in three parts: the negotiations of the convention itself, the Paris Agreement, and the Kyoto Protocol. As one interviewee pointed out, in the space of the convention, the Parties cannot be held accountable for issues related to the Paris Agreement, such as limiting global warming to 1.5°C, for this goal is of the Paris Agreement and not of the convention. Hence, each process needs different narratives and discourse.

105 *UNFCCC standard admission process for non-governmental organizations (NGOs)* (n.d.)

106 First draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework... (2021, July 5)

107 Dudley, N., & Alexander, S. (2017)

On the other hand, the processes (or spaces) of the convention also serve as decision-making processes that, although they are not officially part of the convention and in this sense are voluntary processes, have the power to persuade state and non-state actors to shift their behaviors. For example, COP26 launched the Global Methane Pledge (GMP), aiming to reduce anthropogenic methane emissions by at least 30 percent between 2020 and 2030. This initiative has 111 country participants (including the US and EU), which together are responsible for 45 percent of global human-caused methane emissions.¹⁰⁸ Also at COP26, in the Glasgow Leaders' Declaration on Forests and Land Use, 145 countries committed to working collectively to halt and reverse forest loss and land degradation.¹⁰⁹ In this regard, the presence of local and regional governments in UNFCCC is closely related to these kinds of voluntary processes that are not part of the official negotiations.

Box 2. Why Does Engaging in the UNFCCC Matter?

While there are well-grounded criticism and skeptical voices on the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UNFCCC, this convention is legally binding and thus parties to it are obliged to fulfill their commitments. As a result, international legal obligations arise from the decisions in the convention. Also, the Paris Agreement is a treaty with the weight of international law, but not all its provisions establish legal obligations.¹¹⁰ To reach universal acceptance, this agreement adopted a hybrid approach to issues of prescriptiveness, legal form, and differentiation.¹¹¹

Unlike the Kyoto Protocol, which prescribed emission targets from the top down, the Paris Agreement allows Parties to determine their contributions to slowing climate change. The Paris Agreement requests that each country outline and communicate its post-2020 climate actions, known as their NDCs, but these are not legally binding; the agreement does not require that parties achieve their NDCs to address climate change.¹¹² Instead of prescription, the agreement relies on accounting and transparency to promote accountability and ambition.

In this way, NDC commitments at the international level are translated into commitments at national levels. For instance, Kenya's NDC to the Paris Agreement includes a commitment to expand power supply, and in doing so, provide all its citizens with access to electricity.¹¹³

Also, the UNFCCC (and its processes) are not only legal instruments but also political ones, and thus are spaces of contestation and dispute. In view of the growing influence of the private and corporate sector (see Section 3.1.2) and the questions to democratic legitimacy (see Section 3.1.1), these spaces are not to be left uncontested or unchecked for CSOs and other organizations seeking to strengthen democratic institutions.

2.2.2. High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)

The HLPF is the main United Nations platform at the global level for sustainable development, and it has a central role in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The HLPF adopts intergovernmentally negotiated political declarations, but unlike

108 IEA (n.d.)

109 *Glasgow leaders' declaration on forests and land use* (2021, February 11)

110 United Nations (n.d. c)

111 United Nations (n.d. c)

112 Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (December 12, 2015)

113 Dal Maso, M., et al. (2020)

the Rio Convention treaty bodies, the policy decisions are voluntary for member states.¹¹⁴ As mentioned previously (see Box 1), the engagement mechanism for non-state actors in the forum is the Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS).¹¹⁵ According to an interviewee, the relevance of this space for member states decreased after the Covid-19 pandemic: “Many countries had allocated resources for the SDGs, and progress was being made, but the pandemic has distracted the attention of Member States from this forum.”

The HLPF is also perceived as a space where particular dynamics of inclusion and exclusion unfold. According to an officer of HIC, in the process of selecting which organizations are allowed to participate in the forum, “development organizations” are favored, in contrast to “human rights organizations.” “When tables are created to follow up on this agenda and to decide how and what is going to be reported,” the officer said, “development organizations have a prominent role.” Human rights organizations still find it difficult to participate significantly in discussions about the implementation of the SDGs.

Despite this criticism of the forum, representatives of urban grassroots advocacy networks acknowledge the importance of discussing and following up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at both national and international levels. First, HLPF is a central space for the global governance of urban issues. It serves to follow up on and review the implementation of SDG 11 (make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable) and other SDGs key for fulfilling the demands of marginalized urban communities, such as SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), SDG 4 (quality education), and SDG 6 (clean water and sanitation), among others. Therefore, it is a space where urban grassroots have traditionally mobilized.¹¹⁶ Hence, marginalized urban communities have a stronger representation HLPF, in comparison to other “non-urban spaces,” such as UNFCCC.

For urban grassroots, HLPF is particularly relevant because Member States report on the implementation of SDG 11, according to an interviewee, because this is an SDG that urban grassroots networks have a direct influence on. Also, in this space CSOs and urban grassroots actors can perform one of their traditional roles: detecting noncompliance and providing on-the-ground information of rules violations.¹¹⁷ This role has been signaled as one of the comparative advantages that CSOs have in international policy spaces.

HLPF is considered a strategic space for links between the SDGs and climate change. In this regard, the interviewee underscored, HLPF needs not just more organizations that monitor human rights, but also more organizations working on climate change and the environment. Some urban grassroots networks, such as HIC, have been working with its membership on the territorialization of SDGs at national and local levels. Therefore, participating in HLPF is relevant for urban grassroots.

Over the years, the forum has served as a platform for civil society major groups, especially the Indigenous Peoples’ Major Group, the NGO and Women Major Groups, to denounce the corporate capture of international policy space and institutions, as well as the hazards of limited civil society participation in decision-making

114 United Nations (n.d. b)

115 United Nations (n.d. a)

116 It is also important to note that while there is not a major group in the forum specific to urban dwellers, they do have representation through other major groups. Aside from the MGoS system, non-state actors and organizations can engage via two other mechanisms in the forum: by invitation or by acquiring ECOSOC consultative status, as specified in ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, *Consultative relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations*.

117 Tallberg, J., et al. (2018)

spaces. One interviewee pointed out the example of how, thanks to the determined protest of civil society, and especially of the Women’s Major Group, a memorandum of understanding between UN Women and BlackRock Inc.—one of the biggest transnational corporations buying up rental housing and carrying out rental evictions—was canceled, thanks to the determined protest of civil society, and especially the Women’s Major Group.¹¹⁸

2.2.3. The World Urban Forum (WUF) and UN-Habitat Assembly (UNHA)

The WUF is a central space for the global governance of urban issues and is convened by the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) every two years. Like HLPF, WUF does not entail any legislative action, meaning that there are no negotiated Member State resolutions or policy decisions as outputs, but it is considered an important event for urban actors, including subnational governments, think tanks, international organizations, the private sector, and grassroots. The forum is marketed as the premier global conference on urbanization, and its last edition took place in Katowice, Poland, in June 2022.

The value of this space for urban grassroots lies chiefly in the opportunities that it presents for networking, mobilizing resources, and establishing new alliances, exchanges, and collaboration among representatives of networks and organizations of different regions. This space allows grassroots representatives, as well as other actors such as think tanks, to contest national and subnational urban policies and narratives, for it enables engagement with high-level officials, such as housing ministers and mayors. The forum also serves grassroots and other actors as a platform to present their work, draw attention to issues relevant to their constituencies, and build capacities among organizations.

In the 2022 edition of WUF, grassroots organizations were clearly less represented than representatives of these organizations considered ideal.¹¹⁹ “The World Urban Forum was sad,” one participant in the forum said, because “the assembly of the grassroots groups passed without any appreciation, without any support.” Furthermore, representatives of grassroots organizations did not have enough time to submit their visa applications, because “the announcement of the events came in late, a typical issue in this event,” reported a researcher. As a result, several events were canceled after the grassroots representatives and organizers of events were not able to travel to Poland.

Given the lack of on-site grassroots participation, remote participation was offered as an alternative. Nevertheless, remote participation is not an effective engagement alternative, as networking opportunities are significantly diminished. “Remote participation is so unfair because all the connections happen before and after the event,” said one interviewee. “This just perpetuates a very uneven playing field because the networking opportunities are there for those stakeholders that are able to attend the event, such as the private sector”, pointed out the interviewee. Planning for these spaces should consider facilitating opportunities to attend for marginalized groups, to match those of the private sector and representatives from Global North countries. “If there are not the same opportunities for all, it is not fair,” concluded the interviewee.

118 Wei, L. D., & Konotey-Ahulu, O. (2022, August 26)

119 Slum Dwellers International (2022, July 6)

Box 3. CSOs and Urban Grassroots Are Blamed for Their Lack of Organization

Processes of social organization take time. Given the lack of recognition and guarantees in engagement mechanisms to account for the imbalances in power, capacities, and resources among actors, grassroots often stand at a disadvantage compared to other stakeholders with more power, capacities, and resources to engage in debates and discussions. In addition to this uneven playing field, which translates into organization and coordination challenges, CSOs are accused of being disorganized or even criminalized when they cannot engage in conversations in the same organizational capacities as other actors, highlighted a researcher.

“You guys, you are not even able to agree on something, so that is very difficult to engage with you; please, can you get together, spend your own money, and then create your own voice and mechanisms,” said the researcher, imitating the discourse that is heard in policy spaces referring to CSOs. According to another interviewee, the lack of capabilities and resources for organizations also has repercussions on how funding is allocated. Sometimes donors and national governments prefer to deal with communities of practices, such as the environmental communities, “that are not as messy as civil society advocacy.”

Standing in contrast to WUF, UNHA is a new intergovernmental body composed of 193 Member States of the UN; it convenes in Nairobi, Kenya, every four years. Among the functions and competencies of the assembly are the adoption of resolutions, recommendations, and formal decisions for Member States. The decision-making process entails voting rights for Member States. Nonmembers do not have voting rights but can participate through written statements and selected oral statements. Civil society can participate through nongovernmental organizations, which are required to have consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).¹²⁰

UNHA is a strategic space for urban grassroots because among the assembly’s functions is developing recommendations of strategies for the coherent implementation of the dimensions of urban and human settlements contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the NUA. This provides an opportunity for grassroots organizations to participate in the NUA implementation and draw connections with HLPF and the implementation of SDG 11. Besides UNHA, decision-making spaces in UN-Habitat include other meeting spaces of UN-Habitat governing bodies, such as the UN-Habitat Executive Board and the Committee of Permanent Representatives, which together with UNHA form the governance structure of UN-Habitat.

According to an interviewee, UN-Habitat could be the place to deliver the demands of marginalized urban communities. However, its decision-making spaces and stakeholder engagement mechanism are not transparent and participatory enough. Several other interviewees made this point as well. Said one, “There is no means to hold UN-Habitat accountable, neither for its decisions nor for design of international forums like WUF.” Another said, “We need better frameworks with clear principles, commitments, and obligations for civil society engagement in those decision-making processes. In this way, civil society can hold those groups accountable. We cannot hold them accountable if we don’t have any framework.”

120 *Rules of procedure of the United Nations Habitat Assembly (2019)*

There is also the perception among urban grassroots that, in the face of few resources and limited power, UN-Habitat has increased its partnerships with the private sector. Within the UN system, said one interviewee, “UN-Habitat is trying to position itself in global discussions in a way that it can generate resources for action. And one way to do that has been to approach the private sector, where they believe they have a better chance of activating funding for local actions.”

Mandated by the UN General Assembly and by adoption of the NUA as well as directed by a UN-Habitat Governing Council Resolution, UN-Habitat’s executive director is currently reforming the program’s stakeholder engagement mechanism. Some urban grassroots organizations have tried to engage and shape this process. HIC has put forward a new proposal for a civil society mechanism, modeled after the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSIPM) in the CFS.¹²¹

2.2.4. Committee on World Food Security (CFS)

The CFS was originally established in 1962 as an intergovernmental body and steering committee of FAO. Following the global food price crisis of 2007–2008, it was reformed in 2009 to become a intergovernmental and multistakeholder policy body including 19 UN agencies and mechanisms for civil society and the private sector. Following this reform, the CFS vision is to be “the foremost inclusive international and intergovernmental platform for a broad range of committed stakeholders to work together in a coordinated manner.”¹²² Currently, it is one of the more advanced decision-making spaces in terms of participation in global food governance with relevance for climate policy.

The committee is central for the global governance of food systems, nutrition and agriculture policy, and it pursues the goal of promoting the human right to food, as well as food security. The CFS Plenary is the central body for decisions of the committee and is held each year in October in Rome.

CFS is made up of members, participants, and observers. Committee membership is open to all Member States of the FAO, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Programme (WFP), as well as non-Member States of FAO that are Member States of the UN. Current rules allow CSOs and NGOs to be involved in the work of the CFS as observers through the Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples’ Mechanism (CSIPM). Private sector actors in food and agriculture have a separate Private Sector Mechanism (PSM).

While Member States remain the ultimate decision-makers in the committee, all multistakeholder consultations feed into the CFS Plenary, and therefore are linked to decision-making. Participants have the right to intervene in CFS Plenary and breakout discussions, submit documents and formal proposals, and contribute regularly to intersessional activities of the committee through the Advisory Group and Open-ended Working Groups established by the CFS Bureau, the committee’s executive arm.¹²³

The CSIPM, established after CFS reform in 2009, aims to facilitate civil society participation and articulation into the policy process of the CFS. Every organization that belongs to civil society and works on food security and nutrition can join and participate in the mechanisms. All participating organizations in the CSM belong to one of the following 11 constituencies: smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, agricultural and food workers, landless people, women, youth,

121 *Proposal for a mechanism to organize civil society participation ...* (n.d.)

122 Committee on World Food Security (2015, May)

123 Committee on World Food Security (2015, April)

consumers, the urban food-insecure, and NGOs.

For more than a decade, urban grassroots organizations such as HIC have been involved in CSIPM, representing the urban food-insecure constituency.¹²⁴ In addition to the urban food-insecure constituency, the CSIPM has had a working group on urbanization and rural transformation that represents urban marginalized groups, and in 2022 on the agenda was the role of urban and territorial food governance as it relates to climate change.

Within the CSIPM, organizations like HIC and allies have participated in the development of guidelines related to land and food security, as well as contributed on gender-related issues. The work of advocacy networks in this space has also entailed partnering with city networks, such as UCLG, in the follow-up on the forum's working agenda from a "municipalist approach."

2.2.5. International Labour Organization (ILO)

Founded in 1919, the ILO is the oldest specialized agency within the UN. The mandate of ILO is to promote the implementation of international human and labor rights, promoting decent work for all. ILO has a unique tripartite governance structure in its bodies and decision-making process that comprise governments, employers, and workers

Historically, the main instrument of ILO has been international standard-setting processes, among which the conventions are the most important.¹²⁵ When ratified by member states, the conventions become legally binding. The International Labour Conference establishes and adopts international labor standards and is a forum for discussion of key social and labor questions. The conference is a tripartite body, meaning that in its deliberations, workers and employers have an equal voice with governments. The conference meets once a year in June in Geneva.

ILO has engaged in partnerships to provide technical cooperation to countries. Under the framework Partnership for Decent Work, ILO has engaged with non-state actors to promote decent work for all.¹²⁶ Among these actors, ILO has engaged with local and regional authorities, and in particular with UCLG for the realization of the Decent Work Agenda at the local level. In addition, urban grassroots organization based around labor issues, such as WIEGO, have been working closely with ILO on topics such as the development of statistics to quantify the informal economy.

In 2022, WIEGO collaborated with ILO and the International Domestic Workers Federation (IDWF) to prepare *Domestic Workers in the World: A Statistical Profile*. In 2021, a collaboration between WIEGO, ILO, and HomeNet International (HNI) resulted in the publication of *Home-Based Workers in the World: A Statistical Profile*.¹²⁷ Urban grassroots organizations dealing with labor issues have also engaged in the International Labour Conference and contributed position papers to the discussions; in the conferences, these organizations have been following the Social and Solidarity Economy agenda in particular.

2.2.6. The United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)

The UNEA is the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, with a universal membership of all 193 member states. The assembly meets bi-

124 *HIC and the urban food insecure constituency* (n.d.)

125 Boockmann, B. (2000)

126 International Labour Organization (n.d.)

127 *ILO-WIEGO statistical reports* (n.d.)

ennially in Nairobi to set priorities for global environmental policies and develop international environmental law.¹²⁸ The UNEA is also the governing body of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). The UNEA is now preparing for its sixth session, scheduled for February 26 to March 1, 2024, at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi.

The engagement mechanisms of the assembly (and UNEP) are based on the major groups engagement model. The Major Groups Facilitating Committee (MGFC) is composed of facilitators from the Major Groups and from the six UNEP regions, with two representatives per Major Group and two representatives per region (Regional Facilitators), which are elected by MGoS organizations accredited by UNEP.¹²⁹ The MGFC serves as the formal avenue and main interface for the facilitation of MGoS engagement when it comes to UNEP's governance. In total, there are nine Major Groups: Farmers, Women, the Scientific and Technological Community, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples and Their Communities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry, Nongovernmental Organizations, and Local Authorities.

The work of UNEP-MGFC members is guided via UNEP's Stakeholder Engagement Handbook¹³⁰ and any further internal terms of reference that the Major Groups and regional constituencies may have agreed on for their respective representatives.

2.3. Transnational Spaces

Transnational networks of municipal and subnational governments have played an essential role in rescaling climate politics and creating new spheres of authority,¹³¹ as well as new climate diplomacy spaces.¹³² For instance, the first Climate Summit for Mayors organized by C40 took place in Copenhagen in 2009, parallel with the UNFCCC COP15. Since then, there have been parallel summits of cities and subnational governments at UNFCCC COPs organized by the Global Taskforce for Local and Regional Governments representing many of the national and transnational networks of subnational governments. These initiatives have included and empowered new actors beyond sovereign nation-states,¹³³ such as cities and local and regional governments, "so that key decisions about how to deal with climate change are now made outside the confines of multilateral treaty negotiations."¹³⁴ Therefore, alongside intergovernmental or multilateral decision-making spaces, transnational governance spaces are also now part of decision-making processes aiming to shape urban approaches to climate governance.

Similarly, many other non-state actors—including grassroots organizations, CSOs, NGOs, and business associations—now operate in transnational governance spaces, "pursuing their special interests and values with differential power and capabilities."¹³⁵ The appearance of these governance spaces also reflects the differences in the authority that state and non-state actors can bring to bear. For state actors, establishing governance initiatives as legitimate does not entail too many challenges; however, non-state actors must work with others to gain legitimacy. Therefore, participation in these spaces has become crucial for those actors attempting to shape global climate change policy.

128 *The United Nations Environment Assembly* (n.d.)

129 *Major Groups modalities* (n.d.)

130 *Major Groups modalities* (n.d.)

131 Andonova & Mitchell (2010) as cited in Bulkeley, H., et al. (2014)

132 Broto, V. C. (2017)

133 <https://www.global-taskforce.org>

134 Bulkeley, H., et al. (2014)

135 Abbott & Snidal (2009) as cited in Bulkeley, H., et al. (2014)

2.3.1. UCLG Town Hall Process and World Congress

Transnational municipal networks and city networks have become important conveners of global urban climate governance spaces. Urban social movements and CSOs are currently playing important roles in some of these transnational governance spaces. One remarkable example is the UCLG-convened Town Hall 2022 process. The Town Hall is described as a dialogue and interaction space between “organized civil society constituencies and the political leadership of the local and regional government constituencies.” The aim is to jointly define global policies. The results of this Town Hall fed into the UCLG World Congress in 2022 and the congress’s main outcome document, the Pact for the Future. Previous Town Hall processes contributed to, for instance, the Durban Political Declaration.¹³⁶

Among the organizations leading the Town Hall is GPR2C. The platform is being supported by UCLG to lead the discussion on Global Commons.¹³⁷ Given the meaningful inclusion of CSOs in this governance space, UCLG is seen as a reliable ally for CSOs. According to one interviewee, UCLG is open and committed to building collaborations and relationships with networks of urban social movements. “I’ve never seen any multilateral agency as committed to building these relationships as UCLG is at the moment. And this is impressive,” expressed one interviewee, concluding that social movements engaged in these initiatives are tapping into that opportunity.

2.3.2. Other Transnational Governance Initiatives

City networks are also leading the creation of other arrangements relevant to the global urban perspective to climate change governance. These arrangements have largely taken the form of coalitions, with a strong presence among research institutes and organizations. Though CSOs have not been directly included in these coalitions, other actors important in the advocacy of urban and climate justice have joined these coalitions. One interviewee pointed to a huge influx of progressive organizations into these coalitions and spaces, all seeking to organize at a transnational level. An example of this was the Coalition for Urban Transitions, led by C40 and the World Resources Institute (WRI), active between 2014 and 2021.

3. Advocacy Issues in Global Urban-Climate Spaces

3.1. Transversal and Strategic Issues across Spaces

3.1.1. Governance and Participation Mechanisms

The growth of activity beyond nation-states attempting to govern different realms of society has given rise to discussions on the democratic deficit in international politics, including global climate and urban governance. This democratic deficit arises from the fact that while democratic institutions remain tied to nation-states, the exercise of public authority is now also exerted in international bureaucracies, such as UNFCCC.¹³⁸ Thus, individuals and communities are affected by decisions made beyond nation-states; however, they do not have an equal say in formulating these decisions.¹³⁹

136 *The Durban Political Declaration* (2019)

137 *The global commons* (n.d.)

138 Bäckstrand, K., & Kuyper, J. W. (2017)

139 Bäckstrand, K., & Kuyper, J. W. (2017)

In addition to the question of democratic or normative legitimacy, the global urban-climate governance regime also faces questions at the level of “popular legitimacy.”¹⁴⁰ This legitimacy refers to the extent to which the decisions made at UNFCCC are accepted by others—that is, the degree to which other actors comply with decisions made. “While the participation of civil society in the UN system is weak, we also see a weakening in the legitimacy of the UN system,” an activist said. The questions concerning the legitimacy and democratic deficit in the UN system are at the core of advocacy issues raised by civil society and urban grassroots organizations engaged at the international level.

Regarding the debate over the legitimacy and democratic characteristics of global urban and climate change intergovernmental spaces (and, to a lesser extent, transnational spaces), there are questions related to the overall governance structure of these spaces, and the civil society engagement and participation mechanisms in particular. These questions encompass the different models of engagement mechanisms and their different degrees of legitimacy, and include questions of democratic values, such as participation, deliberation, accountability, and transparency.¹⁴¹

Advocacy efforts to shape the mechanisms for participation are ultimately calls for democracy and, thus, for legitimacy of global urban and climate governance. Hence, engagement mechanisms for non-state actors (civil society) are at the core of advocacy issues for urban grassroots in the current global urban-climate governance landscape. Urban grassroots organizations—such as HIC—are currently engaged most actively in the reform of the UN-Habitat engagement mechanism (see Section 4).

3.1.2. Corporate Capture of Policy Spaces

Related to the current models for engagement in intergovernmental spaces at the intersection of urban and climate issues, such as the major groups model of HLPF or the constituencies model of UNFCCC, is how power imbalances among non-state actors or stakeholders have been obscured. These imbalances are not only perceived as detrimental to civil society participation but favor the more powerful actors, such as the private sector. In fact, the growing influence of corporate actors in decision-making process in the UN is not only a matter of CSOs’ perception. For instance, the unequal distribution of resources in the UN—where non-core (earmarked) resources from corporate donors outpace core (regular, unrestricted, or unearmarked) resources—points to the influence of corporate actors over specific UN agencies and activities at country levels.¹⁴²

Because this imbalance in resource distribution further skews power, the “corporate capture” (understood here as an umbrella term to signal the multiple forms through which the corporate sector gains influence) of many of the UN decision-making spaces is a major issue in the advocacy work of CSOs. For the most part this refers to the power and influence of the largest transnational corporations though there are also powerful national private sector lobbies across various levels of governance.

This capture has been a consistent topic of conversation for many years in certain policy spaces where the mobilization of urban grassroots has been traditionally strong. As part of the civil society constituencies, urban grassroots networks and organizations adhere to demands against corporate capture and join efforts with

140 Thew, H., et al. (2021)

141 Bäckstrand, K., & Kuyper, J. W. (2017)

142 Marmo, E. (2022)

other organizations in these spaces to advocate against attempts to privatize decision-making. Thus, advocacy efforts of CSOs have been articulated around the denunciation of partnerships between corporate actors and UN institutions. For instance, as mentioned previously, CSOs managed to end the intended partnership between UN Women and BlackRock Inc. in 2022.

The 2021 UN Food Systems Summit was also marred by controversy largely owing to the strategic partnership framework between the World Economic Forum and the UN to collaborate on meeting the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.¹⁴³ The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food affirmed that the summit was “elitist, regressive, and pro-corporate.”¹⁴⁴ In a policy brief, the rapporteur affirmed, “Corporate concentration of power remains the Summit’s elephant in the room.”¹⁴⁵ In response, hundreds of CSOs led by CSIPM, decided to boycott the summit.

The alleged corporate capture of policy spaces is also a central issue for urban grassroots organizations in UN-Habitat-related spaces, and it is related to the development of UN-Habitat’s new stakeholder engagement mechanism. According to an interviewee, UN-Habitat officials involved in this process who were advising UN-Habitat’s Executive Director, were also engaged with UN Women, which operates a stakeholders engagement model of that is considered illegitimate by some CSO critics. Given the intensification of corporate influence across different global governance spaces—including those at the intersection of urban and climate issues—there is a tremendous need to engage and to improve those mechanisms in some way for civil society to have effective input into these policy forums, highlighted an interviewee.

Lastly, several interviewees pointed out the growing influence of corporate actors in shaping urban approaches to climate change. This issue is discussed further in Section 3.2.3.

3.1.3. Human-Rights and Development Approaches

Most of the interviewees commented on the technocratic nature of how climate change discussions are held in general, and how “urban approaches” are being introduced into climate change conversations in particular. Aside from being a major communication barrier for CSOs’ engagement in policy conversations, technocratic questions are part of a bigger debate and discussion around linking development and human rights that has gone on for many years now on the international stage.

For decades, a market-dominated and “welfare model”¹⁴⁶ of development dominated international cooperation. This development paradigm primarily frames issues within the logic of economic growth,¹⁴⁷ thus demanding a very technical response. Climate change discussions have not been exempt from this view. The Stern Review, commissioned by the UK government in 2006 to examine the economics of climate change in order to inform the government’s policy positions in international negotiations, suggested that the key mechanisms for addressing adaptation were the same as those for generating economic growth. Under this logic, the adaptation challenge is basically a development challenge, which can be solved by technological transfers aimed at generating economic growth and increasing wealth in order to enable resilience and adaptive capacity.¹⁴⁸

143 World Economic Forum (2019)

144 McVeigh, K. (2021, September 22)

145 Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food (2021, August 19)

146 Offenhiser, R. C., & Holcombe, S. H. (2003)

147 Uvin, P. (2007)

148 Normative approaches to technology and human rights (2018)

Nevertheless, over these same decades, the dominant assumption of a market-led neoliberal development has been challenged and contested. One way this has been done is through the introduction of a human rights perspective into development discussions. Responses have ranged from the formulation of a “right to development,” led by voices from the Global South, and postcolonial demands for a New International Economic Order in the 1970s, to the rhetorical incorporation of rights within prevailing development discourse in the 1990s, to the articulation of a “rights-based approach” to development more recently.¹⁴⁹

Unlike the development approach, a human rights-based approach locates the state as the central duty-bearer, and therefore, as accountable for fulfilling its obligations regarding individual or community entitlements. In this approach human rights are conceptualized in terms of “duty-bearers” and “rights-holders.”¹⁵⁰ This calls for building the state’s capacity to deliver on human rights commitments and citizens’ capacity to claim their entitlements. In general, rights-based approaches entail practices and rhetoric to move from needs to rights, from charity to duties, from receiver to rights-holder and from giver to duty-bearer.¹⁵¹

This change of focus to duties, obligations, and claims also entails discussing mechanisms to adjudicate the violation of rights. These mechanisms bring the discussion to root causes of discrimination in matters of state policy, and how to address that discrimination. Furthermore, if duty-bearers are to be held accountable and claims to rights exist, methods for holding to account those who violate claims must exist as well. In this way, the discussion expands to mechanisms of accountability such as legal remedies. These mechanisms are at the heart of human rights-based approaches, for this is precisely what distinguishes charity from claims.¹⁵² Nevertheless, the nature of human-rights claims, as well as the duties created by these claims, is a deeply political and constantly shifting matter.

At the international level, a human rights approach entails a shift from state-to-state obligations and aggregating needs and achievements at the national level to focusing on various strata of society and the impacts felt by individuals on the ground. In other words, a human rights approach emphasizes the needs of vulnerable populations within countries and refocuses the discourse away from the obligations of states to one another and toward the obligations of all states to vulnerable populations.

In the climate change arena, this shift allows decision-making to engage with the more direct question of whose rights within each country should be protected, as well as with questions about the distribution of the risks and benefits of social and environmental change. From a human rights perspective, the unit of climate impact analysis must be the individual and the community rather than the state, or even the city.

At present the interaction between human rights and development is growing rapidly. Still, because development has been so long divorced from human rights in rhetoric, discourses, and practices, this attitude still permeates policy discussions and persists in international policy spaces, including those spaces related to the nexus of climate and urban issues. For example, according to an interviewee, in spaces like HLPF, development organizations are still dominant compared to human rights organizations.

149 Uvin, P. (2007)

150 Piron, L. H., & O’Neil, T. (2013)

151 Kirkemann Boesen, J., & Martin, T. (2007)

152 Uvin, P. (2007)

3.2. The Insertion of Marginalized Urban Issues into Climate Change Conversations

3.2.1. The Predominant Spatial Focus of Global Climate Discussions

Most global environmental and climate-centered decision-making processes (e.g., UNFCCC, CBD, and UNCCD) have focused primarily on rural areas, largely because poverty has long been considered a rural issue. This is due to, among other factors, a lack of global data on urban poverty. As a result, conversations in global climate spaces about vulnerability and oppression have been rural-centered. For instance, a stereotypical portrayal of frontline communities—those that experience the “first and worst” consequences of climate change—are communities in forests or rural areas, pointed out a representative of the Women and Gender Constituency; less visible are communities in city slums. “You will hear a lot of linkages between climate change and agriculture or migration,” the interviewee said, but not “a reflection of the linkages between climate change in urban planning, for example, or urban governance, because we feel that’s not the conversation we should have.”

Because of this “rural-centered perception,” a representative pointed out, organizations that discuss climate with an urban focus are “disenfranchised” regarding access to funding and policy decision spaces, and from the climate movement more generally. The types of organizations that engage in these spaces work predominantly in rural areas, at least according to the organizations involved in the Women and Gender Constituency in the UNFCCC. The overall spatial focus of current global climate discussions is rural—which means there is an opportunity to disrupt the premise that marginalization is only a rural issue. There was evidence of this shift in the last COP 27 and by the next COP 28 there could be a much stronger emphasis on the impacts on and roles of cities and subnational governments.

3.2.2. Urban Actors and Initiatives at UNFCCC

Despite their efforts to engage, urban grassroots organizations still have relatively weak participation in the UNFCCC. Currently, out of the more than 3,000 organizations that are formally admitted as observers to the conference, only one is a CSO that explicitly seeks to progress on the issues of marginalized urban communities. As one interviewee said, “at the UNFCCC, there is hardly any voice on urban poverty.”

Within civil society constituencies’ discussions at UNFCCC, a member of the youth constituency said, “marginalized urban communities (including youth) and their concerns and priorities are currently not well represented in the UNFCCC space, nor in youth organizing spaces.” Although networks of local and regional governments increasingly play a major role in advocating for urban issues at UNFCCC, this constituency does not have representation of urban grassroots either. Furthermore, the participation of UN agencies and programs in charge of urban issues, such as UN-Habitat, is relatively weak in the UNFCCC, compared to the participation of other UN agencies and programs.

The Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation Initiative—led by the COP27 presidency (the host country, Egypt), in collaboration with UN-Habitat and with the facilitation of ICLEI—is an example of initiatives that aim to bring urban approaches and cities to a more a central place in the climate change discussion.¹⁵³

However, the momentum or impact of these initiatives is looked at with skepticism.

153 *COP27 Presidency Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation (SURGe)* (2022)

“Like with a lot of initiatives, the actions following these words are most crucial,” pointed out an interviewee. In COP27 and in the UNFCCC, there is as yet weak support for urban issues. This can be seen in the calendar and thematic days for COP27: “Urban issues are on the very last day, [positioned] under human settlements by the high-level champions. This is not really the strong signal needed for urban issues,” concluded the interviewee.

Box 4. A First Step for Urban Grassroots Engagement: Building a Discourse

Among urban grassroots networks and organizations, there is a strong willingness to engage in climate change discussions. Yet for many activists and members of these organizations, the route for engagement is not clear. In addition to the usual barriers that civil society generally faces in UN spaces, urban grassroots seeking to engage in international climate discussions face a particular challenge: building a discourse that links marginalized urban communities, urban inequalities, and climate issues.

“I think we first want to be very clear about what we want and how we want it. And we want to negotiate on the issues we desperately need at the moment,” said a prominent activist. Another activist expressed, “I would not tell you it is not worth it [to engage at the UNFCCC COP], but we don’t know if our discourse is enough to give us influence.” In the case of engagement at the international level, building a discourse for urban grassroots is related to identifying and mapping where the challenges are for meaningful participation, which in turn is related to governance and thus with engagement mechanisms in international institutions. As one interviewee said, “the first thing to do is to map where the problems are; the next step is to strategize.”

Given the lack of discourse, many organizations still look with hesitation at engaging in climate spaces and question the efficacy of pursuing such an effort. “I’m not sure if UNFCCC is the space to deliver the demands of marginalized urban communities,” noted another interviewee. Nonetheless, articulating the links between marginalized urban communities’ issues and climate change is a strategic question to build a discourse for urban grassroots, and from there to confidently open a path to engage in climate conversations.

Urban grassroots are aware that identifying which topics to advocate for and building a discourse around them is not going to happen overnight. Nonetheless, advocacy networks and organizations (including urban grassroots organizations, think tanks, and foundations) have started to develop positions addressing UNFCCC agenda items. In addition to what issues to advocate for, a clear route of engagement also touches on the question of *how* to advocate. This issue relates to further questions on communication barriers, language, and knowledge management issues that civil society, in general, faces in global governance spaces.

For urban grassroots, engaging in global climate governance spaces also depends not only on the capacity to engage in complex, technical discussions but also on the ability of their interlocutors to speak their “language” and understand their approach to climate issues, which is more often shaped by a human rights perspective.

3.2.3. Inclusion of Urban Issues into Climate Change Discussions

In general, the insertion of urban topics and issues into global climate change governance has been marked by its technocratic character: top-down and intersecting with a series of economic and private-sector agendas. The agenda for urban

approaches to climate change governance has often come the narrative of “smart cities”, with emphasis on large infrastructure developments and technology, and with the perspective that climate finance for the urban transitions process should be channeled through the private sector (e.g., financing private transportation companies to reduce emissions). . .According to an interviewee, the insertion of the urban perspective into climate discussions is captured and co-opted by many private-sector actors.

In recent years, urban grassroots networks have been catching up with climate conversations at the international level. The science-policy platform of UNFCCC and the IPCC has shown that climate impacts are felt disproportionately in urban communities, with the most economically and socially marginalized being most affected. Some individual voices (policy champions) advocating on behalf of the urban impoverished have also attained prominent positions as global ambassadors in global climate change spaces and initiatives, reaching high-level decision-making circles and other climate policy champions.

Furthermore, some of the historical demands of marginalized urban communities, such as slum upgrading, have received renewed attention as they have been re-branded as part of the climate change agenda. In this regard, community-led policy, planning, or development (also with other variations, such as community-led or community-based financing, design, contributions, and practices) have been instrumental for the insertion of marginalized community issues into intergovernmental climate change forums.

In particular, this agenda—grounded in the role local communities can play in driving housing, sanitation, and other needed solutions in informal settlements—has found a foothold in climate adaptation, and to a lesser extent, in discussions of mitigation and loss and damage. The reasons for this are manifold. First, adaptation practices can be held more easily at the community level; communities are already carrying out adaptation practices through banking, and improving their housing and habitat conditions. Second, from the perspective of marginalized urban communities, the need to adapt is more evident than the need to mitigate. Hence, the adaptation agenda is more aligned with the practices of urban communities, and there are more community-led practices and evidence of actions directed toward adaptation. With this evidence, they then find it easier to secure resources to support adaptation-related activities more systematically. This also makes it conceptually easier to connect the demands of urban movements with adaptation practices and, thus, elaborate a convincing discourse. Even so, the insertion of marginalized urban communities’ issues in global climate conversations is at an early stage.

3.3. Thematic Entry Points in UNFCCC

International climate change governance and law are divided into three pillars. The first two, mitigation and adaptation, were established when the UNFCCC was adopted in 1992. The third pillar, loss and damage, was introduced at COP21 with the Paris Agreement. These three pillars have shaped climate policy and action, and hence climate investment and projects and more. By the same token, the urban governance of climate change has been discussed in reference to these three main pillars.

As such, the three climate change governance pillars have framed urban grassroots efforts to shape approaches to climate change from a community-based perspective. So far, the adaptation agenda has been the most relevant. Nevertheless, CSOs working at the urban level are increasingly directing their efforts to contest other

arenas of action, such as mitigation, where most climate finance is allocated, and loss and damage. In addition, other sectoral thematic entry points can serve as stepping stones for developing a climate justice agenda based on the needs of marginalized urban communities.

Box 5. The Top-Down (and Private) Shaping of Urban Approaches to Climate Change

The insertion of urban approaches into global climate change governance processes has come hand in hand with global banking and insurance institutions, investors, foundations and major think tanks. Institutions such as Bloomberg, the World Bank, and the World Resources Institute, just to mention a few, have mobilized resources to promote private finance and solutions in climate action plans at city levels. Financing climate action through debt and private investment for “bankable” infrastructure projects has also been linked to city networks, such as C40. This particular network has been characterized by its support for private response to climate change through advanced technologies, debt, and private investment for “bankable infrastructure projects as a means to advance economic growth and the green economy.¹⁵⁴ In this way, the agendas of large-scale finance organizations and NGO partners, regarded as the “big players,” have come to shape urban approaches to climate change.

An example of this privately backed urban approach to climate change is the #FreetownTheTreetown campaign in Sierra Leone.¹⁵⁵ The campaign aims to use digital tools to “tokenize” trees. By tokenizing trees, which can be bought, sold, and traded by businesses and individuals, the model aims to “leverage investment from an eager private market and create a self-sustaining financing model,” aiming to finance more trees. This initiative, funded by the World Bank and Bloomberg, among others, has been inserted into the Freetown adaptation strategy.¹⁵⁶

Some foundations and think tanks, particularly ones from the Global North, have also played a major role in inserting the climate change agenda at urban levels by funding urban grassroots networks. As one network officer pointed out, organizations such as Misereor and IIED have brought the attention of urban grassroots networks at international levels to climate issues and policy spaces such as UNFCCC, and governments of countries (Germany for example) are also sponsoring these networks’ events. Furthermore, advocacy networks comprised of grassroots organizations have begun to work in climate spaces, not necessarily by the organizations on the ground (i.e., their entire membership), but by individual leaders, selected members and officers coordinating the network. In this way, network members have started linking their practices and problems to climate change and it is likely the full memberships of city networks will become more engaged.

3.3.1. Adaptation

3.3.1.1. Urban Grassroots Demands as Adaptation Practices: The Case of Slum Upgrading

Climate adaptation has served as a banner under which some of the historical demands of the urban grassroots’ have gained recognition in the global climate agenda and in local politics. Slum upgrading, for instance, conventionally has been the accepted best practice to intervene in informal settlements. These interventions

154 Smeds, E. (2019)

155 Fisseha, T., et al. (2021, July 20)

156 Smeds, E. (2019)

are often done in situ and aim to improve the built environment and socioeconomic conditions. Slum upgrading practices have been promoted as an important part of international and local agendas on poverty eradication and development.

At the international level, the need “to adopt pro-poor policies and strategies that will obviate the need for further slum creation” has been promoted since the Millennium Development Goals.¹⁵⁷ With the 2030 Agenda, SDG 11 further called for “adequate, safe, and affordable housing and basic services” and to “upgrade slums.” Multidimensional poverty measures, promoted at global levels,¹⁵⁸ have also promoted actions associated with housing quality and access to basic infrastructure, such as access to drinking water, toilet facilities, and electricity.

Slum upgrading has also been at the core of the working agendas of urban grassroots advocacy networks working transnationally, such as SDI. At the local level, slum upgrading has always been at the top of the agenda for impoverished urban communities and organizations on the ground, as it brings concrete material benefits to marginalized populations.

More recently, climate responses to intervene in informal settlements have also emerged under the slum upgrading framework. Slum-upgrading programs have been promoted as a policy mechanism to address socioeconomic issues and an instrument by which built-environment interventions can enhance adaptation in informal settlements.¹⁵⁹

The reframing of slum upgrading as a climate adaptation practice has been a very important achievement for the recognition of marginalized urban communities in global climate conversations, highlighted an interviewee. Through the lens of climate adaptation, certain actors have been able to more easily recognize the need for investments in slum upgrading. Presenting slum upgrading as an adaptation practice has also brought renewed attention from potential funders. Previously, when slum upgrading was framed as a poverty-reduction issue or as inclusive planning, there were no resources, said a researcher; but suddenly for adaptation, the resources appeared: “You still can’t say it is mainstream, but it is a digestible agenda.”

From the recognition of slum upgrading as an adaptation practice, demands and policies that have historically been part of the agenda of urban grassroots—such as security of tenure, provision of essential services, provision of public and shared spaces, and inclusive planning of policies and actions—are now considered ways to reduce vulnerabilities to the adverse impacts of climate change. Hence, the recognition of slum upgrading as an adaptation practice has reinvigorated urban social movements in local politics too.

3.3.1.2. Community- and Locally Led Adaptation: Localizing Climate Adaptation Finance

Urban grassroots have always challenged slum-upgrading practices that seek to deliver solutions from the top, without considering communities and actors on the ground. From the perspective of urban grassroots, slum upgrading has a community-led component, a crucial best practice for any intervention in informal settlements. This applies to the allocation of finances provided by governments or international funders to support grassroots movements and to the design and implementation of upgrading projects.

157 Tibaijuka, A. (2008)

158 *Multidimensional Poverty Measure* (2022, October 14)

159 Núñez Collado, J. R., & Wang, H. H. (2020)

Community-led practices (in development, planning, financing, design, etc.) have been instrumental in inserting marginalized community issues into intergovernmental climate change forums. Conventional practices carried out with the engagement of communities on the ground (including slum upgrading) to deliver infrastructure, housing, essential services, and food, as well as solutions to urban populations living in high-risk areas, have also been reframed as community- and locally led adaptation practices. Therefore, the community- and locally led adaptation agendas are seen as very productive for urban social movements at the international level.

These agendas, which seek to shift power to local communities to guide adaptation practices, are also concerned with creating financial opportunities for local actors to carry out the adaptation practices (a practice referred to as localizing adaptation finance). According to an interviewee, localizing adaptation finance is an agenda that urban grassroots at the international level should pursue. Organizations like IIED, together with grassroots networks such as SDI and various policy champions, have been working on this agenda.

3.3.1.3. Criticisms of the Adaptation Agenda

Some of the interviewees in this study had general concerns regarding the locally and community-led adaptation agenda. Although actions currently promoted as adaptation measures in informal settlements are related to the immediate enhancement of marginalized urban communities' material conditions, on some levels this approach is considered superficial and focused on the symptoms rather than systemic issues. As one interviewee said, "sometimes we are concerned that the debate falls a lot into the question of how we endure, without changing anything in the economy."

In fact, there has been a tendency to adapt to climate change through incremental measures or business-as-usual strategies that do not challenge the status quo. Incremental adaptation has been defined as "actions where the central aim is to maintain the essence and integrity of a system or process at a given scale" and "does not include actions to change the fundamental attributes of a system in response to actual or expected impacts of climate change."¹⁶⁰ Following this trend, urban grassroots discussions and the urban climate governance landscape are dominated by adaptation conceived as an incremental practice.

The institutions that plan adaptation interventions have narrow mandates and lack familiarity with alternatives to incremental adaptation, such as transformative adaptation strategies, and this has constrained funding structures for alternatives to incremental adaptation.¹⁶¹ On a general level, collective thinking and practices on adaptation have been dominated by incremental approaches.

As one interviewee put it, staking everything on adaptation—understood as resisting and coping with climate change, rather than fighting climate change—narrows the climate agenda. Instead, mitigation might more strongly question the status quo than transformative adaptation does, and would call for more radical shifts. In general, there are questions about adaptation as the leading tenet of climate justice.

Another question regarding the locally led adaptation agenda is the capacity of local actors and institutions to absorb and manage the scale of climate finance that is needed to carry out adaptation practices. As locally led adaptation is concerned with channeling finance and resources into local hands for implementing adaptation practices, there is often a lack of local structures and capacities that prevent

160 Denton, F., et al. (2014)

161 Fedele, G., et al. (2019)

local actors, including both governments and CSOs, “from either effectively absorbing dedicated funds or from clearly communicating and raising demands and needs for adaptation finance to the allocation decision-makers.”¹⁶²

Developing capacities and strengthening partnerships at the local level is essential to demonstrate at the international level that local actors can manage climate finance. According to an interviewee, “if local governments and CSOs come together to present a more credible argument, demonstrating they can manage financial aid, they will refute some of those allegations.” Establishing mechanism to administer climate finance between local governments and local civil society actors (not even at the level of the Green Climate Fund) is crucial for channeling large amounts of international climate finance to the local level.

3.3.1.4. Transformative Adaptation: Addressing Criticism

Transformative adaptation strategies are a direct response to urban grassroots’ chief criticisms of mainstream adaptation approaches—that is, that are conceived chiefly as an incremental practice. Transformative adaptation instead aims to address the root causes of vulnerability to climate change in the long term by “challenging the systems and structures, economic and social relations, and beliefs and behaviors that contribute to climate change and social vulnerability.”¹⁶³ It aims to transform these relations into “more just, sustainable, or resilient states.”¹⁶⁴

The need for transformative adaptation emerges from considering “current development pathways as the root causes of climate risk and vulnerability.”¹⁶⁵ Hence, the transformation of broader political, economic, and social systems appears necessary. Furthermore, the need for transformative adaptation is rooted in the incremental adaptation’s major limitation: such a strategy may not effectively reduce vulnerabilities to climate change. For instance, in the face of floods, people can incrementally adapt by elevating their houses. However, people will remain vulnerable to floods in the future. Alternatively, people can respond by transforming their socio-ecological system by restoring previously degraded wetlands upstream.¹⁶⁶

Transformative adaptation is rarely considered in adaptation projects, plans, or policies to reduce the impacts of climate change, and thus it remains poorly defined in practice.¹⁶⁷ Several barriers hinder social and political support for transformative adaptation: the high investments and longtime horizons needed to carry out transformative measures; the power imbalances among actors and the interests of dominant actors to keep profiting from the status quo; the need to involve multiple stakeholders, sectors, governance levels with potentially different interests; and the need to reconcile different future visions (e.g., economic growth versus low carbon emissions), among others.¹⁶⁸

3.3.1.5. Opportunity: Developing an Urban Agenda within Locally Led Adaptation

While community- and locally-led adaptation refers to shifting the power to local actors, whether urban or rural, the global policy discussion around adaptation in general, and locally led adaptation in particular, has focused almost exclusively on rural actors and areas. “No one has really talked about the extremely specific

162 Restle-Steinert, J., et al. (2019)

163 Denton, F., et al. (2014)

164 Fedele, G., et al. (2019)

165 Denton, F., et al. (2014)

166 Fedele, G., et al. (2019)

167 Fedele, G., et al. (2019)

168 Fedele, G., et al. (2019)

issues around localizing climate finance in the context of urban areas,” said an interviewee, adding “there is a missing urban element that I think entrepreneurial donors should rise to claim.”

There is an opportunity to start championing the discourse on locally led adaptation from an urban perspective and creating an adequate space in which this discussion can take place. Some questions related to the development of this agenda are how to channel resources and finance to municipalities and how to ensure that municipalities spend that finance fairly, considering marginalized urban communities. Currently, there is an entry point at UNFCCC: the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) and the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme (see Chapter 3.4)

3.3.2. Mitigation and Just Transition

In the current urban-climate governance landscape, there is a strong tenet that justice is based on adaptation, so addressing the demands and needs of marginalized urban communities usually rests on this pillar. Nevertheless, for some interviewees, mitigation and just transition approaches are also promising avenues for climate justice that can also address the issues affecting impoverished communities in urban areas.

A first argument is related to the gap in financing mitigation and adaptation. While the fourth Biennial Assessment and Overview of Climate Finance Flows in 2020 established a political aspiration to a fifty-fifty balance between mitigation and adaptation, the financial support remains greater for mitigation than for adaptation.¹⁶⁹ In fact, adaptation finance has remained at between 20 and 25 percent of committed concessional finance across all sources (including bilateral flows, multilateral climate funds, and funds from multilateral development banks).¹⁷⁰ By contrast, to give an example, 65 percent of the finance moved through bilateral channels goes for mitigation.¹⁷¹

Against this background, some voices believe that climate justice political agendas should look more at mitigation, and thus marginalized urban communities should be at the table in conversations about zero emissions. Organizations like IIED are working “to change or expand the tenets of climate justice to include the mitigation perspective,” said one interviewee. In this regard, making sure that the energy transitions do not overlook rights and further marginalize informal settlers emerges as an entry point to this discussion. Thus, the mitigation and just (urban) transition agenda appear as important political arenas to include marginalized urban communities.

In general, it is more difficult for urban social movements to participate in mitigation discussions, as the connection between the demands of urban grassroots and mitigation and just transition agendas is not clear yet. According to a researcher, this connection is still under conceptual development. Nevertheless, both urban grassroots organizations at the international level and think tanks have started to work on this track, using as entry points discussions about construction materials and CO₂ emissions and housing policies (e.g., policies oriented toward private markets) that emit great amounts of CO₂ and do not favor the right to housing and energy or (local) autonomy for marginalized urban communities.

3.3.3. Loss and Damage

Regarding the pillar of loss and damage, urban grassroots organizations at the in-

169 UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance (2020)

170 UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance (2020)

171 UNFCCC Standing Committee on Finance (2020)

ternational level have also seen opportunities to address climate justice issues such as those related to the displacement and evictions of marginalized urban communities. The topic of loss and damage has potential to draw legal connections between displacement in urban high-risk areas, the effects of climate change, and global responsibilities.

Much of the displacement that occurs in urban high-risk areas due to changing climate conditions, such as increased sea levels and rainfall, is result of the failure of local planning instruments; but this displacement also demands responsibility from the global level. Some organizations, such as HIC, are trying to connect local displacement and eviction to these global climate change responsibilities.

Furthermore, loss and damage entails a discussion of compensation and the recognition of costs of repair, and this also offers an avenue to connect climate change displacement and eviction of marginalized urban communities. This presents an opening to work on a more substantial and deeper agenda on the participation of urban movements in global climate discussions.

3.4. Further Thematic Entry Points

In addition to the three pillars that structure UNFCCC and climate change policy, other sectoral entry points can serve to advance the interests and demands of marginalized urban communities in global climate conversations.

3.4.1. Waste and Informal Economies

Some urban grassroots organizations, such as WIEGO, have focused on issues concerning waste pickers and the economy around them. Since COP15 in Denmark in 2009, WIEGO has tried to bring waste pickers to climate change talks in order to bring attention to recycling as an important part of the climate solution. “We had the opportunity to get funding in 2008 from the Gates Foundation, which enabled us to take different delegations to COP,” highlighted a WIEGO officer.

In 2019, WIEGO also managed to have a delegation to voice these workers’ issues at the People’s Summit for the Climate, an alternative to COP25 in Madrid. On that occasion, WIEGO partnered with GlobalRec, a global alliance of waste pickers, to host a side event showcasing waste picker organizations around the globe, underscoring incineration threats and highlighting greener alternatives.¹⁷²

However, the engagement of this organization in global climate policy scenarios stopped due to challenges in coordinating between different organizations of waste pickers around the globe. Additionally, “it was very difficult to break into these spaces given that climate change [discourse] is so much focused on other things,” pointed out the officer. As a result, the framing around the issues of the specific marginalized communities of waste pickers has taken a more regional perspective; the organization process of this constituency has been stronger in Latin America, for instance. Nevertheless, WIEGO still does support a networking process among waste picker organizations, with groups in more than 28 countries covering mainly Latin America, Asia, and Africa via the Global Alliance of Waste Pickers (note: this is not a registered alliance).

At the same time, WIEGO has started to work in the field of climate change, both in mitigation and adaptation. The work has focused on trying to link climate change and its impacts with informal work. An important part of this work has been

172 *Waste pickers on the global stage fighting climate change* (n.d.)

to include facts and statistics on the role of waste pickers in relation to climate change. For instance, WIEGO developed a methodology and calculator to estimate the amount of greenhouse gas emissions that waste picker groups prevent.¹⁷³ Also, waste pickers' livelihoods are an important arena for discourse in the context of climate adaptation. Although this work is still at an exploratory stage, it is hoped that it will help inform WIEGO strategies on climate change.

WIEGO has as partners organizations traditionally working on urban issues, such as Cities Alliances and IIED, as well as environmental organizations such as the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives. However, partnering with environmental organizations has been challenging. Most of these organizations still have what the officer characterized as "an outdated approach to environmental issues." As the officer explained, environmental organizations often omit the social dimension of waste, excluding questions related to the livelihoods of marginalized groups and climate change. Therefore, it is crucial to break into environmental discourses and bring the social and justice dimensions to environmental spaces.

From this perspective, spaces related to the worlds of both work and environment (in general terms), such as the UN Environment Assembly and the International Labour Conference, take on greater relevance for urban informal workers. The upcoming negotiations on the UN Plastic Treaty are a window of opportunity for addressing the issues of these communities in a legally binding treaty (see Section 3.4.5).

3.4.2. Women and Gender Issues

In current science-policy climate change debates, there is a high confidence that climate change vulnerabilities in urban areas are shaped by drivers of inequality, including gender, sexuality, and nonconforming gender orientation.¹⁷⁴ At the political level, parties to the UNFCCC have recognized the gender-differentiated impacts of extreme weather events due to climate change: as a result of systemic gender discrimination and societal expectations related to gender roles, these effects are often felt more keenly by women than men.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, as mentioned in Section 1, there is a gender dimension in marginalization in urban areas, which is often characterized by women working in informal and precarious work forms, showing higher unemployment rates, and generally being overrepresented in slums.

While all these facts point to specific climate change challenges and vulnerabilities faced by women living in marginalized urban areas, who form a large bulk of the current population of the Global South, there is no specific urban focus on gender and women's issues at UNFCCC. Therefore, this is a promising arena of new work at UNFCCC.

The Women and Gender Constituency has been actively pushing for "gender-just climate solutions." This agenda seeks to push decision-makers to consider "locally driven solutions [to] promote democracy, making gender equality and women's rights central to just climate action."¹⁷⁶ A member of the Women and Gender Constituency said, "Often, we have been told that we want gender justice in climate action, but what do these solutions look like?" To provide an answer, the constituency seeks to document and showcase the solutions that bring gender justice to bear in climate action.

Some of the documented gender-just climate solutions initiatives have taken place

173 *Waste pickers on the global stage fighting climate change* (n.d.)

174 Dodman, D., et al. (2022)

175 UNFCCC Secretariat (2022, June 1)

176 *Gender just climate solutions* (n.d.)

in urban areas. “We have been documenting what is done by local women, and there is a range of initiatives in communities in cities, in slum areas, in the peripher-ies,” highlighted the interviewee. The pathways for bringing those initiatives to the forefront of gender-just climate solutions could be found working inside the constitu-ency (see Section 3.4.4)

4. Specific Arenas for Action in UNFCCC and Other Spaces

Part of the UNFCCC decision-making process is based on work programmes, which run over different periods, usually over several years. Based on these pro-grammes’ outcomes and reports, the COPs adopt different decisions. As a result, the opportunities to influence decision-making in multilateral climate-urban spaces are generally given by the relatively short periods in which particular work pro-grammes run.

The window of opportunity to influence work programmes is, in fact, even shorter than the programme’s duration on paper. The window is larger at the beginning, during the first stages of the policy process, and starts to close as the programme progresses. Therefore, engagement at the early stages is crucial. For this, tracking the different work strands of the UNFCCC and following up COP decisions is cru-cial. Nevertheless, urban grassroots often lack this capacity to follow the different processes not only in UNFCCC, but also in other spaces relevant for marginalized urban communities.

The following sections present the current processes at UNFCCC and in other spac-es of the urban-climate governance landscape that represent windows of opportu-nity to advocate for marginalized urban communities. Also presented below is the constituency pathway, another entry point to bring forward these interests.

4.1. The Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA)

Over the next two years at UNFCCC, one of the most important opportunities to advance on the issues of marginalized urban communities is the discussions on the GGA. Established under Article 7 of the Paris Agreement, the GGA aims to “enhance adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change in the context of the temperature goal of the Agreement.”¹⁷⁷ This goal can be considered as an adaptation equivalent to the global goal on mitigation of limiting global warming to 1.5°C.

Since COP26 in Glasgow, the GGA process has moved forward and gained mo-mentum, with the establishment of the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work pro-gramme (GlaSS), which will run until 2023. The programme primarily aims to enable the achievement of the goal, enhance its understanding, and contribute to reviewing the overall progress made in achieving the goal.¹⁷⁸ This process, as many others in UNFCCC, such as the Koronivia joint work on agriculture, will be coordi-nated through submissions and workshops. In April 2022, parties were invited to submit views on how to achieve the objectives of the work programme. In June 2022 was the first of the programme’s four official workshops per year.

177 Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (2015)

178 *Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on the global goal on adaptation* (2022)

Much of the content of this two-year work programme still must be defined. Although GlaSS is a strictly party-led process, many parties called for including “non-party stakeholders,” including experts, practitioners, and representatives from civil society, including local communities and indigenous peoples, youth, and people with disabilities, in the workshops.

In this regard, the Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme offers an entry point to start shaping collective thinking toward the needs and demands of urban marginalized communities as part of the locally led adaptation agenda. Organizations working on locally led adaptation, such as IIED and WRI, are taking this opportunity to shape the process to make locally led adaptation a central component of the goals.

Still, there are some challenges in entering the discussions of this programme and advocating a local perspective. One of the main challenges is the limitation on input by observers and non-party stakeholders in a party-led process and the tension between national and subnational governments’ politics. However, the need to link this global process to local realities was present during the first GlaSS workshop. Fourteen out of 21 submissions acknowledged the importance of including local impacts and priorities in the GGA.¹⁷⁹ For example, the island nation of Maldives stressed that “the collective nature of the goal [on adaptation] seeks to ensure a link between local and regional/global efforts.”¹⁸⁰

Furthermore, parties in this process will assess what has been done in adaptation-related topics. According to an interviewee, “it could be a good space to talk about what cities and urban communities have been doing in the face of climate change impacts in the past few years.”

Alongside the GGA, there is a specific strand on cities and urban systems under the Nairobi work programme (Human Settlements).¹⁸¹

4.2. Locally Led Adaptation Principles

Among the myriad initiatives and campaigns moving forward in global climate change discussions, the agenda on locally led and community-led adaptation is building a significant coalition of actors, among which networks of urban grassroots from the Global South have been playing a major role.

This agenda was built on the development of the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation.¹⁸² These principles were developed under the auspices of the Global Commission on Adaptation, set in motion from 2018 to 2020 to raise the political visibility of adaptation on the global agenda. The commission consisted of 34 commissioners from 20 countries.

The commission agreed to drive a set of Action Tracks, in partnership with the Global Center on Adaptation and WRI, which the commission believes to be essential “to jump-start the needed transitions.”¹⁸³

One of the eight tracks was for locally led adaptation, and it was established and guided by two commissioners: Sheela Patel, former board chair and founding member of Slum Dwellers International, and Muhammad Musa, director of the international development organization BRAC. With the contribution of partners,

179 de Zoysa, K., et al. (2022, July 22)

180 de Zoysa, K., et al. (2022, July 22)

181 *Human settlements and adaptation* (n.d.)

182 Global Commission on Adaptation (2021, January 24)

183 Global Commission on Adaptation (2019)

including IIED, SDI, and Huairou Commission, as well as donors and funds, delivery partners, Global South governments, and other NGOs, the principles were developed “to highlight what needs to happen to shift power into the hands of local stakeholders.”¹⁸⁴

Box 6. National and Subnational Government Politics

National and subnational government politics are crucial for policy advocacy at UNFCCC. According to an interviewee, “when it comes to the UNFCCC, basically, your stakeholders are national governments.” Conversely, the issues of marginalized urban communities are commonly managed by subnational and municipal governments. From that perspective, advocating for marginalized urban communities at UNFCCC raises questions about devolving climate finance to subnational levels. In turn, the devolution of climate finance to more local levels requires reforms to public financial management and devolved power to subnational authorities, which raises questions of jurisdictional authority that in extremely centralized countries are related to issues of democratic legitimacy. “National governments do not want to devolve power and money to municipal governments. And this is when you get into the politics of subnational and national governments,” added the interviewee.

In short, this political tension between national and subnational governments is a significant challenge when advocating for the issues of marginalized urban communities in multilateral climate governance spaces. From this perspective, the UNFCCC can be regarded as a space that is not worth participating in, concluded one interviewee.

There is an additional concern that advocacy efforts promoting devolution of powers to subnational and local levels—for instance, the locally led adaptation agenda—can be used by national governments to relegate their commitments to subnational actors. “There is a worry that in the negotiations, national governments might be able to wash their hands of executing effective adaptation projects by saying, ‘Let’s promote locally led adaptation,’” pointed out one researcher. In this way, adaptation efforts become the responsibility of provincial and local governments while allowing “national governments to say the negotiation led us to this point,” said the interviewee. As a result, there are concerns that promoting more localized policies at the UNFCCC negotiations is only providing a convenient way for national governments to evade responsibility.

The principles became a concrete basis on which an advocacy strategy was developed, for use not only at UNFCCC but also at the Green Climate Fund and World Bank. Part of this strategy has consisted of targeting global actors to sign and endorse these principles, so that more money can be pulled in at the local level, “where local community groups and marginalized groups can actually have a say in how money is spent and used,” said an interviewee. The principles aim “to give vulnerable and excluded communities greater agency over prioritizing and designing adaptation solutions, shifting them from being beneficiaries to empowered agents of change.”¹⁸⁵ To date, more than 80 governments, global institutions, and local and international NGOs have endorsed the principles.

The principles built on a decade of work on local finance and building international awareness of the benefit of decentralizing finance, as well as work on building local capacities to access and manage those resources and make sure they flow from the international to the local level. According to one interviewee, IIED, working with

184 *Principles for locally led adaptation* (n.d.)

185 *Principles for locally led adaptation* (n.d.)

a number of other organizations, including SDI and Huairou Commission, has been trying to spearhead this work. The aim is to move programmes and funding toward adaptation that is increasingly owned by local stakeholders, as well as to move to alternative finance frameworks, such as “business-unusual for adaptation” or “money where it matters.”¹⁸⁶

According to an interviewee, the principles became a powerful agenda because of how they were developed: “Long story short, it was a high-integrity process with genuine consultation.” Four steps were identified in the development of the principles and their attached policy advocacy strategy. First, the principles did not emerge from a sporadic meeting but from that decade of work that organizations had already done on localizing finance. The work that IIED has done in countries like Tanzania and Kenya was referenced. In fact, the principles emerged from reflections on that work, stressed the interviewee.

The second factor that strengthened and powered this agenda was a sound consultation process. According to an interviewee, this was an “intense, almost excruciatingly painful amount of consultation,” getting a large number of organizations from across the world to feed into developing the charter. There were more than 50 events all over the world, in different forums, with hundreds of organizations contributing incremental insights to consolidate the principles. It became a powerful agenda because “people could no longer say that is just one organization pushing it,” explained an interviewee.

The third step was to take the principles and try to set an agenda with powerful actors. The principles first obtained the support from the UK government, then they were taken to actors that finance adaptation. “We reached out to a few philanthropic actors, such as the Open Society Foundation, that emphasized transparency and accountability,” reported an interviewee. When these actors accepted the principles, other powerful funders then became more receptive. The Gates Foundation became interested in adaptation, and the Hewlett Foundation considered balancing their portfolio on mitigation with more adaptation.

To push an agenda, the engagement of donors is crucial. In this regard, keeping the advocacy strategy and the Locally Led Adaptation Principles coordinated with the agenda at UNFCCC, particularly with the GGA, was essential to reinforce donors’ engagement. “Donors were nudging us to make sure that the dots are joined,” noted an interviewee. “They did not want to duplicate efforts. If you look at it from the principle of coordination, compartmentalization goes against the basic tenets of donor behavior.”

Fourth, the principles were marketed to powerful political actors who had agenda-setting capacity. The coalition of actors that formed around the principles was used to engage at UNFCCC, and then, said an interviewee, “we used that emerging power bloc to influence negotiations.” Although this proposed change of paradigm toward locally led adaptation, which is said “to challenge the status quo of climate finance by ensuring local people and communities have decision-making power in adapting to the effects of climate change,”¹⁸⁷ has not been formally recognized, some references to locally led adaptation were opened in the negotiation texts during COP26 in 2021. “There were an increasing number of references to the importance of local agencies and parties signed on to the principles, including Costa Rica and the UK,” underscored an interviewee. The hope is that if parties sign on to the principles, this will feed the negotiating stances.

186 Norton, A., & Huq, S. (2020, January 20)

187 Cogger, T. (2021, December 17)

4.3. Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture and the Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security

In 2017, the COP23 climate change summit in Bonn adopted decision 4/CP.23, what has become known as the Koronivia joint work on agriculture, which recognizes “the vulnerabilities of agriculture to climate change and approaches to addressing food security”. The decision addressed six interrelated topics on soil, nutrient use, water, livestock, methods for assessing adaptation, and the socioeconomic and food security dimensions of climate change across agricultural sectors.

The Koronivia joint work on agriculture has been about not only the scientific aspects of agriculture and climate change, but also important issues to consider in strengthening the resilience of agriculture to climate change. This space is unique in UNFCCC, for it is the only space that address the interplay between a particular sector -food and agriculture- and climate change. There are no similar spaces for mining, manufacturing, or any other economic sector.

The subsidiary bodies of the UNFCCC were tasked with developing the Koronivia joint work on agriculture, a road map for the coordination of the process. This road map contained a series of workshops and submissions for the development of workshops. Both parties and observers were invited to submit their views on the topics to be discussed ahead of each workshop—a process similar to the GGA. Prior to the workshops, there were informal consultations to nominate speakers from the different constituencies. All UNFCCC accredited observers including city networks and organizations representing urban constituencies were able to join in the Koronivia joint work on agriculture process.

In this way, CAN (and other organizations within the constituencies) had the opportunity to participate through submissions and voice their concerns in front of negotiators, as the workshops are official spaces that provide an official summary and with conclusions negotiated among the parties. “We had the possibility to incorporate speakers within those workshops and to promote speakers that we wanted to see there,” explained a CAN officer. “We had the possibility to bring farmers and to bring their perspectives on how climate change is impacting them and how agroecology is much better for them rather than industrial agriculture, for the reality that they’re dealing with.”

In general, CAN’s advocacy strategy has included direct engagement and sharing positions with negotiators in parties. CAN also publishes submissions in the UNFCCC portal. “Submissions are an important and useful tool in a way because negotiators go through all the submissions that are published in the portal before going into the negotiations,” explained CAN’s officer. “In addition, we also host side events and publish documents with CAN’s positions.”

CAN’s priority for agroecology has not seen a direct reference to agroecology in the text. However, some of the principles around agroecology have been incorporated. “We believe that this is the result of all of our work pushing for different ideas around this process,” said the interviewee.

While the Koronivia joint work on agriculture should have closed at COP26 held in 2021, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the official conclusions and reporting back happened at COP27 in 2022, when the Koronivia joint work on agriculture officially came to an end.

During COP 27 parties agreed to start a new process, requesting UNFCCC's Subsidiary Bodies to "establish the four-year Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security, including implementation of the outcomes of the Koronivia joint work on agriculture and previous activities addressing issues related to agriculture, as well as future topics."¹⁸⁸

While the negotiations about this new process in COP 27 were focused on the structure of this new joint work. After difficult negotiations the decision was for a work programme. Thematic issues such as the promotion of holistic approaches to agriculture and references to adaptation and mitigation were included in the decision. This provides a good umbrella for mainstreaming other topics in the process of establishing the programme, explained a CAN's officer. Parties and observers were invited to submit inputs by March 27, 2023 for the consideration of subsidiary bodies at their 58th session in June 2023 in Bonn, Germany.

CAN plans to participate in the establishment of this new joint work. To influence this process, CAN plans to participate in the request for submissions, address Parties to coordinate positions, and participate in the 58th sessions of the UNFCCC subsidiaries bodies. Issues such as agroecology, gender mainstreaming and holistic approaches to agriculture and food security are among the topics CAN plans to work on.

4.4. UNFCCC Civil Society Constituencies

Working with civil society constituencies at UNFCCC (as well as at CBD and UNCCD) appears to be the most expeditious path to advocate for marginalized communities in global climate discussions. Civil society constituencies include indigenous peoples' organizations (IPOs), the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC), the youth NGO constituency (YOUNGO), and farmers and agricultural NGOs. These constituencies often strategize together, reviewing positions and papers and sharing talking points and speaking slots. "That is what differentiates civil society constituencies from the others," noted an activist. Civil society constituencies also often work closely with the research and independent NGOs (RINGOs) and other organizations, such as CAN, that belong to the environmental NGOs (ENGO) constituency.

Marginalized urban community issues do not yet figure prominently within civil society constituencies. But, as a coordinator of the WGC points out, "if an organization can work within the constituency and the issue gets prominence within the constituency, there is an opportunity to influence other constituents, and then there is an opportunity to influence UNFCCC." The Major Groups at HLPF work in a similar fashion.

Within a given constituency, there are organizations working on different issues, such as investments or loss and damage, which then lead the positions on particular topics on behalf of the constituency. Therefore, "if there is an active and significant number of organizations that work on urban issues, who are able to develop a strong position on behalf of their own constituencies, then the urban constituency will have a strong position on urban issues," said the coordinator. Generally, constituencies value institutional capacity for commitment and long-standing work.

Among the civil society constituencies, the WGC appears as a first entry point, particularly the Huairou Commission, which is part of this constituency. Among the constituency members, the Huairou Commission can develop the urban agenda, underscored the coordinator. Eventually, the YOUNGO constituency could be another entry point. Although urban topics are not part of the agenda of this constituency, it works and collaborates with the Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency (LGMA).

188 https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2022_L04_adv_0.pdf

4.5. UN Human Rights System

4.5.1. The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

A body of 18 independent experts, the CRC monitors implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and its protocol. This convention, adopted in 1989, is a legally binding international agreement that is the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history, with just one country (USA) still to ratify.

In June 2021, the committee decided to draft a “General comment on children’s rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change.” After consultations with states, outside experts, interested parties, and children, the General Comment No. 26, as it is more commonly known, will provide authoritative guidance to the governments of the 196 countries that have ratified UNCRC.

The consultation on the General Comment No. 26 is open until February 2023, and it presents an opportunity to fill the gaps left by two previous resolutions: in April 2022, when the Human Rights Council declared access to a “clean, healthy, and sustainable environment” a human right, and in July 2022, when the UN General Assembly passed a resolution (not legally binding) that called on states to ensure people have access to such an environment.

More specifically, the discussions on General Comment No. 26 are a pathway for filling the human right to a healthy environment with normative value and content, such as state obligation and what, under the UNCRC, constitutes a violation of this right. “This is a really good opportunity, for those who are thinking globally and understand the value of the normative and standard-setting processes,” underscored a prominent activist and academic.

4.6. UN-Habitat Engagement Mechanism

In line with a mandate by UN member states and following a reform after the adoption of the NUA, UN-Habitat is currently developing a stakeholder engagement policy, drawing on best practices and models from relevant multilateral institutions, to promote transparency and the effective engagement of civil society. These engagement mechanisms were requested from UN-Habitat, in order to effectively deliver the NUA.¹⁸⁹

Urban grassroots networks such as HIC have read this as an opportunity to democratize this agency, actively participating in this process by submitting concept models for the new policy.¹⁹⁰ The model currently being pursued is one of appointed advisory councils, which in the past has been considered among the least legitimate models for stakeholder engagement. According to an HIC officer, HIC is trying to turn UN-Habitat away from such a model, toward one that will instead result in infrastructure that enables participation.

Although the establishment of this mechanism has no direct impact and the relevance is marginal for climate change issues being discussed at UNFCCC, a positive change in this program for civil society engagement has the potential to shape UN-Habitat’s overall engagement in the more central climate change governance spaces. For urban grassroots organizations, the need for better frameworks for civil society engagement in UN-Habitat-related spaces has been a long-standing issue.

¹⁸⁹ This mandate stems from, among other resolutions, the UN-Habitat Governing Council Resolution 26/7, requested in 2017 by the executive director of UN-Habitat referenced in the *Report of the governing council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme* (2017)

¹⁹⁰ Habitat International Coalition (2022)

Currently there is no way for CSOs to hold UN-Habitat accountable for its decisions

4.7. UN Treaty on Plastic Pollution

In March 2022, during the resumed session of UNEA-5 (UNEA-5.2), UN member states agreed on a mandate to negotiate a legally binding global instrument to end plastic pollution. This resolution recognized the significant contribution made by workers in informal and cooperative settings in many countries to collecting, sorting, and recycling plastics and opens the participation of “relevant stakeholders” in the intergovernmental negotiation.¹⁹¹ According to the resolution, the intergovernmental negotiation for this treaty should conclude by the end of 2024.

5. Concluding Reflections

- While COPs are the central decision-making bodies of UNFCCC and the other Rio Conventions, they are just the last (or first) stop of a year-round policy process. Moreover, the duration of some decision-making processes in these conventions have longer time horizons. For instance, most of the processes identified in Section 4 have been running since the beginning of 2022, and some of them will run until 2024.
- Engaging in the whole policy process entails having the requisite capacities. Some of the most crucial capacities for organizations are human resources and knowledge.
 - The complexity of the UNFCCC is partly due to the many agenda points under discussion. These agenda points lead, in turn, to several processes and working groups, which organizations with limited human resources can find challenging to follow.
 - Familiarization with the terms of discussion in these processes—often regarded as very technocratic for urban grassroots—demands time. Understanding how decision-making processes work also takes time. Building knowledge is necessary to allow organizations to really enter the debates. Engagement in the digital world is also necessary.
- The governance landscape is constantly changing. While the identified actors and spaces will remain relevant in the long term, the arenas for action (or windows of opportunity) are open for a limited time. Therefore, constantly following the discussions in the relevant spaces is key for identifying these windows of opportunity and engaging at the beginning of the policy process, in the agenda-setting stage. The farther a policy process advances, the less chances there is to influence it.
- Funding for long-term planning and capacity building is necessary for strategic work. Long-term horizons allow deeper civil society planning, and organizations should be provided with assistance to follow the whole policy process. For the CFS Plenary in Rome, for example, the civil society mechanism has a multiday pre-event schedule that provides consensus-building sessions for people who are not familiar with the formal policy process or intergovernmental spaces.
- Long-term horizons also allow CSOs and urban grassroots to move from reactive positions to positions from which they can make active proposals.

191 *End plastic pollution...* (2022)

Annex I: Challenges to Civil Society Engagement

Accreditation Barriers

A first barrier CSOs face when attempting to engage in climate discussions is the burdensome accreditation procedures for accessing global policy forums; a large amount of documentation is required, and processing can take more than one year, in the case of UNFCCC and HLPF. Moreover, the procedure varies according to the governance space, creating an additional barrier of fragmentation. Specifically, most CSOs seeking to promote the agenda of marginalized urban dwellers have engaged in other spaces with accreditation procedures under the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). However, UNFCCC requires a specific accreditation procedure, which has represented an additional barrier for engagement even for organizations with other UN accreditations.

Inclusion Barriers (Logistics and Accessibility)

CSOs, especially those from the Global South, face other logistical barriers to active participation. Among these are issues related to visas and passports for representatives to leave and enter countries. Moreover, many representatives of the most marginalized communities do not even have passports.

Conferences and meeting conveners often reinforce these constraints when they do not consider the timelines of Global South CSO representatives in the organization of events. According to one interviewee, the information about the forums often comes too late to file visa applications and receive a reply. Accessing information in a timely manner is among the barriers CSOs face when engaged with global governance forums.

With the rise of Covid-19, some global forums have provided new opportunities for remote participation, allowing representatives to take part in the discussions online. Nevertheless, remote participation does not make issues fairer for CSOs that would face logistical and accessibility barriers to attend in person, as representatives miss out on networking opportunities, one of the major benefits of international conferences.

Other cited issues are the accessibility and affordability of the locations where conferences and meetings take place. CSO representatives often face budgetary restrictions, and lack of resources to travel to distant meetings and conferences. When these forums take place in touristic or expensive locations, the costs of traveling and accommodation increase too. Therefore, it is even more difficult for community leaders to travel to those locations. In addition, according to an interviewee, conferences and forums in luxurious holiday locations (e.g., COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh) are also questionable in symbolic terms.

Coupled with questions about affordability are financing challenges. According to an interviewee, "it is very difficult to get finance for people, especially new people, to go there and speak." Related to this is the question about the extent to which events and panel discussions in conferences and global forums invite new voices. "This is a question we have very often when we go to the conferences; what we see is that they invite mostly familiar faces," expressed a researcher.

(Geo)Political Barriers

At a political level, CSOs also face barriers to engagement in global discussions.

In general, people often voice two types of criticism of civil society involvement in politics. The first relates to problem-solving and the other to legitimacy.¹⁹² According to one interviewee, CSOs are not consistently recognized as organized actors and legitimate voices in some global forums. Instead, they tend to be seen as unorganized actors, messy and with difficulties in reaching consensus. This discourse is often used to disregard CSOs as interlocutors, and therefore to call into question their political legitimacy. Another facet of the legitimacy issue is that civil society is often said to lack accountability.¹⁹³ This relates to the impossibility of the general public, and often not even the membership of civil society organizations, to hold accountable their leadership for action or inaction.

CSOs also face barriers related to the geopolitical agenda and its complexity. According to one interviewee, “it is very difficult for civil society to engage in negotiations because those negotiations are not about climate or urban issues alone but touch on other topics, and decisions are made considering other issues.” A civil society representative said that due to geopolitics, “international spaces are very difficult for us to navigate.” In addition, many NGOs and CSOs are criminalized to different degrees in their countries of origin, and this and other limited political status at a domestic level is a major challenge for CSOs that aim to reach international governance spaces.

Proceedings of the Negotiations (the Policy Process)

CSOs and NGOs also face challenges in navigating proceedings and processes of negotiations in global forums. While rules, guides, and documentation exist, political negotiations also involve other dynamics that are not captured to the desired extent in the documentation available, and they can be invisible to CSOs and NGOs. For instance, there are negotiation management-related strategies that are contingent on a particular policy space, negotiation stage, or the issues at stake.

According to one interviewee, during the negotiations of the NUA in Quito in 2016, up to a certain point the official text included the right to the city, referring to cities as common goods. At that stage, primarily sectoral delegates held the negotiations, such as “people from the housing ministries,” explained the interviewee. However, as the policy process entered subsequent stages, delegates from ministries of foreign affairs took over the negotiations and cut out the reference to the right to the city as a common good. Although the NUA included one explicit mention of the right to the city, it was not the understanding of this right as an individual right but as a collective right, which “goes beyond the conventional conceptions of human rights.”¹⁹⁴ CSOs had introduced the right to the city (i.e., the city as a common good), yet it was cut out of the NUA.¹⁹⁵ The advanced negotiation dynamics within the policy process can be very challenging for newcomers.

How to deal and negotiate with different counterparts is, in fact, a challenging issue for representatives of and advocates for CSOs. According to one interviewee, CSOs are trying to discover allies in institutions with experience at different levels of negotiation. Similarly, it is crucial to identify other civil society allies working in the special access corridors in global climate forums, including UNFCCC. In this regard, the European Climate Foundation is among those powerful advocates with access to negotiations at UNFCCC, according to an interviewee.

192 Bernauer, T., & Betzold, C. (2012)

193 Bernauer, T., & Betzold, C. (2012)

194 *Habitat3 discuss the inclusion of the right to the city in the New Urban Agenda* (n.d.)

195 *Habitat3 discuss the inclusion of the right to the city in the New Urban Agenda* (n.d.)

Communication Barriers

Among the most common barriers CSOs face when engaging in policy discussion at the international level are communication barriers. These communication barriers are manifold, but mainly touch on the jargon used during negotiations.

According to a researcher, “representatives of CSOs feel that the technical language of climate discussions alienates participation.” A CSO representative concurred: “The language and discourses usually employed at the high level and global agenda meetings are totally foreign, exclusionary, and alienating.” CSOs can self-organize to try to overcome these barriers. During COP26, organizations with more experience held spaces for dialogue where they translated what parties just discussed to other organizations with less experience in the negotiations. As a civil society activist said, CSOs “often do not understand what the agreements are and have to rely on workshops [to familiarize themselves with the] technical language and the correlations between policies.”¹⁹⁶

In global policy forums, the use of jargon and terminology is itself a major arena of contestation. In practice, it is through the use of highly specific language that the different positions and opinions regarding policy issues materialize in discussions. However, in some cases, CSOs contest language to express legitimate political positions: in the question of the expression “vulnerable communities,” for instance, the “vulnerable” is rejected, and “marginalized communities” is preferred by some CSOs. According to a prominent Salvadoran activist, “we are not vulnerable per se; it is the political context that put us in that situation: it marginalized us.” This issue with terminology is also an issue for CSOs advocating for aging people, for they sometimes are categorized as people with disabilities.

In other cases, differences in terminology and language present difficulties for the interlocution between CSOs and delegates, even when they share similar positions about determined issues. For this reason, one interviewee said, there is a need for interlocutors and knowledge brokers to make sure that everyone is on the same page.

This issue with technocratic language and discourse is significant for delegation members participating in climate change discussions. According to one interviewee, “those who go from the countries to the COP are very technical people, who work on technical questions, questions about whether or not the trees capture enough CO₂.” Although CSOs acknowledge the importance of technical discussions, their technical nature can still be a barrier. First, organizations often lack this vocabulary, because it is not their primary concern; an organization’s priorities and discussions with communities on the ground may be held in very different terms. Second, for CSOs representing the concerns of marginalized urban communities, the primary approach to the climate crisis is through human rights, which is not the common mode of discourse in global meetings. “We can’t really talk with them about a vision of rights,” added the interviewee, referring to the delegates from member states.

The barriers posed by technical language are reinforced by the way international forums are organized, particularly by the kind and number of organizations that are granted access to the discussions. According to a representative of one advocacy network, “primarily development organizations and hardly any human rights organizations are invited” to the discussions. The proportion of different kinds of organizations in the discussion plays a major role in influencing the terms used for the debate.

196 Abdenur, A. E., & Nihad, N. (2021).

Another kind of communication barrier is the dominance of English in international forums. CSOs have long criticized the UN system for this.¹⁹⁷ The prevalence of English as a working language hampers participation by CSO representatives who do not speak English as their primary language, as they may find it difficult to navigate the complex processes and heavy technical jargon of international climate conventions. Furthermore, representatives of marginalized communities have to depend on translators and/or other interlocutors, and this limits their chances of fully participating in negotiations and connecting with other global networks.¹⁹⁸

Fragmentation of Agendas

One of the main challenges CSOs face when trying to engage in climate conversations and other policy spaces in the UN system is the fragmentation of agendas and the multiplication of policy spaces—that is, when issues that are inextricably linked on the ground are broken into separate pathways for engagement and discussion.

With a multiplication of spaces, CSOs must first understand and sort out the varying rules and procedures for participation across different spaces; in particular, CSOs must confront different UN processes and bureaucracies. Learning to navigate the different requirements demands time and resources.

As spaces multiply, so do participants, including delegates, preceding officials, and representatives of different stakeholder groups. This increased number of people poses a challenge for CSO representatives, who must familiarize themselves with more and different participants and counterparts, which is fundamental to building both personal and institutional relationships, and thus to influencing agendas. Yet this familiarization takes time and attention.

With multiple spaces and agendas, CSOs then face a question of where to participate and concentrate efforts. Difficulties also emerge when different processes must be followed up, especially in the face of limited resources and staff. CSOs must make decisions about where to mobilize, and this in itself requires adequate capacity.

The fragmentation of agendas within UNFCCC and the UN system is perceived to be at odds with human rights approaches. These approaches are considered integral, “for rights cannot be separated,” said an interviewee. The fragmentation of policy spaces is also at odds with the view of the organizations on the ground, where agenda issues and problems are experienced as a whole.

“The idea would be not to have climate on one side, development on another side, and rights on another,” said an interviewee. Another gave examples of the problems raised by fragmentation: “You have the SDGs on one side, and climate is stuffed in there. And then you have climate change in cities, and some urban poverty is put there.” Nevertheless, advocating for an integrated agenda and spaces entails advocating for significant transformation of the UN system, from its siloed approach to a more integrated one.

As part of this fragmented landscape in which CSOs operate, there is also the fragmentation of agendas among CSOs. As expressed by an activist, “everyone has their own agenda, and a basic problem is that they are not articulated enough.” Therefore, it is essential for CSOs to have a clear picture of decision-making processes and agendas, in order for collective action to also be coordinated, she added.

197 Adams, B., & Pingeot, L. (2013)

198 Abdenur, A. E., & Nihad, N. (2021)

“The human rights posture is not easy to hold, especially in increasingly technical spaces, such as the UNFCCC,” said an interviewee. From this, it can also be argued that the tendency toward fragmentation in global governance spaces is also a tendency toward specialization, which increasingly demands technical knowledge. The increased use of a specialized language goes hand in hand with the fragmentation of issues and spaces.

Particular Engagement Challenges Faced by CSOs at UNFCCC

In addition to the general logistical and communication challenges previously discussed, representatives of urban CSOs currently perceive several challenges and limited space for effective participation in climate conversations that are specific to UNFCCC. The reasons cited for this situation are manifold, and most refer to systemic challenges CSOs face in global governance spaces.

The first challenge for the inclusion of marginalized urban voices at the UNFCCC is the current juncture of the convention. Currently “there is much dissonance amongst the parties to taking on the issues of marginalized urban communities,” according to one activist. “Except for the least developed countries, nobody actually has a moral imperative to talk on any of these issues,” she added. Likewise, some interviewees mentioned that some member states had, due to the war in Ukraine and other geopolitical developments, relegated some commitments, making it more challenging for CSOs to now bring to the table the issues relevant to impoverished communities in cities.

On another note, the separation and fragmentation of spaces in the COPs have evolved into another barrier to CSOs’ participation. During the last COP, the conference space was divided in two. The first zone, known as the blue zone, was managed by UNFCCC and could be accessed only by accredited individuals. In other zone was the green zone, managed by the COP’s host country (called the presidency). The green zone was regarded as the space for civil society, academia, and businesses to host events, talks, and workshops. One CSO representative said that during COP26, “we had difficulties to enter the blue zone, the space for debate, for government decisions. Just for the record, we couldn’t access there.”

As to whether advocacy networks representing marginalized urban communities will participate in upcoming COPs, a representative of one of these organizations expressed that there won’t be explicit participation from urban social movements at the COPs. “They don’t even allow us to enter. I mean, we will be in this green zone, trying to dialogue with other organizations that have more expertise in this space.”

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