



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

# Call for Action

## GREEN CITIES

to build back better for SDGs – A new powerful venture

In February 2019, the President of the 73rd Session of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, FAO and UN-Habitat convened the event “From Global Issues to Local Priorities: The Role of Cities in the Global Agenda, Including Cities for Sustainable Development, Food Security, Nutrition and Climate Change”, which resulted in recognizing the strong relationship between climate change, food security and urban action as central to deliver on the 2030 Agenda.

In September 2019, the UN Secretary-General made a call for mobilizing all sectors of society for a decade of action on three levels: global action to secure greater leadership, more resources and smarter solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); local action embedding the needed transitions in the policies, budgets, institutions and regulatory frameworks of governments, cities and local authorities; and people action, including by youth, civil society, the media, the private sector, unions, academia and other stakeholders, to generate an unstoppable movement pushing for the required transformations.

In an international context, where most of the challenges faced by cities are global in nature and call for multilateral solutions, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

### acknowledges that:

- The SDGs are the blueprint for creating a sustainable and just world for all – they address the local and global challenges we face today, across all forms of inequality, justice, climate and peace.
- The increasing pace of urbanization is increasing the demand for basic goods and services.
- Local administrations are having more and more difficulties to meet the needs of urban populations.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened conditions for the most vulnerable and inflated the number of the urban poor thereby exposing the fragility of food systems, turning a health crisis into a food insecurity and nutrition one.



High-Level event at the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA 75)



### and recognizes that:

- Unsustainable urbanization is contributing to deforestation, loss of green spaces, agricultural land and biodiversity, as well as overexploitation and pollution of soil and water resources and air pollution.
- Cities are significant contributors to climate change, accounting for about 70 percent of global energy-related greenhouse gas emissions.
- Many urban and peri-urban communities are exposed to food insecurity and undernutrition. At the same time inadequate food habits and the lack of physical exercise result in increasing overweight and obesity, as well as in the diffusion of diet-related non-communicable diseases.
- Cities consume about 70 percent of global food production, so they have important leverage on the overall sustainability of the food system.
- Urban food systems emit over 20 percent of planet Earth's greenhouse gas (GHG), of which food loss and waste is among the top five largest contributors.
- Measures to combat the COVID-19 crisis have displaced debate and actions on issues related to sustainable urban development, including climate change adaptation and mitigation and land use.
- The COVID-19 pandemic has put people and the planet at a turning point that offers a great opportunity for systemic changes, on the scale demanded by the SDGs.

To address these issues, it has become urgent to invest in more resilient, inclusive and innovative ways to assure the environmental, social and economic wellbeing of urban populations.

Through its Green Cities initiative, FAO reaffirms its will and commitment to increase the wellbeing of urban and peri-urban populations in a sustainable manner through better availability of and access to products and services provided by urban and peri-urban forestry, agriculture and food systems. This is also the opportunity to establish strong foundations on which to build back better and, beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, reduce the vulnerability of cities to external shocks and stresses. FAO's plan of innovative urban green actions specific for metropolitan, intermediary and small cities includes:

- improving the quality and quantity of urban and peri-urban forest and green spaces to maximize the provision of ecosystems goods and services to city dwellers;
- increasing the adoption of sustainable and climate-resilient practices and technologies to increase local food production in and around cities and promote short supply chains, as well as to reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- promoting sustainable and inclusive urban food systems through green agro-processing hubs, efficient food distribution, improved food environments, and management of water resources and food waste along circular economy principles.

To foster investments and promote innovation, the Green Cities initiative will create an enabling policy and programme environment through the development and implementation of, among others, evidence-based and

inclusive policies, risk and vulnerability analyses, as well as planning and governance frameworks aimed at ensuring coherence between actions at national and sub-national levels.

### FAO calls upon all stakeholders to:

- join the initiative as active partners and disseminate the FAO Call for Action;
- ensure that urbanization becomes an opportunity for taking action to increase the wellbeing of urban dwellers, strengthen rural-urban linkages and help cities build back better and achieve the SDGs;
- create an enabling environment to promote green spaces (urban and peri-urban agriculture and forestry) and sustainable food systems addressing the common, but also diverse challenges and opportunities that small, intermediary and metropolitan cities are facing.

### and upon:

- national governments to facilitate dialogue, resources, policy space strengthening coherence with national programmes and empower local governments with adequate resources and a clear mandate;
- local Governments to mainstream green spaces and food systems in their urban and territorial plans, promoting green and inclusive transformation with a long term prospective, including for job generation and youth engagement;
- resource partners to invest in promoting innovation for greening cities;
- research and academic institutions, professionals in the public and private sector and to support and disseminate this Call for Action, and to partner with FAO towards the achievement of greener cities for all;
- UN Organizations to join the programme and mobilize their technical capacities and political leverage to ensure its success.

This Call for Action is intended to support the UN Secretary General's Decade of Action to deliver the SDGs – to raise the level of ambition, to mobilize everyone everywhere, and to find innovative solutions at this crucial point where the world's future is being reimagined.

FAO is determined to work with its Members and partners to mobilize the technical and financial resources required to implement the Green Cities Action Plan, and to establish a Green Cities Network to facilitate the exchange among cities and for scaling up the initiative. The objective is to involve 100 cities initially and then progressively expand the programme as more resources become available and innovative methodologies are tested and validated.

### *The time to act is now!*

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