Cities and Regions Summit boosts nature and urban food solutions ahead of UN Environment Assembly

Nairobi, 24 February 2022 — Mayors, Governments and private sector leaders gathering this week for a Cities and Regions Summit have highlighted the key role of nature in their efforts to achieve reduce greenhouse gas emissions, stave off extreme heat, protect wildlife and filter pollution – all while creating jobs and economic opportunities – as part of efforts to slow the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste.

At the Summit, which took place ahead of the resumed fifth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in Nairobi, Kenya, local and national leaders also showcased solutions ready to be scaled-up, such as tree planting, water body restoration, use of recycled and bio-based materials, as well as innovative financial models.

"In thinking about the cities that we want, we now have a deeper understanding that cities must grow with the natural world, not against it," said UNEP Executive Director Inger Andersen. "The grey in our cities is impacting human and environmental health; bringing the green back is a critical

challenge. Local and subnational governments play a critical role and a central role in making these shifts."

The Summit also saw the launch of the [Coalition on Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Food](#) and the release of a new report looking at the potential of urban agriculture to feed growing urban populations while bringing environmental benefits.

The second UNEA Cities and Regions Summit released an outcome document that lays out recommendations to change the paradigm of cities and nature, make urban infrastructure greener and more resilient to environmental threats, and part of the solution to the triple planetary crisis.

Urban Agriculture's Potential to Advance Multiple Sustainability Goals

Released by [the International Resource Panel](#) and UNEP, [a new think piece](#) documents the many benefits of urban agriculture and provides guidance on how to do it well. To give one example, a study in São Paulo, Brazil, showed that enhanced urban agriculture could supply all 21 million residents of the city with vegetables while generating more than 180,000 jobs – reducing poverty and inequity, improving nutrition, increasing well-being and generating livelihoods.

"Responding to food systems challenges require changing how urban people eat and what they eat" said Izabella Teixeira, Co-Chair of the IRP. "Urban agriculture is a nature-based solution that can provide fresh and healthy foods to urban dwellers and contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. The understanding of local context in which its being implemented is crucial to deal with uncertainties and maximize its benefits."

However, more research is needed to fully understand the effectiveness of urban agriculture and the policy actions

needed to tap its potential. Local contexts and uncertainties need to be clarified, while diverse forms of urban agriculture must be integrated into a portfolio of approaches that cover land-based and vertical farming, poultry and fish-farming, and high-tech indoor techniques.

Coalition on Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Food Systems

The Summit also saw the launch of a new Coalition launched by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNEP, Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), C40, United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) and other partners which will leverage knowledge, resources and multi-level partnerships in support to urban food systems that are sustainable and take nature into account. The coalition is an outcome of the UN Food Systems Summit.

Outcome document

Urban areas are acknowledged as drivers of environmental degradation, nature loss, climate change, and pollution. Yet, more recently, there has been a recognition of the value of nature in cities.

The document calls for flipping the script by removing barriers to progress, including on coordination and multi-level governance, innovative finance and unlocking investments, and planning and designing with and for nature. It also provides recommendations for each, building on UNEP's report to the G20 on Harnessing the Power of Nature-based Solutions for Resilient, Smart and Sustainable Cities.

"When we invest in nature and we integrate that into climate strategy, into infrastructure standards, into building codes, and into planning guidelines, then we make the difference," UNEP's Inger Andersen added. "And when we invest in that mangrove forests that protect the city or that urban wetland that can

collect t water and heavy rainfall then we are investing in nature's infrastructure."

The outcome document also calls for subnational action under [the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration](), which aims to accelerate efforts to restore millions of hectares of degraded land and bring back biodiversity.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)

UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

UNEP@50: A time to reflect on the past and envision the future

The 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden, was the first-ever UN conference with the word "environment" in its title. The creation of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) was one of the most visible outcomes of this conference of many firsts. UNEP was created quite simply to be the environmental conscience of the UN and the world. Activities taking place through 2022 will look at significant progress made as well as what's ahead in decades to come.

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