Track 2 - Cities, urban and rural settlements, infrastructure and transport

1. Overall scope and objectives of regional Climate Weeks in 2023

The recent IPCC AR6 synthesis report confirmed that the world is not on track to meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement. According to the report, emissions need to fall by 43% by 2030 compared to 2019 levels to avoid the worst impacts of climate change. However, projected global GHG emissions from the 2022 NDC Synthesis Report, which analyses the latest available NDCs covering 193 Parties to the Paris Agreement, make it likely that warming will exceed 1.5 degrees unless more ambitious mitigation measures are implemented immediately. Similarly, current actions toward adaptation and resilience do not match the ambition for transformational adaptation and climate resilient development at large.

The increasing climate change impacts will affect all regions and in particular the most vulnerable groups and communities. At the same time, it is at the regional, national, and local level where climate change solutions are being implemented, lessons being learned, and experiences are being shared and cooperation is forged to enhance climate action.

The first global Stocktake, which will conclude at COP 28 in UAE in December this year, offers a unique opportunity to call for decisive change and for urgently responding to the need for accelerating progress by collectively embarking on a swift and deep transformation of our economic and social systems.

The 2023 Regional Climate Weeks provide a timely opportunity for policymakers, practitioners, business and civil society to exchange on climate solutions, approaches for overcoming barriers, and opportunities realized in the different regions. The aim is to provide region focused contributions across four major systems-based tracks to inform the global Stocktake:

1. **Energy systems and industry;**
2. **Cities, urban and rural settlements, infrastructure and transport**;
3. **Land, ocean, food and water**;
4. **Societies, health, livelihoods, and economies**.

Such systemic transformation requires not only significant investments and uptake of innovative solutions well beyond the current levels of available climate finance, but also other types of enabling support. The costs and benefits of such global transformation are unevenly distributed within and across countries and regions hence we need to accelerate global and regional cooperation and support, in particular on climate finance, technology, and capacity-building, to ensure that the transformation is just, equitable and advances sustainable development.

Actions across the four systems-based tracks together with support, cooperation and just transition will allow us to course-correct and achieve the Paris Agreement goals and objectives.

The 2023 Regional Climate Weeks will also allow regional policymakers, practitioners, businesses and communities to showcase their achievements and lessons learned so far, how they intend to enhance their climate action and cooperation and also how they will ensure credibility of and trust in their climate pledges and initiatives to contribute to the required transformation across the above-mentioned systems-based tracks.

2. Expected overall outcomes of regional climate weeks in 2023

The events organized and delivered under all the systems-based tracks are expected to:

- Contribute substantively to the GST process by identifying region relevant actions and timelines necessary to accelerate the progress needed to keep the 1.5 C trajectory reachable.
- Enable and support the dissemination of valuable of good practices and lessons learnt, facilitating the identification of impactful initiatives for replication or inspiration at local, subnational, national and regional level.
- Provide a platform that fosters constructive dialogues between Parties and non-Party stakeholders creating opportunities to explore partnerships and /strengthening of networks in the regions.
- Provide insights for enhancing the engagement of non-Party stakeholders, including regional and local governments, the private sector, investors, youth, science, academia, indigenous people, and others, thereby increasing effectiveness and active participation.

3. Linkages between tracks

The four tracks are designed with a view to provide region focused contributions to inform the global stocktake at COP28. The tracks are also developed in such a way as to provide opportunities to advance regional and local dialogues and individual and collective climate action at both regional and local level by taking regional priorities into consideration.

Events/sessions under each thematic track are cross-cutting and are linked to each other. For instance, water, **energy, industry, and ecosystems** are central to the **economic and social development** of any society. Energy is particularly essential for most activities including the provision of daily services like lighting, cooking, and heating, etc. Access to energy is critical to **cities, urban and rural settlements, transport systems, infrastructure, and waste management.** Yet there is a need for the global community to shift to a swift and deep transformation across a wide spectrum of economic, environmental, and social systems in pursuit of climate resilient development.

Land, water, **oceans, and food** are key for **societal and economic development**, **livelihood and ecosystem services provision** and **food security**. There are evolving land uses –for urban expansion and food production while **wate**r is important for society's most essential needs hence a lever for sustainable development. Unsustainable land uses associated with urban expansion and infrastructural evolution cause degradation of natural ecosystems such as wetlands and forests, and subsequently resulting in loss of ecosystem services. The **ocean** on the other hand sustains **livelihoods, provides ecosystem services including those of aesthetic and cultural value** to many communities. Yet, climate change is increasing sea-level rise, ocean acidification and warming, de-oxygenation, and marine heat waves causing among other things increased inundation, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation (particularly coral reefs), and salinization of groundwater and soil, all of which interrupt food webs and ecological connectivity.

These impacts not only affect basic human needs, but they also have an impact on human and animal health. Indeed, there is growing acknowledgment that **health and climate change** are interlinked. This nexus is of particular importance for both **rural and urban settlements**

and entails **gender, economic and policy dimensions**. For instance, **certain health conditions are caused by air pollution and transport in urban settlements**. **In cities, waste discharges to land, water and air** threaten the environmental integrity and thereby human health. Similarly, increased temperature projections in several regions across the world are threatening human, animal and planetary health thereby compromising livelihoods and economies dependent on natural systems.

The cross-cutting aspects of the four tracks offer an opportunity to encourage behavioural shifts, spark innovation, and encourage collaboration towards a just and transformative solutions at the regional and national levels.

4. Scope and themes of Track 2: Cities, urban and rural settlements, infrastructure and transport

The role of **cities**, regions, **urban and rural settlements and infrastructure** is key in addressing the climate crisis; their importance has been growing consistently giving their capacity to deliver action and stronger flexibility in decision making processes.

Today, cities are responsible for over 70 per cent of resource use, 71-76 per cent of energy-related global greenhouse gas emissions and over 80 per cent of the world's GDP. Urbanisation is occurring rapidly, increasing the impact of cities on the environment and economy. By 2050, 68 per cent of the world's population is projected to be urban. At the same time, climate change has caused grave impacts on human health, livelihoods, and key infrastructure in urban setting. Climate risks to cities will rise rapidly in the mid- and long-term with further global warming cities.

It is not possible to achieve the Paris Agreement goals without taking comprehensive action in urban areas.

According to the Marrakech Partnership Climate Action Pathways, **cities and regions** can take comprehensive action to enable decarbonized and resilient living and development among all people and businesses. The transition to a net-zero and resilient future for cities, regions, and human settlements can be enabled through integrated and inclusive urban planning strategies, which take into consideration the relationship between cities and surrounding ecosystems, steer infrastructure development and transport systems towards low-carbon solutions, and ensure efficient resource use and consumption patterns and waste management.

The Working Group III AR6 Report Chapter on Urban Systems identifies three broad mitigation strategies that can effectively reduce emissions when implemented concurrently: (i) reducing or changing urban energy and material use towards more sustainable production and consumption across all sectors, including through compact and efficient urban forms and supporting infrastructure; (ii) electrification and switching to net-zero-emissions resources; and (iii) enhancing carbon uptake and storage in the urban environment. In addition, urban green and blue infrastructure can mitigate climate change through carbon sequestration, avoided emissions, and reduced energy use while offering multiple co-benefits.

The report highlights the potential of integrated spatial planning to achieve compact and resource efficient urban growth, which could reduce GHG emissions between 23% and 26% by 2050 compared to the business-as-usual scenario. Compact "15-minutes cities" with shortened distances between housing and jobs, and interventions that support a modal shift away from private motor vehicles towards walking, cycling, and low-emissions shared and

public transportation, passive energy comfort in buildings, and urban green infrastructure can deliver significant public health benefits and have lower GHG emissions.

Hence, cities should adopt a cross-sectoral, multi-stakeholder, and integrated approach when undertaking upgrades to and/or new developments in city infrastructure. In addition, policies need to be developed, and investment decisions need to be taken, based on social equity considerations and that no one is left behind on the path to more climate-friendly urban environments.

Infrastructure systems' decarbonization can be achieved by demanding less material, minimizing energy use, and implementing low-carbon and renewable heating, cooling, material and construction technologies at scale, while promoting the decarbonization of the energy, transportation, and material manufacturing sectors (e.g., steel and cement) in parallel. The interventions needed to reach net zero will vary from project to project and can range from using ultra-low-impact refrigerants for cooling, implementing passive design measures, installing electric building energy systems powered by renewables and reusing existing materials.

Transport and mobility are a critical facilitator of global trade and development and, like other economic sectors, faces a dual challenge with respect to climate change, which is the need to reduce its carbon emissions and, at the same time, adapt to the potentially wide-ranging climate change impacts. Improved efficiency and inclusivity of transport systems, including the reallocation of road space, not only can increase mobility and accessibility, but also decrease road fatalities and injuries as well as local air pollution, bringing about a considerable enhancement of public health. It can also increase inclusivity and address the needs of underserved populations, including women, improving *gender equality,* for example by using the gender lens in transport infrastructure design and services to cater to different travel patterns and behaviours. Low emission zones are one instrument that local governments have at hand to help reduce both emissions of GHGs as well as of black carbon, a short-lived climate pollutant. According to the Climate Action Pathways, **ensuring the resilience of transport systems is a key priority, and decarbonization of transport can occur** through a mix of actions that focus on avoiding unnecessary trips and reducing transport distance for both passenger and freight, shifting to modes with zero carbon emissions such as active mobility and electric mobility, and improving vehicles, aircrafts or vessels and their respective fuel and operational efficiencies. Supply chain optimization through the best use of technology and resources, such as blockchain, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things, play a key role in improving the efficiency and performance of freight transport. Institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks should drive sustainable and climate-resilient mobility technologies and generate outcome-oriented investments and incentives.

In addition, cities must shift from the current take-make-waste model to become **"zero waste**", with no discharges to land, water or air that threaten the environment or human health by means of responsible production, consumption, reuse and recovery of organic waste, products, packaging and materials without burning. This can happen through the implementation of **five main circular economy strategies**: (i) **recover** (collection, segregation and recycling based on proper waste management); (ii) **reduce** (resource efficiency in industry and manufacturing); (iii) **reuse** (repairs, remanufacturing), (iv) **redesign** (facilitating sustainable product design and circular business models; and (v) **regenerate** (regenerative urban development, Nature-based Solutions).

Last but not least, cities should turn to **Nature-based Solutions** to become more resilient, healthy and equitable. But for urban nature to reach its full potential, investments need to be substantially scaled up. In 2020, NbS received just 0.3% of overall spending on urban infrastructure, and investments are unequally distributed across and within cities. While cities increasingly recognize the need to invest in nature, action on ecosystem-based approaches needs to be rapidly scaled up to deliver on resilient and sustainable cities.

5. Thematic Focus

The Thematic Focus of each Track of the Regional Climate Weeks in 2023 provides a broad non-exhaustive framework and can act as guidance for developing individual events and sessions to be aligned with the overarching narrative.

a. Subnational regions, Cities, Human Settlements, and the enabling environment, including awareness raising, education, inclusion, innovation, and finance:

- Localizing climate financing: increasing access to financial resource to escalate climate action at local level
- The role of technology and innovation in accelerating climate resilient infrastructures: develop energy efficient and clean energy solutions for the built environment.
- Inclusive, participatory, and integrated human settlement planning: – connection to national planning

b. Infrastructure, transport, nature-based solutions, and waste:

- Achieving a decarbonized and resilient infrastructural system.
- Achieving a just, affordable, accessible and decarbonised transport system to ensure healthy, inclusive, and equitable human settlements
- Achieving (zero waste) and circular economy: recover; reuse; recycle; redesign; regenerate.
- Achieving sustainable and resilient urban development through the wide-spread implementation of Nature-based Solutions and ecosystem restoration.
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c. Social and just impact of policy decision making and investment choices for more effective climate outcomes:

- Enhancing transparency and ensuring accountability to improve monitoring of results and promote trust across citizens and stakeholders.