

Integrating Climate Change Into National Urban Policies: Sustainable Urban Development And Multi-Level Governance Strengthening For Climate Action In Colombia.

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Context

Currently, 80% of the Colombian population lives urban settlements. The most populated cities include Bogota, Medellin, Barranquilla, Cali, and Cartagena de Indias. It is expected that, towards the end of 2050, the population in cities will increase to 85%. Despite the current economic context and the impacts caused by COVID-19, Colombia is moving towards planned and sustainable urban development through urban policies that include climate change criteria.

Environmental degradation caused by the expansion of the agricultural frontier, colonization (mainly livestock farming), illegal crops, mining, forest fires, infrastructure expansion, urbanization, and timber extraction amounts to an annual loss of 3.4% of national GDP (Minambiente, PNUD, 2014). Colombia increasingly faces disasters, mostly floods, flash floods and windstorms caused by heavy rainfall that result in hydro-meteorological events.

Each municipality in the country is at some kind of risk, and zones with greater risk are located in the Amazonia and the southern Orinoco regions, as well as the main cities in the Andean and Caribbean regions.

Urban-LEDS In Colombia

The Urban-LEDS project, a multi-year global initiative aimed at accelerating climate action through the promotion of Urban Low Emission Development Strategies, is implemented by UN-Habitat in partnership with ICLEI and generously funded by the European Commission. In close collaboration with municipalities, national governments and multiple stakeholders, the formulation of Urban Low Emission Development Strategies helps define pathways to transition cities to resilient, green, and inclusive urban economies, through integration into existing city development plans and processes. Urban-LEDS supports innovative city-level climate action initiatives in eight countries across the globe, one of them being Colombia.

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Facts & Figures

Population / Land area

50,372,424 / 1,141,748 km² (2014)

GDP per capita

5,332 USD (2020)

Government Structure:

A democratic republic

Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions

258,8 Mton Co₂ Eq (2010)

Multidimensional Poverty Index

19.6% (2018)

Percentage of Urban Population

80% (2018)

The Urban-LEDS Project

An Urban Low Emissions Development Strategy (Urban LEDS) defines a pathway to transition a city to a low emission, green and inclusive urban economy, through its integration into existing city development plans and processes.

The Urban-LEDS II project addresses integrated low emission and resilient development in more than 60 cities in 8 countries.

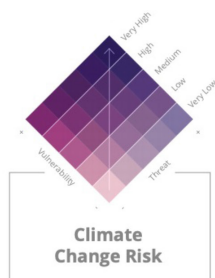
It is implemented by UN-Habitat and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability from 2017 - 2021. The project is funded by the European Union.

For more information, please visit: <http://urbanleds.iclei.org>

Similarly, the process of updating the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) also offers a distinct opportunity for Colombia to assess the inclusion of key urban aspects into the country's climate change commitments such as its long-term carbon neutrality strategy (E2050).

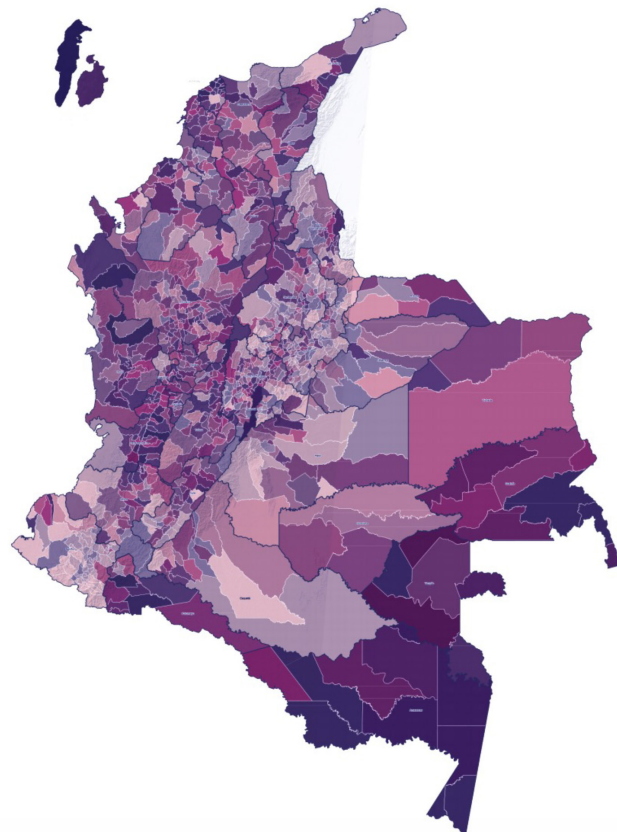
In Colombia, Urban-LEDS has been providing technical assistance in close coordination with the Ministry of Housing, Cities and Territory as well as the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, with direct support from the Colombia-based UN-Habitat and ICLEI local teams. Through an initial diagnostic study, the initiative analyzed the current state of the municipal, regional, and national collaboration for climate action in Colombia. The diagnostic study identified strengths, weaknesses and followed a systematic approach to accessing information through stakeholder consultations, participation in working tables, expert working groups, roundtable sessions, and one-on-one interviews. Subsequently, a thorough review of the National Urban Policy was conducted to analyze factors like climate-sensitive language, climate statistics and data, relevant climate objectives, and sub-national urban climate projects. Finally, the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) was reviewed to examine the extent to which urban aspects, in particular urban climate action, is adequately represented or needs to be included.

As part of the work of Urban-LEDS in Colombia, the methodological approach also included applying three of UN-Habitat normative guides to the national context in Colombia, namely: "[Addressing Climate Change in National Urban Policies](#)"; "[National Urban Policy: A Guiding Framework](#)"; and "[Enhancing NDCs Through the Integration of Urban Climate Action](#)".



National Ranking of Climate Change Risk

San Andrés, Providencia y Santa Catalina	1	0.74
Vaupés	2	0.54
Amazonas	3	0.45
Guainía	4	0.39
Chocó	5	0.26
Putumayo	6	0.25
Atlántico	7	0.24
Valle del Cauca	8	0.22
Tolima	9	0.21
Caldas	10	0.20
Guaviare	11	0.20
Arauca	12	0.20
Quindío	13	0.20
Córdoba	14	0.19
Bolívar	15	0.19
Norte de Santander	16	0.19
Antioquia	17	0.18
Cundinamarca	18	0.18
Vichada	19	0.18
Magdalena	20	0.18
Huila	21	0.17
La Guajira	22	0.17
Risaralda	23	0.17
Cauca	24	0.17
Boyacá	25	0.16
Caquetá	26	0.16
Meta	27	0.16
Cesar	28	0.16
Santander	29	0.16
Sucre	30	0.15
Casanare	31	0.15
Nariño	32	0.15



Map for Climate Change Risk in Colombia

Legal Analysis

The way in which cities are planned, designed, governed, and managed has an impact on their resilience to climate change. Urban law has an important role to play in increasing cities' resilience and in helping cities reduce their emissions: it defines urban forms, where land, infrastructure and basic services can be built, it lays out rules for planning and decision making, and sets the context within which urban authorities, local governments and communities are expected to fulfil their mandate and react to emerging challenges. Colombia has a robust set of territorial planning legislation and has been expanding its body of climate change laws and policies. This provides a distinct opportunity to analyze synergies between climate change laws and policies and multi-level planning instruments.

Through a strategic partnership with the University of Michigan, a rigorous, in-depth assessment of Colombia's national legal and policy frameworks in relation to urban and climate planning was carried out. The [University of Michigan](#) analyzed over 100 laws, policies, and decrees using the [Law and Climate Change Toolkit](#). The toolkit is an online open database grading system developed jointly by UNFCC, UNEP and the Commonwealth Secretariat, designed to provide a global resource to assist countries in building the necessary legal frameworks for effective domestic implementation of the Paris Agreement and their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

In consultation with the Colombian Ministry of Environment Development and Ministry of Housing, the legal assessment focused on five key domains: (i) governance and institutional arrangements, (ii) planning instruments, (iii) planning for adaptation, (iv) planning for mitigation, (v) financial and economic instruments. The combined analysis of these five domains identified key areas of strength and opportunity in planning for climate change, with the aim of increasing cities' resilience to climate risks and vulnerabilities through sustainable urban development.

The findings of the legal and policy review clearly underline that Colombia's highest priorities as:

- Reducing GHGs through urban planning and form
- Making use of green spaces for climate services,
- Ensuring that development approval processes are related to mitigation,
- Prioritizing, as well as incentivizing, strategy development for planned areas that are vulnerable to climate change.

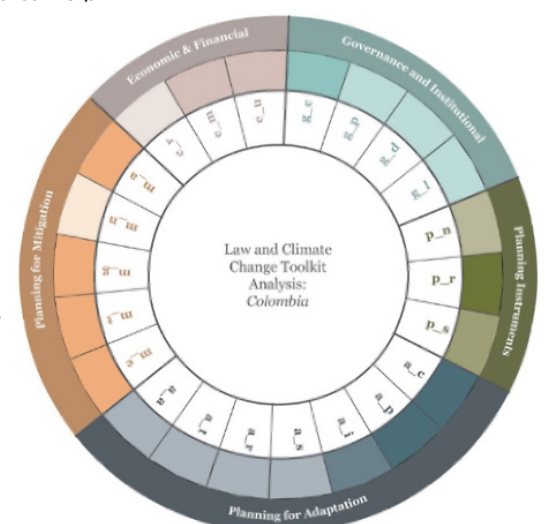
This in-depth analysis provided key inputs, such as recommendations for legal adjustments and best practices, to strengthen urban and climate planning policy and legal frameworks at the national, regional, and local level. It is also expected to help improve responsiveness to climate change, enhancing Colombian cities' resilience and sustainability and allowing the country to better align with its international commitments to climate mitigation and adaptation and implement its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

In addition to the national legal analysis, at the city level, the legal assessment is being expanded to the city of Manizales, supporting the Mayor's Office, in mainstreaming biodiversity and climate change into territorial planning. The legal assessment in Manizales bolsters UN-Habitat's support to the Mayor's Office and the Ministry of Environment in the implementation of "[BiodiverCiudades](#)" or BiodiverCities —a recently launched flagship initiative that promotes a model of urban development that is harmony with biodiversity.

"The urban legislation we design and implement must prioritize the promotion of climate actions aimed at reducing GHG emissions and communities' vulnerability to natural disasters. This is what we are doing in Colombian cities by focusing urban projects around the initiative entitled "Biodiverciudades" or Biodivercities, which implementation in Manizales will benefit from the added value provided by support from Urban-LEDS, UN-Habitat, ICELI and the University of Michigan".

Edward Alfonso Buitrago
Torres

Adviser, Ministry of
Environment and Sustainable
Development - Colombia



“At the Ministry of Housing we are taking advantage of multiple scenarios to identify conflicts between urban policies to facilitate climate action interventions from both public and private entities. This enables us to guarantee a proper horizontal and vertical coordination between different levels of government, stakeholders and regulations to advance climate action”.

Juan Sebastian Herrera
Zapata

Cities Coordinator, Ministry
of Housing, Cities and
Territory - Colombia

Main Findings

The main findings indicate that at the national level, Colombia has made tremendous progress towards the creation and harmonization of planning and organizational frameworks to address climate change. There is a multiplicity of policy instruments in place, which are essential for the ambitious climate change agenda established by Colombia in the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and its long-term carbon neutrality strategy (E2050). A robust body of legislation in support of climate change also exists, as indicated by the legal assessment described in the paragraphs below. However, key aspects of the multi-level governance structure and operationalization of policy instruments remain a challenge, most prominently: (i) sub-national coordination mechanisms need to be substantially strengthened and provided with financial instruments to make them fully operational; (ii) financial mechanisms need to be strengthened, e.g. greater engagement of the private sector is necessary to attract investment, increase trust and reduce financial risk; and (iii) given the abundance of legal, policy and governance instruments in Colombia, there is an increased risk of dispersion, proliferation, duplication and increasingly complex coordination. This risk needs to be acknowledged and mitigated.

A set of technical recommendations, well received by the Ministry of Housing and Ministry of Environment, included guidelines, suggested actions and indicators associated with the challenges identified for the integration of climate action in the National Urban Policy. Likewise, recommendations on how to include or highlight existing urban components in the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) were made, including suggested indicators and better alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicator framework. Three salient overarching issues that could benefit both the National Urban Policy as well as the NDC processes include: (i) fostering public-private partnerships; (ii) increasing the reach and ambition of climate goals; and (iii) continuing the process of fiscal decentralization and providing greater autonomy to the regions and municipalities backed by operational and financial instruments.



Medellin, Colombia (Source Pixabay)

Next Steps

Beyond 2021, potential areas of continuous support include the identification of actions to strengthen the alignment of the national climate and urban agendas. Future support will aim at ensuring that the new Urban Policy will be an inclusive instrument that strengthens the capacities of local actors, especially Mayors and Governors. Further work is also expected to ensure that SDGs 11 and 13 are fully reflected in the National Urban Policy to ensure that the climate change dimension is properly aligned. Another area of potential assistance is the preparation of bankable local projects in collaboration with national and local government, including collating and sharing existing large-scale climate project implementation ideas with potential funders. Finally, in recognition of the paramount challenge that the post-pandemic recovery poses on cities, UN-Habitat expects to continue advocating the inclusion of green recovery vision in urban and climate planning processes.

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For more information on the Urban-LEDS project;



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