Cities launch global alliance to lower carbon emissions

Image credit: Mark Henley/Panos

Speed read

- The Compact of Mayors coalition comprises more than 2,000 cities

- Its goal is to reduce emissions in these cities by 454 million tonnes a year

- Cities produce up to 70 per cent of global carbon emissions, says the UN

[NEW YORK] More than 2,000 cities (http://www.scidev.net/global/governance/cities/) have banded together in what the UN calls the largest effort by cities so far to curb their greenhouse gas emissions (http://www.scidev.net/global/environment/pollution/).

The goal of the Compact of Mayors is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 454 million tonnes a year by 2020 — equivalent to the carbon dioxide emissions from 130 coal power plants — through knowledge sharing and transparent and accountable measures.

The compact was launched last week (23 September) at the UN Climate Summit 2014 in New York City, United States. 228 of the cities involved have already disclosed existing strategies and targets.

"In many ways, cities all over the world are leading the way by example: not only setting ambitious emission reduction targets, but [also] working collaboratively to help each other to achieve our respective goals," Mpho Franklyn Parks Tau, mayor of the South African city of Johannesburg, a compact member, said at the conference.

He told *SciDev.Net* that this coalition "places a collective responsibility on all of us because we are accountable to each other. As partners, we can also tap into the knowledge and expertise of other cities that have the same objectives."

Just over half the world's population live in cities and this proportion is projected to grow to two thirds by 2050, adding an additional 2.5 billion people to cities around the world, according to the UN.

Cities produce up to 70 per cent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions, it adds.

According to Tau, 15 cities, including Copenhagen, London and Washington DC, have committed to cut their emissions by more than 70 per cent by 2050.

Johannesburg continues to expand its Rea Vaya bus rapid transport system to reduce congestion and the city's carbon footprint (by cutting the use of personal cars).

"It has been hailed as an international case study of a public transportation system's ability to reduce carbon," Tau told *SciDev.Net.*

In addition, Johannesburg is now generating rather than using electricity when treating sewage, he says. The project, first implemented at the city's largest wastewater treatment (http://www.scidev.net/global/environment/water/) facility, converts sewage organic matter into biogas containing about 60 per cent methane —which can be used to generate electricity (http://www.scidev.net/global/environment/energy/).

The Global Environment Facility (GEF) launched an Integrated Program on Sustainable Cities at the summit, committing US$100 million to "establish a common platform for cities to access and share solutions on climate change (http://www.scidev.net/global/environment/climate-change/) adaptation and mitigation, energy, transport (http://www.scidev.net/global/enterprise/transport/) and water". Some cities in South and South-East Asia are already leading the way (http://www.scidev.net/global/policy/news/ten-asian-cities-leading-the-way-in-climate-proofing-1.html) in climate-proofing.