



City-wide Clean Development Mechanism: A Framework for Empowering Cities

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As the dust settles after the [COP17](#) Climate Talks in Durban, a sigh of relief is released. The mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol have survived to see a second commitment period.


The mechanisms under the Kyoto Protocol—the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), Joint Implementation (JI) and emissions trading—provide flexibility as participating countries attempt to comply with their emission reduction targets. Each of these mechanisms allows developed countries to fund emissions reduction projects outside of their borders in order to meet their domestic targets. The CDM has been universally embraced by the first and third world as a way to encourage sustainable development and green economic growth in developing countries.

In a recent effort to expand the benefits of CDM, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Executive Board approved a new methodology for large scale emissions reductions made throughout multiple sectors within a single city. This “city-wide CDM” allows for a city to reduce emissions through buildings, energy use, water use, waste management, transportation and beyond. It allows for an integrated systems approach to emissions reduction and resource conservation, which we at USGBC obviously love. The first pilot of this CDM Programme of Activities (POA) is underway in Amman, Jordan. The U.S. Green Building Council along with countless stakeholders are eager to watch the progress made in Amman as this pilot proves the feasibility and replicability of the city-wide model.


We recently witnessed disappointment for international climate policy as countries further postponed taking action. The fate of the planet’s climate looks bleak when countries have extended the deadline of an agreement on a new climate regime to 2015 when the first round of major reductions is due by 2020. In the face of this indecision and inaction, cities have historically stepped up to the plate to reduce their carbon footprint without pressure or prompting from national governments. To learn more about city leadership on climate change and green building policy, see Jason Hartke’s blog, “[Lights...Cities...Action](#),” the [C40 Cities blog](#), and the World Green Building Council’s [Government Leadership Awards Publication](#).

A new challenge that we would like to pose to U.S. cities is to turn to Amman for inspiration. Consider an integrated approach to city-wide sustainability as outlined in the [CDM methodology](#) developed by the World Bank. As a climate change policy wonk, the potential for cities to out “green” each other is very exciting and opens additional policy and economic opportunities. I dream of emission reductions made within the buildings sector of participating cities, with opportunities to meet additional compliance through city-to-city emissions trading schemes. Though I am not the only one to think and dream of this potential, we are several degrees away from this end goal.

I will finish with a few asks to U.S. cities. Establish baselines for greenhouse gas emissions and energy use. Develop a multi-sector approach to city-wide sustainability and consider Amman as a model. Enable emissions trading for reductions made through building retrofits à la the [Tokyo model](#). Inspire and encourage other cities to join this effort. The wider the pool for emissions trading, the more economically efficient are the reductions. The U.S. Green Building Council is here to help you develop and implement policy. Let’s work together to create an extensive network of sustainable cities who recognize the role of market-based approaches and common sense economics.



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