UN Panel Names Cities as a Vehicle for Sustainable Development

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Last week, the UN Secretary General's High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability released a report of recommended outcomes for the Rio+20 conference in June. The report, *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing*, outlines both long- and short-term goals for governments, civil society and the private sector. These recommendations address all facets of resiliency, including climatic, economic and social. Below are a few of the UN Panel's key recommendations that align with the goals of sustainable communities, many of which are already being addressed by the green building industry.

"Cities and local communities have a major role to play in advancing a real sustainable development agenda on the ground."

As we already know, cities are a key to the success of the sustainable development agenda. Cities have the political will and flexibility to implement development goals more easily and quickly than national governments. Cities also have greater influence over the construction of buildings and infrastructure within their borders and can aid or incentivize the use of sustainable strategies. Past experience will also show that cities are leading the way by implementing innovative policies. See the World Green Building Council's Government Leadership Awards publication for case studies of the leading green building policies in the world.

"Many argue that if it cannot be measured, it cannot be managed. The international community should measure development beyond gross domestic product (GDP) and develop a new sustainable development index or set of indicators."

Countless organizations are dedicated to developing sustainability indicators. For example, the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Green Building Rating System has been implemented in over 120 countries and promotes a sustainable built environment through five credit categories that addresses different aspects of sustainability—site selection, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources and indoor environmental quality. Other programs around the world are advancing the benefits of energy and resource efficient buildings. The World Bank's Tool for Rapid Assessment of City Energy (TRACE) offers measurement tools for each sector that contributes to a sustainable city, including transport, buildings, public lighting, water and wastewater, power and heating, and solid waste. These indicators allow cities to pursue energy efficiency strategies which reduce costs and contribute to climate change mitigation goals.

"Governments should adopt and advance "green jobs" and decent work policies as a priority in their budgets and sustainable development strategies while creating conditions for new jobs in the private sector."

An additional benefit of green buildings and sustainable cities is the creation of adequate, long-term jobs, which improve quality of life and support a resilient economy. This goal can be met through investments in clean technologies and infrastructure construction. The maintenance of these strategies provides stable employment and enables cities and countries to remain competitive within a globalized economy.

The UN panel's recommendations for Rio+20 outline specific and tangible steps for meeting the conference's goals of sustainable development and the amplification of the green economy. Cities are instrumental to the implementation of these strategies, but require financial and technical assistance. All sectors are thus called to action to increase investments in capacity building, green infrastructure and sustainable energy.

The green building industry is paving the way toward meeting the UN's sustainable development goals. Through international cooperation in Rio, we will be a major step closer to our shared goals of a healthy planet for future generations.

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