

We've Got the Power – Bummm...Bumpa...Bumm

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Mayor of Johannesburg, Mayor Bloomberg, Mayor Paes of Rio and the Mayor of Seoul

Cities Arrive in Force at Rio+20

I don't know if that 1992 pop song "We Got the Power" was meant for cities. But it should have been. It certainly would have been apropos during Rio+20, where cities arrived in force.

Bumpa...Bumm

Recognized widely as the driving force behind many of the most significant actions taken to combat climate change, mayors from around the world came to Rio with a simple message: We've got the power.

Bumpa...Bumm

How inspiring to attend the two signature events for local governments, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group's event at Fort Copacabana and ICLEI's Global Town Hall, where we didn't hear rhetoric, and instead we just hear results, like [Tokyo's cap and trade program](#) that covers commercial buildings or Brasilia's intent to have the first LEED Platinum stadium in the world.

Bumpa...Bumm

Unfortunately at many of these global conferences, like Rio+20, where national governments convene and negotiate, the role of cities all too often seem to be an afterthought. Yet cities are economic engines. They generate 75 percent of GDP. They nurture investment and innovation. "Intellectual capital gravitates to cities," said Mayor Bloomberg of New York City last Monday at the C40 Climate Cities Leadership Group kickoff event at Rio+20.

Bloomberg announced that C40's 59 megacities have collectively taken nearly 5,000 actions to combat climate change, which is expected to reduce greenhouse gases by over a billion tons by 2030.

Local leaders can't afford to wait out our problems. They don't have time to diagnose and re-diagnose or debate the problems we face. Instead they take problems head on and work until they're solved. It was Fiorello La Guardia, a former New York mayor, who said there is no Democratic or Republican way to pick up the trash. Local leaders just see problems and they don't let politics get in the way of taking action and implementing solutions.

Cities also recognize a false dichotomy when they see one. "Mayors know the supposed choice between saving money and spending it on climate action is a false one," said Jay Carson, executive director of C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group. "Mayors know climate change puts their cities at particularly great risk, but they also know there is economic opportunity for cities in the response to climate change."

And with a changing climate, the pressure to perform will only increase for our cities. And now for a statistic we've all heard – more than half the world lives in cities. That will grow to more than 70 percent in just 20 years. Cities, which take up only two percent of the world's land mass, use most of the world's resources: they consume 75 percent of the world's energy and produce more than two-thirds of the world's greenhouse gases.

Groups like C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group and ICLEI International are working to accelerate sustainability actions in cities around the world. ICLEI International, which represents more than 1,200 local governments around the world, arrived at Rio+20 with a powerful message --- in the last 20 years local

advances in implementing sustainable policies were more meaningful than those at the global level. At their Global Town Hall conference at Rio+20, local governments didn't negotiate, they told the world of their actions and accomplishments in policy implementation.

Clearly, there's a huge return on investment when it comes to working with cities to accelerate action.

Fostering leadership at the local level is certainly something the green building community has embraced. Many of the U.S. Green Building Council's members and our huge trained practitioner network has long engaged with city officials to deliver dynamic green building solutions that save citizens and businesses money, save energy, create jobs and increase value and improve infrastructure. Today in the United States, local leaders have passed more than 400 various green building policies to bring the economic and environmental benefits of green building to their communities.

Incidentally, the famous phrase that came out of the original Earth Summit in 1992 – “think globally, act locally” – had it right all along.

United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon revived the sentiment at Rio+20: “Local is global and global is local,” explaining the importance of local action to meet sustainability goals. “The country is the sum of cities. If cities do not work, then countries cannot work.”

Cities won't wait and can't afford to wait for binding national or international agreement. They just do what they always do. Solve problems.

And the garbage we keep dumping into the sky? Lucky for us, our cities know how to pick up the trash.

Do I daresay? *Bumpa...Bumm*

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