PATHFINDERS
FOR PEACEFUL, JUST AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES
HOSTED BY THE NYU CENTER ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

International
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peace
IN OUR CITIES

Leveraging Partnerships to Strengthen Cities' Resilience through Peace, Justice, Inclusion, and Adaptive Governance

Monday, January 26, 2026 | 1:15 a.m. (EST)

Organized by the Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies at NYU's Center on International Cooperation (CIC), International IDEA and Peace in Our Cities, this event highlighted the intersection of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 (cities) and SDG16 (peaceful, just and inclusive societies) through real-time, concrete examples, good practices, and partnerships that have strengthened cities' capacity to meet the needs and expectations of their residents through inclusive, adaptive, and democratic processes. **Experiences were shared from Rwanda; Cali, Colombia; New York, NY, United States; and experts from the Governance Action Hub at Results for Development and CIC.**

Overarching Messages

As the global order ruptures, SDG implementation stagnates, and trust in governance institutions decreases, cities play a critical role in addressing the challenges people face daily.

Cities and subnational governments are often more flexible, quicker to adapt, and have higher levels of accountability and trust with their constituents. This is supported by local financing and funding, which is traditionally more oriented towards development financing than national budgets/financing.

SDG16 is a critical enabler of the 2030 Agenda, and foundational to navigating and adapting to crises and challenges at all levels of governance-subnational, national, regional, and global.

Examples of the interlinkages of SDG16 and SDG11 include:

- In New York City, those experiencing homelessness face criminalization, exclusion, weak legal protections, and insufficient social safety nets, necessitating better access to justice.
- In Cali, Colombia, illegal mining, narco-trafficking, and environmental crimes are often national concerns, but affect local populations, requiring local and national government coordination.
- In Rwanda, climate change is hitting cities, requiring local governments to mainstream climate resilience through housing policies, service delivery, and infrastructure, supported by accountable and fair institutions.

Recommendations for policies and partnerships that advance both SDG11 and SDG16 include:

- Support budgeting, service delivery, and implementation at the city level to address problems that national governments often struggle to tackle.
- Create a strong civil society infrastructure and public funding to embed housing advocacy into justice movements and systems.
- Create clear short- and long-term plans for city and subnational governments that embed SDG targets, coordinated with national and state authorities, and supported by realistic budgets.

- Use clear targets and monitoring to sustain political or media attention; use participatory approaches to enact people-centered policies, and use adaptive governance.
- Utilize networks, coalitions, and hubs to support reforms facing resistance, especially when they are multi-stakeholder and multi-level. Mapping actors, incentives, and power relations can also inform strategy and anticipate resistance.

Speaker Highlights

Moderator: Margaret Williams, Associate Director, SDG16+, Pathfinders, NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC)

- Pathfinders is a member-state–led, multi-stakeholder action platform dedicated to advancing peaceful, just, and inclusive societies at all levels, from local to global. As the Secretariat, we have engaged in this Forum for the past few years as a precursor to HLPF, highlighting our commitment to partnerships as critical to advancing the 2030 Agenda with SDG16 as its driver.
- The global context is characterized as a point of rupture. Against this backdrop, SDG16 and its pillars remain fundamental enablers of sustainable development, key to stability and governance dividends, and a cost-effective investment essential for addressing current and future crises.
- The event seeks to highlight the interlinkages between SDG16 and SDG11, emphasizing the critical role of cities and of adaptive, multi-level governance and partnerships in responding to often overwhelming challenges. Seventy percent of the global population is projected to live in urban areas by 2050, making these the physical spaces where progress on the SDGs will ultimately succeed or fail.

Welcoming Remarks: Annika Leander-Silva, Head of North America and Permanent Observer to the UN, International IDEA

- SDG16 cuts across all SDGs and is widely recognized as an enabling goal, providing the foundations of peace, justice, inclusion, and accountable institutions necessary for progress on all other goals.
- These dynamics are most visible at the city level, where a growing share of the global population lives. Cities are on the front lines of managing key challenges, including public safety, housing, climate-related shocks, access to basic services, migration, and social cohesion, where the results of governance are most tangible.
- Cities are also key sites of democratic innovation, with local governments experimenting with new forms of citizen participation, cross-sector partnerships, and adaptive responses to rapidly changing conditions.
- Achieving SDG11 fundamentally depends on governance, including trust in local institutions, inclusive decision-making, peaceful conflict resolution, and meaningful public participation.
- International IDEA focuses on democratic institutions with direct engagement with local governments to strengthen inclusive municipal governance, including in countries such as Nepal. This work includes supporting local democratic processes, fostering dialogue, strengthening accountability, and helping local governments navigate complex challenges to build trust.

Panelist: David Jackson, Non-Resident Fellow, NYU Center on International Cooperation (CIC)

- Since the Seville Financing for Development Conference, significant emphasis has been placed on the view that local government finance is development finance, which has become even more relevant given recent global developments.
- SDG16 was underscored as foundational in the Compromiso de Sevilla, particularly its focus on transparency, anti-corruption, strong institutions, and democratic governance, all of which are essential to a government's legitimacy, social stability, and peace. Without citizens' trust in the authority

and fairness of institutions, sustainable development and social cohesion cannot be achieved.

- Strengthening local government finance can be a means to rebuild legitimacy from the bottom up. City budgets and local public services have historically been oriented towards development finance, in contrast to national budgets oriented towards defense and extraction.

- Local governments are central to addressing the climate crisis, as most climate adaptation responsibilities fall within their mandates. Mayors are uniquely positioned to advance climate resilience measures due to their direct accountability to communities.

- We need to refocus budgeting, service delivery, and implementation at the city level, and recognize cities as the most effective units of action in a complex, polarized, and climate-constrained world.

Panelist: Siya Hegde, Senior Staff Attorney, National Homelessness Law Center

- New York City is a strong subnational example of the intersection between SDG11 and SDG16, particularly in discussions on urban resilience, housing, and access to justice. This is particularly the case in a shifting political economy and a new mayoral administration.

- People experiencing homelessness in NYC face criminalization, exclusion, weak legal protections, and insufficient social safety nets, making access to justice and SDG16 a central concern. This also includes tenants in housing precarity who are often undercounted and excluded from policy narratives.

- Despite high fiscal capacity, the city is facing an acute homelessness crisis and a large backlog of eviction cases amid a shortage of affordable housing.

- Civil society has focused on strengthening tenants' rights, expanding the right to counsel in eviction cases, and challenging practices such as encampment sweeps and the criminalization of homelessness. Despite these gains, housing advocacy must be better integrated with broader justice movements.

- While New York City benefits from a strong civil society infrastructure and public funding for legal and housing defense, the fragmentation and siloing of

actors remain key challenges. A cross-sector, rights-based approach is needed to advance the right to housing.

Panelist: Jairo Garcia, Secretary of Security, City of Cali, Colombia

- Cali, a city of about 2.5 million people, has faced persistently high levels of violence for over three decades; in 2023, the city recorded 1,065 homicides, the fourth least violent year in the past 32 years.
- The responsibility for addressing citizens' most pressing challenges has historically rested with cities, though this role has often been overshadowed by expectations placed on national governments.
- In Colombia, local governments are legally required to develop four-year development plans with defined budgets, goals, and explicit alignment with the SDGs.
- In developing Cali's current plan, the administration prioritized translating the SDGs, particularly SDG16, into practical actions to address violence and transnational crime and promote access to justice.
- Entrenched challenges could not be resolved within a single four-year political term, so a 10-year, long-term strategy was developed. The 10-year plan received strong cross-party support, demonstrating the potential for long-term consensus when priorities, resources, and responsibilities are clearly defined.
- Fiscal realism was central to the planning process, with long-term budget projections developed in consultation with the city's budget authorities to ensure feasibility and sustained implementation.
- While challenges such as illegal mining, narcotrafficking, and environmental crime are often viewed as national-level issues, Cali has taken the position that subnational governments must act where these problems directly affect local populations.
- Cali has pursued coordinated action with national and state authorities, while also asserting local leadership. The city is working to build networks with other mayors and international partners, including Peace in Our Cities, to address challenges through technical, political, and community-based approaches.

Panelist: Dr. Odette Uwizeye, Chair of the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Forum (CLFG) and Chair of the Rwanda Association of Local Government

- Sustainable Development Goals 11 and 16 have a strong local dimension, and local governments are critical partners in implementation and monitoring. Trusted peer-learning networks such as CLFG enable practical solutions to travel quickly across contexts and support leaders facing similar climate risks.
- Climate change is a challenge for many cities, and climate resilience requires institutions that can act quickly, fairly, and accountably over time.
- Decision-making should be grounded in local data and statistics, combined with structured community engagement to identify risks, prioritize the most exposed populations, and build legitimacy. An example is Rwanda's [Integrated Development Program (IDP) Model Villages](#), which relocates households from high-risk zones into climate-resilient settlements with integrated housing, services, and infrastructure.
- Delivery is most effective when climate resilience is mainstreamed rather than treated as a stand-alone project. Proximity to impact allows local governments to respond rapidly, but requires alignment between national and local priorities, with continued community engagement and transparent feedback mechanisms.
- Progress must be demonstrated through clear targets and regular monitoring to sustain political or media attention.
- Adequate and predictable financing is essential for decentralization to work. Without fiscal space, resilience becomes an unfunded mandate.

Panelist: Mario Picon, Senior Program Director, Governance Action Hub, Results for Development

- Assumptions that national governments alone will automatically generate effective downstream impacts overlook that cities and subnational governments are often more flexible governance spaces, where policy

experimentation, innovation, and adaptive reforms can be pursued with comparatively lower risk and greater responsiveness to local contexts.

- Governance should be seen as a dynamic process of collective action that requires adaptation as new information, challenges, and opportunities emerge. Adaptive governance is essential for sustaining reforms, particularly amid political resistance, shifting power dynamics, and electoral cycles that often stall progress.
- Three practical concepts can help cities navigate complexity and bottlenecks:
  - *Mapping how actors and incentives interact in practice to inform strategy.*
  - Leveraging connections to build shared capacity and strengthen partnerships beyond convenience-based alliances.
  - Building issue-specific alliances, including with actors who may not initially support reforms, to overcome entrenched opposition and advance common goals.
- Reforms often face resistance from actors who stand to lose power, status, or economic interests, making strategic coalition-building and system-aware approaches critical. These include hubs such as:
  - In Peru, multi-actor hubs work to implement regional development plans and facilitate dialogue among traditionally opposing stakeholders.
  - In South Africa, the [Asivikelane](#) coalition ("let's protect one another"), a network of grassroots organizations operating across multiple cities, links municipal departments, national oversight institutions, and community actors.
  - In Santa Marta, Colombia, a university-led environmental hub acts as a convening platform highlighting the limits of data without broader community engagement and political influence.

About Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies

[Pathfinders for Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies](#) is a cross-regional and member state-led, multi-stakeholder coalition committed to advancing action on peace, justice, equality and inclusive institutions through the Sustainable Development Goals and beyond (SDG16+). It is convened by 46 governments, works with over 100 partners across civil society, the United Nations (UN), and regional and international organizations, and is hosted by the Center on International Cooperation at New York University.

About the New York University Center on International Cooperation

The [Center on International Cooperation (CIC) at New York University (NYU)](#) is a think tank and research center that, for over two decades, has been a leader in applied policy, connecting politics, security, justice, development, and humanitarian issues. Our mission is to inform and strengthen collaborative approaches and/or collaboration among national governments, international organizations, and the wider policy community to build trust, prevent and respond to crises—and advance peace, justice, and inclusion at all levels. Learn more on [our website](#) and @nyuCIC on social media.