

The ACU joins HRH The Prince of Wales to discuss the importance of sustainable urbanisation in the fight against climate change

Submitted by: BlueSky Education

Wednesday, 3 November 2021

Days before the global COP26 climate talks began in Glasgow, HRH The Prince of Wales met with key Commonwealth partners – including the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) – for a high-level discussion at Clarence House, to call attention to the crucial importance of sustainable urbanisation in tackling climate change.

During the event, convened by The Prince's Foundation and Commonwealth partners, HRH discussed the 'triple threat' of rapid urbanisation, natural resource depletion and climate change, and the need for collaboration if the targets are to be met within the limited time now available.

HRH said: "Sustainable development is clearly critical to responding to the climate emergency. The scale of our response needs to be equal to the scale of the challenge we are facing. I sincerely hope the very essence of adding social, environmental and commercial value can help to inspire and guide our actions and responses in the weeks and months ahead.

"There is a real central necessity to look at [rapid urban planning] in a more structured way, which will directly determine so many aspects of our human existence. So if Covid has taught us anything, then surely it has been to demonstrate what can be achieved through collective action. Leadership is key, but so is effective collaboration.

"Institutional investors and the private sector are increasingly coming to realise the real need for transformational change with a much greater degree of focus, at last, of working with Nature rather than against her, as well as being fully alive to the risks of not doing so and merely getting on with business as usual, that approach which would be absolutely fatal."

Dr Joanna Newman MBA FRSA, Secretary General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, said: "The Association of Commonwealth Universities is a global network of 500 member universities in 50 countries, dedicated to building a better world through higher education. Universities are helping to tackle the issues of rapid urbanisation and climate change highlighted by the Call to Action through research, education and policy engagement. They are also central to the need for interdisciplinary action – by working together with communities, governments and the built environment professions, universities are able to drive evidence-based policymaking into practice, creating a more sustainable future for us all."

Prof Eris Schoburgh, Professor of Public Policy and Management at ACU member the University of the West Indies, joined the event remotely to discuss the crucial role of universities, commenting: 'They have an obligatory role in shaping policy strategies in urban infrastructural development'.

Cities already consume more than two thirds of the world's energy and account for more than 70% of all carbon emissions. From 2015 to 2050, the world's urban population is expected to almost double, and based on current trends of urban sprawl and unplanned settlements, could mean a tripling of the urban

land mass, crushing often fragile eco-systems in the process. Almost 50% of that global urban growth is projected to be in the Commonwealth – well over 1bn more people living in Commonwealth cities. A staggering 95% of that growth is expected to be in Asia and Africa, two continents which are particularly vulnerable to climate change impacts and currently with limited capacity to respond to these intense challenges.

The discussion was therefore convened to highlight the Call to Action on Sustainable Urbanisation across the Commonwealth, a joint initiative of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Commonwealth Association of Architects and the Commonwealth Association of Planners. The Call to Action was circulated to Commonwealth Heads of Government in February 2021, highlighting the issues facing the Commonwealth and urging the need for collective inter-disciplinary action to place climate conscious urban planning and management at the heart of the response to climate change. The Commonwealth, with its many shared systems and structures, has the opportunity to lead and model collaborative, inclusive and effective action on sustainable urbanisation, which will be a key priority for CHOGM in Kigali in 2022.

Joining HRH were key voices including the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland, Commonwealth Secretary General, The Executive Director of UN-Habitat Maimunah Sharif, Dr Jeanne d’Arc Mujawamariya the Rwandan Environment Minister and HE Saida Muna Tasneem, the Bangladeshi High Commissioner among others, for a discussion moderated by Bristol City Mayor Marvin Rees.

The Commonwealth Secretary-General, The Rt Hon Patricia Scotland QC said: “Tackling climate change is the defining global challenge of our times and if we can solve the challenges of urbanisation, we have a realistic chance of tackling climate change and providing a hope and a future for our world.

“The Commonwealth is showing leadership and taking action on creating more sustainable urban environments with collaborations at a local, national and global level from academia to business to civil society.”

Marvin Rees, the Mayor of Bristol who chaired the meeting, said: “It is critical that we work together across all levels of government and with civil society, the private sector and academia to make our cities and towns liveable for all. We must all understand the threat climate change poses to our cities, the critical role sustainable urbanisation can play in building resilience and reducing global carbon emissions and we must commit the global finance needed to provide the infrastructure that is needed to decarbonise.”

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