

ADVANCING URBAN DECARBONIZATION THROUGH LOW CARBON CITY NETWORKS

Positioning NEA-LCCP as a Regional Coordination Mechanism



Subregional Office
EAST AND NORTH-EAST ASIA



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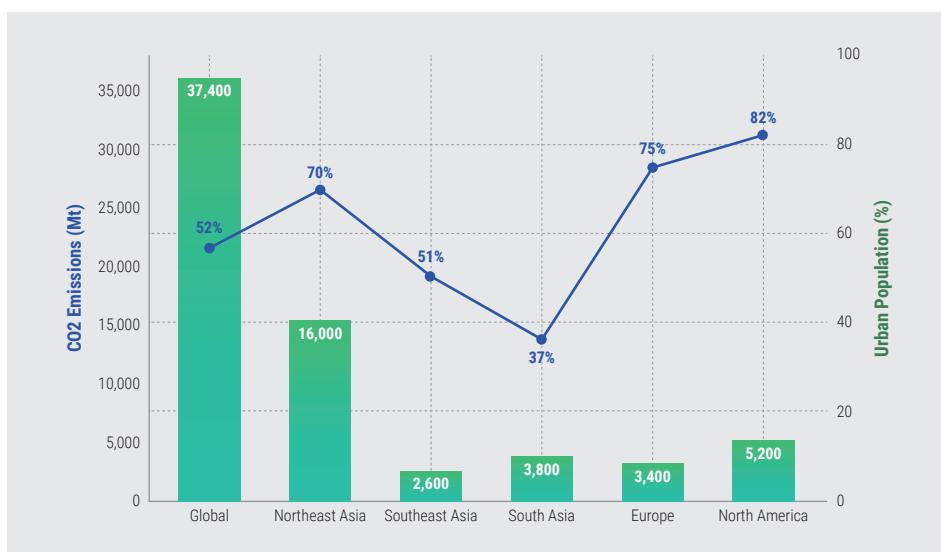


NEA-LCCP : Connecting Cities for Low-Carbon Transition

Overview

Cities in North-East Asia account for a major share of regional greenhouse gas emissions, while also serving as hubs of innovation, technology, and policy leadership. Yet efforts to advance low-carbon urban development have often been fragmented, with limited cross-border exchange and uneven access to resources.

The North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP) was established in 2014 under the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC) to bridge these gaps by serving as a dedicated regional platform connecting cities, national governments, experts, and international partners. It responds to the urgent need for cities in the subregion—home to some of the world's largest urban centers and fastest-growing economies—to accelerate their low-carbon transition.



[CO2 Emissions and Urbanization Levels by Region (2023)]

Objectives of NEA-LCCP

The Platform provides an enabling space for:

- **Knowledge Exchange** – sharing policy experiences, technical solutions, and good practices across cities in China, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation.
- **Capacity Building** – offering training, peer-to-peer learning, and technical assistance tailored to municipal needs.
- **Networking and Partnerships** – linking local governments with regional and global city networks, research institutions, and funding agencies.
- **Demonstration and Pilots** – supporting city-level projects that can generate replicable models for sustainable and low-carbon development.

Value Proposition

What makes NEA-LCCP distinct is its role as a **bridging mechanism** in the subregion. Unlike global networks that focus on high-level commitments, NEA-LCCP is designed to:

- Address subregional priorities (e.g., heavy reliance on fossil fuels, rapid urbanization, air quality challenges);
- Connect North-East Asian cities of different sizes, including **medium and smaller municipalities** that often lack access to global platforms;
- Facilitate dialogue between **science and policy**, ensuring that local decision-making is informed by the best available data and research;
- Complement and coordinate with existing networks (e.g., ICLEI East Asia, CityNet, C40, Shenzhen Low Carbon Forum) rather than duplicate efforts.

"Sustainable cities are built through collaboration, innovation, and shared knowledge."

NEA-LCCP stands out as a unique subregional bridge in North-East Asia, emphasizing the importance of city-level practical actions leading to sustainable urban development.



Responsive

Respond to subregional needs, including dependence on fossil fuels, rapid urban growth, and persistent air quality challenges



Inclusive

Engage cities of all scales, particularly medium and smaller municipalities that often lack access to international platforms



Connective

Strengthen science– policy linkages, ensuring local governments can base decisions on robust data and research



Synergy-driven

Align with and complement existing networks, and further connect the subregion to global low-carbon efforts

Activities and Progress

Peer Review and Comparative Analysis

To operationalize the North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP), SOM-21 (2017) endorsed two key activities: a municipal-level peer review and a national comparative study. The peer review aimed to strengthen local LCC planning and implementation, with pilot workshops held in Wuhan (2018), Guangzhou (2019), and Gwangju (2019). These reviews enabled cities to exchange innovative solutions, governance practices, and practical recommendations.

At the national level, a comparative study in China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea—carried out with iGDP, IGES, and KEI—examined policies and frameworks, identified sector-specific good practices, and drew lessons for wider application in the subregion. Together, these activities linked city-level innovation with national strategies, creating knowledge that is both practical and transferable across North-East Asia.

Knowledge Sharing: the establishment of the International Forum on Low Carbon Cities (IFLCC)

Recognizing that many cities in North-East Asia had already begun their own low-carbon strategies, NEA-LCCP took steps to expand peer learning and knowledge exchange. In November 2021, the first International Forum on Low Carbon Cities (IFLCC) was launched together with Incheon Metropolitan City and partners including the Incheon Climate & Environment Research Center, ICLEI East Asia, iGDP, and the Green Climate Fund (GCF).

Since 2022, IFLCC has grown into an annual flagship event. Each year, it brings together city leaders, researchers, and international partners to explore emerging urban challenges, share subregional experiences, and connect local actions with global climate goals. The Forum has also become a space for building new partnerships, expanding the reach of NEA-LCCP beyond North-East Asia to link with cities across Asia and beyond.

Technical Assistance & Capacity Building – Leveraging Science, Technology and Innovation (STI)

Science, technology and innovation (STI) are central to building low-carbon and resilient cities. North-East Asian countries have set ambitious neutrality targets—Japan and the Republic of Korea by 2050, and China by 2060—making it essential to equip local governments with the right tools and knowledge.

To respond, NEA-LCCP launched the project “**Leveraging STI for Low-Carbon and Resilient Cities**” in 2021. Its first training workshop, held in Mongolia with partners CCRCC, ICLEI East Asia, and iGDP, introduced practical solutions in clean energy, efficient housing, low-carbon transport, and air quality management. All training materials were made publicly available through ESCAP, enabling other cities to replicate and adapt the approaches.

Since then, NEA-LCCP has expanded STI capacity-building to address cross-cutting priorities such as digital innovation, demographic shifts, and urban resilience, aligning with the evolving needs of the subregion.

Building Momentum through Partnerships

Through these activities, NEA-LCCP has established itself as the key bridging platform in North-East Asia. It connects cities, governments, and knowledge partners by fostering city-to-city networking, offering practical policy recommendations, and engaging leading research institutes to generate comparative insights.

Since 2022, the Platform has further scaled up its partnerships, working more closely with regional and international organizations. This evolution has positioned NEA-LCCP as a subregional hub that not only strengthens cooperation among North-East Asian cities but also links their actions to global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda



[Evolution of the North-East Asia Low-Carbon Cities Platform (NEA-LCCP)]

Mapping Low-Carbon City Networks in North-East Asia and Beyond

Over the coming years, the **North-East Asia Low Carbon Cities Platform (NEA-LCCP)** will continue to evolve as a regional hub for low-carbon city collaboration, deepening partnerships and scaling up activities. By aligning with global frameworks – the **Paris Agreement**, the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, and the **New Urban Agenda** – the Platform positions North-East Asian cities not only as beneficiaries but also as contributors and leaders in the global low-carbon transition.

North-East Asia: Regional Networks and Initiatives

North-East Asia is one of the world's most urbanized and economically dynamic subregions. Cities in China, Japan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, and the Russian Federation are both engines of growth and major sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Over the past two decades, national and local governments have launched numerous low-carbon city (LCC) initiatives – spanning green buildings, sustainable mobility, district-level energy reforms, and digital innovation. Alongside these, city networks and multilateral mechanisms have helped connect stakeholders, promote peer learning, and share replicable solutions across the subregion.

ICLEI East Asia Secretariat

Headquartered in Seoul, ICLEI East Asia connects cities in China, Japan, ROK, and Mongolia to ICLEI's global network. It supports capacity building, project-based collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning in fields such as climate, energy, and mobility.

CityNet

Based in Seoul, CityNet is Asia's largest city network with more than 170 members, including NEA cities such as Seoul, Yokohama, and Ulaanbaatar. It focuses on SDGs, climate resilience, sustainable transport, and municipal governance.

C40 East Asia Cities

C40 unites megacities including Beijing, Shanghai, Seoul, and Tokyo. It emphasizes net-zero pathways and leadership commitments, linking East Asian cities to global climate dialogues.

GTI (Greater Tumen Initiative)

A regional economic cooperation mechanism involving China, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, and Russia (with Japan as observer). While not climate-specific, it incorporates green energy and urban sustainability within its broader economic agenda.

Shenzhen National Low-Carbon City Forum

An annual forum since 2013, hosted by Shenzhen, showcasing low-carbon technologies, urban innovation, and public-private partnerships. It attracts international participants and reinforces Shenzhen's branding as a demonstration city.

Y-PORT Forum (Yokohama)

Y-PORT promotes smart city and low-carbon urban development, linking Yokohama with Asia-Pacific cities. Its strong emphasis on public–private partnerships facilitates infrastructure investment and technology transfer.

Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS)

Supports cooperation among China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, including urban environment and climate exchange programmes. While not an LCC-specific platform, it provides diplomatic channels for joint projects.

Green Climate Fund (GCF)

Headquartered in Songdo, Republic of Korea, GCF funds climate projects globally, including urban-focused initiatives in East Asia. It also supports readiness programmes that strengthen city-level capacity to access climate finance.

Research and Policy Networks (IGES, KEI, iGDP, etc.)

Regional think tanks and institutes such as IGES (Japan), KEI (ROK), and iGDP (China) provide research, policy evaluation, and knowledge-sharing platforms on low-carbon cities, contributing evidence-based insights to policy processes.



Beyond North-East Asia: Asia-Pacific and Global Networks

Global networks play a pivotal role in advancing the global low-carbon transition by linking cities through shared frameworks, technical cooperation, and climate finance. The following initiatives exemplify successful models of multi-level collaboration and offer valuable insights for strengthening the NEA-LCCP.

C40 Cities

C40 is a global network of nearly 100 mayors from the world's leading cities committed to halving fossil fuel use by 2030 and addressing the inequities of climate impacts. Its Climate Action Implementation Programme supports cities in operationalizing Climate Action Plans aligned with the 1.5°C target. Through initiatives such as the C40 Cities Finance Facility (developed with GIZ) and sectoral accelerators like the Zero Emission Bus Rapid-deployment Accelerator (ZEBRA), C40 mobilizes finance and technical expertise to drive urban decarbonization. Its practical focus on toolkits, financing, and targeted partnerships provides strong lessons for NEA-LCCP in developing actionable project pipelines for cities in North-East Asia.

ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

ICLEI is a global association of over 2,500 local and regional governments advancing sustainability through climate action planning, resilience strategies, and integrated low-carbon development. Its regional branches—such as ICLEI East Asia and ICLEI South Asia—offer capacity-building and peer-learning platforms. Programmes like CapaCITIES demonstrate how medium-sized cities can integrate climate risks into planning and develop Net-Zero Climate Resilient Action Plans. ICLEI's multi-level governance approach provides a useful framework for NEA-LCCP to strengthen inclusiveness and elevate smaller cities.

Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM)

GCoM is the largest global alliance of local governments for climate leadership, representing over 13,500 cities worldwide. Its four structured pillars—Amplify4Cities, Data4Cities, Mobilize4Cities, and Invest4Cities—bring together advocacy, data, and finance under a unified framework. Initiatives such as Bankable Cities and the Business Matchmaking Platform enhance city access to funding and partnerships. GCoM's standardized methodologies and collaboration with C40 and ICLEI provide a model for harmonizing reporting and scaling cooperation across regions.

UN-Habitat

As the United Nations' focal agency for sustainable urbanization, UN-Habitat supports national and local governments in advancing inclusive, safe, and resilient cities. Its programmes align with the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11, providing technical assistance and policy guidance. UN-Habitat's multi-stakeholder approach makes it a key partner for NEA-LCCP in linking subregional experiences with global UN frameworks.

Green Climate Fund (GCF)

While not a city network, the GCF is a major enabler of climate finance. Its readiness programmes, concessional loans, and blended finance instruments assist developing countries—including smaller cities—in implementing low-carbon and climate-resilient projects. Urban-focused initiatives such as Green City Kigali and E-Mobility programmes in Latin America illustrate how GCF funding can be leveraged for integrated urban solutions. For NEA-LCCP, closer engagement with GCF could expand financing access for cities in Mongolia, the Russian Far East, and other emerging urban centers.

ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN)

ASCN connects 26 cities across ASEAN to promote smart and sustainable urban solutions through public-

private partnerships. Its financing toolkit and city-specific action plans demonstrate how regional mechanisms can accelerate investment and innovation. This model offers useful insights for scaling city-level cooperation in North-East Asia.

Pacific Urban Partnership (PUP)

PUP supports small island developing states in enhancing resilience and governance through integrated urban planning. Its collaborative approach to adaptation and multi-sectoral coordination offers lessons applicable to smaller and peripheral cities in other subregions.

EBRD Green Cities Programme

Implemented by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), this programme enables cities to develop Green City Action Plans (GCAPs) linked to infrastructure investments. Ulaanbaatar's participation exemplifies how cross-regional cooperation and access to green finance can foster low-carbon urban transformation.



Cross-Cutting Gaps and Challenges

Limited Cross-Border Collaboration

Despite the region's shared challenges in urbanization, energy transition, and climate change, most low-carbon city initiatives remain framed within national contexts. China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, and the Russian Federation each pursue their own strategies with minimal cross-border dialogue. As a result, there is no unified subregional mechanism that could help align approaches, pool resources, and jointly address common challenges such as air pollution, transboundary energy systems, or sustainable transport. The absence of such a framework weakens the potential for scaling successful policies and solutions across borders.

Fragmentation of Efforts

Several networks and platforms—such as ICLEI, CityNet, and C40—are active in the region. While these organizations have created valuable opportunities for knowledge exchange, their overlapping mandates often lead to duplication of activities and fragmented interventions. Cities and policymakers face difficulties in navigating the landscape of initiatives, which in turn reduces efficiency, wastes resources, and limits the collective impact that coordinated action could achieve.

Unequal Access to Capacity Building

Participation in regional networks is often dominated by megacities like Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing, which have greater financial resources, institutional capacity, and international visibility. In contrast, medium-sized and smaller cities—including those in Mongolia and the Russian Far East—struggle to gain entry to such platforms. They face barriers in accessing knowledge, training, and finance, leaving them underrepresented in regional dialogue and unable to fully benefit from the transfer of best practices. This imbalance reinforces a “two-tier” system of low-carbon development, with leading cities advancing rapidly while others fall behind.

Underutilization of Scientific Expertise

The region is home to a wealth of research output from institutes such as the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), the Korea Environment Institute (KEI), and iGDP in China. However, their findings and tools are not systematically integrated into policymaking at the city level. The science–policy interface remains weak, with limited institutionalized mechanisms to channel academic knowledge into municipal planning processes. As a result, scientific evidence is often overlooked, and city policies may not reflect the latest insights on emissions reduction, adaptation, or green technology deployment.

Recommendations: Strengthening Synergies among Low Carbon City Network

Strengthen Subregional Coordination

- **Establish a NEA-LCCP Working Group** – Formalize a subregional body with representation from participating cities, national focal points, and partner organizations. This group can provide strategic guidance, ensure alignment with NEASPEC's broader agenda, and coordinate annual workplans.
- **Develop a Subregional Action Framework** – Set shared priorities (e.g., clean energy transition, sustainable mobility, digital solutions for climate action) to guide joint activities and reduce duplication across existing networks.
- **Facilitate Cross-Border Pilot Projects** – Identify opportunities, such as transboundary air quality monitoring or integrated renewable energy systems, where cities from different countries can collaborate, demonstrating tangible regional benefits.

Enhance Inclusiveness of Participation

- **Target Medium-Sized and Smaller Cities** – Dedicate tailored entry points (e.g., scholarships for participation in the International Forum on Low-Carbon Cities, mentorship programmes) to engage cities beyond megacities like Seoul, Tokyo, and Beijing.
- **City Clusters and Thematic Hubs** – Create thematic clusters (e.g., "industrial transition," "coastal resilience," "digital innovation") where cities of similar profiles can learn from each other.
- **Localized Capacity Support** – Use translated toolkits, online platforms, and regional training centers to overcome language and resource barriers faced by smaller municipalities.

Institutionalize Science–Policy–Practice Linkages

- **Formal Partnerships with Research Institutes** – Institutionalize collaboration with IGES, KEI, iGDP, and others to translate research into practical tools and policy briefs for city leaders.
- **Peer Review and Benchmarking** – Expand the municipal peer review mechanism into a structured benchmarking system, enabling cities to assess progress and receive evidence-based recommendations.
- **Data and Knowledge Repository** – Create an online NEA-LCCP platform for sharing comparable city profiles, GHG inventories, and case studies, aligned with GCoM's reporting frameworks.

Leverage and Expand Partnerships

- **Integrate with Global Networks** – Strengthen formal ties with ICLEI, C40, GCoM, and UN-Habitat, enabling joint events, tool co-development, and cross-regional peer learning.
- **Finance Mobilization through GCF and MDBs** – Position NEA-LCCP as an intermediary to help cities access climate finance, prepare bankable project pipelines, and connect with donors.
- **Annual Flagship Forum as Partnership Hub** – Use the International Forum on Low-Carbon Cities (IFLCC) to launch joint initiatives, attract investment, and connect with international frameworks (Paris Agreement, New Urban Agenda).

Ensure Strategic Sustainability of the Platform

- **Long-term Planning** – Work towards a shared roadmap with agreed outputs, providing continuity beyond annual forums.
- **Dedicated Funding Mechanism** – Explore blended funding (member contributions, donor support, partnerships with development banks) to secure financial stability.
- **Visibility and Advocacy** – Publish regular "State of Low-Carbon Cities in North-East Asia" reports, highlighting regional progress and elevating North-East Asia's leadership in global climate dialogues.

The Road Ahead

The journey of low-carbon city development in North-East Asia reflects both the urgency of action and the power of cooperation. Cities across the subregion have already demonstrated their capacity for innovation—from carbon markets in Shenzhen, to smart mobility in Seoul, to industrial transformation in Kitakyushu. Yet these achievements also highlight the persistent gaps in knowledge-sharing, financing, and cross-border collaboration.

The North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform (NEA-LCCP) stands as a unique mechanism to address these gaps. By connecting municipalities of all sizes with research institutions, national ministries, and global networks, it amplifies regional strengths while ensuring no city is left behind. Moving forward, the Platform can serve not only as a hub for peer learning and capacity building, but also as a bridge linking subregional priorities with global climate goals.

The path ahead will require continued partnership, innovation, and leadership. If cities, governments, and partners act together, North-East Asia can transform its urban challenges into opportunities—demonstrating to the world that rapid economic growth and ambitious decarbonization can go hand in hand.

ANNEX I Low Carbon City Networks in North-East Asia

Network / Forum	Scope (Countries & Cities)	Key Participants	Distinct Features
NEA-LCCP (North-East Asia Low Carbon City Platform)	China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mongolia, Russian Federation	Incheon, Beijing, Tokyo, Ulaanbaatar, etc.	Only subregional multilateral platform; Peer Review, Comparative Study, IFLCC
ICLEI East Asia Secretariat	China, Japan, Republic of Korea, Mongolia	Beijing, Seoul, Tokyo, Ulaanbaatar, etc.	Local government members; capacity building on climate, energy, transport; linked to global ICLEI
CityNet	Asia-wide (including NEA)	Seoul, Yokohama, Ulaanbaatar, etc.	170+ city network; SDGs, resilience, sustainable transport
C40 East Asia Cities	NEA megacities	Seoul, Tokyo, Beijing, Shanghai	High-level climate leadership; net-zero commitments; megacity focus
GTI (Greater Tumen Initiative)	China, Mongolia, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation (Japan observer)	Tumen, Vladivostok, Ulaanbaatar, etc.	Economic cooperation platform; energy transition, power interconnection, green cities
Shenzhen National Low-Carbon City Forum	China + NEA + international	Shenzhen, other NEA cities	Policy & technology showcase; public-private cooperation; infrastructure exhibition
Y-PORT Forum (Yokohama)	Japan + Asia-Pacific cities	Yokohama, Seoul, Asian cities	Smart city & low-carbon urban development; PPP; infrastructure export
Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS)	China, Japan, Republic of Korea	Headquarters in Seoul; cooperation among 3 countries	Not a direct LCC platform but supports climate/environment city exchanges
Green Climate Fund (GCF) Partnerships in East Asia	Global (HQ in Songdo, Republic of Korea)	City-level projects worldwide	Funds urban climate projects; readiness programmes for capacity building
Institute Networks (IGES, KEI, iGDP, etc.)	Japan, Republic of Korea, China	IGES, KEI, iGDP	Independent policy research; knowledge hubs; LCC policy evaluation, Net-Zero Cities studies

ANNEX II Comparative Overview of Global and Regional Low-Carbon City Networks

Network	Mission / Vision	Membership	Focus Areas	Modalities of Engagement	Example Programmes / Initiatives	Relevance to NEA-LCCP
C40 Cities	Halve fossil fuel use by 2030; enhance equity and resilience in cities	~97 leading global cities (mayors with Climate Action Plans)	Energy & buildings, transport, waste, food systems, urban design, air quality, resilience	Toolkits, peer networks, technical assistance, finance facility, private-sector engagement	C40 Cities Finance Facility; ZEBRA (Zero Emission Buses); Climate Action Implementation Programme	Provides models for sector-specific accelerators and financing mechanisms relevant to NEA cities
ICLEI (Global / South Asia)	Build a global movement of local governments for sustainable urban development	2,500+ cities worldwide; ICLEI South Asia: 100+ members	Zero-emission, resilient, circular, equitable, and nature-based development	Peer exchange, consultancy, advocacy, multi-level governance	CapaCITIES (India); Climate Action and Resilience Plans	Offers strong peer-learning structures, especially for medium/small cities in NEA
Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM)	Mobilize ambitious, measurable city climate action	13,500+ cities worldwide	Mitigation, adaptation, energy access, climate finance	Data sharing, finance access, advocacy, capacity building	Amplify4Cities; Data4Cities; Mobilize4Cities; Invest4Cities; Bankable Cities initiative	Supports standardized reporting frameworks and climate finance access
Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Support developing countries to achieve NDC ambitions via finance	Country-driven (129 developing countries, city-level projects funded indirectly)	Urban resilience, energy, transport, ecosystems, livelihoods	Blended finance, grants, concessional loans, guarantees, equity	Green City Kigali (Rwanda); E-Mobility Latin America	Potential financing partner for NEA cities, esp. Mongolia/Russian Far East
UN-Habitat	Promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities	Active in 90+ countries	Housing, prosperity, equity, resilience, crisis response	Technical assistance, knowledge, policy advice	Urban resilience programmes; Housing for All	UN mandate enhances legitimacy; platform for aligning NEA with global UN agendas
ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN)	Advance smart and sustainable urban solutions through PPPs	26 ASEAN cities	Smart city planning, digital solutions, infrastructure, health, safety	Public-private partnerships, capacity building, financing toolkit	ASEAN Smart City Financing Toolkit; City-specific Action Plans	Model for subregional cooperation and financing; lessons for NEA inter-city platform
South Asian Forum for Environment (SAFE)	Conservation + poverty alleviation through participation and equity	Works with 57 partners, 63 local councils, 17 municipalities	Agroforestry, waste mgmt, biodiversity, air pollution, climate-smart agriculture	Training, capacity building, community projects	CLEAR (urban waste initiative by women/youth); Float Farming (with UNDP)	Demonstrates community-based, inclusive urban climate models adaptable for smaller NEA cities
Pacific Urban Partnership (PUP)	Strengthen resilience of Pacific island cities through integrated planning	Cities in small island developing states	Urban resilience, integrated governance, adaptation	Knowledge exchange, integrated planning, governance tools	Resilience-building toolkits for SIDS	Relevant for peripheral/vulnerable NEA cities (e.g., coastal/mountain towns)
EBRD Green Cities Programme	Address environmental challenges via policy + investment	Central & Eastern Europe, Central Asia, Mediterranean	Transport, energy efficiency, water/waste, governance, financing	Green City Action Plans (GCAPs), technical + financial support	Ulaanbaatar GCAP (green energy, sponge city design); Dushanbe sustainable mobility	Illustrates how subregional financial platforms can support urban decarbonization in NEA



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