

# GLOBALINDIA

## Reinforcing climate commitments: Rajkot's Climate Action Plan<sup>1</sup>

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As urbanization rapidly increases across the world, especially in developing countries, cities are now at the frontline of dealing with a global challenge like climate change. Climate action has a wide variety of benefits including improving the local economy, reducing emissions and building resilience.

This policy brief aims to highlight how city governments in India can pursue climate concerns, and contribute to global climate commitments alongside existing local development objectives. Despite a weak domestic climate governance framework, Rajkot, located in the state of Gujarat, voluntarily consolidated and mainstreamed a climate action plan. Learning from Rajkot could guide other cities to pursue climate action along with stated developmental priorities. The key policy recommendations of this policy paper include a) involving the local government to further climate action, b) building climate awareness and capacity, especially of city officials, c) promoting collective decision making including both state and non-state actors, d) building on previous policy frameworks and experiences, and e) acknowledging city officials for pursuing climate efforts.

### CONTEXT

Cities in the global South including India are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. These cities are already vulnerable due to the combined effects of increasing urbanization and governance challenges leading to severe deficits in services and growth. The ability of cities to deal with existing challenges is already poor. Climate change will exacerbate existing vulnerabilities thereby putting a large section of the society at risk.

In India, climate change is not politicized at the local level that is at the city level. Climate change is considered to be a global issue, and not something to be addressed at the local level (Sharma and Tomar, 2010; Sami, 2017). Additionally, India has not established a formal urban climate policy, the union and sub-national governments do not support climate action at the local level (Sami, 2018), and there are no dedicated climate institutions at the local level. City governments lack the capacity and motivation to institutionalize climate measures due to the absence of

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climate awareness (Sami, 2017), and inability to prioritize and mainstream climate concerns into local agendas (see Dewulf et al., 2012) or planning processes (Kumar and Geneletti, 2015). Therefore, most urban local bodies in India have not engaged with climate issues seriously.

Given that a significant proportion of global population, close to 6.4 billion people (Shah and Kulkarni, 2015), is projected to live in urban areas in the future. Also, in the case of India, the United Nations (2014) has projected that close to 50 per cent of the population will be living in cities. It is therefore imperative for cities, especially in India, to pursue measures to cope with and limit the impacts of a global challenge like climate change. Climate action will not only meet local priorities, but also build resilience against extreme events and reduce Greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Conventional urban planning in developing countries has been insufficient to deal with developmental challenges; the dynamic and unpredictable nature of climate change makes such tools redundant. However, cities possess assets (Revi et al., 2014) and power to further climate action (Krellenberg et al., 2017). A climate action plan can guide cities by highlighting a city's GHG emissions and identifying potential measures which address development priorities alongside climate concerns.

## HOW DID RAJKOT FORMALIZE AND INSTITUTIONALISE A CLIMATE ACTION PLAN?

Given the above mentioned concerns, Rajkot poses a puzzle with respect to climate action. Rajkot has been an early adopter of climate action. The city has taken several measures spanning across different sectors such as transport, health, water, sewerage/drainage, and waste. The city pursued these measures to not only meet local developmental priorities, but also combat the impacts of climate change. In 2019, the Rajkot Municipal Corporation (RMC) voluntarily institutionalized a climate action plan, the Climate Resilient City Action Plan (CRCAP). The most unique aspect of this initiative is that the city took it up on its own volition, and without any pressure (from the central or sub-national government or non-governmental organization).

As part of the plan, the city has committed to reducing its GHG emissions by 14 per cent (absolute target) by 2022-23 (CapaCITIES, 2018). This climate plan was incorporated into the existing municipal agenda. The climate action plan comprises of a detailed city level vulnerability assessment, a sectoral emissions inventory, and climate measures (adaptation and mitigation) across different sectors. The plan also acknowledges the adaptation and mitigation potential of existing and future developmental measures.

Rajkot was able to successfully consolidate and institutionalize a plan by building on past experiences, through coordinated planning, and by improving capacity within the local government.

### *Path dependency*

The city government relied on learning and experiences from former policy measures to formulate the climate action plan. Due to previous experience of formulating action plans, such as the solar city master plan, low carbon mobility plan, and low emission development strategies plan, the city government was better equipped to formulate the climate action plan. Similarly, the earlier emissions inventory was recalibrated to current emission levels, which

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helped identify adaptation and mitigation actions. Also, the urban local body, due to prior experience, was able to acquire relevant information and support from both state and non-state stakeholders to further its policy idea.

## *Coordinated decision making*

While formulating the climate action plan, the urban local body engaged with domain experts to overcome its technical deficits and access new information. A climate core team, comprising of city officials working across different departments (e.g. electricity, town planning, water, transport, housing, waste etc.) of the urban local body was consolidated. This was done to ensure representation and expertise across sectors; this would also help improve data collection and management within the local government. The core team collectively identified the policy problems such as urban development and environmental related problems, modified emissions inventory for the city, assessed the city's vulnerability across sectors, and accordingly identified adaptation and mitigation measures. Similarly, the city government also consolidated a stakeholder committee, including other state officials and non-state actors (e.g. local non-governmental organizations, representatives from citizen association groups and the Rajkot chamber of commerce, and academics) to review the climate action plan.

## *Climate related capacity building*

Rajkot consistently prioritized building its capacity to combat climate change. The local government, particularly city bureaucrats and occasionally the mayor, participated in several capacity building activities such as domestic and international climate workshops and meetings. Such events helped build a consciousness around climate issues, and connected the government with a domestic and international climate network, which cumulatively assisted in consolidating the plan. Also, due to improved technical capacity of the state at the local level, climate co-benefits associated with existing and future development objectives were acknowledged in the climate action plan.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on Rajkot's experience this policy paper makes the following policy suggestions for other Indian cities who could integrate climate concerns into their local agendas:

1. Institutionalizing and executing a climate action plan requires **active support and involvement of city governments**, without which such policy proposals can be permanently shelved. Urban local bodies possess the skills and expertise to formulate policy proposals, often with the assistance of experts who act as knowledge partners. Also, adoption of policies requires the support of the local government, especially the legislative branch. Furthermore, city governments can channel resources from the state/sub-national and central governments, under urban development schemes and programmes, to pursue local measures.
2. City governments need to actively invest in **improving climate awareness and capacity building**, especially of policymakers, to further climate action. Given the lack of urban climate action frameworks, city governments can learn about climate issues and measures from experiences of other cities. Also, engagements with technical consultants can improve access to new information and technology. These steps will not only improve climate awareness, but will also help recognize climate co-benefits associated

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with existing & future development objectives, and identify domestic programmes and schemes to support local measures without any significant investments from the local government.

3. The nature of climate change necessitates cross disciplinary knowledge and expertise which is dispersed amongst individuals and organizations. **Collective decision making** is required to comprehensively identify local vulnerabilities, and design locally embedded and feasible adaptation and mitigation measures. Both state and non-state stakeholders contribute differently, and should work together as a cohesive unit to channelize relevant expertise to further climate concerns.
4. Urban local bodies can **learn from previous policy frameworks and experiences**. Since there is no urban climate policy guiding cities, learnings from other policy interventions, both within a city and across different cities, can be used as a basis for formulating and consolidating an action plan. As a result, climate concerns can be pursued under existing institutional structures at the local level.
5. Climate efforts pursued by **dedicated city officials need to be acknowledged through incentives** such as declaring climate ambassadors by the state/sub-national and/or the national government. This will further motivate city level bureaucrats to pursue climate measures, which are often perceived as an additional task.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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