

THE 2021 IPCC REPORT: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The summer of 2021 has seen unprecedented flooding, wildfires, heat waves, heavy rainfall, and other alarming weather-related events. [The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change](#) recently released its latest report (the "Report") which confirms that much of the devastating weather events we have experienced this summer are the result of human-caused climate change.

It is predicted that global temperatures will increase by up to 2 degrees over the next 20 years based on our current activities. While climate change is already occurring and will continue to impact the earth, the harms associated with 2 degrees warming are not inevitable. The Report demonstrates that modifications can be made to reduce the warming to 1.5 degrees, which is the threshold identified to avoid the worst of the harms arising from climate change. However, such modifications would require drastic change.

According to the Report, local governments have a key role in preventing such harm. Litigation associated with climate related harms has already begun and will likely increase. To avoid such liability in the years to come, it is recommended that local governments consider the ways in which they can act now to reduce the impact on their communities, thereby reducing the likelihood of liability.

In a [previous article](#) it was explained that, in the context of environmental issues and regulatory liability risks, the higher the degree of knowledge of a potential harm, the higher degree of care is expected of local governments. This article is intended to provide an overview of some of the key takeaways from the Report as they may inform the expectations of local governments moving forward.

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The Report unequivocally explains that human activities have warmed the atmosphere, ocean, and land alike. Human-induced climate change has already impacted weather and climate in every region of the globe. For example, ongoing heavy precipitation, heatwaves, drought, and tropical cyclones can be attributed to human influence.

There are many adverse consequences related to climate change for local governments to consider. Specifically, the Report confirms that an increase in global temperature is projected to negatively affect human health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth.

The Report explains that cooperation amongst all levels of government as well as non-state actors is needed to successfully implement the systemic change that is required, along with increased adaptation measures in both rural and urban areas. Such measures include an energy system transition as well as carbon dioxide removal initiatives. It is essential for all levels of government to collaborate on such efforts to ensure their success, and participate in risk sharing to implement these much-needed changes.

Land use is a critical component of limiting global warming. Sustainable land management and mitigation efforts, particularly in terms of agriculture and

forestry, have the potential to help limit warming to the 1.5°C threshold. The Report also recommends reducing the demand for land, energy and material resources as well as restoring natural ecosystems. Moreover, local governments have the capacity to implement sustainable water management, invest in green infrastructure and urban agriculture initiatives, as well as deliver sustainable water and environmental services.

To avoid the worst of climate change impacts, the Report makes several recommendations, many of which local governments can put into effect, in collaboration with other levels of government. The recommended focus for local governments is identified as energy transition, carbon dioxide removal, and restoring natural ecosystems as well as implementing sustainable land management practices.

With the numerous opportunities available for local governments and the specific cautions and recommendations set out in the Report, there are many ways in which local governments can create policies to make a positive impact on reducing climate change.

September, 2021

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