



London Climate Action Week 2023 - Event Recap “Harnessing Data for Accelerated Climate Action”

IEEP UK, in partnership with [ui!]uk, organised a successful event hosted by the Greater London Authority (GLA) at City Hall on 27 June 2023 as part of [London Climate Action Week](#). With four very different perspectives, the event highlighted the importance of evidence-based policy making by local authorities to deliver on urban climate objectives.

IEEP UK Chair, Malini Mehra, said:

“We’re delighted to have worked with the London Assembly, [ui!]uk and ICLEI on this timely event at City Hall. If harnessed correctly, the data revolution can massively scale positive climate impact. But its risks need to be managed to ensure democratic accountability. Today’s event was a good step to improved understanding in the local government context. It follows on the heels of IEEP UK’s earlier examination of environmental data and reporting frameworks in the UK after exiting the European Union. We look forward to further substantive engagement with London Assembly and local government partners to promote best practice in the use of environmental intelligence.”

The Chair of the GLA Environment Committee, Leonie Cooper AM who hosted the event, said:

“London’s data store is a vast repository of environmental data, used to measure key environmental indicators, such as tree canopy, heat maps, emissions inventories, and water, among others. The use of data to monitor water reservoirs in London has helped reduce plastic bottle waste by 1.6 million in 2023.”

“Data is crucial to assess London’s air quality, it is integral to measuring air pollution, traffic, the efficacy of net zero capable taxis and buses, among others. There are over 200 automatic monitors recording data every 15 minutes, and postings have gone up, from around 2,000 before the pandemic, to nearly 4,000 today.”

Leonie pointed to the [London Data Store](#) and its 201 environmental datasets which are helping to shape climate action in the capital. From air quality data which is helping to drive policies that encourage taxi operators to shift into zero emissions vehicles or help to spot trends in the use of woodfire burning stoves, to *Oyster* and public transportation use, and [GiGL](#) and its help in driving forward biodiversity net gain policies.

Yunus Arikan, spoke to the conference via live stream from Bonn, Germany. As Director of Global Advocacy at [ICLEI](#) (Local Governments for Sustainability), with more than 2500 local and regional governments involved in his network sustainable urban development, he is highly experienced and cognisant of the challenges and opportunities for London in using its wealth of resources to meet its climate objectives.

Yunus spoke passionately about the spearhead role that cities have had in pushing international action on climate action - whether it be Toronto and its 1988 commitment to carbon dioxide gas reduction targets or ICLEI’s climate action campaign in 1991. The latter has evolved into several partners working together bringing in thousands of cities using carbon climate registry platforms to measure and monitor emissions which then became a key component of the UN data reporting platform for the IPCC process later on. Yunus acknowledged that not all cities are working at the same pace in tackling climate change but those like London are raising the bar for everyone else.

Co-organiser, **Antony Page** from [\[ui!\]uk](#) brought a very different perspective to the night’s proceedings. As managing director of [\[ui!\]uk](#), Antony reminded the audience of the increasing number of instances of collaboration of public, private and the third sector in working together to tackle the climate crisis. Highlighting specific case studies such as the one from [Paramatta](#) in Australia, Antony talked of an urban brownfield site which was redeveloped using Internet of Things (IoT) sensors¹ to monitor environmental impacts (air quality, particulates, water quality etc) before the building work commenced.

Antony emphasised the importance of ‘moving beyond data collection in informing policy creation’ to a stage where data and information was integral to decision making. However, Antony warned that this must be done within a clear governmental framework, with a common understanding between public and private sectors of data ethics and privacy, with a transparent decision-making structure and an unambiguous view of data sovereignty where local authorities must manage that data.

Michael Nicholson, Head of UK Environmental Policy at [IEEP UK](#) grounded the discussion by speaking about fundamental concepts and the challenges around using data and information in public policy making. He highlighted the importance of being crystal clear about *what*

¹ physical objects (or groups of such objects) with sensors, processing ability, software and other technologies that connect and exchange data with other devices and systems over the Internet or other communications networks.

data and information is being collected and what that says about the state of the environment, as well as *where* it is held and *who* holds it, *how* it is transferred from one entity to another, how it is checked and *quality assured*, and whether it can be produced in a *consistent and repeatable* way and in a *comparable* way e.g., between cities and other urban areas and how it is *accessed* by the public as well as by scrutiny bodies. The challenges in managing the costs of collecting, analysing and communicating data and information is a concern but so is ensuring the timeliness and quality of data and information as well whether or not public authorities have the right skills e.g., data scientists who can interpret and analyse complex data and information sets.