



## Highlights of an Oak evaluation on sustainable cities

### Introduction

Cities are often chaotic and complex places to live where change occurs constantly. As a funder with partners actively trying to make our communities cleaner, healthier and safer, these dynamics can make it challenging to achieve the right impact.

To better understand Oak's role in shaping the future prosperity of a city, we recently undertook an evaluation of the impact of our sustainable cities grant-making. The results provided an interesting insight into what was working, what was not and how we can take these learnings forward.

### Outcomes:

The central tenet of the evaluation was that there are multiple theories of change across multiple geographies, delivering multiple outcomes.

In India and China, the most significant outcomes were in helping to support progressive government policy and practice, but were less impactful on how businesses behaved.

In India, the impact at the government level could be largely attributed to the role partners played in providing technical assistance to government agencies. This was supported in parallel with focused advocacy that used communications and mobilisation tactics to create public awareness. This introduced new narratives and demonstrated public demand for environmental improvements and improved wellbeing.

In China, partners placed their emphasis on government policy (including national plans, policies and standards). This involved a combination of demonstration projects at the sub-national level by providing technical assistance to research institutions across the national, state and city-wide spectrum. These projects were highly successful in leveraging millions of dollars in provincial and city government investments.

New data generation and analytical tools to support policy implementation also created additional platforms for driving policy changes forward. For example, making government data more publicly available, transparent and accessible to the public had a positive impact on policy enforcement on both state and business actors.

In Brazil, while partners continue to try changing government policy (including national plans, policies and standards) the emphasis was more on implementation. The overall balance of grant-making is more focussed on citizen voice and public mobilisation. As a result, the outcomes in Brazil are more around changes in public participation in environmental governance.

### **Next steps:**

- *Inclusive approaches:* Cities can be the engines for deeper and quicker emission reductions if partners and funders are able to adapt their strategies and develop an inclusive and participatory approach to cities.
- *Theory of change:* Putting in place a clear and solid theory of change that can be applied to different contexts including cities would improve impact.
- *Mainstreaming the grant-making process:* Grant-making needs to support more cities adopting low carbon approaches and for those approaches to be implemented quickly. The methodologies being used by partners for mainstreaming ideas are not sufficiently assessed and monitored.
- *Citizen engagement:* The predominant theory of change used by partners is very heavily focused on technical and policy-focused approaches and on city contributions to national or global climate policy. Outside of Brazil there is insufficient emphasis on how citizens engage with city decision-making and advocate for positive change.
- *Timelines:* The outcomes identified are typically not just a product of three year grants, but of much longer periods of work by organizations embedded in their national and local contexts.
- *New cities:* While most urban growth in the coming century is likely to take place in Africa the Oak environment Programme grant-making related to cities work is predominantly focused on a few countries. Partners are focused on larger cities and those which already have political willingness to act. There may be opportunities for wider impact that are being missed as a result.