

# EmiratesGBC 2024 Congress Briefing

***Beyond COP28: The Role of the Built Environment to Deliver on the UAE Consensus.***

*Under the Patronage of the **Ministry of Energy & Infrastructure.***

## Panel 2.2 Briefing: Municipalities Empowering Decarbonization in the Built Environment

“Municipalities Empowering Decarbonization in the Built Environment” panel delves into the complexities municipalities face in developing green building codes, providing participants with an understanding of both the process and effectiveness of these codes. The discussion will also highlight strategies through which municipalities can amplify the impact of green building codes on sustainable construction practices.

### Speakers

**Dr. Abeer Sajwani**, Section Head, Policies and Environment Planning and Infrastructure Sector, DMT, Abu Dhabi

**Aisha Saleh Ali ALTunaiji**, Director of Spatial Information Systems Department, Ajman Municipality

**Eng. Aameera Ahmad Aljasmii**, Green Building Engineer, Research and Building Systems Section, Building Permits Department, Dubai Municipality

**Andrea Di Gregorio**, Executive Director, Energy Efficiency and Renewables Office (Reem), Ras Al Khaimah Municipality

**Alida Saleh**, Head of Sustainability - MEA, JLL; Senior Advisor, Climate Champions Team, Built Environment, as Moderator

The UAE’s transformation from arid deserts to thriving urban landscapes is not merely a feat of construction but a testament to a vision that balances growth with environmental stewardship. Cities are envisioned as ecosystems, where the green building guidelines set by municipalities are more than just regulatory documents; they are pathways to a sustainable future. These guidelines encourage developers and architects to embrace resource efficiency, sustainable design, and resilient infrastructure, while ongoing collaboration between municipalities, stakeholders, and communities drives progress.

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The discussion began with an overview of Abu Dhabi's built environment initiatives, specifically its goal to reduce carbon emissions by 22% by 2027 through mitigation and adaptation strategies. **Abu Dhabi's Department of Municipalities and Transport (DMT)** highlighted ongoing progress and key initiatives aligned with these goals.

**Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) Municipality** then shared insights into its Energy Efficiency and Renewables Strategy 2040, emphasizing the municipality's green building regulations and retrofit programs, which include energy-efficient practices and a growing focus on renewable energy integration. Moving forward, **RAK Municipality** stressed the importance of retrofitting for energy efficiency and optimizing renewable installations based on project-specific needs and grid considerations.

The **Ajman Municipality** discussed its commitment to the UAE 2050 strategy through the Ajman Carbon Neutrality Path. This phased approach begins with industrial facilities and will later expand to government and commercial institutions. In the initial phase, Ajman has been calculating carbon footprints and devising targeted action plans to reduce emissions. Sustainability efforts are concentrated on the existing 70% of the built environment in Ajman due to the emirate's high degree of development, emphasizing a need for deep retrofitting over new construction.

**Dubai Municipality** highlighted its strategic approach to a sustainable built environment, aligning with UAE and Dubai's long-term strategies. Key initiatives include waste recycling in construction, establishing guidelines for recycled content in materials, and developing an online platform for construction-sector innovation. **Dubai Municipality** is actively working on standards for retrofitting and is set to update building codes and guidelines regularly to keep pace with rapid urban growth.

The panel explored how Estidama, a green building program tailored for the GCC, compares to global standards. Estidama's mandatory adoption in Abu Dhabi sets it apart, requiring government projects to achieve higher sustainability levels. **DMT Abu Dhabi** noted that the program could gain wider acceptance if linked with financial incentives, such as green loans, tied to measurable reductions in energy and water usage.

**RAK Municipality** described the unique aspects of its Barjeel regulations, which simplify compliance by focusing on fewer but stricter requirements, allowing developers to achieve energy efficiency through approaches like enhanced insulation. Barjeel's streamlined framework, informed by lessons from other emirates, enables easier implementation of sustainability practices.

Moving on, **Ajman Municipality** noted its adoption of mandatory green building standards in 2018 for specific building types and is currently benchmarking other municipalities to enhance its guidelines. Furthermore, **Dubai Municipality** elaborated on Al Sa'fat, Dubai's green building rating system, which mandates regular updates to align with Decree 45 of 2021. **Dubai Municipality** emphasizes a collaborative approach with contractors and consultants to ensure the guidelines remain relevant and impactful.

The discussion then focused on creating a unified UAE green building framework that balances national standards with regional flexibility. **Ajman Municipality** emphasized the need for a national baseline to present a cohesive sustainability front, while **DMT Abu Dhabi** pointed to the value of regional autonomy in achieving tailored sustainability targets based on each emirate's development pace and market maturity. **RAK Municipality** echoed this sentiment, emphasizing the critical role of adaptable guidelines in fostering innovation across diverse regions.

The session concluded with an enriching dialogue on empowering decarbonization through green building standards, exploring both local adaptations and the potential for a national guideline across the UAE.