



UN-HABITAT

**PROMOTING SOUTH-SOUTH AND TRIANGULAR COOPERATION IN
SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABLE URBANISATION**

**By
Anna Tibaijuka
Executive Director, UN-HABITAT and
Director-General, United Nations Office at Nairobi**

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*Honourable Chair,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

I am honoured to be part of the deliberations of this high-level panel on south-south cooperation. South-south cooperation is a centrepiece of UN-Habitat's mandate and way of doing business. It has been so since the adoption of the Habitat Agenda by member States in Istanbul 1996. This global plan of action calls for enhanced cooperation, transfer of technology, and the systematic exchange of knowledge, expertise and experience at all levels to meet its twin goals of "shelter for all" and "sustainable urbanisation".

Excellencies,

As you are all aware, urbanisation is taking place at an unprecedented scale and pace in the South. Recent estimates indicate that about 2 billion people will be added to the number of urban dwellers in the developing countries over the next 25 years. To meet the needs of this additional population, an average of 35 million new houses, and the requisite infrastructure and services, will have to be provided every year for the next 25 years. Of the one billion urban dwellers currently living in slums, 94 per cent are in the South. In the Least Developed Countries, 78 per cent of the urban population live in slums, while 42 per cent of the urban population in all developing countries combined are slum dwellers.

The scale and pace of this irreversible transition poses considerable challenges. The first challenge is that the battle for attaining the Millennium Development Goals will be won or lost in cities. Unless very large amounts of investments are made in housing and urban development over the next two decades, the majority of the South's growing urban population will not escape the trap of urban poverty, deplorable housing conditions, poor health, poor nutrition, and low productivity.

***Mainstreaming South-South cooperation at the inter-governmental level
Distinguished delegates,***

The second challenge that follows the first is the need to mainstream the urban agenda. How we will mobilize the required resources will depend to a large degree on building awareness of the issues at stake. This has been recognised by the Governing Council for UN-Habitat. At its most recent session, concluded last month, three resolutions were adopted in support of meeting these challenges. This first resolution deals with Guidelines of decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities. The second pertains to Guiding principles on access to basic services. The third pertains to the implementation of experimental revolving seeding operations to provide housing finance for the poor. All three of these resolutions call for enhancing the role of local authorities, the private and civil society sectors in support of attaining the human settlements related MDGs. South-south cooperation are essential components to the follow-up implementation of all these resolutions.

***South-South cooperation – towards a global framework
Mr. Chairman,***

The first step in any form of cooperation, including south-south cooperation, is to match supply with demand for knowledge, expertise and experience in a systematic manner.

With the generous support from the Government of the People's Republic of China, UN-Habitat has conducted a number of global activities designed to promote both south-south and triangular cooperation in the area of housing and urban development. These activities have been designed to help forge a global framework for the exchange of knowledge and experience to make our work at the regional and country level more effective. They include a series of international conferences hosted by a number of Chinese cities since 2000.

The first in this series of conferences was the “Chengdu International Conference on Learning from Best Practices”, held in the City of Chengdu in 2000. This Conference brought together 220 participants from 26 countries as part of the preparatory process for the special session of the General Assembly on the review of progress in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The Conference resulted in the Chengdu Declaration, which provided future directions on how the international community, cities and their associations could further the implementation of the Habitat Agenda through the systematic exchange and transfer of best practice expertise and experience.

The second was the “International Conference on Financing Social Housing”, which was held in the City of Baotou, in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China, in August in 2002. This conference was attended by housing finance stakeholders from all developing regions of the world.

The third was the “International Conference on Sustainable Urbanization Strategies”, held in Weihai in 2003. The aim of the conference was to compare national experiences in the areas of social and economic development strategies in support of more balanced territorial development.

The fourth and most recent in this series of conferences was the “Nanning International Conference on Sustainable Urban Development: From Research to Action”, hosted by the City of Nanning in 2005. The Conference, which also benefited from the generous support of the European Commission, brought together approximately 400 representatives of all spheres of government, scientific and research bodies, national development agencies, international financial institutions and other UN agencies to share their experiences in disseminating and applying research results in the formulation of housing and urban development policies, within the context of south-south and triangular cooperation.

The Nanning International Conference gave birth to a new partnership on “Research for Sustainable Urban Development and Land Use” between UN-HABITAT and the European Commission. This partnership, launched at the Second Session of the World Urban Forum in Barcelona in September 2004, promotes south-south and triangular cooperation in the area of sustainable urban development. The two organizations are also working on a number of initiatives that bring together actors from the North and from the South on specific projects in urban development and land-use planning.

South-south cooperation at the regional level Excellencies

The Millennium Declaration demonstrated the commitment of the world’s leaders to accelerate the attainment of the MDGs. Paragraph 56(m) re-iterated the importance of slum upgrading and called for further and urgent action to prevent the future formation of slums. For this reason, slum improvement and slum prevention have become an important part of our efforts at the regional level.

Learning from the seminal experience of the Meeting of Ministers and High-level authorities on Housing and Urban Development for the Latin America and the Caribbean region (MINURVI), UN-Habitat organized, in collaboration with the Governments of South Africa and India, Ministerial Meetings on Housing and Urban Development for Africa and the Asia and Pacific regions.

These meetings, held in 2006 and 2007 respectively, provide a forum for exchange of policies, strategies and lessons learned from experience in meeting the challenges of rapid urbanisation and urban growth.

Regional high-level meetings will now take place on annual basis, and we plan to expand this series in 2008 to include countries with economies in transition.

South-South Cooperation- towards a knowledge infrastructure Distinguished delegates,

Effective south-south cooperation also depends on a sound knowledge infrastructure. UN-Habitat’s Best Practices and Local Leadership Programme has played a pivotal role in promoting south-south cooperation in recent years. UN-Habitat’s Best Practices Database is a global repository of experiences on how people and civil society institutions, with the support of governments, the private sector and the international community, have been improving the living environment, reducing poverty and promoting gender equality and social inclusion. The database is fed by submissions to

the Dubai International Award for Best Practices to Improve the Living Environment. After ten years of the Dubai Award and the Best Practices Programme, the database contains more than 2,500 best practices from 140 countries, the vast majority of them from the South.

The database is the largest of its kind and is used extensively by organisations around the world to match supply with demand for best practice expertise, not only for south-south cooperation, but also in several instances for south-north cooperation.

One of these organisations is the Ibero-american and Caribbean Forum on Best Practices established in 1997 with the support of the Government of Spain. The Forum consists of a regional network of capacity-building institutions dedicated to the transfer of best practices knowledge and expertise in the Latin America and Caribbean region, and has produced transfer tools and methodologies that are applicable in other regions.

South-south cooperation at the country level
Mr. Chairman,

In a similar vein, UN-HABITAT has, at one time, more than 100 technical cooperation initiatives around the world. Most of these are pilot projects designed to test new approaches, practices and policies in attaining the human settlements related MDGs. Increasingly, they are implemented within the context of south-south cooperation, involving governments, local authorities, the private and civil society sectors. Two examples include our water and sanitation initiatives for the Lake Victoria basin and for the Mekong River basin. Both of these initiatives involve rapidly growing towns and cities in several countries. However, they share the same eco-system, a common source of livelihood and a single source of fresh water. Preserving these eco-systems while meeting the growing demands for freshwater and economic production can only be achieved through enhanced south-south trans-boundary cooperation.

Excellencies,

Allow me to conclude by sharing some lessons learned from experience and pointers for the future. South-south cooperation has become increasingly effective and meaningful in an information society. The use of information-communication-technology affords us unprecedented opportunities for matching supply with demand for knowledge, expertise, know-how and technology. It is incumbent upon us to make use of this opportunity. One small but I believe significant contribution that UN-Habitat can make is to offer its Best Practices database and knowledge management system as the portal for south-south cooperation for sustainable development.

South-south cooperation also takes on new significance in light of UN system-wide reform. It provides new means of achieving greater coherence as country teams learn from each other's experience across borders. It also provides for effective means of reducing transaction costs as we avoid re-inventing the wheel. For this reason, south-south cooperation needs to be come an explicit and well-funded endeavour in forging a UN operating as one.

I thank you for your kind attention.