Lessons and Recommendations from Strategic Evaluations &
their Integration into UN-Habitat’s Future Planning
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1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents a synthesis of lessons learned and recommendations from strategic evaluations and their integration into UN-Habitat’s future planning. The report also highlights challenges and presents next steps. It is based on 24 evaluations conducted since the beginning of the implementation of the Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTSIP) in 2008. However, the synthesis focuses on the evaluations of the Global Land Tool Net Work (GLTN), the Experimental Reimbursable Seeding Operations (ERSO), the Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF), Gender Mainstreaming and the Youth Programme, as well as the Mid-term Review of the Water and Sanitation Trust Fund (WSTF), the WSTF impact study, and the Peer Review of the MTSIP. The summary of the lessons and recommendations from these eight evaluations is reflected in Annex 1 of this document.

2. EVALUATIONS CARRIED OUT FROM 2008 TO APRIL 2011

The Biennium Evaluation Plan, detailing the evaluations to be conducted, is prepared along with the work programme and budget and is approved by the General Assembly. However, the plan is flexible and other evaluations can be added. The implementation of the plan also depends on availability of resources.

For the 2008-2009 and 2010-2011 biennium work programmes, 8 and 10 external evaluations were planned, respectively. As of April 2011, 24 evaluations had been conducted, resulting in an implementation rate of 133%. These evaluations exclude the mandatory self-assessments conducted by programme managers for reporting on achievement of expected accomplishments in the programme performance report.1 Figure 1 and Table 1 show categories and titles of evaluations conducted from January 2008 to April 2011.

Figure 1: Number and percentages of types of evaluations conducted in 2008 – April 2011

As shown in Figure 1, 54% of the evaluations were thematic in nature. Except for the GLTN evaluation which was requested by the Management, all were requested by either the UN-Habitat Governing Council (GC) or donors. Twenty-five per cent were programme/project evaluations, mostly requested by the programme management, and 21% were institutional in nature.

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1 For 2008-2009 and 2010-2011, this involves assessment and reporting on 49 expected accomplishments, gauged by 70 indicators of achievement.
Table 1: Evaluations and reviews conducted during 2008-April 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Title of the Evaluation/Review</th>
<th>Requested/initiated by</th>
<th>No. of Rec</th>
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<td>DE</td>
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<td>ME</td>
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<td>ME</td>
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<td>Donor</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>ME</td>
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<td>Thematic</td>
<td>A global impact study of UN-HABITAT’s gender mainstreaming and pro-poor initiatives in water and sanitation in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria in Africa; India, Lao PDR, Nepal and Vietnam in Asia; and Nicaragua in the Latin America and Caribbean Region</td>
<td>Management</td>
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<td>Evaluation of Experimental Reimbursable Seeding Operations (ERSO)</td>
<td>GC</td>
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**KEY:**
- **DI** = Discretionary Internal evaluations, initiated by programme managers & conducted by external consultants or internal evaluators.
- **DE** = Discretionary External evaluations- commissioned by programme managers but conducted by external entities.
- **ME** = Mandatory External evaluations - requested by the GC and conducted by external evaluators.
3. SHARED COMMON LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EVALUATIONS

Analysis of 8 synthesized reports reveals shared common lessons and recommendations relating to structural and administrative arrangements, programme planning and resources, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting and communication.

i) Structural and administrative arrangements
The lessons and recommendations identified issues relating to:
- Improvement of structural and governance arrangements (MTSIP, GLTN, ERSO, WSTF, Gender).
- Administrative procedures including procurement (GLTN, ERSO, MTSIP).
- Consideration of effective policies (Gender, youth, MTSIP).

ii) Programme planning and resources
With regard to programme planning, most lessons and recommendation related to:
- Improving programme planning (MTSIP, GLTN, Gender, Youth, WSTF, and ERSO).
- Defining programme priorities in strategic and work programme document (MTSIP, GLTN, and Gender).
- Feasibility studies (ERSO, SUF, and WSTF).
- Improving coordination (MTSIP, WSTF).
- Consideration of strategic issues of UN environment (Gender, MTSIP).
- Feeding lessons learned into new planning (GLTN, ERSO, WSTF).
- Adequacy of resources (SUF, ERSO, MTSIP).
- Improvement of internal communication (MTSIP, WSTF).
- Internal and external coordination (Gender, Youth, WSTF, ERSO, SU, GTLN).
- Consultations with relevant stakeholders (WTSF, GLTN).
- Resource mobilization (SUF, ERSO, WTSF).
- Focus on UN-Habitat priorities (WSTF, MTSIP, Gender, and ERSO).
- Revising strategies (GLTN, WSTF, Youth, and Gender).

iii) Programme implementation
Regarding programme implementation, the following issues were noted as necessary for effective programme implementation:
- Delivery of the right activities in order to achieve programme goals (MTSIP).
- Efficient internal communication and collaboration with partners (MTSIP, GLTN, ERSO).
- Enhanced Partnership (WSTF, ERSO, MTSIP, and GLTN).
- Global, regional and country cohesion and coordination (MTSIP, Gender, Youth WSTF).
- Capacity improvement (WTSF, GLTN, Gender).
- Scale and replicate (SUF).

iv) Monitoring and evaluation
- Establishing clear roles and responsibilities (MTSIP, Youth).
- Developing monitoring and evaluation framework in the planning documents (MTSIP, Gender, WSTF, and GLTN).
- More feasibility studies, reviews and evaluations (WSTF, ERSO, MTSIP, Youth).
- Monitor, evaluate and report (all evaluations/reviews).

v) Communication and reporting
- Sharing of experiences (ERSO, GLTN).
- Raising awareness (MTSIP, WSTF).
- Improving information systems (GLTN, WSTF).
4. INTEGRATION OF LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS INTO FUTURE PLANNING

Evaluation purposes relate to programme performance improvement, knowledge generation and learning, and accountability. However, the value of evaluations depends on effective use. To be utilized, evaluations should serve the information needs of intended users. An evaluation that users consider irrelevant may be of no use, even when it is methodologically sound.

There are preconditions that aid the processes of effective evaluation follow-up and utilization. These include good evaluation planning, quality evaluation implementation and reports, management response and action plans for implementing recommendations, dissemination of evaluation findings, and follow up to implementation of evaluation findings and utilization of evaluations.

4.1 Follow-up to evaluations

Evaluation findings and recommendations should be follow-up to influence decision-making, and the lessons learned should be applied in future programme planning, design and delivery of new programmes and projects. UN-Habitat has demonstrated that management response, follow-up and reporting at regular intervals increase the implementation rate and use of the recommendations. Thirteen (13) recommendations in the in-depth evaluation of UN-Habitat by the OIOS were all implemented within the specified timeframe of 3 years and all processes on MTSIP resulted from the use of evaluation recommendations.

4.2 Using lessons and recommendations for future planning

In UN-Habitat, evaluation is increasingly being viewed as playing an important role feeding not only into programmes and projects, but also into the work programme of UN-Habitat as a whole. The results of the recommendations from the evaluation of ERSO resulted in the adoption of a significant resolution at the 23rd session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council (GC) that will change the planning and implementation of ERSO.

Implementation of recommendations from the Review of the World Urban Forum Sessions 2002-2008 is changing our planning and implementation of the WUF sessions. With regard to the Peer Review of the MTSIP in 2009, the recommendation to consider organizational review is the basis for the current organizational review. A further external evaluation has been initiated that will provide recommendations on organizational restructuring. This in turn will influence the implementation of most recommendations in the MTSIP Peer Review. Implementation of fifteen (15) out of 16 recommendations of the mid-term assessment of the Global Land Tool Network, GLTN (2010) is on track and lessons learned will feed into the planning of the second phase.

The GLTN evaluation recommendation regarding mechanisms to mainstream grassroots has been tested and finalized, and a plan, with appropriate resources, will be put in place to revisit all GLTN tools and publications.

Incorporating lessons learnt through its normative and operational pilot activities, the WATSAN iTrust Fund Unit developed a Strategic Plan for the period 2008–2012. The plan envisions the following outcomes for the programme2:

- Increased institutional capacity in partner countries for advocating/promoting and implementing pro-poor water and sanitation initiatives and policies with focus on gender equity, renewable energy and energy efficiency and environmental sustainability;

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2 WSTF impact study 2010, pg. 11; Mid-term progress report (Jan.-June 2009), pg.16
• Increased flow of investment into the water and sanitation sector catalyzed by WSTF interventions; and
• Improved Millennium Development Goals monitoring mechanisms in place in partner countries, with improved benchmarking of water and sanitation service providers.

Publications of lessons learned from experience in the development and implementation of strategic urban development plans and evaluations of the SUF, GLTN, Safer cities national projects and programmes and WATSAN Trust Fund have informed the debate and stimulated exchange of information inside and outside UN-Habitat on urban planning, management and governance3.

The GLTN Review (March 2010) recommendation on the need to adapt gender criteria for evaluation of land-related projects and programmes (e.g. evaluating project designs at appraisal, mid-term and ex-post)’ was piloted in Ghana, Nepal and Brazil for evaluating policies and programmes, and the results documented in August 2010.

The lessons from the review of the Safer Cities programme in Tanzania have been used, among others, to:
• guide institutional arrangements and institutionalization at local and national levels; and
• realign UN-Habitat’s technical support according to shifting local needs and the requirements for national replication.

5. KEY CHALLENGES

• Limited evaluation capacity: With the current capacity of three professional staff and limited consultancy support, the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit is limited to planning, managing, and follow-up of the implementation of evaluation recommendations, in addition to carrying out monitoring and reporting on work programme and MTSIP implementation.

• Following-up the implementation of monitoring and evaluation recommendations: Many recommendations are contained in the evaluation reports. Considerable work remains to be done in reviewing the recommendations, developing management responses and implementation action plans to promote a culture that uses evaluation findings to make decisions and improve planning.

• Implementation of evaluation plans is not assured: This is because the conduct of evaluations is not based on the priorities of the biennium evaluation plans, but rather on the preferences of and availability of resources from donors.

• Project and programme level evaluations face multiple challenges: These include resistance of programme managers to have their activities evaluated; inadequate tools for evaluating special interventions such as humanitarian assistance; and reliance on outsourcing for evaluations, who require time to understand the context and operations of the organization and are very expensive..

6. NEXT STEPS

UN-Habitat is in the process of finalizing a new policy and guidelines framework for Monitoring and Evaluation functions. The framework covers requirements for organizational, subprogramme and project level monitoring and evaluation activities as well as guidelines to ensure effective planning, implementation and reporting, as well as appropriate mechanisms for sharing of findings and lessons learned, and follow-up through the implementation of recommendations.
• Peer review of the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit has been initiated. It will be undertaken by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG), Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). The review will be completed in November 2011, and will evaluate the efficiency of the monitoring and evaluation function and give recommendations for improvement.

• The UN-Habitat evaluation website, www.unhabitat.org/evaluation, is to be updated to facilitate knowledge sharing. It will include evaluation summaries and templates for following-up accepted evaluation recommendations.

• The Programme Review Committee (PRC), which is responsible for approving programmes/projects, will take steps to ensure that approved programmes design good logical frameworks with good indicators of achievement that will make it easy to monitor and evaluate the programmes/projects.

7. CONCLUSION

• Evaluations conducted since 2008 were thematic (54%), institutional (21%) and programme/project focused (24%). The lessons learned and recommendations have commonality on a number of key issues and themes, including organizational performance, in terms of both organizational and strategic priorities; institutional and administrative issues; as well as planning and implementation of programmes.

• Evaluations have been used, resulting in better informed and relevant decision-making, improved performance and accountability. There is room for improvement in conducting evaluations, and in the effective use of the findings and recommendations of evaluations.

• The new monitoring and evaluation policy and guidelines will help in improving the evaluation culture in UN-Habitat and in the effective assessment of UN-Habitat’s interventions at the global, regional and country levels. The Portfolio Review review of UN-Habitat’s programmes and projects found that only 5% of the programmes and projects had been evaluated. With the organization’s increasing emphasis on Result-Based Managements, this situation should change.

• Without adequate resources for evaluation and effective use of evaluation findings, UN-Habitat, as a learning organization, will not fully benefit from the evaluation function. Adequate resources and mechanisms should therefore be put in place for the implementation of evaluation plans, as well as for monitoring the implementation of evaluation recommendations.
ANNEX 1

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM EIGHT SPECIFIED EVALUATIONS

i). Peer Review of the implementation of the MTSIP

- **Purpose of Evaluation**
  - To assess the status of implementation of the MTSIP and make recommendations for improvement, and to assess institutional and strategic arrangements used to further strengthen the MTSIP implementation.

- **Lessons learned (4)**
  - An unintended consequence of the MTSIP adoption was the creation of overlapping systems of data collection and reporting.
  - Early engagement on strategic issues and clarity of purpose are essential in tackling sensitive issues.
  - During times of institutional change, taskforces can be useful.
  - Major reviews of the organization level require adequate time and resources.

- **Recommendations (16)**
  - The Executive Director to consider a new organizational structure of UN-Habitat.
  - UN-Habitat to establish a unified planning and reporting system.
  - Policy and programme priorities to be defined in strategic frameworks and programme of work.
  - Strategic planning, monitoring and reporting should be coordinated by a central management unit.
  - An independent evaluation function should be established.
  - Coordination at global, regional and country level to be formalized and strengthened.
  - Regional offices to play a more active role in promoting Enhanced Normative Operational Framework.
  - Programmatic aspects of MTSIP should be re-emphasized while continuing with institutional reform.
  - UN-Habitat to identify efforts to raise its profile.
  - UN-Habitat to define clearly its role and expected results in policy research, capacity building etc.
  - UN-Habitat to undertake independent assessment and systematically monitor its work at country level.
  - UN-Habitat to carry out evaluation of disaster activities.
  - UN-Habitat to concentrate more on staff composition, competency and commitment at all levels.
  - UN-Habitat should review service level agreement with UNON.
  - UN-habitat should prepare an assessment of financial risks, including diversifying fundraising efforts.
  - Communication problems should be addressed as a matter of priority.

ii). Mid –Term Assessment of the GLTN

- **Purpose**
  - To inform planning and decision making for the remaining period of the second phase of GLTN which ends December 2011. The assessment results to be used by donors for accountability purposes and for future funding decisions as well as for learning of UN-Habitat and its partners.

- **Recommendations (14)**
  - Improve the GLTN website by revising the structure and content of the website.
  - Revise the training and capacity building strategy and incorporate outputs to achieve the strategy.
  - UN-Habitat to hold regular partnership meetings.
UN-Habitat and UNON to improve the efficiency of procurement and other administrative procedures.
- GLTN secretariat should undertake internal administrative reforms.
- The steering committee should take up the administrative issues and concerns.
- GLTN to update and disseminate findings on land-related projects.
- Testing gender evaluation criteria for projects is needed.
- Develop an overall strategy on how to engage activities at country level.
- Develop GLTN medium to long-term strategy and associated staffing plans.
- Review effectiveness of GLTN communications and revise the communication strategy.
- A partnership and membership strategy should be developed.
- Develop knowledge on the linkages between tools and test value of multiple tools.
- Review institutional capacity of all international land agencies against the scale of global land needs.

iii) Evaluation of Gender Mainstreaming in UN-Habitat

Purpose
To assess what UN-Habitat has achieved in mainstreaming gender equality in its programmes and to inform decisions about how gender mainstreaming and related strategic partnerships can be improved.

Lessons Learned (6)
- There is no one best model/solution for all organizations for mainstreaming gender.
- Gender Mainstreaming is one concept that is deeply ingrained in international development policies.
- The situation of women is unlikely to improve unless initiatives are undertaken at the local level.
- Relevant gender indicators are hard to develop through a central unit.
- Having staff with gender expertise throughout the agency is an excellent resource.
- UN-Habitat’s programme and project documents use somewhat vague terminology around gender.

Recommendations (11)
- Focus attention to operationalizing, implementing and monitoring activities outlined in the Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP).
- Align GEAP with MTSIP monitoring process.
- The Programme Review Committee to ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment in projects/programmes are included in monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
- Clarify the Gender Mainstreaming Unit’s mandate and role within the agency and with partners.
- UN-Habitat gender policy guidance material should integrate key findings from relevant research on gender equality and women’s empowerment.
- Programmes/projects design should give greater consideration to potential impact of the intervention on gender equality and women’s empowerment and incorporate the results framework.
- Greater coherence between normative and operational work is needed, as is greater support for HPM’s to promote work towards gender equality with partners at country level.
- UN-Habitat policy lessons on the need to actively support women’s rights to land and housing especially in post crisis situations must be incorporated in planning.
- The organization should use its education and training material to challenge gender stereotypes around households.
- The partnership strategy should include criteria on the willingness and ability of the proposed partners to adopt approaches to gender equality.
Tensions between the Gender Mainstreaming Unit and Huairou Commission need to be resolved.

iv). Evaluation of the Experimental reimbursable seeding operations (ERSO)

Purpose
To assess implementation progress during the pilot period and suggest alternatives for more effective implementation of future activities, thus providing information to guide decision-making by the Governing Council at its twenty-third session on potential future applications of ERSO.

Lessons Learned (6)
- Feasibility studies to target programme beneficiaries and resources required: Absence of a feasibility study on how to run the ERSO programme led UN-Habitat to underestimate the resources required for implementing the pilot.
- Use of appropriate technical expertise: Having a sufficient level of financial service experts on board to provide support in projects dealing with urban development and housing with a finance component is an important contribution towards successful implementation of such projects.
- Flexible funding mechanisms: Having enough flexible funding agreements increases the effectiveness of the programme through a more diverse loan portfolio.
- Research and information dissemination to support innovations: Distilling lessons learned from UN-Habitat’s global research and feeding them into innovative finance programmes would build knowledge to scale up.
- Financial product development for strong finance institutions: Offering diverse funding options increases likelihood of developing projects where specific challenges exist.
- Proper implementation mechanisms to lessen the burden: To lessen the administrative burden when operating loan programme activities, it may be useful for the UN-Habitat Secretariat to conduct a feasibility study on how to fit a lending programme into a grant-giving institution.

Recommendations (10)
- UN-Habitat should continue supporting the ERSO programme owing to its relevance.
- A review study is recommended to advise ERSO on alternatives for implementation.
- UN-Habitat to define the beneficiary groups of its lending operations.
- For a future ERSO programme, analysis to assess the leveraging impact of individual loans should be done.
- UN-Habitat should explore future strategic partnership with UNCDF and IFAD.
- Negotiation and liaison with partners in financing affordable housing should be carried out.
- To reduce administrative challenges, consultations with UNON are necessary.
- UN-Habitat should share experience in innovative financial mechanism with other UN agencies.
- Operations of ERSO should be monitored and reported on and kept on track.

v). External Evaluation of Water and Sanitation Trust Fund (WSTF)

Purpose of Evaluation
To contribute to refinement, adjustments and improvements in the Trust Fund’s direction and practices.

Recommendations from Part 1 report (10)
- WSTF senior management to prepare a paper to be discussed with the Advisory Board on current status and alternative scenarios.
WSTF to consider the advantages and disadvantages of a re-establishing approach, status quo, or re-focusing strategy.

WSTF to reduce the number of operational regional and country programmes based on 3rd development strategy.

UN-Habitat to review the existing organizational and divisional structures to explore how Urban Water and Sanitation Branch can maintain its strengths and develop linkages with other parts of the organization.

UN-Habitat to restate and if necessary rephrase the importance of water and sanitation within the broader agenda for sustainable urban development.

WSTF Advisory Board to discuss the role and viability of trust funds in general, and WSTF in particular.

WSTF Advisory Board to ensure that WSTF’s future role in UN-Habitat is discussed in the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) and other appropriate governing bodies.

WSTF Advisory Board to provide professional and financial support to ensure smooth transition of the programme.

WSTF Advisory Board to continue funding in order to maintain ongoing activities.

WSTF Advisory Board to discuss future viability of Water and Sanitation Trust Fund.

Recommendations in the Regional and Country Reports (8)

Processes of the Water Sanitation Programme and Water and Sanitation Advisory Board are fragile and need support to ensure lasting effects.

UN-Habitat could conduct a review and comparison of reforms in three countries.

UN-Habitat should encourage town councils to arrange environmentally safe solid waste disposal sites.

UN-Habitat should work on sustainable strategy for micro loans to construct sanitation facilities.

Construction of rain water harvesting tanks and school latrines should be left to NGO’s, with UN-Habitat focusing on tasks of comparative advantage such as water sector reforms.

UN-Habitat to continue with the multi stakeholder forum but also encourage and re-motivate the forums.

Monitoring and Evaluation for Lake Victoria Water and Sanitation (LV-WATSAN) initiative should be focused to promote and replicate present activities.

LV-WATSAN should pay more attention to the environmental impact of Lake Victoria.

Youth Programme, including the Opportunities Fund for Youth-Led Development

Purpose
To serve as a management tool for UN-Habitat, donors and partners in ascertaining efficiency and effectiveness of the operation of the Youth Programme, specifically the Opportunities Fund for Urban Youth-led Development.

Lessons learned (5)

Strong demonstration of Youth in decision-making in UN-Habitat operations is necessary.

UN-Habitat’s “laboratory” (centers of excellence) is metaphor for running youth programmes.

Having staff with expertise of mainstreaming youth could contribute to more effective youth mainstreaming.

UN-Habitat’s different programmes for integrating youth empowerment are weakly institutionalized.

Linking the youth with other actors in urban youth issues such as the municipality and the private sector has led to win-win situations for UN-Habitat and the youth.
Recommendations (5)
- UN-Habitat should increase the capacity of youth programmes to strengthen its mandate.
- UN-Habitat should review the youth programme’s strategy for mainstreaming youth in order to do this more effectively.
- UN-Habitat should strengthen implementation of the Opportunities Fund for Youth-led Development by ensuring all objectives of the fund are implemented.
- UN-Habitat and its partners should review the governance structures of youth programmes to align them with UN-Habitat priorities.
- Monitoring, evaluation and reporting on youth projects and programmes should be improved.

vii). The first Water and Sanitation Trust Fund (WSTF) Impact Study

Purpose
To assess the impact of the WSTF activities.

Recommendations (10)
- Give greater focus on policy and strategic issues in addressing pro-poor urban WATSAN reforms.
- Make country strategy adjustments, including more strategic selection of activities and projects.
- UN-Habitat to build on progress made in leveraging investment finance from financial institutions.
- UN-Habitat’s country activities should consistently support municipalities’ WATSAN activities.
- UN-Habitat should play a central role in coordinating donors involved in the urban WATSAN sector.
- Country programmes that have not included specific gender mainstreaming activities should do so.
- Information management and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) monitoring should be strengthened.
- Project and programme administration should be strengthened, including improved project planning.
- UN-Habitat should improve its monitoring of WSTF funded interventions.
- UN-Habitat should improve its internal capacity by strengthening capacity in municipal services management, performance monitoring and reporting.

viii). End of Programme Evaluation: Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF) Pilot Programme

Purpose
To assess the extent to which the objectives and expected accomplishments and outcomes of SUF and its associated projects in each of the pilot countries (Ghana, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Tanzania) were met, and to present lessons learned and clear recommendations for action to inform future strategy and direction of SUF.

Initial Lessons learned (4)
- Building new institutions takes time and expectations of stakeholders have to be managed appropriately.
- Early engagement of national and municipal governments is important.
- Financial operations are fundamentally different from traditional roles of most UN Agencies. To sufficiently engage in finance at any significant scale requires supportive institutional involvement not only one or two finance experts.
- Major new initiatives should be preceded by an institutional analysis to identify policies and procedures that might hamper programme implementation.
Recommendations (5)
- A new SUF entity should be created anchored in an experienced financial institution.
- Six Local Financial Facilities (LFFs) established under the SUF pilot programme should continue to be supported by UN-HABITAT.
- The LFFs should pursue additional financing from local donors, including municipalities and governments.
- Two main activities, (i) project packaging and (ii) approval of credit enhancement, should be separated to avoid conflict of interest.
- LFFs should continue to strengthen their financial expertise.