BRIEFING NOTE ON THE PUBLIC SPACE PROGRAMME

12th September 2016

At the 23rd Governing Council of UN-Habitat in 2011, Member States asked UN-Habitat to focus on public space and how it can contribute to sustainable urban development. Specifically, UN-Habitat was mandated:

a) To advance the agenda on place-making and public spaces in a way that will consolidate local and international approaches to creating inclusive cities, enhance the knowledge of UN-Habitat partners and local authorities of place-making, public spaces and the quality of urban life, and facilitate and implement exchange, cooperation and research between partners working in this field;

b) To develop a policy approach on the role that public spaces can play in meeting the challenges of our rapidly urbanizing world, to disseminate that policy and its results widely and to develop a plan for ensuring its application internationally;

c) To assist in coordinating UN-Habitat partners in disseminating knowledge to existing sustainable urban development processes at all government levels.

In 2012, UN-Habitat launched the Programme on Public Space, supporting the sustainable human settlements and urban development approach which requires a good city plan with a sound legal framework and sustainable financial plan as a key strategy for addressing urban growth, especially for cities where population growth is rapid. The objectives of the Programme on Public Space are:

- to promote public space as an important element for creating sustainable cities, for improving the quality of life of urban citizens, and as a key message in the global dialogue leading up to Habitat III;
- to consolidate knowledge, good approaches, tools and methodologies on public space and make these accessible, particularly to local government partners;
- to engage the broader network of partners and public space practitioners in the global promotion of good policies and practice on public space; and
- to demonstrate, through pilot projects and in partnership with cities, the importance of public spaces in achieving social, economic, environmental and other benefits to cities.

The intention of the public space programme is to impact on the development of the whole city; to help improve capacity of local institutions and communities; and to contribute to long-term change. Therefore, UN-Habitat considers the following criteria before engaging with a city:

1) Public space pilot site/s have already been identified by the local government (and background information received by UN-Habitat);

2) Ownership and rights over the proposed site/s is clear;

3) The local authority or relevant government agency is the project owner and cooperation partner of UN-Habitat;
4) UN-Habitat can provide financing resources for technical services and one or two pilot/demonstration projects, but the government/local authority counterpart has to be committed to deliver other public space sites as a means of scaling up;

5) The public space project has to take a city-wide approach and have a city-wide impact, such as through a policy or strategy input; technical inputs to the master or structural plan for the city; through production of public space design, planning, implementation and management guidelines; through capacity building of local institutions, etc.

6) The opportunity to consolidate with a recent or on-going UN-Habitat programme in the same city will be prioritized as a means for ensuring city-wide impact;

7) UN-Habitat uses participatory approaches and relevant capacity building activities, which includes utilizing collaborative tools for participatory planning and design of public spaces (for example, Minecraft), taking the opportunity to collaborate with various stakeholders.

The programme is organized around three main areas:

1. **Partnerships and networking** – UN-Habitat has agreements and on-going activities with various partner organizations.
2. **City-wide strategies and pilot/demonstration projects** – UN-Habitat supports cities in developing city-wide strategies and sectorial development plans. These activities are strategic entry points for public space as well as for demonstrating participatory approaches to public space design, implementation and management.
3. **Knowledge management, advocacy and tools** – The efforts related to developing a policy approach, development of tools and indicators, and implementing capacity building programmes, help to institutionalize public space in the normative work of the UN and its partner cities.

**Partnerships**

The programme partnerships include the following:

**Regional and Global partners** - The partners of the Public Space Programme are involved in both normative work (developing tools, indicators, technical and policy guidelines, etc.) and operational work (implementing public space projects in cities and towns). Just to mention a few:

- United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Barcelona and Asia Pacific: A global umbrella organisation of local governments will establish regional networks on public space.
- Ax:son Johnson Foundation, Stockholm: is supporting a series of global conferences that convene the leading global thinkers on public space.
- National Planning Institute (INU), Rome: has developed the Public Space Charter (a set of principles to guide the design, creation, implementation and management of public spaces). INU organises the Public Space Biennale, an event that facilitates the exchange of experiences in public space planning and design.
- Fundacion Avina, La Paz: is co-financing public space work in Latin America, specifically in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Medellin, Colombia, Quito and Cuenca, Ecuador and Lima, Peru
- Institute pour la Ville en Movement, Buenos Aires: specialises in innovative mobility solutions and research around public space in Latin America.
- Svensk Byggtjanst, Stockholm: Providing technical support on the use of Minecraft as a participation tool and recruiting Minecraft gamers for projects.
• FyreUK, UK: Builds virtual models of public spaces for use on the Minecraft platform.
• Minecraft MX, Mexico City: The largest Minecraft community in Latin America provided technical support and are supporting the building of virtual public space models in partnership with FyreUK.
• Gehl Architects, Copenhagen: has provided pro-bono expertise and access to tools, methodologies and the publications of the founder, Jan Gehl.
• Project for Public Spaces (PPS), New York: has been working on developing the place-making methodology, compiling good practices and supporting the public space initiatives.

Other UN Agencies: = In 2015 UN-Habitat began developing collaborations with other UN agencies on the issue of public space.

UN-Habitat and UNESCO are establishing a joint programme on urban heritage preservation and regeneration of historic neighbourhoods. This includes public spaces, and embracing a social and human approach for sustainable revitalization that preserves cultural heritage and cultural identity. To kick-start the collaboration, UN-Habitat and UNESCO organized a joint panel during the International Conference on Culture for Sustainable Cities in Hangzhou, China on “Public spaces as a key to urban regeneration”.

UN-Habitat and UN Women jointly organized World Habitat Day and Urban October events around the theme of public space and safe public spaces for women and girls. The partnership with UN Women is being extended to the development of a regional public space programme for the MENA region.

Key partners in the implementation of the Public Space programme are the cities and local authorities and other key partners on the city/local level. To get a flavor, just mentioning a few below:

• City County of Nairobi, Go Down Arts Centre, Kounkuey Design Initiative, Placemakers, KUWA – Building Cities with People, Dandora Transformation League, Architects without Borders (Sweden), HopeRaisers, Friends of Jeevanjee are all collectively working on public space projects in Nairobi;
• Telmex, Mexico City: Mexico’s largest mobile operator provided funding and technical support to the largest Block by Block competition at Aldea Digital in Mexico City.
• Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing, UK: and their network of local partners (SWaCh/KKPKP and Asiye eTafuleni) are promoting gender issues and legal aspects of access to public space for informal sector workers, such as street traders and waste-pickers.

Internal collaboration with other UN-Habitat Units - Public space is an excellent entry point to practically demonstrate good approaches and practices to improving the social, environmental, governance and economic potential of cities. Hence, most of UN-Habitat’s core themes are good entry points for the public space work. By connecting with existing UN-Habitat programme, public space activities benefit from UN-Habitat’s presence, experience and capacity in a country and city, facilitating negotiations and agreements. The strategy of tying up with other UN-Habitat programmes has evolved in, for example:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Public Space Project</th>
<th>UN-Habitat Programme/Unit</th>
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<td>Addis Ababa and Ruiru</td>
<td><strong>Urban Basic Services:</strong> Sustainable Urban Transport in East African Cities (SUSTRAN) Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mogadishu, Beirut, East Jerusalem, Bungamati</td>
<td><strong>Conflict, Post-Conflict and Post Disaster Rehabilitation,</strong> Regional Office for Arab States (ROAS) and Regional Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Programme Division:</td>
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<td>Nairobi and Hanoi</td>
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<td>Housing and Slum Upgrading: Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP) and Climate Change Planning Unit</td>
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<td>Kirtipur</td>
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<td>Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP) for Asian Cities</td>
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<td>Pristina and Mitrovica</td>
<td>Municipal Spatial Support Programme (MuSPP)</td>
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Partnerships internally also revolve around the normative such as development of tools, guides and frameworks, for example:

- Urban Legislation unit are looking into laws and regulations which protect, govern and maintain/manage public space.
- Safer Cities programme developing a tool on creating safer cities through public space.
- Urban Mobility are developing a guide on promoting NMT in
- Climate Change incorporating a public space element in the city climate action plans
- Regional and Metropolitan Planning how to mainstream public space in National Urban Policies

**Main donors include:**

- **Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (Sida):** USD 1,066,907 (2012 – 2015) and USD 150,000 (2016).
- **Mojang**, Stockholm: the gaming company behind the popular computer game Minecraft is funding pilot projects across the world. From October 2012 to date it has mobilised USD 4,074,102 from the Minecraft community. A new agreement has just been signed covering July 2016 to December 2019 for an amount of USD 12 million.
- **Local governments and other key partners** have also mobilized resources on the local level to support implementation. This amounts to about USD 600,000 both as in-kind and actual financial resources for project implementation.
- **Axson Johnson Foundation** have supported a series of three international conferences which has amounted to approximately USD 3 million (which did not come to UN-Habitat).

**City wide strategies and overview of pilot projects**

Altogether, 7 pilot projects have been completed – Jeevanje Gardens (phase 1), Nairobi; Dey Pukhu, Kirtipur; Lotus Garden, Mumbai; Place de la Paix, Les Cayes; Medellin, Colombia; and Buenos Aires, Argentina, Surabaya –Ketandan (Indonesia).

A further 23 are in progress - Mogadishu (Somalia), Lokoja (Nigeria), Lima (Peru), Khulna (Bangladesh), Kirtipur phase II (Nepal), Gautam Nagar phase II (Mumbai), Honiara (Solomon Islands), La Touterelle (Les Cayes), Pristina (Kosovo), Pune (India), Nairobi phase II (Kenya), Johannesburg (South Africa), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Cuenca (Ecuador), Quito (Ecuador), Mitrovica (Kosovo), East Jerusalem (Palestine), Mankara (Madagascar), Ruiru (Kenya), Beirut (Lebanon), Bungamati (Nepal), Sijoarjo and Surabaya (Indonesia) and Bamenda (Cameroon).

An additional 10 pilot projects are in preparation to start implementation – Kisumu (Kenya), Doctares (Mexico), Mdantsane (South Africa), Hanoi (Vietnam), Sebrang Perai (Malaysia),
Blantyre (Malawi), and Iquitos (Peru) and two cities in the Philippines. Annually a call for public space proposals is launched and out of the submissions 6 to 10 projects are selected.

Nairobi and Mogadishu have completed their city-wide inventory of open public spaces, which will now feed into the development of city-wide strategies on public space. UN-Habitat is also supporting Bamenda (Cameroon), Kisumu (Kenya) and Kingston (Jamaica) in preparing to conduct city-wide public space assessments. Kirtipur Municipal Office together with the Centre of Integrated Urban Development (CIUD) and the support of UN-Habitat developed a plan for the “Revitalization of Open Spaces in the Traditional Core Settlement of Kirtipur”.

The UN-Habitat Regional Office for Arab States is in the process of establishing a regional programme for public space in the MENA region. An EGM will take place on the 21st and 22nd of September in collaboration with UN Women Regional Office for the Arab States to identify current issues relating to public space, ascertain thematic orientation for the regional programme, develop criteria for selection of public space pilot projects, identify cities/towns for conducting the city-wide public space assessment, start an initial stakeholder mapping and finally develop a resource mobilization strategy. UN-Habitat is embarking on a similar process of setting up regional programmes in the Asia Pacific, Africa and Latin America.

Knowledge Management, Advocacy and Tools

In 2013-15, the Future of Places (FoP) initiative significantly contributed to raising awareness around the public space agenda on a global level. The FoP is a multi-stakeholder initiative which was established by Ax:son Johnson Foundation, UN-Habitat and Project for Public Spaces (PPS) bringing together a large and diverse network of stakeholders around the issues of public space through a series of annual conferences (2013 in Stockholm, 2014 in Buenos Aires and 2015 in Stockholm again). The Future of Places gathered leading global thinkers, academia, decision-makers, practitioners, other UN Agencies, media, communities and private sector that subscribe to the transformative power that good quality public spaces can have in a city. All together the network represents about 1,500 individuals from 700 organisations, from 275 cities, across 100 countries. The success of this initiative has shown the commitment of a wide range of actors with a stake in public space, as well as highlighted the global importance of this theme. In a short time it has created a global movement for public space (10.000 followers on twitter) contributing actively to highlighting its benefits and putting it on the global development agenda.

The Public Space Toolkit - Principles, Policies and Practices was developed together with the Italian National Planning Institute (INU) and builds on the Charter of Public Space. The toolkit was launched at the Habitat 3 thematic Conference on public space which was held in Barcelona on the 4 and 5th April 2016.

UN-Habitat has also developed a city-wide open public space inventory and assessment tool which has been piloted in Nairobi. The tool looks at spatial location, distribution, accessibility, quantity and quality (in terms of accessibility, safety and inclusiveness) of public space in the city. Building on a request from Haiti, the open public space inventory and assessment tool was tailored to assess public markets, looking at accessibility, use, comfort, safety, the physical facility, environment, operations, management and the economy of markets. Since the piloting, requests have come from Kingston (Jamaica), Kigali (Rwanda) and Kisumu (Kenya) to conduct a city-wide public space assessment.

A a step-by-step participatory design manual for using Minecraft as tool to engage communities in the design of public space. Has been developed based on the experience of the participatory workshops held in 16 cities.
Since 2014, United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), UN-Habitat, The International Union of Architects (UIA), City of Porto Alegre, eThekwini Municipality, City of Blantyre and Nairobi City County have organised a series of peer learning events to further the dialogue on public spaces and taking the opportunity to network, learn and develop a body of knowledge on public space, as well as to support the cities in their work on public space. The series of peer learning events was established upon the request and due to a growing need for municipal practitioners to continue learning, sharing ideas and creative ways to develop, design, implement, protect and manage public spaces.

Training – with the launch of the Public Space toolkit UN-Habitat is now partnering with for example Citynet and UCLG ASPAC to deliver trainings on public space. UN-Habitat also deliver training on city level in for example how to conduct a city-wide assessment of public space.

SDG 11.7 and the New Urban Agenda = The Programme has also been actively engaged in the SDG and Habitat 3 processes.

The adoption of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and particularly Goal 11 target 7 which states: “by 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities” provides significant recognition of the importance of public space in sustainable development, which though a critical first step, on its own will have little impact without an appropriate follow up mechanism. Therefore, there is a need for supporting local and national governments in developing legislation, policy, norms and practices, which support governments in adopting a holistic and integrated approach to the planning, design, development, creation, protection and management of public space. This will require the concerted effort of governments at different levels (national and local) to develop strategies and invest to ensure access to public space for all in their cities and towns.

Public Space has also been prominent in the process leading up to Habitat III. The theme of one of the 22 Issue Papers was on public space. The Issue Papers was the departing point for the work of the Policy Units for the development of the New Urban Agenda.

Future plans and opportunities

In conclusion, 2015 and 2016 has focused on scaling-up, with many new partnerships being developed and public space being elevated in the international dialogue on sustainable urbanisation. Next steps for 2016/17 include:

- Developing regional strategies and networks on public space in partnership with UCLG. This will be kicked-off in Quito with the signing of an MoU with UCLG
- In October 2016 in Bogota, Colombia at the UCLG Congress, a learning event on public space will take place.
- On 23 September 2016 in Venice at the Architecture Biennale UN-Habitat will launch the first ever academic journal focused on Public Space, published with University of Queensland and with City Space Architecture.
- Compilation of public space tools and development of a set of training modules
- Rolling-out the public space assessment tool to assess the quality of public spaces in other cities (Kingston, Kigali Addis Ababa, Kisumu, amongst others)
- Development of a guide for cities on how to develop city-wide public space strategies
- Developing a quick guide on creating and protecting public/community space in informal settlements
• Developing a set of simple indicators for cities to establish a baseline and monitor implementation of their public space projects and programmes
• Specific focus on streets as important public space which also includes street vending
• Specific focus on market places which includes rural-urban linkages.

With many new partnerships there is also a need to form a network around the issues of public space, at the global, but also at the regional and national levels. In partnership with UCLG, UN-Habitat is discussing the possible establishment of a Global Platform for Public space which will be a crucial piece of the puzzle to be able to support national and local governments in their public space work. A platform with several substantive regional hubs, anchored in cities interested and active in the topic. The idea of launching a Call for Expression of Interest together with UCLG is being explored.