Guidelines and New Template for UN-Habitat’s Regional Strategic Plans
By Programme Division

Introduction

The approval of the Strategic Plan (SP)/2014-2019 by the Governing Council through its resolution 24/15 of 19 April 2013 provided a clear mandate for UN-Habitat to develop Regional Strategic Plans (RSPs) as a key tool for ensuring successful implementation of both its 2014-15 work programme and the 2014-2019 Strategic Plan.

Moreover, the OIOS evaluation of UN-Habitat (E/AC 51/2014) in paragraphs 24-26 requests that UN Habitat completes Regional Strategic Plans (RSPs) in all regional offices and resumes the development of Habitat Country Programme Documents (HCPD) in priority country programmes.

The responsibility for developing such regional strategy plans lies primarily with the regional offices, as the custodians of UN-Habitat’s work at the regional level, with a view to ensuring regional ownership. However, collaboration between the regional offices and the HQ-based thematic branches under coordination of the Programme Division remains crucial for greater efficiency.

The Guidelines below have been proposed by the Programme Division to assist in developing the mandated RSPs. These Guidelines are organized around three key pillars providing specific directives for the design of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time-Sensitive) RSPs.

In that connection, the planning period as provided under the present Guidelines for developing SMART RSPs is five years maximum, keeping in mind that UN-Habitat, as mandated by the UNDG, has committed itself to delivering as “ONE UN-HABITAT” at both the HQ and the regional level.
**Bridging the normative-operational divide**

Part I of the RSPs should outline the context for regional development and urban planning processes, highlighting the significance of regional policies and programmes in the context of UN-Habitat’s programmatic and normative mandates. This should demonstrate how past failures to align the complementary normative and operational aspects of UN-Habitat’s mandate has had a negative impact on its delivery at the regional and country levels.

Within the broader UNDAF context, and anchored in the “ Delivering as ONE” approach, considerable attention must go to responding to the question of how RSPs will address the global need for delivering together with other partners; especially with those UN entities associated with UNCTs at the country and regional levels.

**Flexibility for regional ownership**

Part II of the RSPs should focus on regional specificities, providing a detailed series of deliverables and pointer to good practices. In principle, this should be the key section of any RSP document and be presented in a clear and attractive format to attract the attention of current and future beneficiaries of UN-Habitat’s operations and services (the demand side), but also targeting entities in a position to provide funding or political support (sponsors and investors) to boost UN-Habitat’s delivery capacities (the supply side).

Part II must take into particular account intra-regional diversity, because different Member States often experience similar challenges facing a fast-urbanizing world in different ways. At the regional level, there are currently few, if any shared blue-prints for action; more often different approaches to similar realities exist side by side, because countries in the same region may be at different stages of urban development. Therefore, the RSPs should take into account such intra-regional diversities to increase the relevance of proposed interventions for different countries within the same region. Likewise, it must be understood that good practices may not necessarily be suitable to or replicable in every locality and in every context.

In sum: The purpose of the RSPs, should not be to prescribe one particular approach in any given situation, but rather offer meaningful advice towards finding location-specific tailored solutions.

**Planning for success**
Part III of the RSPs should be structured along a log-frame providing the key programmatic details on planned activities, including inception and completion dates, as well as information on the budgetary and disbursement modalities.

To collect information on best practice for knowledge generation, RSPs should be designed in such a way that lessons learned from the field feed back into UN-Habitat’s normative and thematic at the HQ level. Therefore, communication modalities and easy flow of information must be created between the field and HQ, including for monitoring and evaluation purposes.

**Clear linkage with the Post-2015 Agenda and the SG 11**

The “Post-2015 Agenda” is the development agenda meant to overhaul the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with the aim at achieving a world of prosperity, equity, freedom, dignity, peace and security.

The UN working with governments, civil society, and other partners has been committed to building on the momentum generated by the MDGs in order to successfully implement the crucial post-2015 development agenda in an integrated manner through a negotiated compact of global objectives called: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

UN-Habitat as a key player within the UN family has mobilized its partners campaigning for an urban Sustainable Development Goal to specifically address urban development issues in order to ensure that urban issues are adequately addressed in the Post-2015 Agenda. We live in an era of unprecedented urbanization. Cities are home to the majority of humanity, and sustainable development cannot be achieved without significantly transforming the way we build and manage our urban spaces. Cities therefore must be given special attention and consideration in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

In that connection, the need for a specific urban SDG has been self-evident. This must clearly focus on green, well-planned, resilient, inclusive, productive, safe, and healthy cities for all at the heart of the development agenda. Therefore, the SDG 11 stipulating to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, must be placed at the centre of the substantive focus of UN-Habitat’s regional strategies in order to increase the synergy in the implementation of the Agency’s mandate at the regional level and maximize the potential of its success for the benefit of the urban poor.
Proposed table of contents of RSPs

Introduction

PART I: BRIDGING THE NORMATIVE-OPERATIONAL DIVIDE

1.1. Regional urbanization trends: Challenges and opportunities
- Demographic
- Economic
- Social
- Housing
- Environmental
- Governance

PART II: FLEXIBILITY FOR REGIONAL OWNERSHIP

2.1. Regional strategy and focus areas
- Vision (reflecting the objective of the strategy)
- Goals (reflecting the expected achievements of the strategy)
- Focus on the regional specificities and diversities
- Focus areas (Regional interventions to be aligned with six focus areas in the Strategic Plan 2014-19):
  - urban legislation, land and governance
  - urban planning and design
  - urban economy
  - urban basic services
  - housing and slum upgrading
  - risk reduction, rehabilitation and resilience
  - cross-cutting issues (gender, youth, Climate Change and human rights) and Safer Cities
- Alignment with UNDAF where appropriate

PART III: PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

3.1. Strategic results and key outputs
- Feasibility studies
- A general log-frame shall be developed under the 6 focus areas to provide:
  - Goals
3.2 Linkage with the SDG 11 in line with vision 2030

3.3 Implementation mechanisms
- To indicate how this strategy will be implemented, monitored, and with whom.
- Regional mechanisms
- National mechanisms
- Partnerships
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Research and capacity development