Proposed theme:

Partnering for evidence-based implementation of the New Urban Agenda¹

Background

The proposed theme is aimed at supporting member states, local authorities and their partners in integrated urban policy-making towards more effective and accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals and other relevant global agendas. Recent reports indicate that numerous cities and countries are formulating policies and action plans without clear evidence and information. It is estimated that as high as 65% of local authorities both from the developed and developing world do not know how and why the city is growing in specific directions and who is behind this growth. In too many cities around the world data is incomplete, needs to be improved or is simply missing. Because of this, important aspects of people’s lives, parts of the city and living conditions are not properly measured, and therefore it is difficult to apply corrective solutions for improvement.

The proposed special theme is in line with the recommendations of the Secretary General’s Report on Progress on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (Quadrennial Report 2018) that calls for the adoption of an Incremental and Inclusive Reporting System and the creation of user-friendly and participatory data platforms.² It is also consistent with UN-Habitat’s role of focal point within the United Nations system and the need to reinforce data collection procedures and strengthen data and statistical capacities at national, subnational and local levels.³ As indicated by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the SDGs, custodian agencies of agreed indicators, as UN-Habitat⁴, are responsible for the preparation of statistical standards, methods and guidelines, training and capacity development, and for the collection, processing and dissemination of data for the production of accurate and internationally comparable statistics.⁵ The UN-Habitat led SDG-11 Synthesis Report discussed at the High Level Political Forum (New York, 2018)⁶ emphasizes the need for innovative data systems to support with strong evidence base the monitoring and implementation of the NUA, the urban related SDGs as well as the urban dimensions of other global agreements.⁷

The proposed special theme fully responds to the fundamental notion of ‘partnership’ as a critical means to the achievement of sustainable urban development. Indeed, the multidisciplinary nature of urbanization calls for a holistic approach with multi-stakeholders working together on both general and specific issues and making cross-sectoral linkages at all levels.⁸ The 2030 Development Agenda revitalized a global partnership as an essential vehicle for mobilizing and sharing knowledge, expertise,

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¹ An expanded version of the title of the special theme could be: “Partnering for evidence-based implementation [and monitoring] of the New Urban Agenda [and the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals]”.
³ New Urban Agenda, par. 158.
⁴ UN-Habitat is the designated custodian agency for 9 indicators out of 15 from Goal 11, and additional 2 indicators from Goal 1 and 4.
⁶ UN-Habitat 2018 Goal 11 Synthesis Report....
technology and financial resources. Likewise, the NUA called for ‘new forms of direct partnership between governments at all levels and civil society, including through broad-based and well-resourced permanent mechanisms and platforms for cooperation and consultation open to all, using information and communications technologies and accessible data solutions’. Through strategic partnerships it will be possible to advance in evidence-based implementation and monitoring of the urban global agendas improving quality and systems, data management, efficiency in use and dissemination of information for added-value and better results.

Justification

The preparation of the Quadrennial Report (2018) and the Synthesis Report for Goal 11 (HLPF, 2018) put in clear evidence the lack of data and information, as well as the lack of agreed methods and standards. This was extensively corroborated by the review of the Voluntary Country Reports that 44 countries prepared for the HLPF process which showed that many targets and indicators do not have information at all, and various policies presented do not have clear evidence of results. It should also be noted that since 1984 the theme of data for cities and human settlements has not been discussed by the Governing Council or the preceding Commission on Human Settlements. Clearly much has changed in terms of approaches, technology and partnerships related to the use of data for cities and human settlements, as well as needs on data disaggregation and as support of more informed policies.

Recent global development agendas had shown the importance of multi-stakeholder participation and interactive dialogue, including at the ministerial and mayoral levels, civil society and academia. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, the Accra Agreement, and Bussan Declaration all emphasized partnerships. It is clear that the breadth and depth of partnerships are expanding, and although their effectiveness will be dependent on many factors, they will be increasingly tied to their ability to manage and share knowledge and expertise about the issues, processes, and solutions they are promoting.

Purpose

The proposed special theme would provide a forum for Member States and partners to discuss how innovative data systems, including geospatial data, big data and community data may complement progress reports submitted by member states, including Voluntary National Reports on the implementation of the SDGs and progress reports on the implementation of the NUA.

The proposed special theme could engage partners operating at different levels, including global (UN agencies), regional (including UN Regional Commissions), national and subnational. It could attract research institutions, civil society groups and private sector engagement related to urban data and knowledge generation. It could also include debates on thematic datasets in line with specific SDG

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10 The Quito Declaration (2016), NUA draft, paragraph 89.
11 From Goal 11 on cities, 9 out of 15 indicators require data to be collected at city/urban level, including spatial analysis, and current methods are not yet supporting these needs.
12 The last time the topic of ‘data’ was discussed was at the 7th session of the Commission on Human Settlements in 1984.
14 Considering that few countries are creating conditions to move beyond the use of conventional statistics with rather poor levels of data disaggregation, and the use of geo-spatial information.
15 The implementation, follow-up and review of the urban global agendas must carry forward the spirit of partnership and participation of the various UN Agencies. As a focal point, UN-Habitat can coordinate UN agencies’ efforts and align their experience to deliver concrete results in support of the Governments’ efforts to implement these agendas.
targets, such as improving informal settlements, measuring urban sprawl, participation in urban planning, reducing air pollution, promoting access to secure land tenure and strengthening urban resilience. It may also attract innovative data initiatives on cities with common interests, such as data on coastal cities, data on Arctic cities.

‘Partnership for evidence-based implementation’ strongly supports the 2030 Agenda ambition of leaving no one and no space behind in achieving the NUA and the SDGs and encourages policy coherence through integration of information systems.

The topic would also encourage exchange of views of member states on the need for improved data systems, including a global urban database. Finally, it would contribute to improved positioning of UN-Habitat as a knowledge-based centre of excellence, offering evidence-based policy advice to Member States and providing data to United Nations Country Teams.

**Expected outcomes**

As a result of the dialogue on the special theme and the related GC resolution, the following outcomes are expected:

- Strengthened integrated urban policy-making towards more effective and accelerated implementation of the global agendas.
- Strengthened reporting systems for the Quadrennial Report on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the SDG-11 Synthesis Report;
- Reinforced and expanded global urban database system building on the tradition of the Urban Indicators Programme (1996-2010) and the current Global Sample of Cities, supported by specific tools, standards and methods.
- Reinforced Global Urban Observatory (GUO) network\(^{16}\) and expansion of national and local partnerships to support national governments in the production of data and information.
- Expanded initiatives and new partnerships towards innovative data collection, including geospatial data, big data and community data and related capacity development;

**Road map towards GC27**

- 30 August 2018: internal discussion about the theme within UN-Habitat Secretariat
- 4 September 2018: discussion on roadmap to GC27 at the expanded Bureau of CPR
- 17 September 2018: presentation and discussion at the CPR subcommittee
- 20 September 2018: CPR decides on the title of the special theme
- October-November 2018: development of full theme paper
- December 2018: presentation and discussion of theme paper at CPR subcommittee
- January 2019: preparation for the dialogue including call for nomination of speakers
- 10 April 2019: interactive dialogue on the special theme at GC27
- 12 April 2019: adoption of a resolution on the special theme

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\(^{16}\) The GUO was created in 1996 as part of Habitat II legacy. Today this network is made of more of 350 local urban observatories that are to different levels coordinated by UN-Habitat.