Review Report of the Past Four WUFs

UN-HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

2002-2008

Monitoring and Evaluation Unit
Office of the Executive Director
UN-Habitat

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1. **Background to the Review**

At its twenty-second session, the Governing Council (GC), through resolution 22/2 requested a review of all previous sessions of the World Urban Forums (WUFs), drawing on their respective evaluations, with a view to improving the planning, organization and effectiveness of future sessions. The review report is to be submitted to the Committee of Permanent Representatives (CPR) for consideration of the lessons learned in order to make recommendations to the Executive Director on future sessions of the WUF.

Specifically the review is to provide recommendations on the following areas based on the lessons learned:

a) Timing between Governing Councils and sessions of the WUF;

b) Mobilization of adequate and predictable resources;

c) Consideration of the Foundation budget for activities related to the WUF;

d) Scale, inclusiveness and effectiveness of participation;

e) Strengthening participant preparations at all levels;

f) Results-based evaluation process to ensure that specific objectives of the WUF relate to the UN-Habitat Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTSIP) and to the biennial Work Programme and Budget;

g) Location assessment, including a cost-benefit analysis;

h) World Urban Forum budget planning process;

i) Timely negotiation of host country agreements;

j) Need to strengthen UN-Habitat internal management processes;

k) Cooperation with Habitat Agenda partners.

2. **Purpose, methodology and scope of the review**

This present review report is submitted for consideration by the CPR. Its purpose is to provide forward-looking insights to UN-Habitat and the CPR in terms of the strengths and weakness of previous WUFs with the intent of improving the planning, organization, operational processes and effectiveness of future WUFs. The review was conducted by the Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, UN-Habitat, during the month of April 2009. It was based on the evaluation reports of all previous Forum sessions and discussions with relevant staff in WUF Secretariat and Programme Support Division. It should be noted that previous WUF evaluations were mainly based on participant satisfaction surveys, and therefore did not include a full analysis of pre-session processes where weaknesses have been identified. Should this review report be considered inadequate by the CPR, then an in-depth external review of the WUF sessions could be conducted based on a detailed Terms of Reference (TOR).

3. **Establishment and evolution of World Urban Forum**

The UN-Habitat was established as the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) in 1978, in Nairobi, in the wake of the UN World Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I) held in Vancouver, Canada in 1976 that resulted in the Habitat Agenda and the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements.
Organizationally, the UNCHS functioned as a centre within the UN Secretariat, with the Commission for Human Settlements (CHS) of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as its oversight body.

In its resolution 18/5 of February 2001, the Commission on Human Settlements requested the Executive Director of UNCHS to, among other things, promote a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty into a new urban forum, with a view to strengthening the coordination of international support to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Thus, the World Urban Forum was formed.

In December 2001, by resolution 56/206, the General Assembly elevated the UNCHS into the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat); transformed the Commission on Human Settlements into the Governing Council of the UN-Habitat; and further formalized the Committee of Permanent Representatives to serve as the Governing Council’s intersessional subsidiary body. The resolution further affirmed the World Urban Forum as a non-legislative technical forum in which experts can exchange views.

The Forum is convened by UN-Habitat every two years and coincides with the years that the Governing Council of UN-Habitat does not meet.\(^1\) The first session of WUF was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in February 2002 and was attended by 1,200 participants. The second session was held in Barcelona, Spain, in September 2004 and attracted 4,389 participants. The third session was held in Vancouver, Canada, in June 2006 and attracted 10,121 participants. The fourth session of WUF, was held in Nanjing, China, 3 - 6 November 2008, and it attracted 7,900 participants (see Figure 1). The World Urban Forum has established itself as the world’s urban development platform for debate and discussions on the most pressing urbanization issues.

\(^1\) Rule 1 of the Rules and Procedures of the GC of UN-Habitat (2005) specifies that the GC shall normally hold one regular.
4. Objectives of World Urban Forum

The World Urban Forum (WUF) – is a non-legislative technical Forum in which experts exchange views and advise UN-Habitat on issues of shelter and sustainable urbanization. Its main objectives are:

- To facilitate exchange of experiences and advancement of collective knowledge among cities and their development partners;
- To place strong emphasis on the participation of Habitat Agenda partners and relevant international programmes, funds and UN Agencies with the intent of ensuring their inclusion in the identification of new issues, the sharing of lessons learned and the exchange of best practices and good policies;
- To identify overlaps and synergies; and to cooperate and coordinate among development agencies in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the Declaration on Cities and other Human Settlements related goals of Millennium Development Goals;
- In the context of the UN-Habitat Medium-term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTSIP) 2008-2013, and as outlined in MTSIP Focus Area 1: Advocacy, Monitoring and Partnerships, WUF is an advocacy and normative debate activity to contribute to mobilizing a broad constituency of support for sustainable urbanization.
5. **Time between Governing Councils and the WUF sessions**

WUF is convened by UN-Habitat every two years, in the years that the Governing Council of UN-Habitat does not meet. Each Forum sets the theme for the next session two years later. Thus, the planning for the following session should start immediately. To ensure that momentum is maintained, preparations start in earnest at Governing Council session that oversees UN-Habitat’s work plan and budget. Table 1 shows timetables of WUF and GC sessions.

**Table 1: Timetables of WUF and GC: 2001-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Dates of GC session</th>
<th>Dates of WUF Session</th>
<th>Difference in planning period (in Months)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>4-8 April 2005</td>
<td>19-23 June 2006</td>
<td>13.5 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>16-20 April 2007</td>
<td>3-6 November 2008</td>
<td>19 Months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2010</td>
<td>30 March-April 2009</td>
<td>22-26 March 2010</td>
<td>12 Months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From Table 1, it is clear that WUF sessions have not had equal planning, coordinating and organizing periods. Whereas the dates of the GC do not vary much (February–May), the WUF session dates vary considerably (March –November). For instance, the WUF in Nanjing had a planning period of 19 months while that of Rio De Janeiro will only have a planning period of 12 months. There is, therefore, a need to harmonize and find appropriate and consistent dates for the Forum. This need came out clearly in the evaluation of WUF III. The timing of the dates of the Forum were less than ideal, as it was the peak of the tourist season in Vancouver, which resulted in a scarcity of accommodations and higher prices for Forum attendees. It was also pointed out that it would have been better to hold the conference at a time of year when most children were in school, as this could make it easier for women to attend. In determining the appropriate dates, the starting point would be to work out the adequate period to allow for adequate preparations, taking into account host country conditions and realities.

6. **Mobilization of adequate and predictable resources**

Financial resources for WUF are normally provided by the host country. The funding is mainly utilized for overall logistics of the WUF event, theme development and travel costs for Least Developed Countries (LCDs), and other travel arrangements to ensure that the Forum is inclusive and that there is equal chance of all regions and countries to participate. The Host countries decide what suits them best and informs UN-Habitat on resource implications.
For the WUF I, convened in Nairobi, the costs of logistics were relatively low since the Forum took place at UN Complex. But for WUF II, in Barcelona, the event was held at the newly developed and redeveloped part of Barcelona on its sea coast. This area was developed, in part, to host major conferences and conventions - of which the City’s Universal Forum of Cultures, was the first, which took place concurrently with the WUF and significant resources were invested by the host country.

For WUF III, overall logistics of the Forum cost were US$12.2 million. Theme development and travel costs for LCDs amounted to US$2 million. Additional contributions (US$956,000) were given for travel arrangements to ensure the Forum was inclusive. The WUF IV took place at the newly built Nanjing International Conference Centre. It is not known how much was spent on logistics. However, UN-Habitat submitted a budget proposal of $2 million for theme development and travel costs. The Host country provided US$600,000 in cash and US$1.2 million in kind.

Apart from financial resources, the success of the Forum depends largely on mobilization of broad range of partners, high profile personalities and decision makers to attend the WUF. There was general consensus that cross-sector engagement is necessary, that the private sector should be engaged and that meetings should be open and transparent. Regional preparatory meetings were suggested to be useful for the preparation processes. For these to happen, UN-Habitat will need to mobilize adequate and predictable resources.

7. Consideration of the Foundation Budget for activities related to the WUF

UN-Habitat derives its financial support from three main sources as follows: (i) regular UN budget; (ii) voluntary contributions to the foundation: which are of two types, general purpose (non-earmarked contributions) and earmarked contributions for specific activities; and (iii) overheads on technical co-operation activities. In fact, UN-Habitat relies largely on voluntary contributions which constitute more than 90% of this funding base for the biennium work programme. Although the non-earmarked (core – general purpose) and earmarked contributions contribute towards meeting the overall objectives of the programme, the core resources are fundamental to ensuring the fulfillment of the institution’s mandate as they provide the basic operating infrastructure of the organization and enable the organization to implement core activities.

The general purpose contributions have grown from an annual average of US$4.5 million in 2000 to about US$23 million in 2008; while the total annual contributions to UN-Habitat have increased from US$24 million in 2000 to US$164 million in 2008. Figure 2, shows the growth in Foundation General Purpose Contributions to UN-HABITAT, from 2000 to 2009.
Since the Forum has become an important platform for UN-Habitat’s advocacy work, it is reasonable to consider funding of some WUF activities from the Foundation Budget. The core activities of WUF could be funded from the general purpose contributions, while donors can also contribute earmarked funds towards specific WUF activities. From the review of the four WUF sessions, some of the key issues discussed at WUF feed into GC and results into decisions and various resolutions. For instance, the theme papers on promoting affordable housing finance systems, access to basic services, debate on cities and climate discussed at WUF IV resulted in strategic decisions and resolutions adopted by GC 22. This also underscores the need for consideration of the foundation budget for activities related to WUF. With the MTSIP Resource Mobilization Strategy, general purpose contributions are likely to grow. In linking results with resources, those WUF activities that are clearly contributing to a MTSIP focus area result and are contributing to work programme outputs should be allocated resources from the general purpose contributions.

8. Scale, inclusiveness and effectiveness of participation

The WUF draws a wide range of partners from non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, urban professional, academia, governments, local authorities, the private sector, the media, youth and women groups, research institutions and other partners. The Forum provides them with a common platform to discuss urban issues, including effective implementation of Habitat Agenda, achievement of MDGs and other internationally agreed goals, and other urban issues UN-Habitat works with Governments and Habitat partners, including local authorities and NGOs. Table 2 shows participation by organization affiliation, for the four WUFs.
From Table 2, the scale, diversity and inclusiveness of UN-Habitat partners’ participation is evident. The Forum meetings are organized into plenary sessions for presenting the key messages; dialogues for discussing the main themes; networking events; caucus meetings, special sessions, roundtables, training seminars, side events, exhibitions, presentations for information sharing and showcase of best practices. The ultimate goal of partner’s involvement at WUFs should therefore go beyond scale and inclusiveness to strategic, targeted involvement and effectiveness of participation.

The MTSIP identifies strategic partnering as a renewed focus of UN-Habitat. Future Forums, therefore, need to recognize that 50% of the world’s population is under 25 years of age – the youth and their involvement and effective participation should be well planned and supported. Involvement of NGOs, civil society organizations, private sector, local authorities, academia, women groups, etc., should be well defined and represented.

Strategic involvement and effective participation will also entail selection of speakers to give key messages. All evaluation reports on WUF indicate that plenary presentations were satisfactory and key speakers presented relevant topics. In Barcelona, the presentation by Mr. Mikhail Gorbachev (on water resources); by Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs (on stemming the growth of slums); and by Mr. Joan Clos, Mayor of Barcelona, on establishment of the United Cities and Local Governments, were highlighted and considered interesting and educative. In Vancouver, three hours for the opening sessions was considered too long. The presentations were too general and not enough solutions were identified. Participants thought that there were too many speakers and that speeches needed to be shorter. In Nanjing, speeches by Minister of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partner category</th>
<th>WUF I %</th>
<th>WUF II %</th>
<th>WUF III %</th>
<th>WUF IV, %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governments</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authorities &amp; associations</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-governmental organizations</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private sector</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research institutions</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundations</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN &amp; Inter-Governmental organizations</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other participants</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affiliation not indicated</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total percentage</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actual registration figures</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>4,389</td>
<td>10,121</td>
<td>7,900</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Participation, WUF I - WUF IV by organizational affiliation
Housing and Urban-Rural Development of China, Mr. Jiang Weixin; the Vice President of the Government of Philippines, H.E Noli de Castro were rated as educative.

Concerning dialogue sessions, the review shows that many participants felt that there were too many speakers and not enough time for interaction, or solutions to be identified or discussed. Sessions should be more concrete and action oriented. Professional facilitators were suggested. Training events provided a good opportunity for learning and it was suggested that more training sessions should be organized at the Forums. Regarding roundtables, they were planned on the basis of stakeholder groups (e.g., youth women, NGOs). Suggestions are to better organize them around themes (e.g., water, finance, governance) and ensure representation by different stakeholders. Otherwise, women end up talking to women, youth to youth, mayors to mayors, etc. It was suggested that some Roundtables be organized by sector and other Roundtables by thematic area. Some participants suggested that Roundtables be organized by continent.

9. **Strengthening participation at all levels**

Suggestions from the review indicate unsatisfactory participation of relevant stakeholders in planning and implementation of the Forum. Suggestions were made for the establishment of Regional Preparation Committees as to improve participation in planning. However, the efficiency of such mechanisms must be considered.

Given the constraints of resources, that may not make it possible for more people and representatives to attended the Forum, innovative ideas like Habitat JAM (online discussion of urban issues prior the WUF Forum), for WUF III, should be promoted. The Habitat JAM was considered useful but it was felt that it did not run long enough to allow full participation, i.e., only three days. It was suggested that it could have continued throughout the Forum session but that it would require better on-site Internet access than was available during WUF III.

10. **Results-Based Management and evaluation process to ensure specific WUF objectives that are related to MTSIP and Work Programmes are achieved**

In the context of managing for results, ideas, outcomes and lessons learned during the WUF are to be used in sharpening the focus and improving the performance of UN-Habitat’s work programme including the implementation of MTSIP. The application of an RBM approach to WUF will make a difference when:

(i) expected results of WUF are inclusively defined and agreed upon by relevant stakeholders,
(ii) results (outcomes) of WUF become a common focus for both planning and implementation,
(iii) performance expectations, roles and responsibilities are clear,
(iv) there is adequate communication (internally and externally),
(v) flexibility is built-in to ensure the expected results are achieved,
(vi) everyone involved has a clear understanding of the expected results and contributes towards that end, and
(vii) the recommendations from WUF feed into the work programme of UN-Habitat.
This would mean that the Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework and Risk-Based Framework, where roles and responsibilities are well defined, and risks assessed with respective mitigation strategies are in place.

From a results perspective, evaluations of all WUF sessions indicate that the forums were successful, in providing opportunities for identifying and sharing solutions to urban issues. They also complied with planned timeframes and budgets. However, it is on the management side (efficiency) of the implementation of WUFs where issues of inconsistencies lie. The selection of the appropriate mechanism to deliver such an event should have clearly defined roles and responsibilities within the UN-Habitat Secretariat, and a defined role for the CPR and other relevant stakeholders as appropriate.

For future WUFs, including WUF V: (i) A planning mechanism for WUF should be established with clear roles and responsibilities of the host country. The WUF Coordination Unit will play a lead role of coordination. (ii) an Action Plan for the planning and implementation of WUF event should be developed with defined expected accomplishments and indicators of achievement in line with MTSIP and work programme results. The plan should also detail:

- Main activities and outputs to be accomplished;
- Timelines with deadlines for completion of activities and delivery of outputs;
- A comprehensive resource requirement plan, with specification of level of contribution from various sources, as well as outline of resource mobilization actions to address any gaps;
- Desired participation (including private sector, civil society, youth, women, parliamentarians, LDCs, etc.) of partner groups and their contribution, with clear targets for female participants; and
- The Action Plan should include a monitoring and evaluation plan.

11. Location assessment, including a cost-benefit analysis

Overall, the location/venue were considered good in all WUF sessions. Main challenges related to size relative to the number of participants, which normally led to overcrowding in many sessions. In Barcelona and Vancouver, most rooms were too small to accommodate all the participants. In trying to accommodate as many people as possible, comfort was compromised. Organizers of future Forums should take this into account when choosing the venue.

12. Word Urban Forum Budget Planning Processes

The UN-Habitat Secretariat in collaboration with the Host country should ensure effective budget planning processes. There should be WUF Secretariat’s financial policies, procedures and operational guidelines that are clearly defined and appropriate.

The WUF planning mechanism should ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood
by UN-Habitat staff and the CPR.

Concerning administration and logistics, a cost-benefit analysis could be conducted, for example, to explore tasks that would benefit from outsourcing. Issues of venue and facility capacity, Forum schedule, registration process, security, information, media, on-site support for sessions, event facilitators, as well as accommodation, meals and transport should be addressed early in the planning and negotiated on time with the host country to establish budget lines.

There should be a monitoring system in place to ensure contributing agreements are complied with.

13. Timely negotiations of host country agreement

Intense preparations for each session of WUF starts with the negotiations and signing of host country agreement that spells out clearly the terms and responsibilities of the host and UN-Habitat. It spells out the provisions for budget, preparations of substantive documents, meeting accommodation, participants’ accommodation, transport and travel, exhibitions formats, facilities and services, security, logistics etc. A lesson from WUF IV was that critical issues related to de facto agreement were not in place in time.

It is important that negotiations start as early as possible and each specific element are considered. There may be issues of third parties in the delivery of the WUF program. All these should be negotiated and concluded as early as possible.

14. Need to strengthen the UN-Habitat internal management processes

There should be a clear WUF internal coordination and planning mechanism. The overall coordination of WUF, by the WUF Coordinating Unit should expand and include additional members, including Divisional Focal Points. WUF Task Forces could also be established to tackle specific activities.

The coordination and planning mechanism coordinating committee should be developed to strengthen UN-Habitat’s internal management process to ensure quality of the Forum sessions, and early involvement of relevant stakeholders for planning of the overall programme. Attention should be paid to:

- Development of a detailed agenda with objectives, justification of the relevance of themes, and appropriateness of the objectives for each session;
- Consideration of the appropriate WUF format: including appropriate session types and balance between session types including training and networking events, one additional day from WUF IV should be considered;
- Examining the extent to which presentations and exhibitions, etc., adequately align with the themes and expected accomplishments of the Forum;
- Planning for how the sessions can integrate practical examples and application; and
• Establishing quality assurance procedure for sessions to ensure focus and depth, selection of speakers and facilitators and review of presentations and papers.

15. Cooperation with Habitat Agenda Partners

UN-Habitat works with a variety of partners, including Governments, local authorities, NGOs, civil society organizations, academia, parliamentarians, UN Agencies and other international institutions and donors. Effectiveness of the cooperation with these partners in WUF activities would create more awareness on urban issues. Early involvement of the partners in planning and organizing WUF would underscore the importance of early planning.

For instance, in previous WUF III participants felt that while there was useful information on the website for those who organize Networking Events (e.g., how to structure the session), the criteria used to select proposals was not adequately clear to potential Networking Event organizers. Apparently, some put considerable time and effort into preparing proposals, which were subsequently rejected. The organizers whose proposals had been rejected were not told the reasons for the rejection, which added to the frustration. The criteria for sessions should be clearly stated and communicated in the future, as well as an explanation for rejection when proposals are not accepted for some reason.

16. Recommendation

The CPR members are requested to give their comments on the way forward in implementing the resolution GC/22/3.