Proposed theme for Governing Council 23:
Sustainable Urban Development: Equitable access to Land, Housing, Basic Services and Infrastructure

Rationale
UN-HABITAT needs to prepare for the Rio+20 conference taking place in 2012. The only Governing Council meeting prior to this event is GC23. Therefore it is critical to have the key messages emanating from GC 23 feed into the Rio+20 conference to ensure that UN-HABITAT’s vision on sustainable urban development is mainstreamed into the global agenda. The discussions and eventual review of the progress in the implementation of the Chapter 7 of the Agenda 21 focusing on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements in an urbanizing world will provide an opportunity to raise the urban agenda higher in the UN system and assert UN-HABITAT’s leadership as the city agency of the UN system. This will unequivocally confirm the need to establish a one-UN global urban agenda in a context of a rapidly urbanising planet.

With the exception of the chapter 7 of the Agenda 21, endorsed during UNCED Rio-1992, sustainable development, was strongly influenced by ecological paradigms without incorporating to the full extent the urban, social and economic dimensions of the sustainable development framework. This was redressed ten years later during the 2002-Sustainable Development Summit and incorporated into the Johannesburg Plan of Action. The global debates and resolutions taken during the Millennium Summit made clear that fundamental questions around access to adequate housing, serviced land and basic urban services such as water and sanitation need to be fundamentally addressed and incorporated into international, national and local responses if sustainable forms of urban development are to be attained in the developing world. A widely accepted framework of sustainable urban development needs to be promoted and used within the agency and in preparation for Rio +20 and this should emanate from the GC 23 presentations and discussions.

The vision on sustainable urban development that has been emerging within UN-HABITAT incorporates a multi-divisional and multi-sector approach that links issues such as equity in access to adequate housing, serviced land and basic urban infrastructure within an umbrella that addresses the adverse environmental impacts that are intrinsic to urbanisation and climate change. This evolving vision is enshrined in UN-HABITAT’s MTSIP, which brings together this vision through different Focus Areas Strategies and policy responses.

Previous GC meetings focused on different issues namely, finance, economy, water, environment etc. While some dimensions of access to land and housing have been addressed during GC18 (secure tenure), GC19 (shelter strategies) and GC22 (housing finance), there is a need to redress Access to Land and Housing within the framework of equitable and sustainable urban development.

This theme is proposed for various reasons. Housing became disconnected from other urban sectors such as services and infrastructure as well as land, and fell out of the global policy agenda, failing to contribute to economic development and poverty reduction. It needs to be placed back in the forefront of the agency’s policy. Internationally, UN-HABITAT is often referred to as the Housing agency, yet this has not been reflected into the recent Governing Councils and resolutions. Land, has been a critical theme in the global policy debate but this has not been reflected in the agenda and resolutions of the GCs since the 2005 resolutions around the Security of Tenure and Urban Governance Campaigns were adopted. A number of GC resolutions related to basic services and infrastructure, such as the one on Guidelines on access to basic services in 2009, have been adopted but without sufficiently integrating land, housing and basic infrastructure in line with UN-HABITAT’s strategic vision enshrined in the MTSIP nor relating it fully to the on-going global debate on sustainable urban development.
Land, housing, basic services and infrastructure underpin all of UN-HABITAT’s work in sustainable urban development and all existing focus areas, programs and projects in the agency will easily link to the proposed theme.

Outline of approach

UN-HABITAT suggests ‘Sustainable Urban Development: Equitable access to land, housing, basic services and infrastructure’ as the theme of the GC23. The theme will unfold into a few core pillars as highlighted in the previous section of this paper.

The theme does not stand alone. It unfolds from previous UN-HABITAT activities and flagship events, to mention a few, the Habitat Agenda and Istanbul Plan of Action, the MTSIP, the fifth Session of the World Urban Forum, the World Urban Campaign and the 100 Cities Initiative, Global Land Tool Network, and various of its research, flagship reports and normative works. The theme of the GC 23 should also be part of, and linked to, this comprehensive vision.

The proposed GC theme fits with a wide range of sub themes and a strategic decision will need to be taken amongst potential inter-connected sub-themes. The sub themes could be chosen from water, sanitation, governance, finance, local authorities, buildings, sustainable land management, building codes, local agenda 21, basic services, environment, energy, transport, capacity building. The emphasis in the choice of themes should be on showing what the agency has done and learned in these areas, as well as our positions on these sub themes.

All these sub-themes should also use the ‘Green Economy’ and ‘Institutional Framework for International Environmental Governance/Sustainable Development’ which are the sub-themes of Rio+20 conference as their entry points. The ‘Institutional Framework’ entry point should also be viewed through national, regional and local levels, including local authorities. The city wide point of view, rather than sector point of view should be promoted.

Mandate and links to previous WUF

MDGs

**MDG Goal 7 Target 11,** aims to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020, and housing, land and basic infrastructure are key to the improvement of slums.

**MDG Goal 7 Target 10,** aims to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by the year 2015. Security of tenure is one of the most important catalysts in stabilising communities, improving shelter conditions, reducing social exclusion, improving access to urban services such as water and sanitation, leveraging corporate and individual investment and improving urban environment. Formal recognition of tenure is often a pre-requisite for most public or official private service provider agencies to extend water and sanitation services inside peri-urban settlements.

Global covenants

**Land and housing** have been a key part of UN-HABITAT’s mandate from Habitat I in 1976, where the **Vancouver Declaration** recognized land as one of the fundamental elements in human settlements.

The right to adequate housing and access to land and housing was highlighted at Habitat II in 1996 and was mainstreamed throughout the **Habitat Agenda** and **Istanbul Declaration**.

Several UN resolutions addressing resolution of **lost housing, land and property through involuntary displacement** have been passed. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (2nd Ed, 2004), Principle 21 relates to the arbitrary deprivation, and/or usurpation of
property and possessions of displaced persons. In 2005 the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, of the ‘Principles on Housing and Property Restitution for Refugees and Displaced Persons (also known as the ‘Pinhiero Principles’) were endorsed.

General Assembly resolutions
Resolution on the realization of the right to adequate housing (41/146 of 4/12/1986)
Resolution on human settlements including security of tenure campaign, including a clause on the need for good land and property administration (A/59/484 of 12/2004).

Governing Council resolutions
Access to basic services for all within the context of sustainable human settlements (20/5 of 8/4/2005)
Guidelines on access to basic services for all (22/8 of 3/4/2009)
Global campaigns on secure tenure and urban governance (20/12 of 8/4/2005)
Guidelines principles on access to basic services for all (21/4 of 20/4/2007).
Resolution on Women’s land and property rights and access to finance (22/1 of 3 April 2009).
Resolution on Affordable housing finance (22/2 of 3 April 2009).
Resolution on Strengthening the Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation: experimental financial mechanisms for pro-poor housing and infrastructure (21/10 of 20 April 2007)
Resolution on Water and sanitation (19/6 of 9 May 2003).

World Urban Forum V
Housing. Discussions in WUF 5 underscored in one of its dialogues the question of equal access to adequate housing as a fundamental step to bridge the urban divide while providing an alternative to slum dwellers to uplift themselves, as a component of sustainable urban development and climate change mitigation and adaptation. The discussion evolved on the provision of serviced land at scale and reforms in housing finance, reinforcing not only the MTSIP FA3 strategic objectives but also UN-HABITAT core mandate. The draft WUF V report (HSP/CPR/37/5) highlights that “UN-Habitat is the lead coordinator for housing, land and planning” and further elaborates that “making our cities more resilient and climate-proof requires better and more rational land use planning, greener and more robust building codes”.

Land. Every WUF there is a dedicated Global land tool network (GLTN) Round Table event. In Rio the title of the GLTN event was ‘Piloting of a GLTN land tool: A practical way to ensure gender equality.’ Some of the key aspects discussed were about how land is cross cutting for other urban interventions and that policy development and implementation is key to sustainable urban development and upgrading. A side event on land and participatory enumeration was also held.

Basic services and Infrastructure. The international guidelines following the Governing council resolutions were prepared in consultation with other United Nations bodies and concerned stakeholders and in line with the guidelines on decentralization. This was taken to meetings at
WUF 5, where a steering committee of partners and donors met to discuss an implementation plan for the guidelines. This implementation plan was then also taken to a high level meeting at Rio for endorsement.

**Linkages to other conferences and global processes**

**Linkages with Climate Change Debate**

Additionally, in view of the global debate on climate change and sustainable urban development, systemic land and housing reforms are to be promoted so that land-use patterns, housing typologies, codes and norms as well as residential densities and construction patterns that affect the built-up form of cities and neighbourhoods can be addressed in a sustainable manner to curb environmental impacts on cities and climate change. This will help to address intrinsic vulnerabilities related to land use, urban densities related to urban intensification versus urban sprawl, emissions related to urban form and urban mobility patterns, and the environmental impact of building practices and related patterns of residential space production. This is very contemporary and is a discussion UN-HABITAT is increasingly drawing attention to these issues, for instance through the Global Reports on Human Settlements (GRHS 2009 on urban planning, GRHS 2011 on cities and climate change, GRHS 2013 on sustainable transport), and the agency provides capacity development support in these areas, particularly to cities in developing countries. The GLTN has developed a tool concerning Land and Environment that highlights this important linkage. These issues have also been raised in UNEP-UNHABITAT dialogues, EGMs on sustainable building, the recent Green Building Conference, climate change and Cities Initiatives for Climate Change and Mitigation. Thus, this link is very strategic.

**Linkage with the UNCSD “Rio+20” process**

Twenty years after the Rio Summit, the concept of Sustainable Development will be revisited on the occasion of a United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, “Rio+20”, to be held in 2012. The themes of “The Green Economy” and revisiting the “Institutional Framework for International Environmental Governance / Sustainable Development” will be the two main issues to be discussed at this meeting. GC 23 and WUF 6 are seen as two milestones in the process towards Rio+20. The proposed theme of GC 23 will make it possible to better articulate how access to land, housing and basic services and infrastructure can stimulate a transition towards the green economy, especially in developing countries. GC 23 deliberations will also feed into discussions on the international governance of sustainable development, particularly as far as the critical components of housing, land, basic services and infrastructure are concerned.

**AMCHUD**

Currently there are discussions to hold the next AMCHUD conference before GC 23 where the theme will be focused on land and sustainable urban development.