

Key Corporate Messages for the 9th Urban Forum

Summary

1. With the adoption of the New Urban Agenda by the General Assembly, **Sustainable Urban Development has been recognized as a tool for accelerating sustainable development.** Urban areas and cities have become a potent force for addressing sustainable economic growth, development and prosperity. They drive innovation, consumption and investment in both developed and developing countries. Cities can take the lead to address many of the global challenges of the 21st century, including poverty (in both rural and urban areas), inequality, unemployment, environmental degradation, and climate change.
2. **Urbanization is not only about cities.** The process of urbanization plays a key role in facilitating and ensuring rural-urban connections that permit more harmonious regional development. Technological access, job opportunities through urban-based activities, proximity to urban amenities, lifestyle influences and consumption patterns are manifestations of these positive interactions.
3. **Sustainable Urbanization is a key contributor to poverty reduction** in urban and rural areas. It has contributed to lifting more than 700 million people out of poverty in the last 15 years, more than 70% of them from rural areas. Working at the urban level, it is possible to include people, locations and city conditions to ensure that no one – and no place, including rural settlements – is left behind.
4. **Sustainable urbanization does not happen by chance, but through an integrated approach engaging all stakeholders.** Urban transformation demands a holistic that takes into consideration the legal frameworks for urbanization in a given country, its urban planning and design capacity as well as its financial frameworks especially at municipal level.
5. **UN-Habitat is the designated focal point in the UN System for the implementation of the human settlements and sustainable urbanization agenda.** Bringing our expertise and a forty-year legacy of experience in this field, we are well positioned to: (i) facilitate coherent support by the UN System and financing institutions to national governments in implementing the New Urban Agenda and achieving the urban dimensions of SDGs; (ii) mobilize and convene multi-stakeholders for collaborative and joint action; and (iii) support a stronger role of regional and local governments in this process.

Sustainable Urbanization and Human Settlements

Half of humanity now lives in cities, set to reach 70 per cent by 2050. Most migrants and people displaced by war or disaster move to cities. Between now and 2050, the equivalent of the total global population alive in 1960, three billion people, will be added to big cities through migration and population growth.

Yet for tens of millions, the magnet of city life is lagging behind the promise. While cities generate around 70 per cent of global GDP the gap between a citizen's quality of life and this enormous urban productivity is widening to a chasm.

Cities consume 78 per cent of the world's energy and produce more than half of all green-house gases and other emissions, hence solutions for environmental sustainability must have adequate focus on how cities grow and are managed.

Most urbanization is taking place where nations can least afford it. Population boom, climate change, and people flocking to cities in pursuit of a better life, is burdening overworked and underfunded cities and national governments. The one billion slum dwelling population worldwide indicates that cities and human settlements are failing to keep pace with new realities through good planning and management.

The UN General Assembly's adoption in 2015 of Goal 11 (the so-called "cities" goal) as one of 17 goals of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and the New Urban Agenda (NUA), in December 2016, was an epochal recognition of the role of sustainable urbanization in development. The General Assembly now recognizes that *sustainable* urbanization is transformative in human development.

Localising SDGs. Local and regional governments around the world consider the 2030 Agenda a once in a generation opportunity to trigger a true universal transformation. The achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals will not be possible without their full ownership at local level and by civil society. City, local and regional government networks are developing global, regional and national systems of 'localization' to contribute to awareness raising, alignment of work plans, learning exchange and local monitoring and reporting. UN-Habitat is committed to supporting this movement throughout its work and in collaboration with other UN agencies.

The New Urban Agenda is the key technical driver of the "urbanization" elements of the SDGs. Its effective implementation will contribute significantly to the ambitions of the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Addis Ababa Plan of Action for Financing Sustainable Development, the World Humanitarian Summit and the Summit for Refugees and Migrants.

The New Urban Agenda addresses the way cities are planned, designed, managed, governed and financed to achieve sustainable development goals, focusing on the three transformative

commitments: Sustainable Urban Development for Social Inclusion and Ending Poverty; Sustainable and Inclusive Urban Prosperity and Opportunities for All; and Environmentally Sustainable and Resilient Urban Development.

Urbanization is not only about cities

UN-Habitat interventions recognize rural-urban interactions and the importance of the flows of people, information, natural resources and waste throughout rural-urban systems. Acting in the rural-urban continuum is paramount for sustainable development. The process of urbanization plays a key role in facilitating and ensuring these crucial, interrelated, connections that have the possibility of permitting more harmonious regional development. Urbanization as a process is not only about cities. Its impact extends beyond urban areas and touches rural settlements. Technological access, job opportunities through urban-based activities, proximity to urban amenities, lifestyle influences and consumption patterns are manifestations of these positive interactions. Urbanization has contributed to lifting more than 700 million people out of poverty in the last 15 years, more than 70% of them from rural areas. Urbanization is therefore a key contributor to poverty reduction in rural areas.

A successful urban planning agenda requires that attention is given to all type of urban settlements – be they rural or urban. Acting in the rural-urban continuum requires:

Rural regional planning - A more harmonious rural-urban (regional) development benefits local communities and enhances the sustainable management of local resources and access to services in rural and peri-urban villages.

Urban planning that aims to address the management of the relationship between urban systems and their hinterlands, and quality of life of urban and peri-urban dwellers. Acting on the space, supported by legal and financial mechanisms, a reinvigorated notion of urban planning can bring shared prosperity and more sustainable development.

Regional planning that focuses on the development of reciprocal linkages between rural and urban areas. This approach emphasizes connectivity of the system and the use of the territory to address socio-economic difficulties and inequalities. The interventions act upon rural-urban pressures and flows through multi-sectoral, interrelated and complementary interventions.

The Role of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme - UN-Habitat
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The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the designated focal point in the UN System for the implementation of the human settlements and sustainable urbanization agenda.

The agency has evolved over the past forty years from a small UN think tank on “human settlements” into a multi-disciplinary agency tackling urban dimensions of the humanitarian, development and peace nexus.

It has transformed into a knowledge-based organization where normative and operational work are intrinsically linked, to ensure that global sustainable urbanization norms and standards are translated into national and local level policies and actions which then feed back to enhanced learning and policy.

The New Urban Agenda resulted in an expanded focal point role for UN-Habitat in the UN system for implementation, follow up and review of the NUA. This includes: UN system-wide coordination; practical guidance to countries; coordination of reporting on the NUA; provision of capacity development and tools and advocacy, awareness raising and stakeholder mobilization and engagement.

How we function

UN-Habitat combines normative, operational, and coordinating mandates

Each of these mutually-reinforcing mandates builds on the other, and are linked to the five thematic areas of the 2030 Agenda: **people**, through our technical cooperation and engagement down to the municipality level; **planet**, through the recognition that sustainable urbanization is part of the solution to climate change; **prosperity**, with urbanization as a pathway to wealth creation, poverty reduction, and equity; **peace**, through the increasing recognition that urbanization is inextricably linked to global security, particularly in the context of the growing number of humanitarian crises affecting urban areas, including migration; and **partnership**.

Normative – getting cities to function

UN-Habitat pursues patterns of sustainable city growth that create jobs and business opportunities, and tackle poverty. UN-Habitat takes on the most common challenges of poor urbanization, which the New Urban Agenda recognizes as primarily poor planning, insufficient rules and regulations, the inability of local authorities to finance, operate and deliver basic services, as well as weak coordination between different levels of governments. We develop and disseminate research-backed global standards and policies for sustainable urbanization, supported by time-tested monitoring and diagnostic tools and platforms such as the Cities Prosperity Initiative, the Cities Resilience Profiling Initiative, and the Global Urban Observatory. In this way, UN-Habitat is aiming to develop its capacity to serve as a ‘Centre of Excellence’ to develop, promote and disseminate norms, guidelines, policies and practices related to sustainable urbanization.

Operational – being on the ground

UN-Habitat supports cities with technical expertise in over 80 countries. UN-Habitat continuously works to build strong relationships with and between national governments and local authorities through its technical assistance and policy advisory work; facilitates large-scale investments in urban initiatives by financial institutions through project preparation services; and has brought innovative solutions to critical challenges such as slums, poverty alleviation, and the land/conflict nexus in numerous and diverse contexts. Of our client countries, 44 are Least Developed, 35 are Middle Income, and one is High Income.

Coordinate, convene, and advocate for results

For 40 years, UN-Habitat has been the focal point in the UN system for sustainable urbanization and human settlements. The robust presence of urbanization elements in the SDGs, the stand-alone ‘cities’ goal (SDG 11), the UN General Assembly endorsement of the New Urban Agenda in 2016, as well as the 30,000 participants at the Habitat III conference in Quito in October 2016, is testament to our expertise and convening power.

Our work is grounded in strong partnerships with government, NGOs, local authorities, UN agencies, academia, and financial institutions. Our private sector relations are being built through the World Economic Forum, the Human Cities Coalition (comprising 38 multi-nationals), and individual companies that invest in sustainable urban development.

Regional and issue-based coalitions and platforms include the Global Alliance for Urban Crises; the Medellin Collaboration on Urban Resilience; the Global Land Tool Network, the World Urban Forum, the World Urban Campaign, the Urban Gateway, and the Urban Planning and Design Lab, as well as others. UN-Habitat is the secretariat for the UN Advisory Committee on Local Authorities, promoting the role of local and sub-national governments in implementation and monitoring of urban aspects of the SDGs and the NUA.

The humanitarian action to sustainable development arc

“Building back better”. UN-Habitat is the only development agency with membership of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (the key global coordination mechanism for humanitarian action). After a crisis, reconstruction and recovery programming provides an opportunity to “plan out” risk and “build in resilience,” for a more functional city. UN-Habitat applies innovative principles of sustainable urban planning and facilitates the smooth transition from emergency relief to recovery and sustainable urban development. UN-Habitat has worked in 35 of 47 fragile states, with current programmes in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, Iraq and Somalia, among others.

From proven results, to up-scaled programmes

UN-Habitat is scaling-up these transformative programmes because they work

- **Housing at the Centre:** Through Resolution 24/9 of April 2013, the Governing Council approved a Global Housing Strategy, to strengthen linkages between housing, the economy, employment and poverty reduction, among other things.
- **The Participatory Slum Upgrading and Prevention Programme** has supported national urban policy frameworks in 35 countries; helped secure tenure for 800,000 slum dwellers in 9 countries; ensured that 67,000 slum households have better water and sanitation, housing, roads, public spaces, and safer, more resilient neighbourhoods.
- **The Urban Planning and Design Lab** engages stakeholders and helps national and local governments with concrete and implementable planning proposals. The Lab is now working in more than 20 countries and 40 cities across the world, including Ghana, Johannesburg, Palestine, Philippines, Myanmar, Haiti and Mexico.
- **Urban Economy and Municipal Finance** integrates economic development with spatial and institutional strategies and capacity building. Examples include improved livelihoods for up to 90,000 people in vulnerable urban communities (Somalia), boosting local revenue by 60 per cent (Kiambu, Kenya); and empowerment of women and youth in DRC and Palestine.
- **The Urban Basic Services Trust Fund**, has improved the lives of up to 5 million people through improved access to safe drinking water, sanitation, energy and support to displaced people.
- **Urban Legislation, Land and Governance:** UN-Habitat has coordinated the Global Land Tool Network (GLTN); developed unified land acts, replaced 60 laws and regulations and peacefully addressed land disputes in Nepal; resettled over 600 returnee households with certificates of residency, and helped resolve 90 per cent of documented land disputes in South Kivu, DRC. In Iraq 2.5 million displaced and informal settlement residents are now better able to access affordable housing, secure land tenure and basic services.
- **Risk Reduction, Resilience & Rehabilitation:** Emergency support to 9 countries that reached over 500,000 people; the strengthening of resilience systems in 33 cities in 12 countries through the City Resilience Profiling Programme, and the 30-partner Global Alliance for Urban Crises.
- **Cutting edge research and capacity development work:** The City Prosperity Initiative, now implemented in 300 cities, enables cities to undertake diagnostic, participatory planning. UN-Habitat has established the Global Urban Observatory, supporting national statistical offices in 39 countries, and the Global Urban Lecture series, which has reached over 50,000 viewers and is voted the world's second-best Massive Open Online Courses on Cities (MOOC).

Our catalytic initiatives to accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and Agenda 2030

To maintain the momentum of Habitat III and accelerate implementation of the New Urban Agenda, UN-Habitat's strategic plan, Strategic Framework and Work Programme and Budget align with the SDGs, the NUA as well as other relevant global frameworks. Current initiatives to

support implementation are outlined below. These initiatives are also in line with the ongoing deliberations on the reform of the United Nations Development System.¹

1. **Implementation Guidelines for Countries** – the Action Framework for Implementation of the NUA (AFINUA) is a practical guide for implementing the NUA. It defines who should lead each element, how to measure (through SDGs and the City Prosperity Initiative) and links to the NUA. It is divided into five categories: National Urban Policies; Urban Legislation, Rules and Regulations; Integrated Urban Design and Territorial Planning; Financing Urbanization; and Local Implementation.
2. **Monitoring Framework for the NUA** – UN-Habitat is developing a monitoring framework, using an expanded version of the CPI’s Global Sample of Cities, to align NUA and SDG monitoring, and to support country and local level monitoring, with data collection and analysis undertaken by the Global Urban Observatory.
3. **Implementation Facility for Sustainable Urban Development** – UN-Habitat is leading a coalition of six UN agencies (UNDP, UNEP, UN Women, UN Global Compact, WFP, UNOPS) in partnership with the World Bank, to support countries and cities to implement solutions and investments for sustainable urban development. Components include knowledge creation, sharing and learning; technical assistance; financing enhancement for country and city projects; and advocacy, policy support, monitoring and evaluation. The six thematic areas are: cities and territorial development; sustainable city infrastructure and services; inclusive cities, affordable housing, financing and urban land; low carbon and resilient cities; city management; and planning and finance.
4. **A UN-System Collaborative Framework** to support implementation of the NUA is being developed, so that the relevant expertise of specialist agencies can be brought to bear at the global, regional and local levels.
5. **Advocacy, awareness creation and engagement** of stakeholders in implementation, monitoring and reporting on the NUA is being strengthened through UN-habitat’s new communications and partnership strategies and the **Stakeholders Collaborative Framework**.
6. **Up-scaling programmes** of UN-Habitat and promoting integrated and joint UN sustainable urbanization programmes, focusing on issues of inclusion, migration and climate change.

¹ The report of the SG proposes a package of seven major changes designed to reinforce one another. They include: (a) the system-wide strategic document, to ensure collective responsibility and accelerate the alignment of United Nations development system support with the 2030 Agenda; (b) a new generation of United Nations country teams with enhanced skill sets, an optimized physical presence and consolidated and effective back-office support; (c) an empowered and impartial resident coordinator system; (d) a revamped regional approach, complemented by a strengthened Department of Economic and Social Affairs; (e) improved strategic guidance, transparency and accountability; (f) a system-wide approach to partnerships; and (g) underpinning all the other changes, a new funding compact between Member States and the United Nations development system.