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WORKSHOP REPORT:
ENTRY POINTS TOWARDS HEALTHIER URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

CARIBBEAN URBAN FORUM

July 1st 2021

Workshop: Entry Points towards healthier urban environments
Caribbean Urban Forum
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Caribbean Development Bank and UN-Habitat

The objective of this pre-conference workshop was to illustrate the various and diverse entry points towards healthier urban environments. Urban and health professionals presented on a number of integrated planning and design approaches and tools which place eco-social health at the centre of development strategies.

This workshop was inspired by the Planning for Healthy Cities programme (the UN-Habitat programme dedicated to supporting urban leaders, decision-makers, health and planning professionals in the merging planning and urban health objectives) and the UN-Habitat-CLGF Commonwealth Healthy Cities Initiative.

Moderator: Graham Alabaster, Geneva Office Chief, UN-Habitat

Opening Remarks: Shipra Narang Suri, Chief of Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat and L. O'Reilly Lewis, Division Chief of Economic Infrastructure, Caribbean Development Bank

Tools Presentations: Lucy Slack, Secretary General, Commonwealth Local Government Forum; Pamela Carbajal, Urban Health and Regional Planning Consultant, UN-Habitat, Dr. Fiona Shenton, Network Facilitator, BOVA network; Michele di Marco, Téchne Consultant, World Health Organization; José Chong, Programme Management Officer at UN-Habitat

Panelist: Mayor Bernard Wagner, Belize City; Angelika Namdar, Caribbean Network for Urban and Land Management; José Mena, Director of Urbanism, Intituto de Planificación Físca del Gubierno de Cuba

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CARIBBEAN URBAN FORUM WORKSHOP: ENTRY POINTS TOWARDS HEALTHIER URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought an unprecedented interest and attention to the intersecting fields of health and urban and territorial planning. Agencies and governments of all levels have grappled with the task of protecting their citizens from the pandemic and ensuring vital urban spaces remain safe. Moreover, the Covid-19 crisis has highlighted not only the necessity of integrating health into territorial planning, but also the many benefit and insights that can be derived from doing so. The webinar on Entry Points towards healthier urban environments, hosted by UN-Habitat at this year's Caribbean Urban Forum, aimed to explore the variety of ways in which health professionals are currently engaging with the urban context and how urban professionals and officials are integrating health into their strategic planning.

Part One: Resources and Tools

The event opened with remarks from Shipra Narang Suri, Chief of the Urban Practices Branch at UN-Habitat and Division Chief of Economic Infrastructure at the Caribbean Development Bank L. O'Reilly Lewis. Both institutions stressed the importance of raising the profile of planning for health and the need for local authorities to embrace the opportunities as the world addresses the covid-19 crisis. Several presentations by health and urban professionals followed, including from Lucy Slack of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), Pamela Carbajal and Jose Chong of UN-Habitat, Dr. Fiona Shenton of Building Out Vector Borne Diseases in sub-Saharan Africa (BOVA), and Michele Di Marco, of the World Health Organization's Techne program. Many tools and resources for integrating health and territorial planning were discussed, ranging from child-focused urban planning to preventative planning for communicable and non-communicable diseases.

Lucy Slack and Pamela Carbajal discussed the ways in which CLGF and UN-Habitat are working to integrate health in their territorial planning practices.

Lucy Slack discussed CLGF's work to get health cities on the commonwealth agenda, including but not limited to the new healthy cities program that CLGF has introduced, and the accompanying charter which ensures mayors are committed to implementing healthy cities strategies. Secretary Slack stressed the importance of this commitment leading to practical action and the program will help demonstrate the integral role that city governments can play within the healthy city agenda. Pamela Carbajal detailed UN-Habitat's new sourcebook for Integrating health into urban and territorial planning, which looks at the ways in which public health aspects can be linked with spatial factors, how health can serve not only as both an outcome and output for territorial planning and offers several implementation and advocacy tools for doing so. Both speakers emphasized the importance of not only intersectoral but multilateral collaboration, a sentiment that would be echoed in the second part of the event.

Cordinator Michele Di Marco introduced Téchne, the World Health Organization's Technical Science for Health Network which has worked to integrate technical built environment expertise into COVID-19 response. The network's intersectoral collaboration has expanded to become a tool for all public health events and the WHO been able to derive valuable insight and operation research through its experience using téchne to address the COVID-19 crises. Di Marco highlighted the experience of vulnerable urban populations, citing the experience of poorer populations who depend on informal markets for basic necessities and for whom the supply chain collapse precipitated by the pandemic has represented an acute danger. José Chong of UN-Habitat focused his presentation

UN-HABITAT's Sourcebook for Integrating health in urban and territorial planning was published in the Spring of 2020. The sourcebook works to bridge the gaps between urban planning and public health, identifying key actors and articulating a framework for future action.

on planning for children in urban environments, identifying them as a second highly vulnerable and expanding subset of urban populations. Chong detailed the efforts of UN-Habitat's global public space programs to focus on creating child friendly cities and the role public spaces can play as neighborhood assets not just for vulnerable populations, but also as economic catalysts. As Chong said, children can serve as an indicator of urban safety and of healthy cities more broadly. Dr. Shelton's presentation focused on the efforts of the BOVA network to address health in terms of communicable diseases, explaining the methodology that BOVA uses to combat Malaria and Dengue in vulnerable locations.

These presentations were followed by questions which interrogated the way that actors can breach the financial and administrative barriers to implementing healthy city strategies. In particular, his Worship Mayor Bernard Wagner of Belize City brought to attention the issue of changing urban typologies and demographic shifts, explaining how urban populations in many places

The BOVA network works to promote and disseminate normative guidelines to prevent the spread of communicable diseases like Malaria and Dengue. BOVA methodology emphasizes the importance of the peri-domestic environment in preventing the spread of disease.

across the Caribbean are not always identified as such, which can complicate the process of planning for these populations. Angelika Namdar, of the Caribbean Network for Urban and Land Management, questioned how healthy city strategies can help repair the education sector, which has been adversely affected by the pandemic.
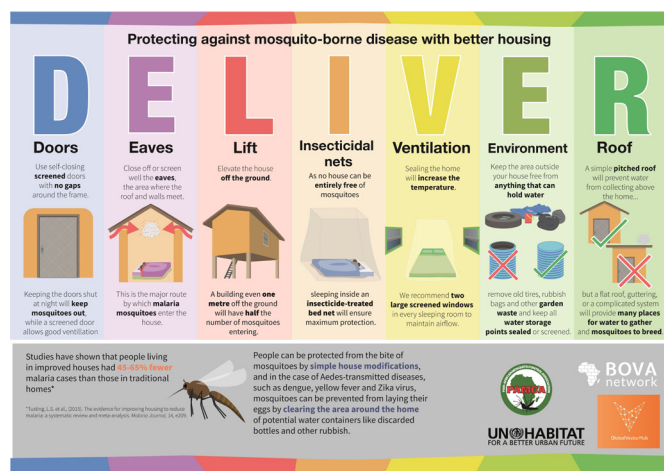
Part Two: Panel discussions

During the panel discussion his Worship Mayor Bernard Wagner of Belize explained the hardships that Belize has suffered during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the lack of security that many marginalized populations have experienced. Mayor Wagner explained that

"Healthy, inclusive and resilient urban communities will only be achieved if our approach is a collaborative one, and one which spans across sectors, constituencies, towns, cities, countries and regions."

- Mayor Bernard Wagner, Belize City

decentralization of planning is critical to ensuring people-centered urban centers and stressed how by permitting urban actors to plan for themselves, urban officials in Belize would be better able to enhance urban resiliency in the face of many different types of health crises, including those vulnerabilities augmented by climate change. According to Mayor Wagner traditional municipal sectors like sanitation must be involved in the push towards healthy cities, as well as more nascent sectors like renewable energy production. Mayor Wagner further stressed that "Healthy, inclusive and resilient urban communities will only be achieved if our approach is a collaborative one, and one which spans across sectors, constituencies, towns, cities, countries and regions."

Angelika Namdar of the Caribbean Network for Urban and Land Management commented on Suriname's experience of the pandemic, the hardships borne by the education sector and the importance of prioritizing public health in policy going further. She emphasized the need to identify opportunities for implementing the tools discussed in the first part of the webinar in a bottom-up manner. Jose Mena from the Instituto de Planificacíon Físca del Gobierno de Cuba discussed the national urban policy which had been developed in Cuba as a response to the experience of the pandemic in Cuban cities. This policy encompasses a territorial approach, legislation framework as well as multilevel plan for each state in Cuba.

This national policy and the experiences detailed by both Mayor Wagner and Angelika Namdar can serve as guidance for other countries seeking to integrate health into legislative frameworks for planning. However, as was stressed throughout the webinar, effective integration will necessitate a commitment from actors across planning and health sectors in the Caribbean. This commitment must consider the changing face of urban environments, the demographic shifts that we will witness in coming years as well and the many lessons learned from the experience of the COVID-19 crisis. Most crucially these approaches must center the experiences of the most marginalized and vulnerable in society to ensure we are building healthy cities for all.

NEXT STEPS & KEY TAKEAWAYS

- There is a need to redefine the urban, to ensure that future planning for urban health takes into account the true existing assets and needs of urban communities.

- Local governments need to be empowered through policy and legislation that supports their intitiatives for health and gives them the independence to effectively plan for their communities.

- Climate change must be centralized within the health and urban planning discussion as a key global health issue.

- Public health needs to be prioritized on all policy agendas.

- Identifying the opportunities to implement existing and future tools in a participatory, bottom-up manner will be key to ensuring their success.

RESOURCES:

Global Public Space Programme Annual Report 2020, UN-Habitat, 2020

Integrating health in urban and territorial planning: A sourcebook UN-Habitat, 2020

Inside and Out: Building Advice for Vector-Borne Disease Prevention, BOVA Network, 2020

Téchne World Health Organization, 2020