



Executive Board of the United Nations
Human Settlements Programme

First session of 2020

Nairobi, 31 March–2 April 2020

Item 5 (c) (vi) of the provisional agenda*

Reports on the implementation of UN-Habitat strategic
plans: implementation of the strategic plan for the period
2020–2023: impact communication strategy

Progress in the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023: the draft communication strategy

Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. The UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 presents a transformative vision for the way in which the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) works, with a strong change narrative focused on increased inclusivity and impact. As drivers of the strategic plan, advocacy and communication play a key role in giving voice and visibility to its ambitious vision and the ongoing implementation of the four domains of change:
 - (a) Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum;
 - (b) Enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions;
 - (c) Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment;
 - (d) Effective urban crisis prevention and response.
2. The strategic plan calls for a robust communication strategy that uses messaging and branding to raise awareness of sustainable urbanization challenges and opportunities, and the unique contribution that UN-Habitat makes as a thought leader and as a centre of excellence and innovation.
3. The communication strategy builds on and amplifies the recognized strengths of UN-Habitat: its mandate, its global presence, the impact of its field work, its knowledge leadership and its powerful convening role to mobilize action and resources for sustainable urbanization.
4. Through the provision of global platforms in which the progress made by partners in sustainable urbanization (in particular the development of best practice) is recognized and where Member States can track their performance in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the New Urban Agenda, the communication strategy will increase opportunities for participation. Communication and advocacy will constitute a force to bring about change through the promotion of sustainable urban policies and legislation through targeted campaigns, events and messages.

* HSP/EB.2020/1.

II. Vision and mission

5. The communication strategy aims to bring into action the UN-Habitat vision of a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world. The strategy revolves around developing and operating an open network of information-driven platforms which engage Member States, local government, private sector partners, non-governmental organizations and the public. The strategy also contributes to the UN-Habitat mission to promote transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action to leave no one and no place behind.

6. Based on the UN-Habitat local and global platforms, the communication strategy will ensure the widest possible involvement in the development and dissemination of its unique mandate to apply urban solutions on the ground and partner with Member States in the implementation and monitoring of the New Urban Agenda within the following four main areas:

(a) **Think.** The Communications and Media Unit will ensure the widest possible dissemination and recognition of the role of UN-Habitat as a centre of excellence and innovation that provides best practice and cutting-edge thinking and research on sustainable urbanization. That will be achieved through the publication and dissemination of key data, flagship reports and research, easily-understood infographics and social media.

(b) **Do.** As one of the few United Nations entities focusing on development as well as humanitarian work, it is essential to showcase the wide range of transformative, positive change that its work engenders. UN-Habitat initiatives will be used to demonstrate urbanization practices which inspire changes in policy and urban practices and provide a feedback loop to channel ideas to Member States, local government and other important stakeholders. That will be achieved through human interest stories, photos and video on UN-Habitat platforms and in the media to demonstrate the impact of projects in the field.

(c) **Partner.** To be truly catalytic, it is essential that UN-Habitat provides wider opportunities to participate in its global programmes. The Communications and Media Unit, with support from other Units within the External Relations and Partnerships Branch, will attract key partners to collaborate, share resources and devote time and effort in an integrated manner through campaigns, messages and multimedia stories developed with partners, including United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, development banks, the private sector and Member States. The material will be disseminated through UN-Habitat, partner platforms and in the media.

(d) **Share.** The Communications and Media Unit will ensure the sharing of accurate, verified and cutting-edge information and best practice on sustainable urban solutions with Member States and other urban stakeholders through a wide variety of outlets, including local and international media, social media, the UN-Habitat website, publications, campaigns, interviews and events.

7. The draft communication strategy builds on the following four key strengths of UN-Habitat:

(a) **Mandate.** UN-Habitat has a strong mandate through the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda and a number of other platforms. It is the United Nations focal point for sustainable urbanization, which is widely recognized as key to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Its global platforms, such as the World Urban Forum, and its global campaigns are internationally recognized, and the ability of the Programme to deliver impact on the ground reinforces its mandate. Its hybrid approach to operational and normative work is one of its key features and allows it to develop policies and implement them with impact.

(b) **Networks.** UN-Habitat has well-recognized convening power with regard to urban issues. It has created and fostered several networks of partners, including at the grassroots level, and of local authorities, often developed through its field offices.

(c) **Centre of excellence.** The high-quality and groundbreaking nature of UN-Habitat research, data, products and work is widely recognized, as are its publications, in particular its flagship reports.

(d) **People and organization.** UN-Habitat employs a wide range of highly qualified professionals with a variety of skills, including research, strategy, programme management and implementation, led by the Executive Director, in 90 offices globally.

8. The communications team will work closely with both internal and external subject experts to offer optimal platforms and media to communicate cutting-edge ideas; highlight urban solutions on the ground; place a spotlight on opportunities to link up with partners; and focus attention on global UN-Habitat platforms to share its products and financing opportunities to assist in scaling up pilot initiatives into global programmes.

III. Key communication roles

A. Inform and engage

9. UN-Habitat plays the primary role within the United Nations in raising awareness of and promoting interest in urban issues, sustainable development and best practice, informing, educating and stimulating participation. It provides local, national and regional authorities and the general public with a wide range of material and information about the challenges and opportunities associated with sustainable urbanization.

1. Tools

10. **Effective storytelling.** Compelling, people-centred stories, whether written or told through photographs or video, have an impact on everyone, from the general public to donors and Member States. Such stories, told in clear, jargon-free language, incorporate important information on urbanization and the work of UN-Habitat.

11. **Timely, ground-breaking research.** The Communications and Media Unit will help to ensure that UN-Habitat is recognized as a knowledge leader and centre of excellence. The themes of flagship reports and other key research materials and data will be synchronized with the themes of key events, such as sessions of the World Urban Forum, and campaigns to ensure real change.

12. **Messaging.** The Communications and Media Unit will work across the Programme to ensure that agreed cohesive messaging, aimed in a timely manner at relevant audiences, forms the basis of speeches, question and answer sessions, briefings and social media output.

13. **Creative materials.** The Communications and Media Unit will produce high-quality creative materials for campaigns, including publications, booklets, infographics, maps, presentations and videos; and services, including translation. It will also create eye-catching, informative exhibitions and bring together dynamic performers and exhibitors.

14. **Media engagement.** The Communications and Media Unit will continue to target the most influential relevant media, whether traditional or social, with stories on projects, opinion pieces or interviews, ensuring regular interaction with the Executive Director and training for media on urban issues.

15. **Social engagement.** Outreach and engagement with the public could be further expanded through social media, discussions on radio and television, forums with the Executive Director and campaigns. The “Urban October” campaign provides a prime opportunity for engaging with the public and city authorities. An increasing number of cities and countries are involved in the month of activities, events and discussions on urban sustainability, but it has potential for further expansion.

16. **Authoritative voice.** UN-Habitat should be ready to provide authoritative comment on current events to raise the profile of the Programme in the media. The Executive Director or Deputy Executive Director should be involved in situations requiring high-profile international media coverage where possible, although the Chief of Communication or senior technical staff could stand in for them as necessary. That approach would help to ensure that UN-Habitat remains the “go to” United Nations entity on all matters related to urbanization.

2. Expected results

17. The enhanced engagement and the role of the Programme as a leading voice on urbanization will result in a better-educated and more informed public, able to engage on urban issues, inform others about urban-related matters and put pressure on its leadership at all levels for change. That, in turn, will increase the reputation of UN-Habitat as a knowledge leader and centre of excellence, and raise the profile of sustainable urbanization, leading to increased trust of donors, the public and UN-Habitat partners in the Programme, thus facilitating resource mobilization and allowing the organization to pursue its mandate more effectively.

B. Inspire change through communication and public advocacy

18. Communication and public advocacy work together to bring about changes in attitudes and transform such changes into action. When people are well informed about sustainable urbanization and the rights that apply to all people, they are more likely to take action to put those rights at the heart of the social, political and economic agenda. Advocacy can work not only to support changes in public policy and legislation, and towards increased local and national funding for key urban issues, but also at an individual level in terms of social behaviour, social attitudes and beliefs.

1. Key areas

19. **Campaigns and themes.** The Communications and Media Unit, in conjunction with the Advocacy and Campaigns Unit, will be closely involved in organizing and promoting key events such as World Habitat Day and ensuring that the themes of such events are linked to ongoing priorities, flagship reports, and data and research. Campaigns will be limited in number, reflect the main priorities of UN-Habitat and have a clear aim, indicators and time frame.

20. **Flagship meetings.** In addition to the UN-Habitat platforms set out in the table below, UN-Habitat will have the opportunity to maximize its messaging at such key meetings and events as those of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the United Nations General Assembly, the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and national and regional urban forums.

21. **Partnerships.** UN-Habitat has a vast range of partners whose help it can call upon to amplify and drive its messages and campaigns. They include United Nations entities, such as the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), which work with UN-Habitat on specific issues, and the United Nations Department of Global Communications, which provides essential support. Other partners include non-governmental organizations, community groups and youth groups, which often have dynamic social media; networks such as United Cities and Local Governments and the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group; and the private sector and other leading actors, many of which are part of the World Urban Campaign.

2. Expected results

22. The mission statement of UN-Habitat refers to promoting transformational change, and communication and advocacy are the drivers behind the knowledge, policy advice and technical assistance that pushes for change to policies and legislation. They are central to publicizing the role of UN-Habitat as a centre of excellence and innovation, and its new vision and mission statements.

C. Positioning UN-Habitat

23. The role and impact of the work of UN-Habitat should be recognized at every level, from the general public and beneficiaries in countries where the Programme works, to donors, permanent representatives and national leaders. Such recognition would ensure that UN-Habitat was seen as the Programme that partners wanted to work with, donors wanted to fund and the media wanted to cover.

24. **Branding.** Through its strategic plan for the period 2020–2023, UN-Habitat has a strong sense of identity, with a vision and a mission to promote. While every activity carried out by the Programme contributes towards the brand, consistent use of the name and the emblem in all its activities will raise the profile and visual recognition of the Programme and will help to further increase the recognition of the expertise of UN-Habitat.

25. **Fundraising.** Communication about the work, impact, expertise and transparency of UN-Habitat are critical to fundraising. In addition, visibility is extremely important for donors and will enhance funding of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023. Visibility guidelines have been produced by the Donor Relations and Strategic Resource Partnerships Unit in conjunction with the Communications and Media Unit.

26. **Monitoring transformative change.** The communication strategy will also provide opportunities for donors and champions to track the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 as it contributes to the wider achievement of the New Urban Agenda and the urban-related Sustainable Development Goals. In its role as the custodian of the indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 11, to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, UN-Habitat communication platforms, including both the physical platforms of traditional media and the digital platforms of social media and online presence, will also provide opportunities for local government and district-level government to participate by contributing data to measure the effectiveness of the normative products being implemented at the local level.

27. **Existing and future platforms.** UN-Habitat currently has a set of platforms that have been designed to support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and to advocate for, promote and support the localizing of the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, a monitoring system associated with the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 will be developed.

Current and future communication and advocacy platforms

		<i>Type of platform</i>	<i>Target audience</i>	<i>Estimated reach</i>	<i>Timing</i>
1	World Urban Forum	Global premier platform – non-decision-making; a one-week meeting with a large array of events	Government, private sector, civil society, United Nations, subject experts and the general public	Direct participation 20,000 people; indirect participation more than 5 million	Every two years
2	UN-Habitat Assembly	Universal assembly – the largest global decision-making body on urbanization	Member States, local government and policymakers	Direct participation 4,000 people; indirect participation more than 1 million	Every four years in Nairobi
3	World Habitat Day	Global awareness campaign focusing on a specific theme linked to a campaign each year	National and city governments, civil society and the general public	Direct participation 500 people; indirect participation more than 1 million	Every year – observed globally
4	World Cities Day	Global advocacy focusing on a specific theme each year	City governments, experts and the general public	Direct participation 500–800 people; indirect participation more than 1 million	Every year – observed globally
5	World Urban Campaign	Global advocacy	Development partners	N/A	Ongoing
6	Urban Thinkers Campus Programme	Global advocacy	Cities and communities (in 2019, 120 communities applied to host Urban Thinkers campuses)	N/A	Talks available on website
7	UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour	Global (leadership)	Award for outstanding contributions and initiatives in the urban field, presented every other year on World Habitat Day	Awarded on World Habitat Day every other year; direct participation 500 people; indirect participation more than 1 million	Every two years
8	<i>State of the World Cities</i> report and flagship regional reports	Global (knowledge leadership)	Experts, governments, the media and the general public	N/A	Every two years
9	City Prosperity Initiative	Global (rating of sustainable development)	500 cities worldwide	N/A	Every year

		<i>Type of platform</i>	<i>Target audience</i>	<i>Estimated reach</i>	<i>Timing</i>
10	UN-Habitat global website	Global	Governments, stakeholders, donors, non-governmental organizations, experts and the general public	N/A	On-going
11	New Urban Agenda platform	Global (monitoring platform for Member States)	Monitoring tool for Member States and city governments	N/A	To be launched at the tenth session of the World Urban Forum
12	Indicators for Sustainable Development Goal 11	Global (monitoring platform for human settlements)	Tracking tool for local and district level participation in sharing data	N/A	To be launched at the tenth session of the World Urban Forum

IV. Public engagement strategy

28. A key factor in the success of the communications network will be the involvement of Member States, local government, the private sector and local communities in the process of developing key programmes. The communication strategy will provide information and opportunities for people to be involved in decision-making in the same way as UN-Habitat currently does through its “Cities for All”, “Safer Cities” and “Public Space” programmes. The engagement strategy is to transform the process from one in which communities have ideas imposed upon them to one in which it is the communities who lead the transformation.

V. Expected outcomes

29. The outcome of the communication strategy will involve the following three key dimensions in which positive change can be seen, felt and quantified:

- (a) Heightened awareness of Sustainable Development Goal 11 and other urbanization-related Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and sustainable urbanization in the general public and at all levels of government;
- (b) Increased awareness of the work of UN-Habitat, its role as a centre of excellence, its impact in the field and key issues related to its work;
- (c) Increased participation with specific reference to selected targeted stakeholders, including Member States, local government, the civil service, the private sector, civil society and special interest groups. Levels of participation can be measured against the number of policy changes, the level of co-investment catalysed and changes in attitude and commitment.

VI. Conclusion

30. The communication strategy takes into account the role of UN-Habitat as the premier United Nations programme working on sustainable urbanization. It is an integral component in the implementation of the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 and will help to galvanize partners, the public and governments to promote transformative change, ensuring a better quality of life for all.