UN-Habitat Covid-19
Policy and Programme Framework

(Version 30.03.2020)

PREAMBLE

The Secretary-General's Report on "Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19" is the guiding document for UN-Habitat's own COVID-19 Policy and Programme Framework. This complements the global appeal launched by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee which focuses on the COVID response in ongoing humanitarian crisis situations

The SG Report is a **call to action, for the immediate health response required to suppress transmission of the virus to end the pandemic; and to tackle the many social and economic dimensions of this crisis, while focusing on the most vulnerable.**

The Report establishes three key parallel steps which directly inform UN-Habitat's own policy and programme framework:

1. Mount the most robust and cooperative health response the world has ever seen.
2. Do everything possible to cushion the knock-on effects on millions of people's lives, their livelihoods and the real economy.
3. Learn from this crisis and build back better […] and seize the opportunity of this crisis to strengthen our commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

UN-Habitat's COVID-19 Policy and Programme Framework provides guidance for global, regional and country-level action. The framework is a key instrument to focus and scale UN-Habitat's contribution to the overall response led by national and local governments, UN agencies and local partners. The framework will be updated as required by changing context and acquired learning or experience.

ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

- UN-Habitat supports **COVID-19 responses relevant to urban areas and human settlements,** prepares for the impact on and respond to outbreaks in **informal settlements and slums**, and maintains a view to **recovery and longer-term impact**.
- UN-Habitat seeks to provide and to mobilize maximum **support to regional and local governments and communities** as frontline responders.
- UN-Habitat **builds on its comparative advantage and the expertise it has today**, in both humanitarian and non-humanitarian settings, as defined by its country experience, global communities of practice, and through our knowledge and data work.

- UN-Habitat aims at **contributing to a broader coordinated response**. UN-Habitat is building strategic **global and regional partnerships**, mobilizing our expertise to support key UN agencies (ex. UNICEF, UNDP, IOM, UNHCR) and other stakeholders (ex. IFRC), further leveraging our advocacy and advisory roles.
- UN-Habitat seeks to maximize the potential of **re-orienting or scaling existing programmes and projects** for direct and tangible impact. We also actively seek to identify **new areas of engagement in coordination with other UN agencies, local governments and key partners,** which will lead to measurable results.
- UN-Habitat will engage systematically in monitoring and learning, to ensure that knowledge about how previous responses have contributed to increased resilience is fully integrated into decisions related to the current crisis. We will also rigorously monitor our interventions to document learning and adjust approach as needed.
- UN-Habitat will comprehensively steer successive engagements both in terms of thematic responses and priority countries, facilitated by **global resource mobilization** while continuously reviewing its organizational capacity.

1. FOCUS OF UN-HABITAT

UN-Habitat focuses on **urban areas** which will be heavily impacted in this crisis in view of their density and the mobility and the connectivity of urban populations. The knock-on economic impact of the crisis will be felt far beyond city boundaries given the dominant role cities play in national economies.

Informal settlements and slums are particularly vulnerable because of their overcrowding, lack of access to water, sanitation and formal health services, and food insecurity. The known solutions to slow transmission of the virus (self-isolation, quarantine, physical distancing, contact tracing, etc.) are very hard to apply in these settings. As the SG's Report points out, if the virus is not managed in these deeply fragile contexts, the global risk for continuous spread of the virus will remain. Action now requires strong global solidarity.

As the urban poor have no financial buffer, the need to **combine** the best possible **health response with socio-economic mitigation measures** will be extremely acute in informal settlements and slums. The lack of pre-crisis resilience and lack of progress against the SDGs calls for a strong focus on early recovery planning and the comprehensive **strengthening of resilience against all hazards** (pandemics, economic shocks, climate).

The socio-economic impact of COVID-19 and health response measures such as lockdowns in urban areas is not limited to only reduced income or loss of livelihood. The strong **relationship between the informal and formal economy** often remains misunderstood and mitigation measures are often limited only to the formal sector. A comprehensive approach also requires a focus on the immediate impact of access to **adequate housing**, including the tenure security for renters; the impact on **food insecurity**, taking into account the vulnerability against price hikes and the lack of financial capacity to stock up in advance; , and the need for **safe mobility to access livelihoods**, as working from home is in most cases not an option for those in the informal economy.

As seen during the Ebola crisis in 2014 and other pandemics, **population movements between urban and rural areas** as well as **trans-national movements** are likely to increase, as people seek to return to their areas of origin, looking for an informal safety net and/or out of fear. In some cases, local governments are considering promoting this as a mitigation and preparedness measures, to reduce the pressure on informal settlements and slums.

The SG's report recognizes that "**local governments are at the frontline of the epidemic but their capacity to respond rapidly depends heavily on the governance context and the financial health of the local government and its budgetary authority".** Support to local governments and service providers is essential and the vehicle to link the national response with what local private sector and communities themselves can do.

A top-down health-focused national response must be combined with a bottom-up **community-led mobilization**. The voice of communities should be fully sought and heard in preparing and responding to an outbreak. Community leadership is needed to reach scale and keep trust of the population.

(UN-Habitat COVID-19 Key messages are kept up-to-date on www.unhabitat.org).

2. UN-HABITAT ENGAGEMENT IN DIFFERENT PHASES OF THE CRISIS

For cities with weak systems and capacities, and a high degree of informality, the **preparedness phase** and early action have already proven critical. UN-Habitat focuses on mobilizing broad coalitions to maximize preparedness and act directly where it has an existing operational footprint and strong local partners.

During the **response phase**, UN-Habitat maximizes its urban expertise to advise national and local governments, UN Country Teams, and key bilateral partners to tailor the response to urban areas, informal settlements and slums. UN-Habitat focuses on policy support and targeted direct implementation built on its expertise where it can add value to a broader integrated response.

UN-Habitat has a key role to play in advising how **urban recovery** can be shaped to ensure a **more resilient future**, driven by the commitments of the Decade of Action.

Global pandemics present new **frontier issues** at the intersection between urbanization and globalization. This crisis, and how it is managed locally and globally, will require a rethinking of sustainable urban development models, influenced by a rebalancing of the public and private sector and new ways of working and living. UN-Habitat has set up a 'braintrust' of global thought leaders, building a multi-disciplinary coalition to develop new insights and knowledge on needed longer-term policy changes.

3. PROGRAMMATIC ENTRY POINTS FOR UN-HABITAT

In urban areas, a granular spatial approach is needed that aligns and integrates efforts to "suppress transmission to stop the pandemic and save lives" with "sustainable solutions to cope with the impact". The programmatic entry points set out below come in support of the programmatic framework developed as a follow up to the SG's report.

3.1 Adapting response to urban areas

UN-Habitat is well placed to provide an **understanding of the nature and complexity of cities** (urban systems) which allows actors to tailor the COVID-19 response to urban areas. These insights can contribute directly to a more integrated multi-sectoral approach with a clear spatial dimension. The Ebola response (2014, West Africa) has provided valuable lessons on dealing with a pandemic in cities and slums (*ALNAP*).

UN-Habitat has a strong experience in mobilizing its planning capacity, supporting community-driven urban recovery and resilience programming at scale during and after crisis, and providing key support roles to multilateral development banks, national governments and local governments.

An early focus on urban resilience helps to profile weaknesses in the existing urban systems to focus on more effective response, while also setting the foundation for a more resilient recovery.

Urban response and coordination mechanisms need to maximize how they capture local knowledge from the local government, service providers and communities. These mechanisms need to be modelled on a granular understanding of the city, allowing response to be organized down to the neighbourhood level. UN-Habitat provides support to *maximize the role of local governments in this area* based on its experience.

The Global Alliance for Urban Crisis has developed a draft *protocol of engagement between local governments and humanitarian actors* and guidance on *building urban resilience in the face of crisis*

Strategic partners: UNICEF, UNDP, IOM, UNDRR, IFRC, World Bank, regional development banks

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3.2 Mapping, use of smart technologies for urban monitoring to support informed coordination and decision-making

Mapping and spatial analysis is key to inform decision-making. It is critical to map and understand the emergence of hotspots and their relationship to essential services. It can also help to map, predict and monitor population movements. This mapping and analysis can shape and localize response: re-organizing informal markets and urban transport hubs, allocating space or buildings to be repurposed for emergency health services (triage points, self-isolation for those without adequate housing, etc.), etc.

UN-Habitat has an important network of global and local partners that can help provide data, mapping and analytical capacity, including using smart technologies.

Resilience profiling and urban data platforms can map risks and vulnerabilities as well as monitor progress. This should include indicators for socio-economic impact, in the formal and the informal sectors (livelihoods, housing market, food security etc.). The Global Alliance for Urban Crisis has developed guidance on *urban profiling.*

Extracting from our global data sets, and working with key partners, UN-Habitat can feed into global risk profiles of cities and vulnerable populations potentially affected by COVID-19, focusing on LDC countries and those cities with high degrees of informality and limited capacity to cope with shocks of this scale.

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3.3 Promoting integrated community-driven responses in informal Settlements and slums

UN-Habitat has over 40 years of experience working in informal settlements, slums and situations of urban displacement. These four decades of accumulated knowledge allow us to offer a solid understanding of the challenges specific to these contexts and to provide integrated approaches and tested tools to support interventions (ex. *www.mypsup.org*). Most of the urban poor live from day to day with no buffer for sustained crises. A health-focused response (testing, contact tracing, etc.) must be accompanied by a strong socio-economic approach which addresses the daily survival need to access livelihoods and food.

UN-Habitat has collaborated with the *Social Science in Humanitarian Action* platform, that emerged out of the Ebola response, to develop a **brief on protection against COVID-19 in informal settlements**. [*Kerstin.sommer@un.org*]

A strong coalition is needed with local government networks and grassroot organizations to cope with the scale of the problem, mobilize quick action, provide direct guidance and fast-track learning across countries and regions. Interventions should be locally adaptable and locally produced where possible (ex. hand washing facilities).

It is key to work directly with communities, connecting formal and informal governance mechanisms and supporting self-organization in communities, recognizing their social and cultural diversity.

Strategic partners: Cities Alliance, World Bank, regional development banks, UCLG, SDI, Asian Housing Rights Coalition, BRAC.

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3.4 Mitigating economic impact and initiate recovery as early as possible

UN-Habitat can support mapping of local economic impact and design of economic mitigation measures and policies, considering both the formal and informal sector, while preparing for early recovery.

An important area for engagement is boosting the fiscal capacity of municipalities and local service providers so they can ensure essential services. It is important to model and measure the likely impact on tax incentives to alleviate the burden on small businesses and livelihoods, and of reduced income on the capacity to operate. Critical work is needed to ensure alternative financing modalities and direct access to global financial resources to compensate for these losses while boosting their capacity to respond.

Close monitoring is needed to predict potential economic breakdowns and severe food insecurity. Preventive measures are needed to help manage potential increase in domestic and street-level violence, working closely with community leaders (traditional, women, youth, religious among others).

Strategic partners: UNDP, UNCTAD, UNIDO, WFP, FAO, World Economic Forum.

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3.5 Promoting active learning on policy measures and practices

A key role for UN-Habitat is to fast-track learning on how cities and communities—especially in informal settlements and slums—are dealing with the COVID-19 crisis across the continuum of preparedness, response and recovery. By supporting and facilitating structured city-to-city learning, these connections can be made in real time to exchange and identify solutions or innovative approaches. In addition, it is also key to network local community leaders, across cities, countries and regions.

UN-Habitat will work closely with UNDP and global networks of local governments and grass-root organizations on a city tracker to inventory and analyse learning and challenges.

A similar level of active learning will be needed at the city level, to keep a finger on the pulse of local adaptation, what works and what doesn't, to quickly adjust the response going forward.

Strategic partners: UNDP, UCLG, Metropolis, Cities Alliance, World Economic Forum, SDI

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3.6 Further thematic entry points in urban areas, informal settlements and slums

3.6.1 Mitigating the impact on access to adequate housing and promoting alternative solutions where needed

Housing issues have been at the core of UN-Habitat's mandate since its creation and we have put *housing at the centre* of sustainable urban development.

Reduced income requires mitigating measures to maintain access to adequate housings for the lower income categories in society, the urban poor and other vulnerable groups (homeless, refugees, migrants, internally displaced, older people, persons living with disabilities). Such measures can include options to lessen the burden of mortgage and rent payments, prevent evictions, provide temporary shelter to the homeless, etc. *[see UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing]*

Real alternatives are also needed for neighbourhood level health services, and options for self-isolation or home care when people's living conditions do not realistically allow for these steps to be followed ; this can include repurposing of under-used buildings, such as schools, hotels, or other facilities among others.

Strategic partners: OHCHR, UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing

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3.6.2 Prioritizing WASH interventions

Water and sanitation are central to preventing and controlling outbreak and an important entry point for UN-Habitat which maintains long-standing experience by the Urban Basic Services Section (Urban Practices Branch). It is critical to ensure affordable access to water and sanitation in a safe way, both in policy decisions and through the water utilities providers (ex. *GWOPA Guidance*).

Local governments need to collaborate with utility providers and community groups to help raise awareness and change behaviours in support of controlling the response.

In a context of likely dwindling tax basis, support is needed to identify how essential basic services and infrastructure can be maintained and expanded where needed.

Strategic partners: UNICEF, GWOPA

UN-Habitat expertise: andre.dzikus@un.org , graham.alabaster@un.org

3.6.3 Keeping urban mobility safe and reliable

Urban transport hubs are a key entry point for a more holistic response. UN-Habitat has experience working with public transport operators. People in cities, including the urban poor in informal settlements and slums, are highly mobile and often have strong social relationships with specific parts of the country or beyond. The COVID-19 crisis and the resulting economic crisis will also affect mobility, social movements and food security.

Maintaining access to livelihoods is critical for people in informal settlements and slums, often relying on public transport.

Strategic partners: UITP

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4. PARTNERSHIPS

4.1 Collaborating with the UN system and INGOs

- UN-Habitat engages in UNCTs, regional and global UNSDG mechanisms (ex. issue-based coalitions on COVID-19 and urbanization) and humanitarian mechanisms (IASC Principals, Emergency Directors Group, Operational Policy Advisory Group, humanitarian clusters – WASH, shelter and settlements). UN-Habitat seeks to develop strategic partnerships both at the global and country level.

4.2 Supporting local governments and local communities

- UN-Habitat maps how regional and local governments can be empowered to maximize their contribution to COVID-19 response, mitigate the impact on the local economy and the most vulnerable and prepare for a more resilient recovery. Wherever possible, the focus is on providing direct guidance and support to local governments and, through them, mobilizing the assets offered by communities, local private sector, and other local actors.
- UN-Habitat promotes the empowerment of communities and their leaders, in particular in informal settlements and slums, and collaborates with them and local governments for direct interventions. UN-Habitat empower youth and women grassroot organizations that can expand the outreach of local governments.

4.3 Working with other stakeholders

- UN-Habitat works with researchers, academic institutions, action-based research initiatives, and a network of professionals working in the built environment. Engagement with them will be critical in terms of gathering lessons and reflecting on the future of the urban environment during recovery.
- The various multi-stakeholder advisory groups established to support the Executive Director will be engaged and mobilized during the response and recovery phase to provide insights and an overview of how their own work is being affected by the pandemic, setting a roadmap for future collaboration.

5. OPERATIONALIZING THE POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC FRAMEWORK

- The Emergency Director (*Christine.knudsen@un.org*) leads on the operationalization of this policy and programmatic framework, in close coordination with the broader corporate Crisis Management Group and supported by a COVID-19 Core Team.
- The corporate policy and programmatic framework is adapted to each region and transformed in a set of concrete country level actions by the **Regional Representatives** and the country teams. UN-Habitat's global technical expertise and normative capacity are mobilized from across the agency: Urban Practices Branch (GSD), the Data and Analytics Unit in the Knowledge and Innovation Branch (ERSKI), and the External Relations and Partnership Branch (ERSKI).
- Corporate priorities are periodically revisited to maximize UN-Habitat's impact and effective use of its limited human and financial resources. This will be guided by the acute need of specific contexts, the current operational footprint and capacity in country, and the concrete demands for support.
- The Emergency Director works with the Director of the Division of Management Advisory and Compliance Services to ensure emergency protocols and specific standing operational procedures are identified and that gaps and bottlenecks are addressed.
- Resource mobilization for UN-Habitat's COVID-19 response is overseen by the Emergency Director and supported by the Chief of Resource Mobilization. The re-deployment of current human and financial resources must be maximized. A compendium of funding proposals will be developed as an appeal document which can be used for donor outreach and private sector collaboration for activities which lie outside of existing inter-agency appeals.
- Public communication is essential to document success, illustrate challenges, and demonstrate UN-Habitat's added value during the COVID pandemic. The Emergency Director works closely with the Chief of Communications and Media to ensure consistent and compelling messages which are in turn taken up by communication focal points in each region and country office.
- Internal communication, including key messages and staff information, is essential to ensure a corporate approach and to support UN-Habitat's broader advocacy role.

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UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

COVID-19
RESPONSE