



**Live Learning Series hosted by UCLG, Metropolis and UN-Habitat
Informalities**

**Speech by the UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif
Wednesday 29 April 2020**

**Dear City leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,
A very good morning, good afternoon or good evening to all of you!**

The moment COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, UN-Habitat highlighted an urgent message: **one billion** people are living in slums and informal settlements; together with the urban poor and refugees, these communities are the most vulnerable people in the world. They are the hardest hit in terms of losing jobs, educational opportunities and even their lives.

61 countries around the world have more than **30 percent** of their urban population living in slums. Living conditions here are dramatically affecting the health profiles of the urban poor. With the pandemic further expanding its reach, every day is now more difficult and more uncertain.

People in informal settlements are more vulnerable, due to malnutrition, lower life expectancy, chronic respiratory diseases, Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. They have a higher exposure to other diseases associated with weaker hygiene practices, exposure to waste and wastewater, changing weather conditions and other risks.

The bottom 20 percent of the poorest urban population living in informal settlements have a life expectancy that is **15 years shorter** than the richer 40 percent of the urban population.

The COVID-19 pandemic gives visibility to the **multiple inequalities, vulnerabilities, forms of exclusion and deprivations**, caused by decades of neglect and underinvestment. **People living in informality are invisible** – they are not counted in data collection and monitoring, planning and social services.

UN-Habitat is working closely with local governments in developing countries to offer practical solutions, to help cities cope with COVID-19, including:



1. Scale up rapidly affordable provision of **water and sanitation**
2. Issue moratoriums on **water and electricity charges** in partnership with service providers
3. Arrange **emergency cash** grants and transfers and ensure emergency access to **food and water**
4. Cease all **evictions** particularly in cases where individuals cannot pay their rent and have nowhere else to go
5. Develop **distribution networks** for food, water and other essentials
6. Develop **strategies for physical distancing** in public transport, or when queuing for water and food distribution
7. **Decentralise larger main markets** into micro markets
8. Encourage **urban agriculture**
9. Identify existing **facilities that could be re-purposed** or provide temporary low-cost structures as community care facilities
10. Establish **safe protocols for funerals**

Local governments can take the lead to work with communities in informal settlements, and all stakeholders to:

1. Implement **pre-emptive strategies** based on area-based risk assessments of residential areas
2. Ensure **worker safety** for government workers and all those ensuring basic services
3. Provide **clear information and advice** in local languages about COVID-1
4. Consult **community leaders** and civil society organisations and ensure their support to **replicate successful efforts**

Let us not focus on what has not been done but instead turn to **what we need to do** to ensure that we lay the groundwork for **integrated and inclusive citywide responses and recovery**.

Friends, 2020 started the Decade of Action on the implementation of the SDGs. COVID-19 is the unexpected, unplanned global wake-up call for this Decade of Action. We cannot move Beyond the Outbreak if people living in informality remain at risk – because of insecure tenure and overcrowding, lack of water and sanitation and lack of income security and access to social services.



On Monday, the United Nations released its full roadmap for After the Outbreak, highlighting that **“there will be no return to the “old normal”** and calling governments to **“act to create a new economy and more jobs”**. The UN’s “Immediate Socio-economic response to Covid-19” sets out five pathways to set in motion a safe recovery of societies and economies. The target is **a world that is better than the old normal** – more sustainable, more gender-equal, more carbon-neutral.

One of the five pathways is to promote social cohesion and to invest in **community-led resilience**. This is where local governments need to come out, in the fore-front, for the benefit of people living in informal settlements and working in the informal sector.

UN-Habitat is working with you to invest in resilience.



Every week, twice a week, since 25 March, I joined these learning sessions, to ensure that UN-Habitat's actions address the needs I hear from you. I called on UN-Habitat's country managers to start immediate assistance projects, in all regions. Last week, I launched the **UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan**. Ongoing programmes are being repurposed, such as the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP), which reaches 5 million slum dwellers in 190 cities in 40 countries.

At the start of the session, allow me to thank once more the thousands of participants who have joined these learning events. I like to thank UCLG, Emilia, the UCLG members, Metropolis, the many speakers. With all of you, my support is for local governments who **leave no one and no place behind, whether formal or informal**. Together, we must overcome Covid-19 and reshape our cities and communities Beyond the Outbreak.