



Global Vision | Urban Action: Collaborating for a Stronger Future Webinar 1: Public Health

**Speech by the UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif
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Thank you, Commissioner Abeywardena for the floor.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Mayor de Blasio , of New York, who is not on this call but just wanted to thank him for his leadership, Madame Commissioner, Dr. Nabarro, distinguished speakers, excellencies, friends, ladies and gentlemen.

Warm greetings to all of you!

Before delivering my speech to you, it is my great honor to share a video message from the Deputy Secretary-General, on the importance of local leadership on the Sustainable Development Goals.

From the outset, I would like to applaud the New York Mayor's Office for International Affairs for their unwavering promotion of the Voluntary Local Review process through the New York Declaration. To the cities who have not yet signed onto these principles, I encourage you to consider doing so. With over 1,430 cities in 210 countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, we must all work together and share together.

UN-Habitat is pleased to partner with the City of New York, the City of Helsinki and Global Citizen on this timely webinar focusing on public health. UN-Habitat works closely with WHO and other partners to address public health considerations in urban settings, using the lessons learned from the 2014 Ebola crisis.

Our Secretary-General Mr. António Guterres stated on 8 April, that the COVID-19 pandemic is one of the most dangerous challenges this world has faced in our lifetime. It is above all human crisis with severe health and socio-economic consequences. Indeed, COVID-19 has touched almost every human, however, we know that the one billion people who live in informal settlements will be deeply affected by this public health crisis. We are well aware that physical distancing and frequent hand-washing are two of the most important practices to slow the spread of COVID-19, however, those living in informal settlements and slums may not be able to practice physical distancing, nor have access to safe water and hand hygiene products.

In response to this and other barriers faced by vulnerable populations, UN-Habitat has developed a programmatic framework for global, regional and country-level action. We will share the link to the UN-Habitat COVID-19 Policy and Programme Framework with those on this webinar and we encourage your feedback.

The Response Plan of UN-Habitat includes an important focus on **urban data, mapping and evidence-based knowledge** for informed decision making, as one of the 3 core areas we have identified in support of cities and communities. We are also deploying the core of our support to **assist vulnerable communities**, particularly in slums; and we are already looking at **economic**



recovery to help cities address the economic impact of both the pandemic and of the measures for contrasting it.

We have been, in the past few years developing, together with WHO, guidance on how to integrate health in urban planning and management towards better health and wellbeing in our cities.

The Sourcebook on Integrating Health in Urban and Territorial Planning which we jointly launch today on our website and social media platforms, highlights three main aspects of the relation of cities with health. I think they provide an initial pathway also for a Stronger Future after COVID-19:

- **Good urban planning can reduce health risks** for communicable and noncommunicable diseases, and relieve pressure from health systems. And **integrating public health in urban planning** creates more equitable, socially inclusive and resilient cities.
- Well-connected and designed public and green spaces, walkability and recreation, and addressing the deficit in services such as water and sanitation and waste management are key strategies to curb both communicable and non-communicable diseases. Co-benefits between health and climate change mitigation can also be achieved through transport, energy and land-use planning.
- A new era of collaboration between urban development experts, local decision makers and health experts is needed. The engagement of communities and local expertise in planning is also important. Data from the health sector is essential for adequate planning.

In the longer term, we are working on a State of the World's Cities after COVID. We would like really to learn from this crisis, which its specific characteristics, and from the response of cities and governments, and of communities. As UN-Habitat we intend to focus on four areas:

1. The governance relations and mechanisms, in a context of multilevel governance
2. The poverty and inequality which determine the extreme vulnerability of people and parts of the city, such as the homeless, those living in slums, and in general linked to poor housing conditions or poorly serviced areas,
3. The quality and characteristic of the urban form, population density and availability of public spaces and its relations with both risk and mitigation of the pandemic impact
4. The fiscal and local economic perspectives facing cities in the aftermath of the pandemic

UN-Habitat is very interested to track innovation and transformation in the way cities are being run, spaces are being managed, and assets and public life are being organized to respond to the pandemic and to shape the future beyond it. We believe many of these policy and practice innovations provide lessons not only in pandemic management, but also in urban planning and management and in local governance.

The Sustainable Development Goals remain as relevant as ever and we are still assessing the impact of COVID-19 on our collective progress towards their achievement. As we start working



on recovery and longer-term transformation, Local Voluntary Reviews and the attention of local governments to the SDGs is essential. We need to collectively work to prevent this crisis to derail our efforts and we need to learn from it to accelerate progress rather.

We believe that given the diversity of contexts and patterns of COVID-19, local data and consistent reference to the SDGs can help better path the way to our future after COVID with a firm eye on positive outcomes for sustainability and human wellbeing. And can help us also exchange experiences and shape collaborations. We need to look at co-benefits across health, environment and other dimensions of the SDGs.

With at least 95% of the COVID-19 cases in urban areas, city leaders are key in developing solutions to curb the spread of illness in ways that are tailored to the needs of their communities. At the same time, in the global effort to build back stronger and better, local governments and community-led organizations are well placed to path the way to the right type of transformation and shift. And they will undoubtedly be the cement that will help bond this new world together.

I would like to take the opportunity to wish everyone good health, and **thanks very much to all of you!**