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**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) Domain of change 1: Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum;
- (b) Domain of change 2: Enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions;
- (c) Domain of change 3: Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment;
- (d) Domain of change 4: 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. The strategy provides for a range of global platforms which will highlight and recognize the progress achieved by governments, partners and communities in sustainable urbanization. These platforms will also showcase the impact of UN-Habitat work, increasing opportunities to measure progress towards the achievement of the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Communication will support advocacy work to bring about change through the promotion of sustainable urban policies and legislation by means of targeted campaigns, events and messages.

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II. Vision and mission

5. The communication strategy aims to put into action the UN-Habitat vision of a better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world. The strategy is grounded in advancing partnerships with Member States, local government, private sector partners, non-governmental organizations, academia and the public through communication materials, platforms, events and messaging. The strategy also contributes to the UN-Habitat mission of promoting transformative change in cities and human settlements through the provision of knowledge, policy advice and technical assistance, as well as collaborative action, to leave no one and no place behind. It will ensure the highest visibility of the UN-Habitat flagship programmes, including promoting their overall themes and reporting on individual projects and results.

6. The impact communication strategy will ensure the widest possible involvement of stakeholders in the development and dissemination of the UN-Habitat mandate to apply urban solutions on the ground and partner with Member States in the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda within the following four main areas:

(a) **Think.** UN-Habitat will ensure the widest possible dissemination of information regarding, and recognition of, the role of the organization as a centre of excellence and innovation that provides best practice and cutting-edge thinking and research on sustainable urbanization. This will be achieved through the publication and dissemination of key reports, research and data using easily understood infographics, stories, and international media and corporate platforms. Action-driven campaigns will promote key urban issues and cutting-edge solutions.

(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 the organization's work engenders. UN-Habitat initiatives, including the flagship programmes, 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 authorities and other important stakeholders. This 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 as well as the engagement of partner organizations in action-driven campaigns to deliver key solutions for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

(c) **Partner.** To be truly catalytic, it is essential that UN-Habitat provides wider opportunities to participate in its global programmes. This will be done by attracting 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, and partners will be engaged to support and deliver on the mandate of UN-Habitat through joint actions using collaborative policy dialogue platforms such as Urban Thinkers Campuses.

(d) **Share.** UN-Habitat 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. By means of advocacy and campaigns, UN-Habitat will share urban solutions and the activities of partners in targeted campaigns to address key thematic areas.

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 and the New Urban Agenda. 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 are widely recognized, as are its publications, in particular its flagship World Cities Report.

(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.

8. UN-Habitat 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. There will be a focus on building the capacity of staff undertaking the central communications and advocacy functions as well as those with communications roles throughout the organization through training and expanded guidelines.

III. Key communication roles

A. Inform and engage

9. UN-Habitat plays the primary role within the United Nations system 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 results and impact of the work of UN-Habitat, including the flagship programmes.

11. **Timely, ground-breaking research** to ensure that UN-Habitat is recognized as a knowledge leader and centre of excellence. The themes of 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, Urban October and campaigns to ensure real change.

12. **Messaging** through cohesive timely messaging for relevant audiences, speeches, question-and-answer sessions, briefings, concept notes and social media output. Public messaging will be carefully crafted taking into account political, cultural and sociological sensitivities, and will be woven into a common narrative across the organization.

13. **Catalytic action** through targeted campaigns to address urban challenges and promote solutions. The campaigns will engage a wide variety of partner organizations to amplify key messages and solutions and promote UN-Habitat through their networks and platforms. The campaigns will support catalytic events to stimulate action from a variety of stakeholders, including through the Urban Thinkers Campuses. UN-Habitat will use the World Urban Campaign as one of its prime platforms of engagement to activate targeted action campaigns.

14. **Media engagement.** UN-Habitat will continue to target the most influential and 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 will be further expanded through social media, discussions on radio and television, forums with the Executive Director and campaigns. “Urban October” will constitute an annual opportunity for engaging with the public and city authorities on urban issues. An increasing number of cities and countries are involved in the month of activities, events and discussions on urban sustainability, and there is potential for further expansion.

16. **Authoritative voice.** Authoritative commenting on current events will raise the profile of UN-Habitat work in the media. The Executive Director or Deputy Executive Director will participate in situations attracting high-profile international media coverage, where possible, with other senior staff providing commentary on behalf of the organization, as necessary. UN-Habitat will build its capacity in that regard as the “go to” United Nations entity on all matters related to urbanization.

2. Expected results

17. The enhanced engagement and the role of UN-Habitat 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 work with partners to 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, increasing programme delivery and enabling the organization to pursue its mandate more effectively.

B. Inspire change through communication and public advocacy

18. Public advocacy campaigns will be designed and implemented 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, and understand the calls for action, they are more likely to take action to put those rights at the heart of the social, political and economic agenda. Communication and 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 changing social behaviour, social attitudes and beliefs.

1. Key areas

19. **Campaigns and themes.** UN-Habitat will organize and promote key events such as World Habitat Day and World Cities Day, ensuring that the themes of such events are linked to ongoing priorities, flagship programmes, the flagship World Cities Report, data and research. Campaigns will be limited in number, align with the priorities of UN-Habitat and have a targeted purpose, indicators and time frame.

20. **Key conferences.** 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 such as those of the high-level political forum on sustainable development, the General Assembly of the United Nations, 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 that can 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 and amplification. Other partners include non-governmental organizations, and community 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 partners in the World Urban Campaign.

2. Expected results

22. The mission statement of UN-Habitat refers to promoting transformational change. Communication and advocacy are the drivers behind the knowledge, policy advice and technical assistance that are used to push for changes 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 will ensure that UN-Habitat is seen as the Programme that partners seek to collaborate with, donors choose to fund, the media promotes and governments engage with.

24. **Branding.** Through its strategic plan for the period 2020–2023, UN-Habitat has a strong sense of identity, with a vision, mission and clear value proposition. While every activity carried out by the Programme contributes to the brand, consistent use of the name and the emblem in all its activities will raise the profile and visual recognition of the Programme, further increasing the recognition of the expertise of UN-Habitat. By building the momentum and recognition of UN-Habitat, it should become

a household name that is closely associated with all matters pertaining to urbanization and human settlements.

25. **Fundraising.** Communication about the work, impact, expertise and transparency of UN-Habitat are critical to fundraising. Donor visibility guidelines have been produced to highlight the important contribution of development partners. Communications highlighting the impact of UN-Habitat work will contribute to resource mobilization in support of the implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023. Mechanisms will be put in place to allow national governments and relevant local authorities to contribute to shaping of the communication strategy for related projects and other relevant strands of work.

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 (make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), UN-Habitat communication platforms will 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.

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 – the world’s largest and most important conference on cities	Government, private sector, civil society, United Nations entities, subject experts and the general public	Direct participation of 13,000+ people; indirect participation through live streaming and media of more than 1 million	Every two years
2	UN-Habitat Assembly	Universal governing body comprising all the States Members of the United Nations – the largest global decision-making body on urbanization	Member States, local government and policymakers	Direct participation of 4,000 people; indirect participation of more than 1 million	Every four years in Nairobi – next session in 2023
3	World Habitat Day	Global awareness and advocacy focusing on a specific theme each year	National and city governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, the media and the general public	Direct participation at global observance and other events of 5,000 people; indirect participation of more than 1 million	Every year on the first Monday of October
4	World Cities Day	Global advocacy focusing on a specific sub-theme each year under the overall theme “Better City, Better Life”	National and city governments, experts, civil society, academia, the private sector and the general public	Direct participation at global observance and other events of 5,000 people; indirect participation of more than 1 million	Every year on 31 October

		<i>Type of platform</i>	<i>Target audience</i>	<i>Estimated reach</i>	<i>Timing</i>
5	Global meetings such as of the General Assembly, high-level political forum, Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, World Economic Forum	Global advocacy	International leaders, governments, high-level experts, United Nations entities, academia	N/A	Usually annual
	Regional meetings including African Union summits and meetings of the Association of South-East Asian Nations, Arab League, Organization of American States, conventions, high-level events	Regional advocacy	Regional leaders, ministers and governments, experts, NGOs, local authorities	N/A	Varied
5	World Urban Campaign	Global advocacy and partner engagement	Governments, civil society, the private sector, academia, the general public	300 organizations, 2,000 individuals	Ongoing
6	UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour	Global (leadership)	Award for outstanding contributions and initiatives in the urban field, up to five awards are presented every other year on World Habitat Day	Direct participation of 500 people (global observation audience); indirect participation of more than 1 million	Every two years
7	World Cities Report (corporate flagship report) and regional reports	Global (knowledge leadership)	Policymakers at the local, subnational and national levels, academia, researchers, international agencies, civil society	50,000 downloads on the corporate website	Every two years
9	UN-Habitat corporate website	Global	Governments, stakeholders, donors, NGOs, experts and the general public	1.2 million views per year	Ongoing

		<i>Type of platform</i>	<i>Target audience</i>	<i>Estimated reach</i>	<i>Timing</i>
10	New Urban Agenda platform	Multi-stakeholder global digital platform for sharing progress made and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals	Primarily Member States and partners that are involved in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, all levels of government, the private sector, non-profit organizations, the United Nations system, multilateral organizations, foundations, parliamentarians, civil society and academia	N/A	Ongoing

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 and in ensuring accurate, timely communication. The strategy for engagement is to transform the communication process from one in which communities have ideas imposed upon them to one in which communities lead.

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 urban-related Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and sustainable urbanization among 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 that occur, 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 in an urbanizing world.