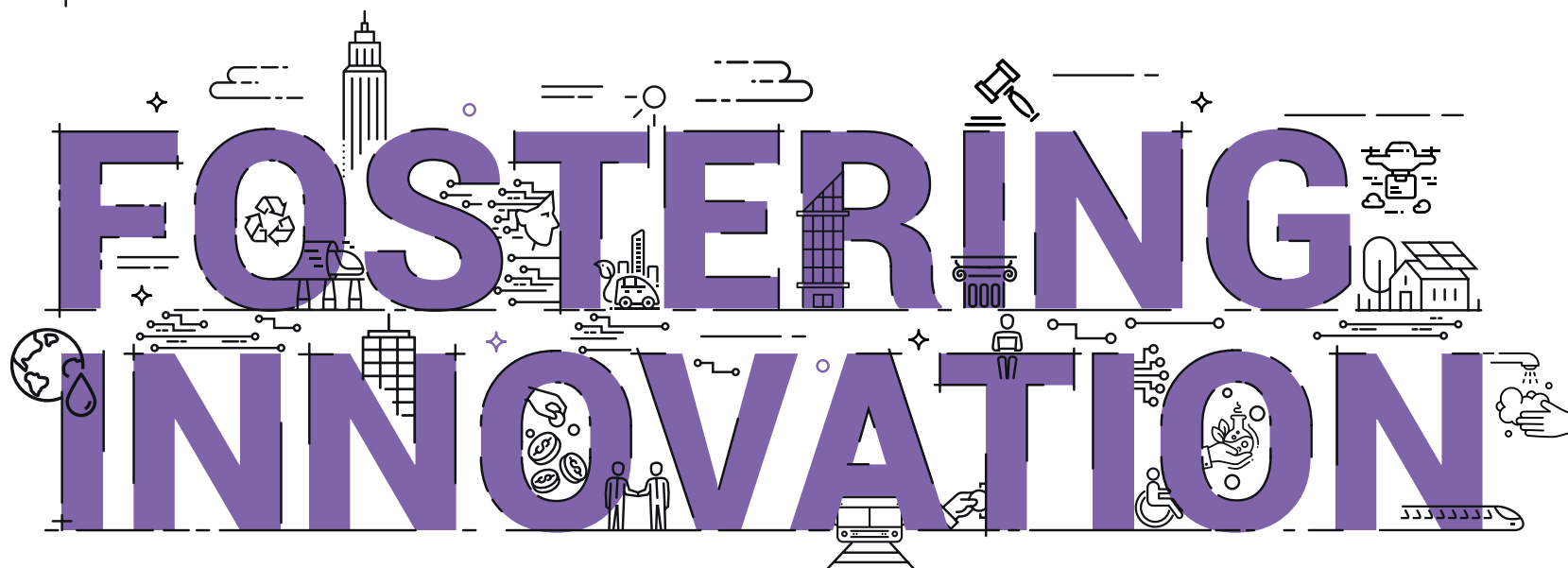


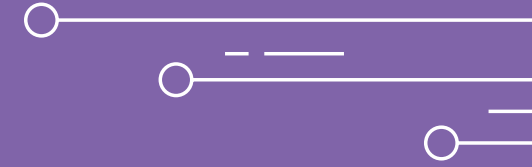
GUIDANCE NOTE



In Urban Programmes and Projects

January 2021

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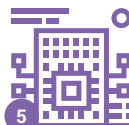
The objective of this Guidance Note is to:



1 Define innovation from UN-Habitat's perspective



3 Explain the role of UN-Habitat's Innovation Unit



5 Suggest how the Principles of Digital Development can be used in technology focussed projects



2 Outline why it matters for sustainable urbanization



4 Suggest how innovation can be incorporated into projects and programmes



6 Present useful practical tools and resource

Why innovation matters

Innovation has become an increasingly important issue as UN-Habitat continues to provide leadership on sustainable urbanization. It is critical as an internal process to adopt an innovation mindset to deliver the most creative, context sensitive and dynamic solutions to our partners and beneficiaries. It is also important as a tool to deliver more progressive, inclusive and sustainable impacts with a strong potential for upscaling within our projects and programmes.

The United Nations Secretary General has called for innovative ideas and solutions as the United Nations strives to deliver the 2030 Agenda in this final decade of action. He gives his vision of innovation as a key tool to overcome the challenges of our time. He stressed that innovative solutions must work for all, not only a few. He has developed a [Strategy for New Technologies](#) and more recently, [a Roadmap for Digital Cooperation](#). Both documents emphasize the importance of a United Nations' wide approach and engagement with digital technology.

The Executive Director of UN-Habitat also embraces innovation and regards it as necessary to improve quality of

life in urban areas. She states that UN-Habitat has repositioned itself through the new Strategic Plan to make more room for innovative and evidence-based urban solutions for all.

The [Strategic Plan 2020-2023](#) calls for innovative funding opportunities, partnerships and methodologies, such as open and challenge-driven innovation, to be explored and the capacity of local government to effectively procure, test and implement frontier technologies to be significantly strengthened. For innovation to flourish, UN-Habitat needs adequate institutional, managerial and financial conditions. It is only when innovation is part of every project across the organization, and when innovative solutions are used by everyone, that innovation becomes a key enabler for development. It recognizes innovation as both an organizational performance enabler and a key outcome of the Plan.

The United Nations has its own Innovation Network and many UN

organizations and entities have active and dynamic innovation programmes. According to the UN Innovations approach, there are three ways that innovation can be fostered:

- 1 **Build or strengthen architecture to promote innovation** (collaborative spaces, systems, labs, processes to incubate new ideas and accelerate development and impact)
- 2 **Activate partnerships and build an innovation ecosystem** (relevant partners, new partners that might not normally be considered, processes to engage such as incubators and labs)
- 3 **Leverage / reinforce a culture of innovation** (embrace innovation and that it is not business as usual, strengthen capacity and permission to ask questions, pose a range of options and solutions, be encouraged by managers to be creative).

This Guidance Note provides colleagues partners and stakeholders with practical information and key entry points to strengthen innovation within their programme and project processes and outcomes to accelerate sustainable urbanization. **The Guidance Note** also provides a checklist to engage on the recommended Principles for Digital Development as they develop their projects and programmes¹.

1. The United Nations Innovation Network has requested its UN members to endorse the Principles for Digital Development as a way to foster shared values on approaching and engaging with digital technology.

UN-Habitat's definition of innovation

In the context of sustainable urban development, innovation can be considered as the process, actions and outcomes that create and deliver new knowledge, tools and sustainable solutions to improve the living conditions for all in cities.

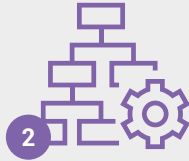
For UN-Habitat, innovation means embracing new ideas, up-to-date means and fresh approaches to our work. It is based on horizontal and collaborative working practices that consider diverse contexts and perspectives. Innovation can be digital or non-digital, and take shape as a

process, a practical tool or application or as a culture. Approached from a collaborative perspective, it can help to efficiently deliver impacts at scale, put people at the centre of the development process and ensure that no one and no place is left behind.

Innovation can be:



1 New ways of thinking, approaching a problem or a process from a new angle or perspective.



2 Incremental and a process evolving over time to deliver new and improved processes and outcomes.



3 Disruptive and quite a radical change from what has been done before.



4 Technology driven, tapping into frontier or cutting-edge technological solutions.



5 Related to non-technological approaches such as a new way of engaging people or integrating sectors in a planning process which have not been used in that context before.

Innovation works best when:



1 It is not left to chance but given mindful application and considered in daily activities and processes.



2 It is generated from proactive discussions that promote fresh ideas and approaches to challenges.



3 There's active collaboration by diverse teams working together across all stages of the project or programme cycle.



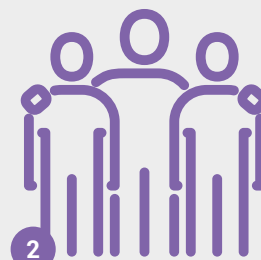
4 There's an overall commitment to building an open, collaborative and non-hierarchical culture supporting the free flow of ideas and interactive spaces for different people to come together.

Innovation at UN-Habitat

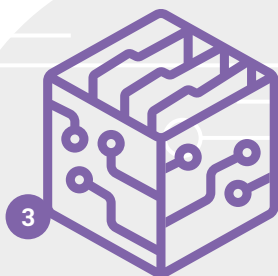
UN-Habitat has a long history of innovation. To consolidate on its work and strengthen its innovation agenda, an Innovation Unit was created as part of the 2019-2020 restructuring to strengthen innovative thinking, practice and solutions both within the organization and externally for the benefit of our partners and the beneficiaries we serve. The Unit will:



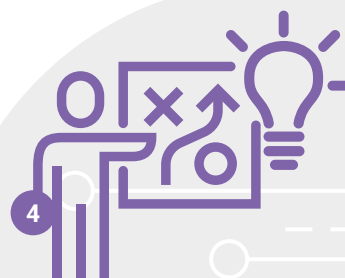
1 Promote an innovation culture for improved sustainable urbanization outcomes.



2 Act as an enabler and broker for new ideas and partnerships for inclusive and at scale impacts.










3 Develop relevant knowledge and tools to strengthen innovation.



4 Promote innovation in project and programme design and implementation by providing advice on tools, methodologies, technologies and partnerships.

What are ingredients to promote innovation?

There are specific ingredients which promote innovation. We believe that the following ingredients are important starting points to consider how we can be more innovative in our work, as well as what partners can do to engage with innovation in projects and programmes:

INGREDIENTS	EXPLANATION
 Leadership	<p>Those in positions of influence and decision-making roles must demonstrate the value of innovation for achieving sustainable development, and initiate processes to make people, organizations, programmes and projects more innovative. This includes dedicating resources for capacity development, investing in research and development, as well as in innovative tools, for example.</p>
 A culture of innovation and creativity	<p>Innovation is heightened when there is a culture of risk taking, creativity and an expectation for partnerships to generate new ideas. An innovation culture must be fostered both within an organization, as well as encouraged in the broader society and amongst partners. Cities and organizational leaders need to create physical and other signals that show how innovation is valued, and resources are invested.</p>
 Capacity and knowledge	<p>Related to a culture of innovation is providing resources and opportunities for capacity building and making knowledge on innovation freely available. Building capacity and knowledge includes training of governments and relevant organizational staff, promotion of innovation in education systems and opportunities for training and exchange for development professionals, entrepreneurs and citizens.</p>
 Innovative frameworks	<p>Innovation is elevated in an environment with clear policies, strategies and approaches to promote it. Integrating innovation in design, implementation and evaluation processes significantly improves benefits to target groups. Innovation should feature in national urban policy, city level strategies or urban plans. At an organizational level, innovation should be captured in strategic plans, as well as individual performance review cycles.</p>
 Flexible infrastructure	<p>Infrastructure to support innovative thinking – public spaces for people to meet, exchange ideas, showcase artwork and ideas, innovation labs and hubs – is fundamental. In an organizational setting, this includes physical spaces and time for interaction and ideas exchange and the access to digital tools. In addition, with the leveraging power of digital technologies, infrastructure to connect people to the internet is essential.</p>
 Diverse partnerships	<p>Cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder collaborations are vital for innovation. Providing platforms for different perspectives will generate new ideas and approaches. Bringing together organizations, leaders (including traditional leaders), communities and the private sector creates a dynamic mechanism for fostering innovative solutions.</p>
 Dedicated funds	<p>All the ingredients above - innovative processes, projects, fostering a culture as well as spaces for innovation - require financial support and resources. Seed funding for ideas, labs or spaces are critical and can often be generated from the collaboration with diverse partners. At the same time, in-kind support and dedicated spaces for innovation are required to facilitate innovation.</p>

Incorporating innovation into projects

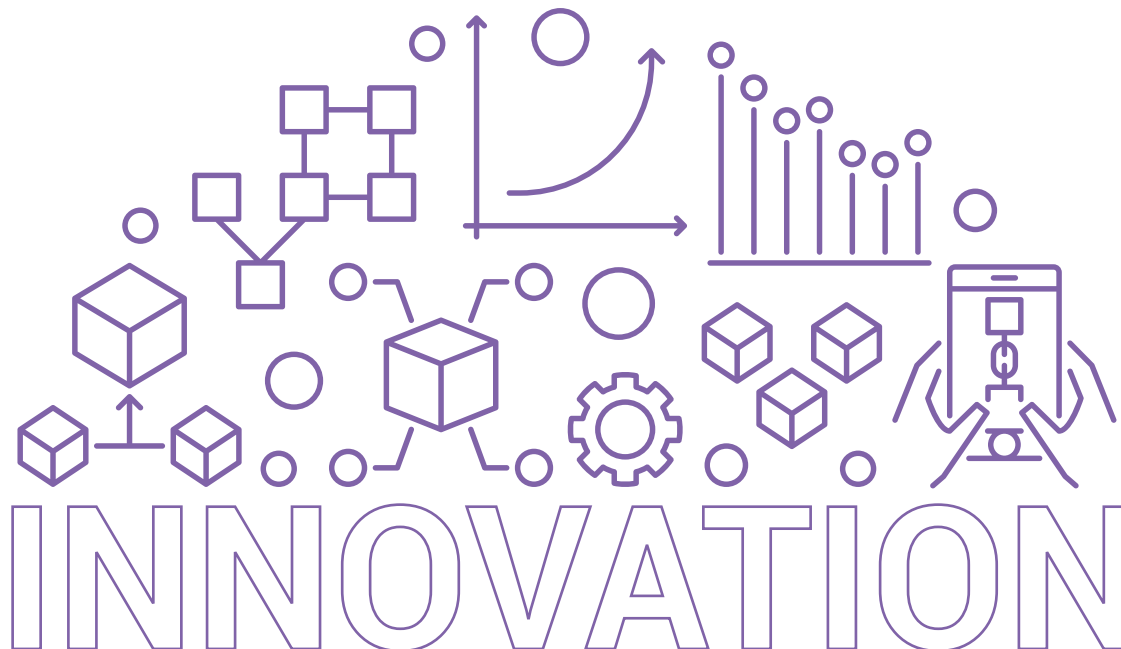
Innovation can feature in programmes and projects in a number of ways, including:

- 1 Building the capacity of teams and key stakeholders** so that everyone can more readily consider and engage with innovation and start to think outside the box, reflect on what's new and different that can be brought into the project across all or particular phases. Make innovation part of your team discussions more systematically.
- 2 Considering what new approaches and methodologies** are being used to approach the challenge and impact on proposed beneficiaries. The Innovation Unit can help you explore what's new or state of the art in your area of work.
- 3 Designing and testing new tools** that can support an innovative approach including a project innovation lab that matches the challenges and aspirations of the project with the appropriate tools.
- 4 Understanding how the innovation could trigger a more dynamic impact.** Innovations can often accelerate the speed at which your project can reach beneficiaries or provide a more dynamic engagement process. Additionally, thinking through the innovative aspects can be a point

of leverage with donors. Consider what your project reports on in terms of innovation e.g. delivering a more inclusive outcome or one that increases the capacity for scalability. Think how this can add value in terms of scaling up or presenting a viable phase 2 option to your partners and donors.

- 5 Considering how the monitoring and evaluation framework** can measure the innovation aspects of your project which strengthens the information and learning from the project, provides an important addition for partners and donors as well as provides rich and interesting communications pieces throughout the life of the project.

Make innovation part of your team more systematically.



Checklist to promote innovation across the programme and project cycle

The following checklist provides practical entry points on how innovation can be incorporated into project and programme development, implementation and monitoring phases.

INNOVATION IN YOUR TEAM	CHECK
Has your team undertaken any capacity development activities on innovation?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has your team engaged with available tools and resources on innovation to see what might be useful?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you dedicated any time towards exploring how innovation could be strengthened in project and programme design, implementation and monitoring?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you approached the Innovation Unit for ideas on building your team's innovation capacity?	<input type="checkbox"/>
INNOVATION IN PROJECT DESIGN	CHECK
Have you reviewed the project pathways (from design to beneficiary impacts) and identified where innovations can make a difference?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you considered how new tools, approaches or technologies can improve impact or efficiency in your project?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you collaborating with others, including stakeholders you might not normally consider, to develop creative and ultimately more integrated solutions?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you checked whether any proposed innovation initiatives are unique or might already exist ² and can therefore be adapted to your project?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you considered any risks or challenges that the innovation initiative might engender and for whom?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you dedicated any budget to innovation activities such as towards capacity development initiatives or a partner roundtable on innovation?	<input type="checkbox"/>
INNOVATION IN YOUR PROJECT AND PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT PROCESS	CHECK
Does your project document identify innovations that can be adopted across the project or programme lifecycle? ³	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the project document demonstrate how innovation can be used to strengthen cross-cutting and social inclusion issues? ⁴	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does the project document show how innovation might be measured in the log frame and expected outcomes?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you consulted UN-Habitat's Innovation Unit on your project document to get new ideas on an approach, process or tools which could enhance innovation in the project?	<input type="checkbox"/>
INNOVATION IN PARTNER ENGAGEMENT (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL)	CHECK
Have you considered engaging new partners or internal colleagues who might add an interesting and different perspective to your project team(s)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you proactively discussed innovation in meetings with key partners, stakeholders and donors?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you explored what innovation networks and capacities exist amongst the project/programme partners or that might be available locally (a local innovation hub or a start-up)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you engaged the Innovation Unit to help explore new partnerships?	<input type="checkbox"/>
INNOVATION IN PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING	CHECK
Have you set some agreed innovation indicators for the project?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you developed a system to track the progress of innovation initiatives and report on any learnings?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you considered other situation(s) where the innovation initiative can be applied subject to customization and/or scaling?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you applying specific frontier technologies or other technical innovations in the project implementation process?	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. This may be particularly relevant when developing new apps or digital tools – there may be already existing open source tools you can use

3. For example, an initiative which enhances efficiency (e.g. to make it timelier or more user friendly), or an approach or a technology which results in a sustainable outcome for beneficiaries

4. For instance the inclusion of different groups, gender, age, disability, human rights, climate change

Checklist to promote inclusive digital technology initiatives

This checklist provides key guiding questions to facilitate the application of the [Principles for Digital Development](#) designed to promote inclusion and help integrate best practices into technology-enabled programs. The principles were created to “synthesize existing guidance in order to create a common vision about how to institutionalize lessons learned in the use of digital technologies to support development”. They also align with UN-Habitat’s commitment to utilize digital technologies in fostering sustainable cities.

DESIGN WITH THE USER	CHECK
Have you incorporated multiple user types and stakeholders ⁵ in each phase of the project lifecycle? Have you developed methods for user feedback and input?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are your engagement tools context-appropriate and informed by users’ priorities, needs and digital capacities, accepting that digital tools will not always be the best solution?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you open about expectations and do you have an opt-out mechanism for people in the design and implementation process?	<input type="checkbox"/>
UNDERSTAND AND MONITOR THE EXISTING ECOSYSTEM	CHECK
Have you consulted other implementing organizations, civil society and the government early on to learn from successful or unsuccessful digital technology initiatives, to integrate with existing programs and duplicate efforts?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Does your initiative align with existing applicable technological, legal and regulatory policies and that you have considered policies that are currently under implementation?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you monitoring the ecosystem of your project for changes, impact and for who, and adapting your products, tools or initiative as needed?	<input type="checkbox"/>
DESIGN FOR SCALE	CHECK
It’s good to keep in mind how your digital technology project can have the potential to upscale? Is your design simple, flexible and modular to make it easy to adapt to other contexts?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you established a validation mechanism to ensure your initiative is appropriate in a new context before scaling it?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you identified partners who can help you scale your solution?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you considered innovative funding models and financial paths to sustain and expand the scaling process?	<input type="checkbox"/>
BUILD FOR SUSTAINABILITY	CHECK
Have you developed a sustainability plan?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you considered using, investing, partnering with and building the capacity of local information technology service providers and local governments to sustain the initiative?	<input type="checkbox"/>
BE DATA AND IMPACT DRIVEN	CHECK
Can you clearly measure the impact of your digital initiative and show the outcomes and outputs?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you considered using existing data and applying open data and interoperability standards? And if you don’t have data, how can you gather it to inform the initiative and perhaps use technology to do so?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you planned to collect and use data responsibly according to international norms and standards?	<input type="checkbox"/>
USE OPEN STANDARDS, OPEN DATA, OPEN SOURCE AND OPEN INNOVATION	CHECK
Have you considered using existing open platforms to help automate data sharing, connect your tool or system with others and add flexibility to adapt to future needs?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will your new software be open source, which anyone can view, copy, modify or share, and distributed in public repositories?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Will you share data freely without restrictions, collaborate widely and co-create tools to enable innovation?	<input type="checkbox"/>
RE-PURPOSE AND IMPROVE	CHECK
Have you identified existing technology tools (local and global), data and frameworks being used by your target population or in your sector that you can re-purpose or build upon?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are you collaborating with other practitioners to become aware of existing tools and to build relationships that could lead to the future reuse and improvement of your tool?	<input type="checkbox"/>
ADDRESS PRIVACY AND SECURITY	CHECK
Have you discussed and defined data ownership, sovereignty and access with all stakeholders before any data collection begins?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you conducted risk-benefit-analysis of the data to be captured and processed with key stakeholders and agreed how to manage any risks?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you understood local rules and regulations about data privacy and security and ensured all key stakeholders involved in the initiative understand them?	<input type="checkbox"/>
BE COLLABORATIVE	CHECK
Have you planned to collaborate with diverse experts and stakeholders across disciplines, countries and industries throughout the project lifecycle?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you developed an agreed mechanism to document the work, results, process and best practices for sharing amongst all key stakeholders?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Have you defined how your project will contribute to the local community and stakeholders?	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. Users are people who will interact directly with the tool or system, and stakeholders are people who will be affected by or have an interest in the tool or system, such as people whose data are being collected, government officials or researchers who may study the data collected

Practical tools and resources

There are many useful resources available which can help deepen your understanding of innovation and its value. The below items are samples of publicly available innovation tools. They serve as a guide, and the Innovation Unit is available to discuss any of the suggestions.

UN INNOVATION NETWORK

UNIN

Webinar Library

Resources (Guides, Learning Materials, Briefs)

The UN's different innovation labs, units, projects



NESTA

A compendium of innovation methods

Help me innovate

TOOLBOX

Tool box

Plenty of innovation tools, toolkits, playbooks, manuals, design kits



Development impact and you

DIY Toolkit to invent, adopt or adapt ideas to deliver more impact



IDEO

Human-Centered Design













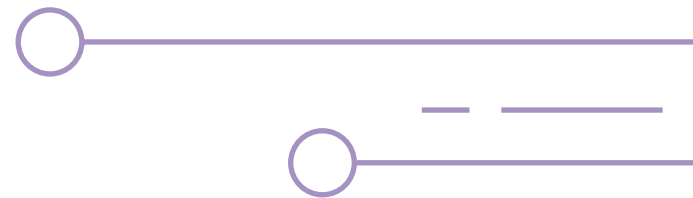
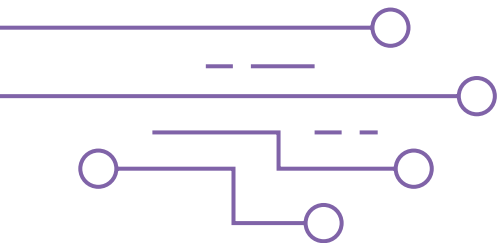
Principles for Digital Development

Many open source tools on how to incorporate digital principles in projects

Innovations at UN-Habitat

UN-Habitat has a history of innovation. There are a range of previous and current work which showcases our innovative thinking, approaches, tools and transformative impacts – whether through new ideas and approaches it brings to sustainable urbanization, or the way in which digital solutions are adopted. The table below outlines a few UN-Habitat projects and programmes that have demonstrated innovative approaches and utilized new ideas in their project design and implementation. For a more exhaustive list of UN-Habitat innovations, have a look at [UN-Habitat's website](#).

 <h3>Block by Block</h3> <p>Using technologies to strengthen gender responsive and inclusive public spaces.</p>	 <h3>HerCity</h3> <p>Improving the participation of young women and girls in public space planning using digital planning tools.</p>	 <p>یاک او زرغون ښار تشمیر پاک و سبز CLEAN & GREEN CITY</p> <h3>Afghanistan Clean and Green Cities programme</h3> <p>A new approach to city planning and creating new public spaces through the inclusive, clean and safe public spaces in Afghanistan.</p>	 <h3>The Global Land Tool Network</h3> <p>A radical and inclusive approach to land rights combined with new frameworks and digital tools such as the Social Tenure Domain Model, improves tenure security for all.</p>	 <h3>Participatory stakeholder engagement</h3> <p>To improve participatory processes in sustainable urbanization, UN-Habitat has developed innovative tools – stakeholder engagement, participatory urban planning, enumerations mapping – which transform hierarchical engagement processes to more vertical and inclusive ones.</p>
 <h3>Slum infrastructure mapping</h3> <p>Bringing apps, maps and partnerships in real time to solve pressing infrastructure challenges in slums.</p>	 <h3>CityRAP Tool</h3> <p>Innovative and participatory resilience planning for cities which fosters often new knowledge on resilience and first time horizontal multi-stakeholder partnerships for resilience planning.</p>	 <h3>Data analytics</h3> <p>Using a range of creative data collection methods, including big data, to inform real time urban trends for “now casting” - showing the trends and picture of today in our cities.</p>	 <h3>Innovations to improve the lives of slum dwellers</h3> <p>UN-Habitat's Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP) is documenting innovation solutions to improving the lives of those living in slums and informal settlements.</p>	 <h3>Monitoring air pollution using citizen science</h3> <p>UN Habitat has joined hands with the University of Nairobi's Maker Space Lab in a project called “open seneca Nairobi - air quality monitoring powered by citizen science”.</p>



Innovation Unit contacts

UN-Habitat's Innovation Unit team are available for technical advice and support.

Contact the following colleagues for more information:

Eduardo Moreno Lopez, Knowledge and Innovation Branch coordinator eduardo.moreno@un.org

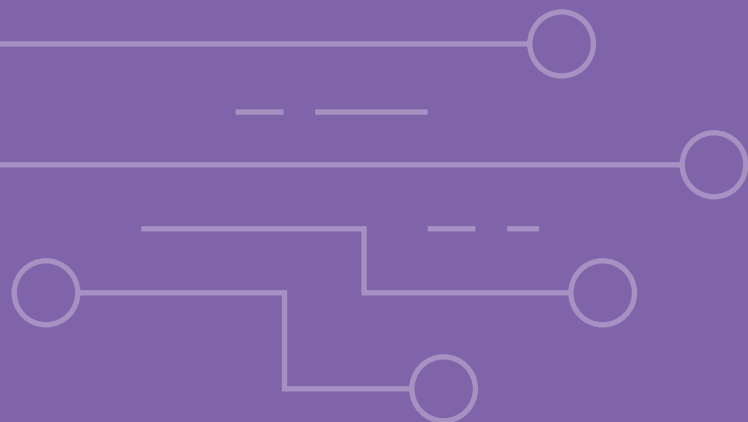
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For general inquiries, do not hesitate to contact our Innovation Unit email address: unhabitat-innovation@un.org



“ Innovation embraces the free flow of ideas and interactive spaces for different people to come together.



**UN-HABITAT
INNOVATION**

**A better quality of life for all
in an urbanizing world**

Regular updates on UN-Habitat's work are available on
www.unhabitat.org



**UN-HABITAT
INNOVATION**

The text 'UN-HABITAT INNOVATION' is rendered in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The letters are filled with intricate line-art icons representing urban planning, architecture, and infrastructure, such as buildings, roads, and tools.

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME
P.O. Box 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya
www.unhabitat.org

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

The logo consists of the text 'UN HABITAT' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The 'U' and 'N' are connected. To the right of the text is the United Nations emblem, a blue globe with a white map of the world. Below the main text is the tagline 'FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE' in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font.