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**Committee of Permanent Representatives to the  
United Nations Human Settlements Programme**

**First open-ended meeting/  
High-level midterm review**

Nairobi, 29 June–1 July 2021

Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda\*

**Progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda:  
implementation of the ministerial declaration adopted by the  
United Nations Habitat Assembly at its first session**

**Implementation of the ministerial declaration adopted by the  
United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human  
Settlements Programme at its first session**

**Report of the Executive Director**

**I. Introduction**

1. In May 2019, ministers responsible for cities and human settlements, together with representatives of local authorities, international organizations and other stakeholders from around the world, gathered in Nairobi for the first session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.
2. They adopted a declaration<sup>1</sup> in which, among other things, they reiterated:
  - (a) The need to accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda as a basis for achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals;
  - (b) The transformative power of urbanization;
  - (c) The role of cities as drivers of solutions to global challenges and as hubs for open technological and social innovation, investment capital and sharing of knowledge;
  - (d) The importance of innovative approaches and solutions in accelerating the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and to address urban development challenges; and
  - (e) The need to address decent and dignified housing, urban development, and urban-territorial and urban-rural linkages through the use of innovative solutions in planning, financing, construction, development, management, cooperation and public-private partnerships so as to spearhead poverty eradication efforts.

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\* HSP/OECPR.2021/1.

<sup>1</sup> HSP/HA.1/HSL.1, Ministerial declaration of the United Nations Habitat Assembly at its first session – Innovation for better quality of life in cities and communities: accelerated implementation of the New Urban Agenda towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, available at <https://unhabitat.org/hspaha1hsl1-ministerial-declaration-innovation-for-better-quality-of-life-in-cities-and-communities>.

3. Barely one year after the first session of the UN-Habitat Assembly, the world experienced the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the ensuing pandemic, which world leaders have described as the greatest challenge to the global community since the 1940s.<sup>2</sup> The coronavirus pandemic triggered what has arguably been the worst public health crisis in the past century and the worst economic recession since the Great Depression. With more than 90 per cent of confirmed cases occurring in urban areas, cities have been the epicentre of COVID-19.

4. The pandemic has exacerbated the underlying inequalities that characterize many cities and disproportionately affected vulnerable groups: low-income households, informal sector workers, women and girls, children, older persons, indigenous people, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees and other marginalized groups.

5. COVID-19 has increased poverty levels, leaving the poor further behind<sup>3</sup> and increasing the number of people newly living in poverty. Recent analysis of the potential increase in poverty due to the consequences of COVID-19 shows that as many as half a billion more people – some 8 per cent of the world’s population – could fall into poverty.<sup>4</sup> Such an increase would mark the first rise in global poverty in the last three decades. COVID-19 could erase development gains and push back the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The annual investment of \$2.5 trillion required to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals will be ever more challenging to secure in a context of fiscal contraction.<sup>5</sup>

6. As the world grapples with the impact of COVID-19, urban areas have a key role to play in global efforts to leverage recovery that is greener, more inclusive and more sustainable. Effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda is essential to redress and accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and other global agreements for sustainable urbanization.

7. A key lesson emerging from the pandemic is that urban areas must invest in preparedness and anticipate the future. They must develop the economic, social and institutional resilience to respond to a wide range of shocks,<sup>6</sup> including contingency plans that consider the most marginalized groups.<sup>7</sup>

8. The present report sets out a preliminary assessment of the ten action points contained in the ministerial declaration of the UN-Habitat Assembly at its first session. Emphasis is placed firmly on the role of UN-Habitat and its partners in the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda, keeping in mind national circumstances and capabilities at all levels of government. The report concludes by reiterating the urgency of and long-term commitment to implementing the New Urban Agenda and the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals.

## II. Commitments

### A. **Adopt and implement place-based innovative, integrated and systemic solutions, including policy measures and corresponding investments to address spatial inequalities, poverty, slums, decent and dignified housing and social protection, and to increase the prosperity of cities, territories and regions, while furthering climate action and urban resilience, as well as to manage crises in urban settings**

9. Rising inequality, poverty, slums, lack of decent housing and the absence of social protection pose major challenges for many cities. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated those challenges. UN-Habitat, working with the United Nations system, local governments and its network of partners, has been at the forefront of implementing emergency projects to enhance preparedness, outreach and hygiene support for slums and informal settlements. Recent research shows that housing-related

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, “Global leaders unite in urgent call for international pandemic treaty”, 30 March 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Furceri, D., P. Loungani and J. D. Ostry, “How pandemics leave the poor even farther behind”, International Monetary Fund Blog, 11 May 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Sumner, A., C. Hoy and E. Ortiz-Juarez, “Estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty”, WIDER Working Paper 2020/43 (United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> *World Cities Report 2020: The Value of Sustainable Urbanization* (United Nations, 2020), available at [www.unhabitat.org/wcr/](http://www.unhabitat.org/wcr/).

<sup>6</sup> parCitypatory, “How can we make our cities more resilient to pandemics?”, 25 April 2020.

<sup>7</sup> UN-Habitat, “Envisaging the future of cities”, concept paper prepared for the World Cities Report 2022, *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future* (United Nations, 2021).

measures constitute a significant component in the response of cities to COVID-19.<sup>8</sup> UN-Habitat continues to advocate for adequate, accessible and affordable housing to be at the heart of response and recovery, and has undertaken significant measures to bring that about.<sup>9</sup>

10. Local governments have been implementing incremental slum upgrading programmes with the participation of civil society. For example, local governments in Rosario, Argentina, in Nairobi and in Harare have developed participatory, inclusive schemes for slum and neighbourhood renovation or upgrading.<sup>10</sup> In 2020, UN-Habitat provided technical assistance to more than 50 countries to support adequate standards of living for all, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

11. Technical assistance has been provided to Afghanistan, Angola, Bulgaria, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Haiti, Jamaica, Kenya, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, the Philippines, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Somalia, Tunisia, Uganda and Zambia. In addition, assistance in the piloting and integration of pro-poor and fit-for-purpose housing, land and property surveying and registration has been provided in several countries, with more than 100,000 direct beneficiaries. There is clear potential for future scaling-up of such assistance that could benefit more than 140 million people currently facing tenure-related challenges to adequate housing.

12. In addition to the devastation caused by the pandemic, 2020 was also one of the three warmest years on record.<sup>11</sup> Climate change remains an existential threat to cities. Many cities are yet to adopt and implement measures to manage climate change and its attendant risks. Furthermore, experience to date often points to a slow response to climate disasters as a result of insufficient capacity and resources. UN-Habitat continues to work with Member States to strengthen capacity for building resilient cities and other human settlements. For instance, the City Resilience Profiling Tool has been used by 139 cities to measure and strengthen their resilience to multi-hazard impact, including those associated with climate change.<sup>12</sup>

13. UN-Habitat continues to promote place-based integrated solutions by strengthening national urban policy frameworks, such as sharing knowledge and case studies on the Urban Policy Platform.<sup>13</sup> That provides Member States with innovative frameworks and ways to integrate dynamic policies, such as smart cities and climate change, into the national urban policy agenda.<sup>14</sup>

14. In collaboration with its partners, UN-Habitat is leveraging the potential of digital technologies to better understand and address the spatial inequalities in cities. The Social Tenure Domain Model,<sup>15</sup> a pro-poor land information tool developed by the International Federation of Surveyors and Global Land Tool Network, sheds light on land relationships and improves security of tenure for vulnerable groups, including women. An increasing number of tools and methodologies are being made more accessible through e-learning platforms, such as those of the Global Land Tool Network and the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme.

15. Global competitions, such as the Climate Smart Cities Challenge, which is an initiative spearheaded by Smart City Sweden, Teknikföretagen, UN-Habitat, Viable Cities and Vinnova, and delivered by Nesta Challenge, aim to stimulate and scale innovative ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in cities while creating other social benefits.<sup>16</sup> The new *SDG Project Assessment Tool* provides Member States and other stakeholders with a new framework, aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, to understand how large-scale projects can deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Cities and Pandemics: Towards a More Just, Green and Healthy Future*, op. cit.

<sup>9</sup> Mohd Sharif, M., and R. Balakrishnan, "Opinion: Housing must be at the heart of the COVID-19 response and recovery", 30 October 2020.

<sup>10</sup> *World Cities Report 2020*, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> World Meteorological Organization, "2020 was one of three warmest years on record", 14 January 2021.

<sup>12</sup> [www.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/05/cityrap\\_tool\\_booklet\\_2020.pdf](http://www.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/05/cityrap_tool_booklet_2020.pdf);  
[www.unhabitat.org/topic/climate-change](http://www.unhabitat.org/topic/climate-change).

<sup>13</sup> [www.urbanpolicyplatform.org](http://www.urbanpolicyplatform.org).

<sup>14</sup> UN-Habitat, "'Developing National Urban Policies: Ways Forward to Green and Smart Cities' book launched", 21 October 2020.

<sup>15</sup> International Federation of Surveyors and Global Land Tool Network (2010), *The Social Tenure Domain Model: A Pro-Poor Land Tool* (<https://www.fig.net/resources/publications/figpub/pub52/figpub52.pdf>).

<sup>16</sup> UN-Habitat, "Open call for cities to join competition to reduce urban greenhouse gas emissions and improve cities' futures", 9 November 2020.

<sup>17</sup> *SDG Project Assessment Tool – Volume 2: User Guide* (United Nations, 2020).

16. Innovative solutions have been combined with finance and planning to generate investible projects, such as the Global Future Cities Programme, the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme Investor Platform, the Cities Connect Programme with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which focuses on climate change in intermediary cities, and the Cities Investment Facility. Private sector partnerships have been initiated to promote digital rights and youth innovation in cities.

**B. Promote smart, sustainable and inclusive strategic planning and integrated technologies that increase resilience, reduce disaster risks and improve decent and dignified housing, water supply and sanitation, vector control, accessibility, sustainable urban mobility and road safety, urban safety, solid waste management, accessible sustainable buildings, green and social spaces, construction and infrastructure, equipment and services, clean energy, ambient air quality, urban extensions, biodiversity conservation, nature-based solutions and sustainable use in cities, communities and human settlements to ensure quality of life for all, with proper attention to gender equality and social inclusion**

17. *Technological change.* Innovation and the use of new technologies are vital for the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The UN-Habitat flagship publication *World Cities Report 2020: The Value of Sustainable Urbanization* notes that cities are at the centre of technological change and are rapidly deploying technology in the delivery of public services and to address a wide range of urban challenges.<sup>18</sup>

18. *Acceleration of technology and digital solutions.* The COVID-19 crisis has accelerated the deployment of innovation and technology, including contact-tracing, digital payments, remote working, distance learning, and tele-health care (the provision of health-care services remotely by means of telecommunications technology) as regulators have waived restrictions on online medical care.<sup>19</sup> The acceleration of technology and digital solutions has occurred in countries with fairly developed digital ecosystems. A large disparity exists, however, between high- and low-income countries in the availability and usage of technological solutions to support the pandemic response.<sup>20</sup> While such trends have enhanced resilience in some cities, they have also exposed the deepening digital divide and social inequalities, both within cities and across the urban-rural continuum. UN-Habitat continues to encourage Member States to address those challenges and, in collaboration with its partners, deploys integrated technologies to help cities to engage with the digital revolution in an inclusive manner.

19. *Mainstreaming gender into planning.* Through platforms such as the “HerCity” joint urban development initiative between UN-Habitat and the Swedish independent think tank Global Utmaning, UN-Habitat is supporting Member States to plan safer and more resilient cities by mainstreaming the participation of women and girls in the planning of gender-responsive spaces and services.

20. *Spatial mapping tools.* Digital technology is also being used to gather information on air pollution and transport usage. Spatial mapping tools, such as the Earth Observations Toolkit for Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements,<sup>21</sup> are being harnessed for that purpose. UN-Habitat, HafenCity University in Hamburg and the United Nations Office of Information and Communications Technology are implementing the United Nations Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities (UNITAC Hamburg), an innovation and technology accelerator laboratory for cities, based in Hamburg, Germany.<sup>22</sup>

21. *Urban Planning and Design Laboratory.* This planning and design initiative by UN-Habitat supports Member States in formulating planning interventions that promote sustainable urbanization.

<sup>18</sup> *World Cities Report 2020*, op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> International Finance Corporation, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Disruptive Technology Adoption in Emerging Markets* (Washington, D.C., International Finance Corporation, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.earthobservations.org/geo\\_blog\\_obs.php?id=494#:~:text=The%20Toolkit%20is%20the%20result,t o%20%E2%80%9Cmake%20cities%20and%20human.](https://www.earthobservations.org/geo_blog_obs.php?id=494#:~:text=The%20Toolkit%20is%20the%20result,t o%20%E2%80%9Cmake%20cities%20and%20human.)

<sup>22</sup> UN-Habitat, “UN-Habitat and the Federal Republic of Germany establish a United Nations ‘Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities’ (UNITAC Hamburg) at the HafenCity University in Hamburg”, 16 March 2021.

To date, more than 100 cities have been supported, with more than 80 adopting plans and designs which are guiding public expenditure and private investment. For example, the planning of district capitals in Myanmar is being shaped by guidelines on planning that have been prepared with the support of UN-Habitat. Similarly, the Government of Haiti is strengthening its urban development through the adoption of UN-Habitat planning principles of sustainable urban development (compact, connected, integrated, inclusive and resilient) and its principles for neighbourhood planning.<sup>23</sup> In Saudi Arabia, through the Future Saudi Cities Programme, UN-Habitat has supported 17 cities in developing plans for more compact, socially inclusive, safer, better integrated and more resilient urban centres, and has also made spatial, financial and policy recommendations.

22. *Urban mobility.* UN-Habitat continues to make significant contributions to ensuring safe, inclusive and accessible mobility in cities. Since the ministerial declaration, with support from the United Nations Road Safety Trust Fund, UN-Habitat has partnered with the Government of Ethiopia to develop a strategy to improve road safety. Launched in June 2020, the strategy is guiding the design and construction of non-motorized transport infrastructure. With support from the European Commission, UN-Habitat has continued to address mobility challenges in cities across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Latin American and Caribbean region by providing training, introducing innovative technological solutions and promoting the uptake of electric means of transport.

23. The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reshaped urban transport, given the need for physical distancing and public hygiene. Effective responses, such as those seen in Bogotá; Bologna, Italy; Montreal, Canada; Nairobi and other cities, have accelerated the development of safer infrastructure or led to the reconfiguration of streets for greater use of non-motorized transport.

24. *Solid waste management.* UN-Habitat continues to engage cities and partners in addressing the waste management crisis through initiatives such as the Waste Wise Cities programme and the African Clean Cities Platform. Notable highlights since 2019 have included the celebration of World Habitat Day 2019, under the theme “Frontier technologies as an innovative tool to transform waste to wealth”; the continuous growth of the Waste Wise Cities Network, which currently has a membership of 250 cities and 40 affiliated organizations; and the development of the Waste Wise Cities Tool to aid cities in the management of solid waste.

25. *Water and sanitation.* UN-Habitat continues to support Member States in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 on water and sanitation for all, by providing policy, capacity-building and technical assistance to local authorities for the delivery of water and sanitation, while specifically addressing the needs of the poor. Since 2019, 1.5 million people have benefitted from improved access to water and sanitation in 39 countries. UN-Habitat is supporting innovative approaches to water and sanitation that provide quick-access and cost-efficient solutions for vulnerable communities. In Egypt, for example, more than 300,000 people in Luxor, Assiut and Sohag governorates have benefitted from riverbank filtration projects.

26. *Urban energy.* Since 2019, UN-Habitat, supported by private sector and civil society organizations, has assisted local and national governments in adopting energy and resource-efficiency measures in policy and legislation, and stimulated the uptake of clean and renewable energy technologies. Several advocacy activities have also been conducted on low-carbon pathways in the building sector. A collaboration has been established with Othalo, a Norwegian start-up company on the use of recycled plastic to produce affordable, low-carbon houses.<sup>24</sup> A memorandum of understanding has been signed with the International Renewable Energy Agency to cooperate on matters relating to sustainable energy in an urban context, such as promoting renewable energy technologies to accelerate energy transitions in cities.<sup>25</sup>

27. *Public space.* By 2020, more than 1.85 million people were able to enjoy safe access to more than 134 public spaces in 87 cities that had been designed or upgraded through UN-Habitat’s Global Public Space Programme. Between 2019 and 2020, some 580,000 people benefitted from 48 public space upgrading projects completed in Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Kosovo, Mexico, Mozambique, Nepal, the Niger, Peru, Uruguay and Viet Nam. The City-wide Public Space Assessment Toolkit was developed and *City-wide Public Space Strategies: A Compendium of Inspiring Practices* was published, with the former being applied in Bangladesh, Lebanon, Nepal, the United Arab Emirates and Viet Nam.

<sup>23</sup> *Urban Planning Responses in Post-Crisis Contexts* (United Nations, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/un-habitat-aims-to-use-plastic-waste-to-support-housing-for-all>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.irena.org/newsroom/pressreleases/2020/Feb/IRENA-and-UN-Habitat-Join-Efforts-to-Accelerate-Global-Energy-Transition-in-Cities>.

**C. Seek state-of-the-art and creative solutions to current and new urban challenges, with particular attention to the urban-rural continuum and territorial surroundings, and to the need to promote the development of rural regions, including through employment opportunities and responses to migration, influxes of refugees and displaced persons, by strengthening public-private partnerships and those with communities and academia and developing participatory solutions for cities and rural settlements**

28. *Urban-rural linkages.* UN-Habitat continues to play a key role in strengthening the capacity of policymakers to address the multilayered connections between urban and rural areas that have implications for sustainable urbanization. For example, UN-Habitat, in collaboration with more than 130 partners, developed *Urban-Rural Linkages: Guiding Principles: Framework for Action to Advance Integrated Territorial Development*,<sup>26</sup> which provides Member States with a framework to implement integrated activities across the urban-rural continuum. The publication also formed the basis for resolution 1/5 on enhancing urban-rural linkages for sustainable urbanization and human settlement, adopted by the UN-Habitat Assembly at its first session, which has since provided a strong foundation for enabling Member States to scale up their activities in the area of urban-rural linkage. In 2020, UN-Habitat supported the localization of the Urban-Rural Linkages Guiding Principles and Framework for Action toolkit in Cameroon, Guinea, Mozambique, Nigeria and the United Republic of Tanzania.

29. *Inclusion of migrants, refugees and displaced persons in urban areas.* UN-Habitat has been working with stakeholders in developing inclusive and sustainable solutions to harness the positive impact of urban migration and support Governments to respond to rapid urban population growth resulting from forced displacement of persons. Through its Urban Planning in Humanitarian-Development Contexts Programme,<sup>27</sup> UN-Habitat, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Government of Japan, is providing strategic planning and advisory services for the development of sustainable solutions in areas where humanitarian and urban development intersect. The new settlement of Kalobeyei, located just outside the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya, applies sustainable urban development approaches in the planning of its refugee camps, thereby creating an enabling environment for both refugees and local communities. The integration of humanitarian and development activities in Kalobeyei, which has been documented in UN-Habitat's bimonthly online newsletter *Supporting Planning for Integrated Refugee and Host Communities*, is a success story in terms of its planning and inclusive approach.<sup>28</sup>

30. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants. Many cities have, as part of their response to the pandemic, taken measures to protect such groups. The city of Geneva has broadened the scope of its social emergency services to cater for undocumented migrants. In Leeds, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in addition to implementing measures that minimized homelessness for refugees, digital inclusion has been ensured through the "100% Digital Leeds" grants fund. In Spain, the city of Cartagena has facilitated access to healthcare for migrants with irregular status.<sup>29</sup>

**D. Strengthen regional, national and local legislation and policies, as well as institutions and service providers, so that they are better able to implement new integrated approaches, new knowledge and sustainable, inclusive and innovative solutions for the communities they serve, including through traditional knowledge and multi-stakeholder partnerships**

31. *Strengthening of multilevel governance.* There is an urgent need to strengthen multi-stakeholder partnerships and urban governance systems in many Member States, not only to ensure innovative regulation, but also to strengthen diffusion mechanisms for emerging solutions. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the need for effective multilevel governance and policy

<sup>26</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/03/url-gp-1.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/programme/planning-for-humanitarian-development-practice-connecting-normative-to-operations>.

<sup>28</sup> UN-Habitat (2021), "Supporting planning for integrated refugee and host communities: bimonthly online newsletters from 2016 to 2021."

<sup>29</sup> Council of Europe, "Intercultural cities: COVID-19 special page".

coherence at all levels of government. The *World Cities Report 2020* emphasizes that appropriate institutional and supportive legislative frameworks are integral to effective multilevel governance.<sup>30</sup>

32. *Support for urban policy.* UN-Habitat continues to support Member States in developing their urban policies: to date it has supported 56 countries in the development of national urban policies. Three regional programmes – urban-rural linkages (Africa), climate change (Asia) and economic development (Arab States) – have been implemented in various countries. As the focal point for local and regional governments within the United Nations system, UN-Habitat continues to support the improvement of local governance systems and collaboration between local and national levels of government.

33. *Enhancing urban legal frameworks.* UN-Habitat has developed tools to guide national and local governments in enhancing their urban legal frameworks. For example, UrbanLex, an urban legislation database developed by UN-Habitat, features more than 2,250 legal instruments on urban law. The Planning Law Assessment Framework, developed by the Urban Legislation Unit of UN-Habitat, continues to support Member States' understanding of their urban legal systems and laws, including the reforms or changes required. Other tools and knowledge products developed by UN-Habitat include the Law and Climate Change Toolkit, the Slum Upgrading Legal Assessment Tool and a publication entitled *Human Rights, Rule of Law and the New Urban Agenda*.<sup>31</sup>

34. *Advocacy for urban law.* UN-Habitat has played a key role in the advocacy and development of urban law by strengthening its partnerships with academia through Urban Law Day, a specialized forum that brings together a multidisciplinary circle of academics and practitioners interested in urban legislation and offers a platform for stakeholders to understand the role of urban legislation in sustainable urban development. Between 2019 and 2020, six Urban Law Days were held in partnership with the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa; the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, University of London; the Urban Law Centre at Fordham University, United States of America; the South African Research Chair in Cities, Law and Environmental Sustainability; and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Germany.

## **E. Promote sustainable and innovative financing opportunities and mechanisms, including through engagement with regional development banks, local financing instruments, such as fiscal mechanisms and micro-finance, and public-private partnerships and community participation**

35. While the COVID-19 pandemic has created an uncertain investment climate for many countries, particularly in terms of meeting the needs of the most vulnerable groups in urban settings, it has also brought to the fore the need for a green, resilient and inclusive recovery. For that to be achieved, there is an urgent need to unlock new capital for investment in sustainable urbanization.

36. Member States are leveraging or proposing innovative financing mechanisms to create and maintain the investment necessary to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 11 and implement the New Urban Agenda in the face of the pandemic. China, for example, has launched an innovative financial intermediary facility – the Shanghai Green Urban Financing and Services Company – that allows small cities and towns in the Yangtze River Delta region to access funds by pooling their investment demand. In recent years, investment platforms have emerged to leverage private capital and channel it into much-needed projects. Those platforms offer the advantage of matching investors with appropriate investment-ready infrastructure projects and reducing transaction costs for investors. To assist in that sphere, UN-Habitat launched the Cities Investment Facility, a technical assistance and “matchmaking” platform to help cities to develop bankable urban development projects that would be attractive to investors.

37. Adequate financing for sustainable urbanization is yet to be realized. The *World Cities Report 2020* noted that six years after the Addis Ababa Action Agenda was adopted, the promised flow of finance to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals had still not materialized. Government revenues remain the primary source of financing for urban development, and in low-income countries, those revenues remain below the threshold of 15 per cent of gross domestic product which is essential for effective State functioning.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *World Cities Report 2020*, op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/human-rights-rule-of-law-and-the-new-urban-agenda>.

<sup>32</sup> *World Cities Report 2020*, op. cit.

**F. Unlock new capital for investment in sustainable urbanization in cities of all sizes, keeping in mind the specificities of small and middle-sized cities and other human settlements, and the needs of those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including the host communities of those displaced due to climate change, through appropriate adaptation measures**

38. In terms of unlocking new capital for investment in sustainable urbanization, the *World Cities Report 2020* notes that while the funding necessary to meet the investment needs for sustainable urbanization exists globally, it is not flowing into the areas where it is needed. Redirecting even some of those assets would make a significant difference to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Most developing countries face a persistent challenge in creating an enabling environment for local government to mobilize financial resources. National governments can address that challenge in an effective, coordinated manner, as they play a pivotal role in determining the regulatory environment in which local government operates and, consequently, the scale of resources raised for sustainable urban development.

39. A proposed policy for unlocking new capital investment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic is the expansion and redistribution of liquidity from developed to developing countries through special drawing rights. Redistribution of liquidity can also be implemented through the establishment of multilateral funds, such as the Fund Against COVID-19 Economics, which has been proposed by the Government of Costa Rica.<sup>33</sup> A further policy action relates to strengthening subregional and regional cooperation by improving the lending and response capacity of national, subregional and regional development banks and other regional institutions.<sup>34</sup> To ensure optimal effectiveness, such policy initiatives should be linked, in order to build forward better and greener.

**G. Improve urban, village and rural monitoring and forecasting systems, territorial modelling and planning tools, land use mapping and data management capacities, always taking care to protect privacy, so as to strengthen evidence-based policymaking and make progress towards establishing comparable international urban data and indicators**

40. More than 150 countries have participated in capacity development initiatives designed to improve monitoring and reporting on various global frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement on climate change. More than 90 countries participated in the harmonization of the definition of urban and rural areas, with many taking part in pilot activities to adapt the global definitions to the local level.<sup>35</sup> The United Nations Statistical Commission has welcomed the work on developing the methodology for the delineation of urban and rural areas and the definition of cities based on the degree of urbanization classification, and requested the submission of the final assessment, to be prepared by UN-Habitat in consultation with Member States.

**H. Recognize the importance of developing monitoring tools, including UN-Habitat's global and local monitoring tools, particularly the City Prosperity Initiative and the Global Urban Observatory, which provide good references and examples**

41. Many countries have recognized the importance of urban observatories as local think-tanks. At the 353 active urban observatories hosted by various subnational and national agencies, local data are collected to inform urban planning and management decisions. Participants from more than 90 countries have been trained by UN-Habitat and local partners in the use of tools to facilitate urban monitoring and reporting, including the “national sample of cities approach”,<sup>36</sup> the City Prosperity

<sup>33</sup> *Financing for Development in the Era of COVID-19 and Beyond: Priorities of Latin America and the Caribbean in Relation to the Financing for Development Global Policy Agenda* (United Nations, 2021).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> See European Union and others, *Applying the Degree of Urbanization: A Methodological Manual to Define Cities, Towns and Rural Areas for International Comparisons* (European Union, FAO, UN-Habitat, OECD and World Bank, Luxembourg, 2021).

<sup>36</sup> [www.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/06/national\\_sample\\_of\\_cities\\_english.pdf](http://www.unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2020/06/national_sample_of_cities_english.pdf).

Index,<sup>37</sup> the Earth Observation Toolkit for Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements,<sup>38</sup> various Sustainable Development Goals training modules and the roll-out of the United Nations system-wide urban monitoring framework. Unlike in the early years of reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals, the voluntary national reviews and voluntary local reviews produced in the past two years have increasingly tended to demonstrate profiling of urban data that has been generated and made available through the Urban Indicators Database.<sup>39</sup>

42. In 2020, the Urban Agenda Platform<sup>40</sup> was set up as an electronic knowledge portal for voluntary reporting on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda by national Governments, subnational governments, local authorities, civil society, United Nations entities, regional organizations the private sector and other key stakeholders. The platform supports knowledge dissemination, builds interaction across stakeholder groups and supports capacity development to establish communities of practice for sustainable urbanization.

**I. Engage citizens, communities and civil society, the private sector, institutions of higher learning and professional institutes, in particular through their role in capacity-building and job creation, and all other relevant stakeholders, including women, children, youth and the elderly, persons with disabilities, local communities, indigenous peoples, migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons, and persons in vulnerable situations, in participatory and inclusive urban governance**

43. Many cities and countries are implementing innovative approaches to ensure participatory and inclusive urban governance as envisaged in the New Urban Agenda. The COVID-19 crisis underlines the importance of collaborative engagement by stakeholders in shaping urban outcomes. As cities explore innovative ways to effectively engage stakeholders to increase participation and inclusivity in urban governance, the pandemic has facilitated digital transformation as a means of engagement, providing solutions that have profound implications for urban areas, such as the increasing shift towards online forms of governance.

44. In most developing countries, the lack of adequate policies and well-trained personnel impedes effective engagement of stakeholders, especially marginalized groups, in city planning processes. It has therefore remained a priority for UN-Habitat to continue to provide capacity-building activities to support the administrative, technical and strategic capacities of all levels of government for inclusive urban governance. UN-Habitat has also offered online training on the New Urban Agenda through the Urban Agenda Platform, and the recently launched online handbook “The New Urban Agenda Illustrated” complements the Platform by providing illustrative action-oriented policies that support the engagement of stakeholders in urban governance.

**J. Strengthen mobilization and advocacy efforts, particularly the yearly observance of Urban October, which starts on World Habitat Day and ends on World Cities Day, to raise awareness, promote participation, generate knowledge and engage the international community in sustainable urban development**

45. In 2020, despite severely restricted circumstances owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, UN-Habitat successfully mobilized unprecedented local, national and regional engagement during Urban October, resulting in 753 events in 74 countries and 230 cities.<sup>41</sup> The promotion and awareness-raising campaign for Urban October included a dedicated website featuring a wide range of resources.

46. The Urban Agenda Platform, a global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development, was

<sup>37</sup> <http://cpi.unhabitat.org/>.

<sup>38</sup> <https://eo-toolkit-guo-un-habitat.opendata.arcgis.com/>.

<sup>39</sup> <https://data.unhabitat.org/>.

<sup>40</sup> <https://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/>.

<sup>41</sup> <https://urbanoctober.unhabitat.org/node/8>.

launched during Urban October, providing a “one stop shop” for information and engagement for all stakeholders.

47. The international community was engaged by the theme for World Habitat Day 2020 – “Housing for All: A Better Urban Future” – through concept notes and briefs, key messages, interviews and an op-ed piece on housing and COVID-19 co-written by the Executive Director of UN-Habitat.<sup>42</sup> The “#Housing4All” campaign, featuring 20 events, was launched on World Habitat Day.

48. The global observance of World Habitat Day 2020 was co-hosted by UN-Habitat and the Government of Indonesia from the city of Surabaya and was attended or followed by 4,800 participants globally. Contributors included the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the President of Indonesia, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, ministers from Cameroon, Colombia, Indonesia and Mexico, mayors and representatives of local government networks, academics, experts, participants from non-governmental organizations and community leaders.

49. World Cities Day 2020, under the theme “Valuing our Communities and Cities”, was held on 31 October 2020. The global observance, from Nakuru, Kenya, included messages from the President of Kenya, the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Commissioner for Political Affairs of the African Union. The highlight of the online event, attended by 2,300 participants, was the launch of UN-Habitat’s flagship report *World Cities Report 2020: The Value of Sustainable Urbanization*. The launch featured a round-table discussion of the key messages of the report by renowned experts, a press conference, two press releases and a media campaign, including related opinion pieces on both local and international platforms.

50. The five UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour winners were also announced at the global observance and their projects were shared with participants in a series of videos.<sup>43</sup>

### III. Conclusion: way forward and recommendations

51. Since the first session of the UN-Habitat Assembly, progress has been made in many of the commitments that form part of the ministerial declaration adopted at the session. However, more remains to be done, in particular in the light of the disruptive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Member States can support the development of innovative solutions that will accelerate recovery and build forward better and greener. Indeed, advances in innovation are central to the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda and to the achievement of the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals.

52. Governments at all levels are encouraged to adopt a renewed sense of urgency and a long-term commitment to implement the New Urban Agenda and the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals as a basis for achieving inclusive and equitable growth, reducing inequality and poverty, and enhancing environmental sustainability and green investment.

53. To implement the New Urban Agenda and the urban components of the Sustainable Development Goals optimally, Governments at all levels are encouraged to address the challenges and bottlenecks that impede the implementation of such development frameworks in all contexts. Those include the low level of awareness of urban-related commitments in global development agendas, low institutional and fiscal capacity, and weak multilevel governance structures and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

54. Member States are encouraged to build the capacity that will allow them to undertake periodic reviews of their implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Doing so will not only help to implement those development frameworks effectively at the local level, but also others that are relevant to sustainable urbanization.

55. Within the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all levels of government are encouraged to build the economic, social and environmental resilience, including appropriate governance and institutional structures, that will enable urban areas to withstand the threats that they face, both now and in the future. Building such resilience, however, will require a stronger and more effective multilateral system that will not only complement, but reinforce both local and national efforts.

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<sup>42</sup> Mohd Sharif, M., and R. Balakrishnan, op. cit.

<sup>43</sup> Available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xu2lBbLa6ZI&list=PLTQZbEc6Bv5\\_pu6xXbFNPoBzqw4Zn5IDB](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xu2lBbLa6ZI&list=PLTQZbEc6Bv5_pu6xXbFNPoBzqw4Zn5IDB).