



## **ROUNDTABLE ON URBAN RESILIENCE IN SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES**

***Addressing urban risks in SIDS through evidence-based and integrated disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation action***

Tuesday, 26 April 2022

3pm-5:30pm

United Nations Headquarters, New York,

Conference Room 8

### **OVERVIEW**

Climate change is no longer an abstraction. Globally, cities face unprecedented, and mounting, environmental, economic, and social challenges. For Small Island Developing States (SIDS) this existential threat is already at the doorstep. Communities are at risk of being displaced by rising sea levels, and the impacts of increasingly frequent and severe hydro-metrological disasters, coupled with periodic seismic events, result in stressed economies and social networks – effects that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Current approaches to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change on urban systems, social and economic, are neither adequate nor sustainable. Bold action to build resilient, sustainable cities must be taken – not at some hoped for time in the future, but now. Failure to move beyond discussion, narrative, targets, and promises, risk catastrophic consequences for humanity.

Transformative action at scale is needed. The implementation of the New Urban Agenda can help achieve true resilience for the SIDS, as set out in Agenda 2030 and its SDGs.

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-Habitat, is the United Nations agency for human settlements, mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities.



As the global leader on sustainable urbanization, UN-Habitat is rallying a broad spectrum of partners to champion the value of urban planning and adaptation measures, that draw equally from new innovative technologies and the collective wisdom of local knowledge, to strengthen the resilience of urban systems to climate change induced shocks, stresses and challenges.

UN-Habitat, together with the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, is pleased to convene a roundtable on building **Urban Resilience in Small Island Developing States** within the framework of the High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The roundtable will bring together governments, innovators, and practitioners to mobilize towards transformative, implementable, scalable, and timely solutions to strengthen the resilience of cities, leaving no one, and no place, behind.

## **BACKGROUND, CHALLENGES and OPPORTUNITIES**

SIDS account for less than 1 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet their size, geography, relative insularity, and remoteness make them particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Many of these adverse changes are irreversible in the short term.

No matter how quickly the world moves towards zero-emissions, SIDS must build their resilience, including robust and mutually reinforcing risk reduction and adaptation measures to protect their economies and urban systems from a multitude of hazards exacerbated by climate change, including extreme weather events, declining reserves of fresh water, ocean acidification, rapid unplanned urbanization, and risk-blind infrastructure development.

The criticality of urban climate resilience has gained awareness and momentum. What is imperative now is to think and work in new ways to upscale successful practices to support cities, in particular those cities facing the dual challenge of high exposure and vulnerability, coupled with limited existing internal capacities and resources.



## ***Urban resilience, climate change adaptation and the case for evidence-based decision making***

Cities are composed of complex interconnected systems. Urban system elements are both critical to citizens' quality of life, and most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In SIDS the infrastructure necessary for the proper, robust, functionality of these critical urban system elements, including public services, and transportation and connectivity, as well as economic centers, such as seaports, airports, and hotels, are often concentrated in locations at low elevation.

A further commonality is that municipalities are constrained by limited resources. Evidence-based decision-making is, thus, a powerful and necessary tool for cities navigating a multitude of challenges, including to enhance resilience and adapt to the effects of climate change, within limited available funds. Evidence-based decision-making further strengthens multilevel government platforms and cross-cutting municipal capacities, that are crucial to avoid policy gaps between local action plans and national policy frameworks.

Effective evidence-based decision-making, in turn, requires both access to relevant, validated, data and information, as well as an understanding of how to analyze and apply the collected data and information (data analytics). In the context of building resilience to the impacts of climate change, a risk and resilience analysis is a critical step in the process to develop a robust framework for the type of evidence-based decision-making that enables city planners and managers to design and implement effective and efficient strategies.

### ***Frontier technologies: challenges and opportunities***

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital divide and shown that the most resilient nations and cities are those most able to move quickly and flexibly, often through the use of digital and data tools, to understand and act on challenges as they arise, and to reach their populations with critical information and services.



Frontier technologies, including virtual reality platforms, and artificial intelligence (AI) can likewise play an important role in supporting SIDS prepare real world integrated solutions to build climate change resilience, including adaptation measures and ecosystem protection. Big data analytics and AI, paired with blockchain technology, the Internet of Things, and other emerging technologies, are poised to revolutionise urban management.

UN-Habitat and UNDP are working to automatize the gathering of data and information in cities, and developing models, tools and methodologies to harness the potential offered by data analytics and resilience diagnostics supported by these frontier technologies to both identify potential shocks and stresses, and to provide contextual recommendations for effective and cost-efficient solutions. This type of “intelligent modelling” will allow UN-Habitat, UNDP and other international organizations to work in a larger number of cities, and to support both national and local authorities to take informed decisions on allocation of resources based on real needs and priorities. Intelligent modelling will also support local capacity development and self-learning, as the input of more and better-quality data and information leads to a smarter system.

## **ROUNDTABLE OBJECTIVES**

Transformative resilience building to a multitude of risks and shocks can best be realized through interacting spheres of influence and action: personal, individual beliefs, community values, and national development objectives and worldviews; political systems and governance structures that create or inhibit enabling conditions; and technical solutions. By working with a wide network of partnerships and voices, UN-Habitat and UNDP will accelerate innovative solutions through harnessing new technologies and local knowledge. The Roundtable will lay the foundation for new and expanded leadership alliances across public and private sectors, and strengthen the bridge between innovators, scientists, engineers, developers, governments, and communities.

Specifically, the Roundtable aims to:



1. Identify innovative solutions that harness both frontier technologies and local knowledge.
2. Lay the foundation for new and expanded leadership alliances across public and private sectors, and strengthen the bridge between innovators, scientists, engineers, developers, governments, and communities.
3. Promote application of data, information and resilience analysis for improved urban multi-level governance and services, including risk-informed development planning and implementation investment to secure vulnerable development sectors, in SIDS against disaster risks and other adverse impacts of climate change.
4. Explore new ways to link globally dispersed SIDS, including the use of frontier technologies for data collection and analytics, and the creation of a virtual platform to strengthening the interregional exchange of information and knowledge, and build local capacities through the dissemination and promotion of resilience building tools, strategies, studies, and information systems.
5. Assess the digital divide amongst SIDS, and within specific communities, focusing on those vulnerable and at risk of being left behind, by ensuring that people remain at the centre of any digital transformation.
6. Strengthen the ability of SIDS to augment their own financial resources, as well as enhance access and mobilize resources through international financial instruments to international finance.