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**United Nations Habitat Assembly of the  
United Nations Human Settlements Programme  
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**Report on the World Urban Forum**

## **Independent report on the evaluation of the programme of the World Urban Forum for the period 2018–2023**

### **I. Introduction**

1. The present report concerns the evaluation of the programme of the World Urban Forum for the period 2018–2023. The programme aimed at progressively consolidating the global relevance of the Forum in coordinating advocacy, partnerships and knowledge-sharing on sustainable urbanization and contributing to the advancement of the coordinated implementation of the New Urban Agenda.<sup>1</sup>
2. The evaluation has been carried out in response to resolution 23/5 of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and subsequent Governing Council resolutions on the World Urban Forum, including resolution 26/6 of May 2017, in which the Council requested an assessment of the impact and outcomes of the Forum and gave clear directives on how the Forum should be evaluated. In addition, the programme was approved with an evaluation framework which included an independent final evaluation.
3. The evaluation has been conducted by an independent evaluation team of two consultants, Ilde Lambrechts and Martha McGuire, from June 2022 to May 2023. The targeted key users of the evaluation are UN-Habitat management and staff, UN-Habitat governing bodies, including the Executive Board, the Committee of Permanent Representatives, the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat Assembly), World Urban Forum host countries, donors, Habitat Agenda partners, experts in the field of urban development, policymakers, other key stakeholders and the general public.

### **II. Background and context**

4. Convened by UN-Habitat every two years, each session of the World Urban Forum is an international global event for exchanging ideas and experiences on sustainable urbanization. The Forum was established by the Commission on Human Settlements in resolution 18/5 of 16 February 2001 as a non-legislative technical forum, in which participation is encouraged from diverse Habitat Agenda partners and other stakeholders, including local and national government authorities, academic and research institutions, non-governmental organizations, United Nations organizations, international organizations, the private sector, media organizations and others. The Forum provides an opportunity for debate, discussion and the sharing of ideas, challenges and solutions related to rapid urbanization.

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\* HSP/HA.2/1.

<sup>1</sup> General Assembly resolution 71/256, annex.

5. Since 2002, there have been eleven sessions of the Forum. The first session was held in Nairobi in 2002, the second session in Barcelona, Spain, in 2004, the third session in Vancouver, Canada, in 2006, the fourth session in Nanjing, China, in 2008, the fifth session in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 2010, the sixth session in Naples, Italy, in 2012, the seventh session in Medellín, Colombia, in 2014, the eighth session was replaced with Habitat III in Quito in 2016, the ninth session in Kuala Lumpur in 2018, the tenth session in Abu Dhabi in 2020, and the eleventh session in Katowice, Poland, in 2022. The General Assembly, in resolution 69/226, recognized the World Urban Forum as the foremost global arena for interaction among policymakers, local government leaders, non-governmental stakeholders and expert practitioners in the field of human settlements.

6. Confirming the relevance of the World Urban Forum, the Governing Council, in paragraph 4 of resolution 26/6, requested the Executive Director of UN-Habitat to identify clearly focused objectives and measurable indicators of success and to strengthen reporting mechanisms to enable the effective collection of the substantive outcomes of sessions of the Forum. Consequently, UN-Habitat implemented the resolution by formulating a multi-year Forum programme covering the period 2018–2023.

7. The programme of the World Urban Forum for the period 2018–2023 was delivered through the ninth, tenth and eleventh sessions of the Forum.

### III. Purpose, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

8. The purpose of the evaluation is to assess the outcomes and impacts of the programme of the Forum for the period 2018–2023, identifying lessons, innovations and challenges, and providing forward-looking recommendations that could influence decision-making to improve future sessions of the Forum. The evaluation will provide a basis for the accountability of UN-Habitat to key stakeholders on the achievements and impact of the programme. The lessons learned and recommendations will improve the planning, programming and effectiveness of future sessions of the Forum.

9. The specific objectives of the evaluation as set out in its terms of reference are as follows:

(a) To assess whether UN-Habitat has efficiently and effectively achieved the objectives of the programme of the World Urban Forum for the period 2018–2023;

(b) To assess the relevance, sustainability, impact and coherence of the Forum in relation to other UN-Habitat work (internally) as well as other international forums (externally);

(c) To assess the extent to which inclusion, coordination, cooperation and partnerships were integrated and effective in the planning, organization and delivery of the ninth, tenth and eleventh sessions of the Forum;

(d) To assess how social inclusion issues, such as those relating to human rights, gender, children, youth, older persons and persons with disabilities, have been integrated into and affected by the programme;

(e) To identify lessons learned and make recommendations on how the Forum planning, organization and delivery and related work could be improved to enable the effective monitoring of the substantive outcomes and impact of future sessions of the Forum.

10. In terms of scope, the evaluation covers aspects of planning, organization and delivery and the outcomes and impact of the programme, using the evaluation criteria of relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability and impact. The evaluation also assesses the extent to which the eleventh session of the Forum achieved its thematic objectives and contributed to achieving the outcomes and impact of the programme of the Forum for the period 2018–2023. The evaluation analysis was based on the expected accomplishments specified in the logical framework for the programme.

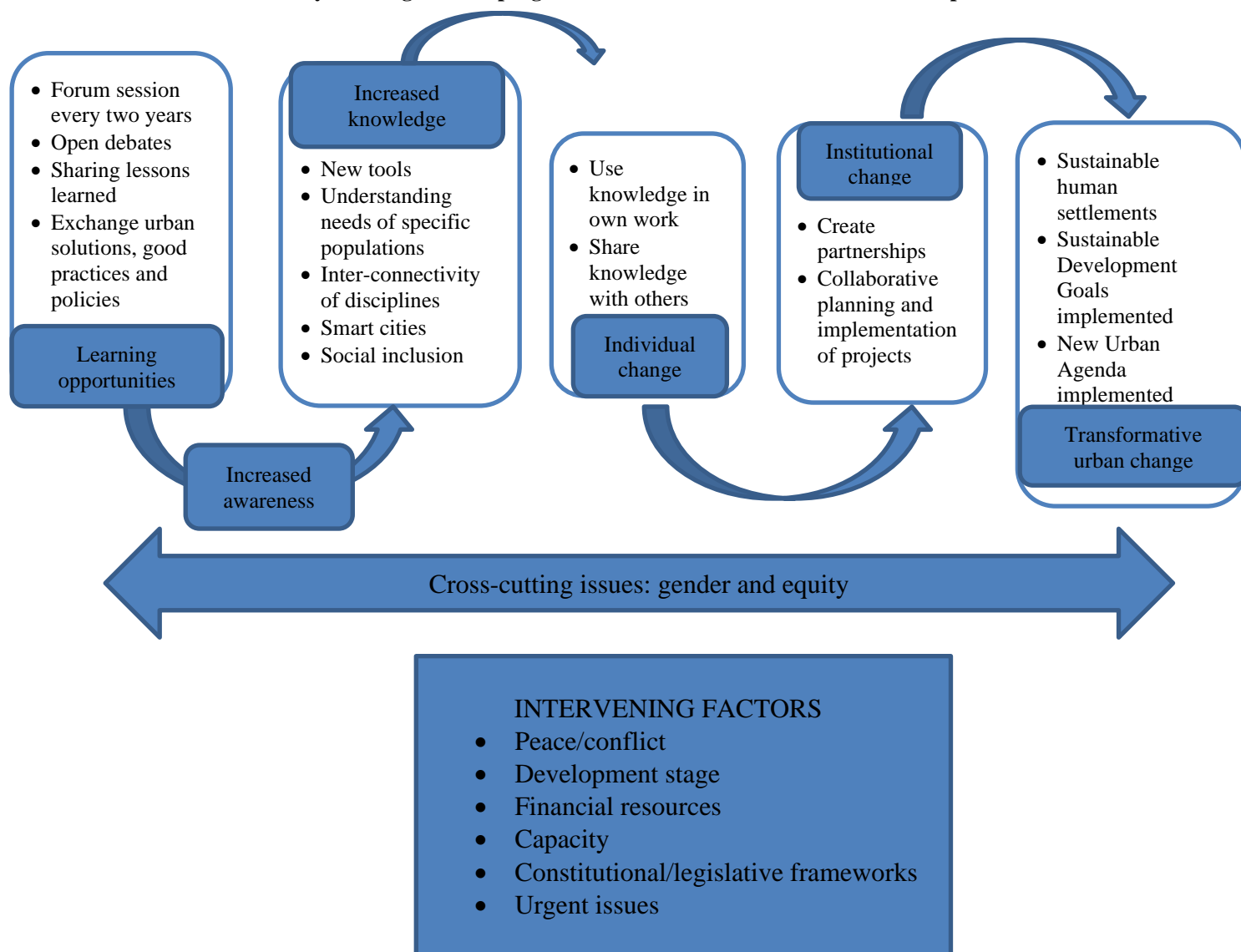
### IV. Evaluation approach and methodology

11. In line with its terms of reference, the evaluation focuses on assessing the outcomes and impact of the programme and the achievements of the eleventh session of the Forum. The evaluation is being carried out in phases. Phase I – the inception phase – covers evaluation design and planning, including defining how to apply the three following distinct but mutually reinforcing methodological approaches:

(a) **Results-based approach (theory of change approach).** This explores the cause and effect relationships across the results chain of input-activity-output-outcome-impact. The constructed

theory of change outlines how the programme was supposed to work and achieve its intended results and impact. The following figure shows the reconstructed theory of change. The theoretical model of the World Urban Forum assumes that the Forum has the potential to influence UN-Habitat partners through learning opportunities, increased awareness and increased capacity, to mobilize for sustainable urbanization, to advance the New Urban Agenda and to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The influenced partners are in turn expected to influence national policies, strategies and budgets which directly affect people's lives in urban areas and lead to sustainable urbanization.

### Theory of change for the programme of the World Urban Forum for the period 2018–2023



(b) **Systems-based approach.** This is used to explain linkages that cannot be explained by the theory of change, through understanding the complexity of the programme as a system;

(c) **Participatory approach.** This approach is used to ensure that the evaluation is conducted in a consultative and transparent manner. The participation of key stakeholders in the evaluation serves to: (i) create a sense of ownership of the evaluation findings, which makes it more likely that stakeholders will act on its recommendations and; (ii) empower stakeholders through the process. This approach also comprises a contribution analysis that identifies the evidence needed to verify and qualify contribution links and better determined facilitating and limiting factors for the success of programme.

12. Phase II involves data collection using various methods, including a desk review of relevant World Urban Forum and UN-Habitat documents; participant observation during the eleventh session of the Forum in Katowice, Poland; surveys, namely (a) a participant satisfaction survey administered through the app of the eleventh session of the Forum during and after the Forum, and (b) a post-Forum

programme impact survey administered online after the Forum; and data pull, media analysis and case studies.

13. Phase III comprises data analysis, the triangulation of data, and the drafting of a report on evaluation findings, lessons learned and recommendations.

## **V. Evaluation limitations**

14. The evaluation has a number of limitations:

(a) Most of the data have been collected virtually. This is not a serious limitation because people are now accustomed to communicating virtually.

(b) Much of the information has been collected through surveys. This allows a larger number of people to be reached but does not allow for in-depth information to be collected. This limitation has been overcome by conducting follow-up interviews with selected survey respondents.

(c) Complexity of the programme – the Forum frameworks were not complete and the cause-and-effect mechanisms of the Forum were not clear. This has been addressed through the development of a theory of change for the programme and applying a systems-based approach to the evaluation.

(d) The complexity of the programme meant that there were many external factors that influenced the outcomes and impact of the Forum. Change for New Urban Agenda partners depends on cultural and other contextual factors, including political or economic circumstances; it is impossible to attribute a positive or negative change in the countries to a particular intervention of the Forum. This challenge was addressed through the use of a contribution analysis.

(e) The magnitude of expected change – transformative urban change is a huge undertaking that can take many years. This evaluation only assesses a six-year period.

## **VI. General constraints and delays of the programme evaluation report**

15. The evaluation has been delayed owing to a number of unavoidable factors, including the replacement of one of the evaluators. Securing the services of another evaluator has proven difficult, and the evaluation is proceeding with one evaluator instead of two.

16. As a result of the delays, the evaluation is still in the data collection phase. The evaluation findings, lessons learned and recommendations will be linked to the present report as soon as the evaluation report is submitted by the evaluation team and prior to the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly. The full evaluation report will be made available on the website for the second session of the Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

## **VII. Evaluation findings**

17. The evaluation findings will be made available on the website for the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly.

## **VIII. Lessons learned**

18. The lessons learned will be made available on the website for the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly.

## **IX. Conclusions**

19. The conclusions will be made available on the website for the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly.

## **X. Recommendations**

20. The recommendations will be made available on the website for the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/governance/un-habitat-assembly/second-session-2023>.