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**Discussion on the implementation of the  
United Nations development system reform in  
UN-Habitat: review of the checklist for governing  
bodies of United Nations Sustainable Development  
Group entities**

## **Implementation by UN-Habitat of the reform of the United Nations development system**

**Note by the secretariat**

### **I. Introduction**

1. The Secretary-General's 2022 report on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 75/233 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/77/69–E/2022/47) provides a complete overview of system-wide progress in the implementation of United Nations General Assembly resolution 72/279 on repositioning of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system.
2. In the 2022 progress report on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (A/76/639–E/2022/1), the Secretary-General also called on the relevant organizations of the United Nations system to ensure that no one and no country was left behind in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, held in 2016. Furthermore, the summary of the Special Meeting of the Economic and Social Council on “Sustainable Urbanization and the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda”, building on the 2022 quadrennial report of the Secretary-General, confirmed that the United Nations system was mobilizing through the system-wide strategy on sustainable urbanization, as the relevance of the New Urban Agenda for the mandate of United Nations entities has been clearly and gradually confirmed.
3. The present note provides updates on the contribution by UN-Habitat to the implementation of General Assembly resolution 72/279.

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\* HSP/EB.2023/10.

## II. Background

4. The reform of the United Nations Development System is taking place through the following six interlinked pillars:

- (a) New generation of United Nations country teams;
- (b) Reinvigoration of the resident coordinator system;
- (c) Revamping of the regional approach;
- (d) Strategic direction, oversight and accountability for system-wide results;
- (e) Funding of the United Nations development system;
- (f) Following up on the repositioning efforts of the United Nations development system at the global, regional and country levels.

5. The United Nations development system reform builds on the guidelines and principles of General Assembly resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, in which Member States resolved to use the policy review framework as the main instrument to better position the United Nations system in support of countries' efforts to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a coherent and integrated manner. Since then, the world has experienced devastating global challenges, including the enduring impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on countries' economies and development, the continuous threat of climate change and multiple emerging geopolitical conflicts in all the regions of the world. Those challenges have confirmed the validity of the new approach of the United Nations development system, addressing the multidimensional challenges to attaining the Sustainable Development Goals through integrated programming for development offering whole-system solutions and responses.

6. The reform process opened up unprecedented opportunities for UN-Habitat to sharpen its advocacy for sustainable urban development leaving no one and no space behind with the aim of ensuring that Member States and stakeholders understand the importance of sustainable urbanization and adopt the New Urban Agenda as a tool for accelerating the achievement of all the Sustainable Development Goals and addressing poverty, inequality, shared prosperity, inclusive participation and environmental sustainability through their urban dimension. That approach is well captured in the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023,<sup>1</sup> which, in decision 2/1 of the United Nations Habitat Assembly, was extended until 2025 to align the planning cycle of UN-Habitat with the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for the development of the United Nations system.

7. The purpose of the present note is to assist the Executive Board in taking stock of progress achieved by UN-Habitat in the implementation of the United Nations development system reform in line with General Assembly resolution 76/4, which is aimed, among other things, at providing adequate information and tools to the governing bodies of the United Nations development system entities to facilitate their oversight role, including monitoring alignment and entity adherence to the dual reporting model.

## III. Working with the new generation of United Nations country teams

### **Collaboration with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams within management accountability framework**

8. A foundational element for reinvigorating the resident coordinator system, the management accountability framework is crucial for the success of the United Nations development system reform. It provides an integrated and unambiguous framework for management and accountability at the country level, connecting the dots with the established mechanisms at the regional and global levels. It also ensures consistency and compliance with the spirit of the reform, as well as transparency. The dual system also ensures that country representatives remain fully accountable to the individual mandates of their respective entities, while periodically reporting to the resident coordinator on their activities and their respective contributions to the results achieved by the United Nations development system towards the achievements of the 2030 Agenda at the country level, and on the basis of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-09/strategic\\_plan\\_2020-2023.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-09/strategic_plan_2020-2023.pdf).

9. The dual reporting and accountability lines within the management accountability framework require entities to further adjust and adapt to delivering as one, reaffirming the leading role of the resident coordinator at the helm of United Nations country teams. Close collaboration with the resident coordinator and the United Nations country teams is required in the planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting on impact and results at the level of outcomes of the Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.

10. Since the adoption of the New Urban Agenda in 2016, UN-Habitat has made consistent efforts to improve and strengthen its collaboration in programming and implementation with other entities in the United Nations country teams. Those efforts have been intensified as part of the new organizational structure deployed in January 2020 and include regular consultations with the resident coordinator on strategic planning issues, development trends, financial analyses and partnerships, and other matters of mutual interest.

11. As a non-resident entity, UN-Habitat relies on good collaboration with the offices of the resident coordinators to convey substantive messages and advocacy for Goal 11 (make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) and the New Urban Agenda as elaborated in the system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development. Although the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023, extended to 2025, does not include specific guidance on compliance with the management accountability framework, UN-Habitat has achieved strong gradual progress in its collaboration with United Nations country teams in most regions.

#### **IV. UN-Habitat contribution to common country assessments and preparations for the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks**

12. Through improved inter-agency collaboration with the entities in United Nations country teams, UN-Habitat has been able to expand its contributions and add value to the common country assessments and to the development of United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks. It has provided substantive inputs focused on integrated and multisectoral development strategies and on harnessing sustainable and inclusive urban development as a means of effective implementation of shared and agreed national development plans.<sup>2</sup>

##### **A. Alignment of UN-Habitat country programme documents with United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks**

13. The reform of the United Nations development system brought about considerable changes in existing programming and operational procedures, requiring the prioritization of common country assessments and United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks as the sole source of United Nations country programming. As of 2023, most UN-Habitat country programmes and documents align with the priorities of national development plans, which has required a methodological shift in the preparation of the next generation of UN-Habitat country programme documents. The country programme documents are intended to capture the strategic approach and the objectives of UN-Habitat operations at the country level, responding both to the need for mandate-specific planning and the duty to contribute to the agreed results areas of the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework and thereby to the achievement of shared outcomes between the national government and the United Nations. A review of the existing document templates and procedural guidelines has been undertaken to guide the development of UN-Habitat country programme documents that emerge from field collaboration. Unlike previous generations of such documents, which were designed and coordinated at the initiative of UN-Habitat, the new Habitat country programme documents will prioritize alignment with United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, becoming the primary source for programming of UN-Habitat operations at the country level.

##### **B. Working with the reinvigorated resident coordinators system**

14. UN-Habitat regional offices are headed by a director who represents the organization at the regional level, including interacting with the respective resident coordinators and governments in countries where UN-Habitat is present. In that regard, relevant UN-Habitat country programme

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<sup>2</sup> UN-Habitat has participated in the review of common country assessments and identification of priorities or contributed to United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks in 15 countries in the Arab region, 21 in Africa, 29 in Asia and the Pacific, and 3 in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

managers need to recognize the reformed role of the resident coordinator, discharging their duties and functions while bearing in mind the shared responsibilities, collaboration and consultation with other members of the United Nations country team under the overall supervision of the resident coordinator, to whom they are also accountable. Recent job descriptions as well as performance reviews of UN-Habitat country managers align with the request for them to closely coordinate with resident coordinators and United Nations country teams.

### **C. Collaborating with the revamped United Nations regional structures**

15. At the regional level, UN-Habitat has engaged incrementally since 2020 in the reform of the United Nations development system by means of active participation in the new regional collaboration platforms and issue-based coalitions to increase support for sustainable urbanization. The organization has been active on the operational front responding gradually to the call for common back offices, contributing to business operations strategies and mutual recognition, as well as common premises modalities where possible.

### **D. Asserting the power of urban data**

16. The reform of the United Nations development system also puts greater emphasis on the ability of the system to use data and evidence to support national planning and prioritization. That ability remains critical for UN-Habitat in ensuring that sustainable urbanization is effectively integrated into the national development plans of Member States. In turn, those plans are intended to influence the content of common country assessments and country frameworks, which determine donor support to the United Nations at the country level. Using its comparative advantage as the United Nations focal point for sustainable urbanization and human settlements, UN-Habitat led the development of the harmonized global urban monitoring framework, which was endorsed by the Statistical Commission in March 2022 and now provides the key foundation for collaboration and enhancing the system-wide collection of urban data. The framework is a key guide for the collection of data at the city or local level and hence directly guides the development of comparable voluntary local review reports, leading to collaboration with other entities at various levels.

### **E. Provision of strategic direction and accountability for United Nations system results**

17. UN-Habitat has demonstrated its global convening power on numerous occasions.<sup>3</sup> The organization has mobilized a variety of stakeholders – governments, civil society, the private sector, research institutions and other partners that have empowered the agency to effectively embrace the spirit of inclusiveness and integration driven by the reform of the United Nations development system. Based on its long-term engagement with both national and local governments for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals, UN-Habitat has been able to strengthen its standard-setting role and has therefore gained recognition as the United Nations system-wide focal point for urban and local action. That recognition is demonstrated in the organization's role as the permanent chair of the Local2030 coalition, in partnership with other United Nations entities. Such roles require the mobilization of continuous additional organizational capacities – which are not always available – for the generation of data and other evidence of improved human settlements at the city and community levels and the strengthening of integrated and territorial approaches to sustainable development.

## **V. Humanitarian–development–peace nexus**

18. The organization's long-standing work in countries such as Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Iraq, Rwanda, Somalia and the Syrian Arab Republic, and its membership in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee as the humanitarian coordination platform of the United Nations development system, provided a good basis for its recognition as a key partner in the approach devised as part of the system-wide reform. Over the last decade, humanitarian crises have become more protracted and increasingly urban, as many displaced people seek refuge in urban areas. With its emphasis on integrated responses and synergies between humanitarian, development and peace actors, the human–development–peace nexus offers a window for holistically addressing complex challenges relating to urban displacement and rapid urbanization.

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<sup>3</sup> This includes planning, organizing and servicing key events of global reach, such as sessions of the World Urban Forum and national urban forums, the celebration of World Habitat Day and World Cities Day, and other United Nations meetings and summits.

## VI. Conclusion

19. The present note highlights the continued efforts of UN-Habitat in supporting and contributing to the consolidation of the United Nations development system reform. The organization's continued engagement with United Nations country teams under the leadership of the resident coordinators has also led to its repositioning as the focal point of the United Nations in the urban sector and the expansion of its networks to increase its influence in urban discourse and practices to better serve Member States. However, the project-funded management structure and practices of UN-Habitat country operations remain a major challenge, impeding progress and slowing down the further engagement and full compliance of UN-Habitat with the requirements of the reform.

20. It would be important for the Executive Board to consider, as part of its oversight role, the financial implications of UN-Habitat engagement with the United Nations development system reform, which increases pressure on the organization's income mobilization and management at the country level. In exercising its oversight role, the Executive Board may also wish to consider mandating the development by UN-Habitat of a mechanism to facilitate further monitoring of progress and compliance with the reform provisions, including encouraging Member States to renew their commitment to the Funding Compact in the spirit of the reform.

21. Finally, the Executive Board may wish to consider providing guidance on the frequency and process of such a reporting exercise, and on other tools that the secretariat may need to develop to facilitate the Board's oversight role in accordance with General Assembly resolution 72/279.