

# Mid-term Evaluation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme Strategic Plan 2020-2025

8 April 2024

Assignment No: IED-24-009



## INSPECTION AND EVALUATION DIVISION

Function *“The Office shall evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation of the programmes and legislative mandates of the Organization. It shall conduct programme evaluations with the purpose of establishing analytical and critical evaluations of the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, examining whether changes therein require review of the methods of delivery, the continued relevance of administrative procedures and whether the activities correspond to the mandates as they may be reflected in the approved budgets and the medium-term plan of the Organization;”* ([General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B](#)).

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## Summary

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluated the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and coherence of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) within the context of assessing mid-term implementation of the UN-Habitat 2020-2025 Strategic Plan.

The evaluation found that UN-Habitat had developed its 2020-2025 Strategic Plan through a participatory process and rooted it in a clear theory of change with linkages to key global initiatives, and that the Strategic Plan served as a valuable tool for programming and advocacy, providing a flexible and coherent vision to guide the entity's work. Notably, the Strategic Plan domains of change were highly relevant and responded to the needs and priorities of stakeholders. However, insufficient resources compounded with an inadequate accountability and results framework and weak strategic prioritization hindered a focused implementation of the Strategic Plan by UN-Habitat. Also, the predominantly donor-driven and project-based UN-Habitat business model prevented its full localization as majority of field presences did not prepare local-level strategies that were aligned with the Strategic Plan and local context and priorities.

Despite these serious limitations, UN-Habitat made significant contributions to improving the lives of beneficiaries and strengthening the capacities of government counterparts through its diverse programmes and interventions ranging from policy formulation to policy implementation. Some UN-Habitat results demonstrated strong evidence of sustainability, although others faced significant challenges in scaling up successful initiatives due to limited resources, reliance on short-term project funding and the lack of robust monitoring and evaluation systems.

UN-Habitat made progress in internal coherence, leveraged collaboration with other UN agencies and partnered with external organizations in support of the urban development agenda. Additionally, UN-Habitat largely integrated gender, environment, human rights and disability into its activities.

OIOS makes six important recommendations to UN-Habitat to:

- i) strengthen the delivery architecture and accountability for strategic plan implementation
- ii) enhance the localization and results management framework of the strategic plan
- iii) strengthen communication strategy and corporate messaging on mandate and impact, and enhance the inter-agency collaboration towards advancing the UN system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development
- iv) strengthen field operations
- v) enhance long-term sustainability of results, and
- vi) leverage its mandate and expertise in addressing the critical urban data and knowledge gaps.

## I. Introduction and objective

1. The evaluation objective was to assess, as systematically and objectively as possible, the relevance, effectiveness, sustainability and coherence of UN-Habitat, within the context of assessing mid-term implementation of the UN-Habitat 2020-2025 Strategic Plan (SP).<sup>1</sup> The evaluation covered all four UN-Habitat subprogrammes.
2. The UN-Habitat management response on the draft report is included in Annex I.

## II. Background

### Mandate and objectives

3. The UN-Habitat mandate is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all and sustainable development. As the focal point for urbanization and human settlement matters within the UN system, UN-Habitat leads and coordinates the monitoring of and reporting on global progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA)<sup>2</sup> and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11.<sup>3</sup>
4. UN-Habitat supports Member States in the development of sustainable cities and human settlements at the global, regional, national and local levels through four cross-cutting functions:
  - a. Normative: conducting research and analysis; setting standards; proposing and testing norms and principles; monitoring global progress; and supporting the formulation of policies related to sustainable cities and human settlements.
  - b. Operational: providing technical assistance, capacity building and advisory services and implementing projects.
  - c. Advocacy, communication and outreach: sharing good practices; mobilizing public, political and financial support and collaborative action in support of national development plans; and developing policy frameworks, development practice and investment choices for sustainable urban development at the local, national, regional and global levels.
  - d. Partnerships: collaborating with governments, intergovernmental entities, UN agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), foundations, academic institutions and the private sector in addressing urbanization challenges.

### Strategic plan for 2020-2025

5. Approved by the UN-Habitat Assembly in 2019,<sup>4</sup> the UN-Habitat 2020-2025 SP restructured the entity's substantive work around four mutually reinforcing domains of change (DoCs) or subprogrammes to address broader global challenges of poverty, prosperity, climate change and crisis prevention in leveraging sustainable urban development. The UN-Habitat theory of change comprising the four DoCs and their corresponding 12 outcomes and organizational performance enablers is presented in Figure 1.

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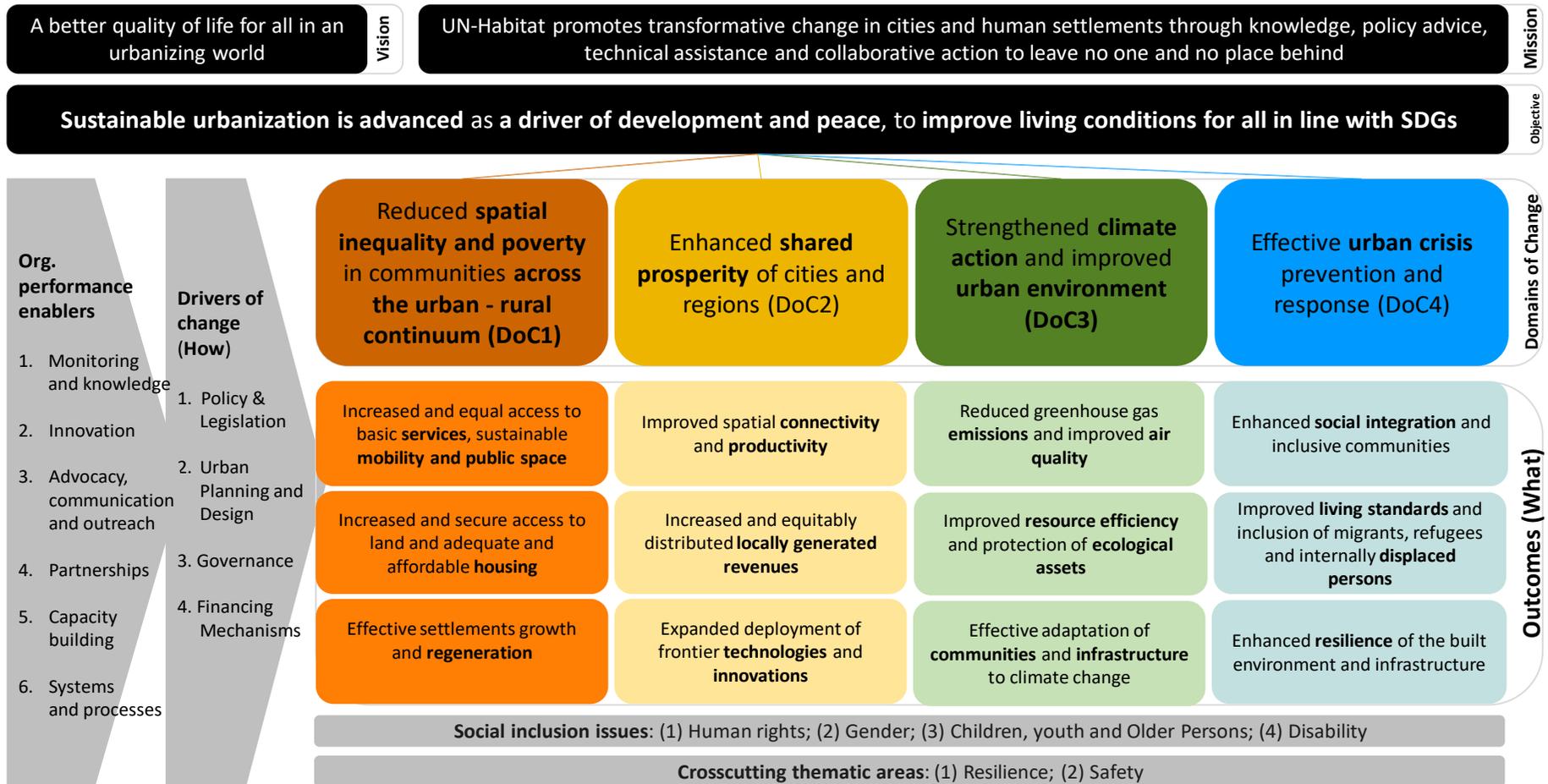
<sup>1</sup> Originally approved for 2020-2023, the SP was extended until 2025 to cover the period 2020-2025. See HSP/HA.2/11/Rev.1, Decision 2/1.

<sup>2</sup> See A/RES/71/256, Annex.

<sup>3</sup> Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

<sup>4</sup> HSP/HA.1/Res.1

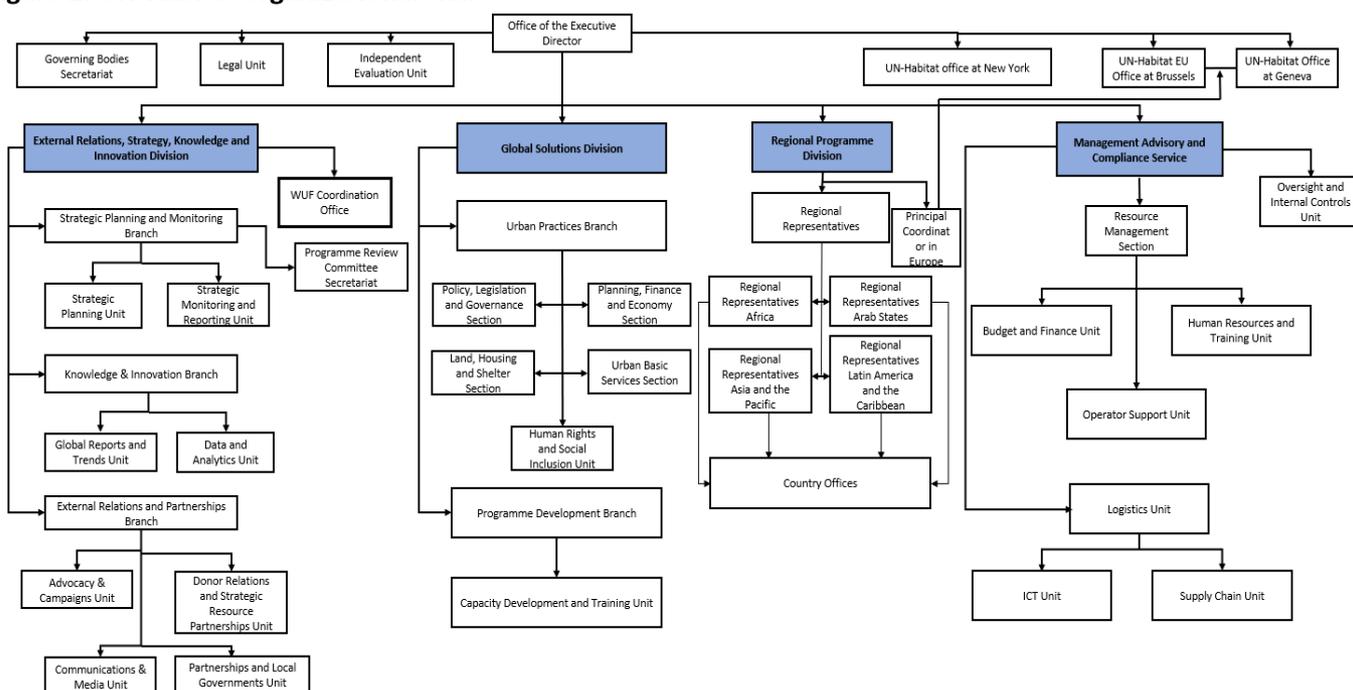
Figure 1: UN-Habitat theory of change for the strategic plan (2020–2025)



## Governance, structure and resources

6. UN-Habitat has a three-tier governance structure consisting of the universal UN-Habitat Assembly, the 36-member Executive Board and the Committee of Permanent Representatives.<sup>5</sup> It is headed by the Executive Director (Under-Secretary-General) who is supported by the Deputy Executive Director (Assistant Secretary-General). The UN-Habitat organigram is included in Figure 2. UN-Habitat had a total of 310 staff and 676 personnel recruited through other UN entities. It also engaged over 3,700 consultants and individual contractors during 2020-2023.

**Figure 2: UN-Habitat organizational chart**

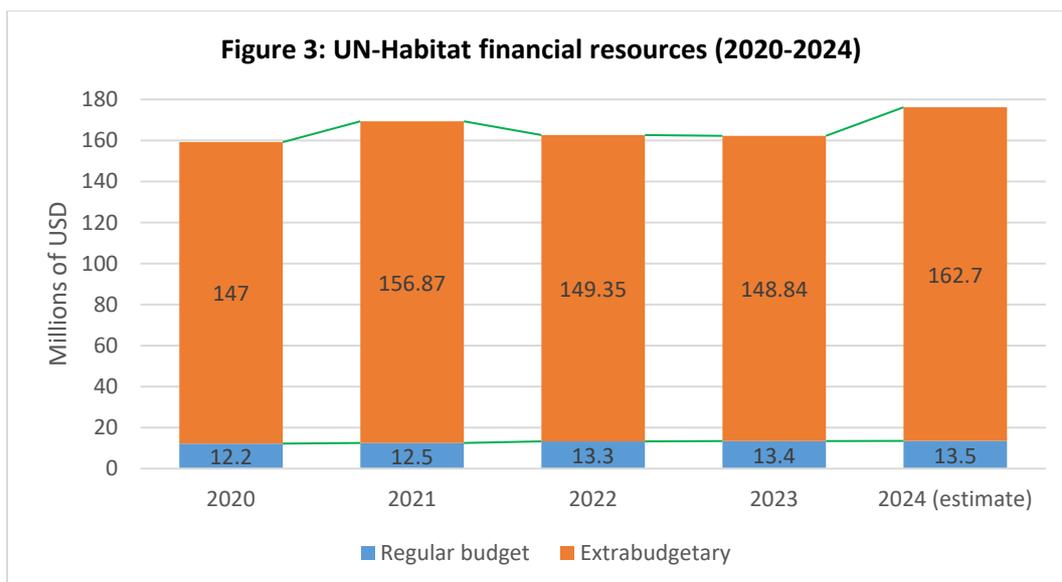


Source : UN-Habitat

7. The UN-Habitat 2024 estimated budget was \$176 million with annual budget during 2020-2024 period averaging at \$166 million, eight per cent of which was contributed by regular budget (RB). Figure 3 shows that UN-Habitat financial resources have fluctuated over the years mainly due to changes in extrabudgetary funding as RB contributions remained stagnant until 2022, when six new posts were approved.

8. The four substantive subprogrammes accounted for 92 per cent of the entity's 2024 budget, and resources were nearly equally distributed among them, with an average of \$40.6 million per subprogramme.

<sup>5</sup> General Assembly resolution 73/239 established the new governance structure in December 2018.



Source: A/77/6 (Sect. 15) and A/78/6 (Sect. 15)

9. Over 92 per cent of UN-Habitat resources were extrabudgetary, which consisted of three main funding types as below:

- Foundation non-earmarked fund**

  - Typically constituted about 5% of UN-Habitat budget
  - Voluntary contributions from Governments, budget allocations were approved by the Executive Board
  - Main source of funding for the implementation of the UN-Habitat strategic plan for mandated normative work, executive direction and management and some programme support
  - Only funding source providing management with discretion over priorities
- Foundation earmarked fund**

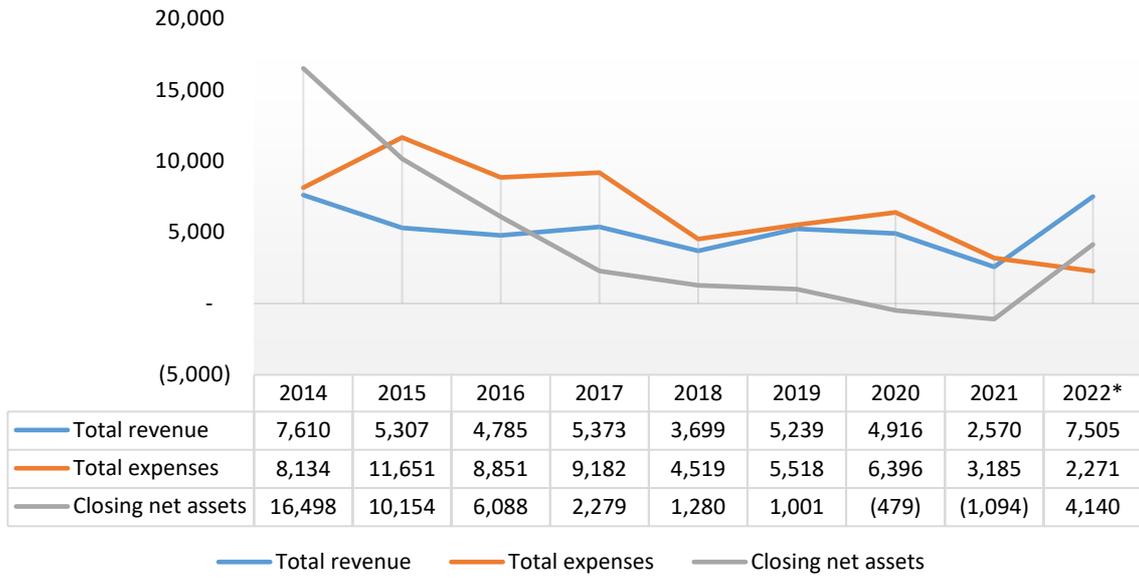
  - Typically between 25-30% of UN-Habitat budget
  - Voluntary contributions from Governments and other donors for implementation of specific activities and projects
  - Generally covered global, thematic and multi-country projects
- Technical cooperation fund**

  - Constituted over 60% of budget
  - Earmarked voluntary resources from Governments and other donors for the implementation of specific technical country-level activities and projects

10. With dwindling non-earmarked funding and overspending for over a decade, UN-Habitat started the current SP period (2020) with a deficit (Figure 4), which reached as high as USD 1.2 million in 2022,<sup>6</sup> affecting trust in the entity's credibility. This prompted severe austerity measures and put the entity in an exceptionally challenging financial situation.

<sup>6</sup> UN-Habitat deficit-spent its foundation non-earmarked trust fund since 2012 (see Executive Director's Report 2022).

**Figure 4: UN-Habitat non-earmarked funding trend (thousands of USD)**



Source: HSP/EB.2023/2

### III. Scope and Methodology

11. The 2020-2025 SP provided the framework for the evaluation. This mid-term evaluation covered the 2020-2023 period and used a mixed-method approach incorporating the following data sources:

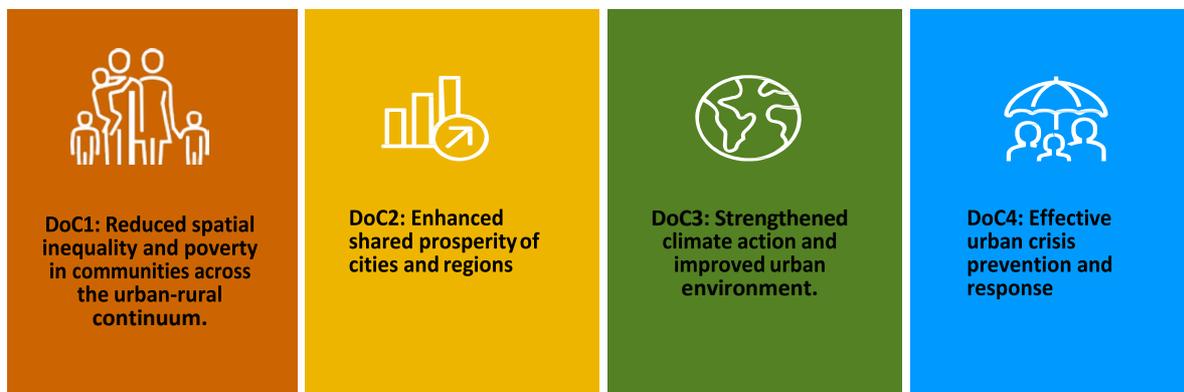
<b>Desk review</b>	Key programme documents and performance data including budgets, project documents and workplans, performance reports, evaluations and other oversight reports, intergovernmental proceedings, reports and resolutions, including other UN and external materials on UN-Habitat work areas.
<b>231 semi-structured interviews with UN-Habitat staff and external stakeholders</b>	With 443 interviewees (47% women) across UN-Habitat global, regional and country presences. Staff from 46 country offices were interviewed, and 64% of all interviewees were external to UN-Habitat including government officials, beneficiary groups, other UN entities, Member States and donor representatives, civil society and non-government organizations (CSOs/NGOs) and implementing partners.
<b>10 focus group discussions (FGDs)</b>	With 62 participants (81% women) from governments, CSOs/NGOs and beneficiary groups.
<b>UN-Habitat personnel survey</b>	526 responses representing a 29% response rate across all personnel. Half the respondents were women, 70% worked at field offices and a total of 64 country offices were represented among the respondents. The online survey was sent to 1,802 personnel including consultants and individual contractors.
<b>Stakeholders survey</b>	593 responses (16% response rate) from other UN, national and local governments, CSOs/NGOs, academic and think tank organizations, donors and diplomatic community from 110 countries. Among the respondents, 40% were women, 87% were familiar with UN-Habitat work and 72% had engagement with UN-Habitat during 2020-2023. The online survey was shared with 3,800 recipients in English, French, Spanish and Arabic.
<b>6 country case study analyses</b>	Philippines, Kenya, Mozambique, Brazil, Egypt and Iraq (virtual). Countries were selected based on a documented and participatory process, including criteria such as extent of project activities; implementation maturity; regional balance; subprogramme coverage; representation of different contexts; and evaluability assessment. Field visits to the five countries included project sites visit to observe outputs and results delivered (e.g., houses built, services delivered).

## IV. Evaluation Results

- A. The UN-Habitat 2020-2025 strategic plan set ambitious goals and provided a relevant and coherent vision to guide the entity’s work, but its implementation was constrained by insufficient resources and an inadequate accountability and results framework.

*The UN-Habitat strategic plan was a marked improvement from prior strategic plans with better alignment with global initiatives, enhanced partner participation and results orientation*

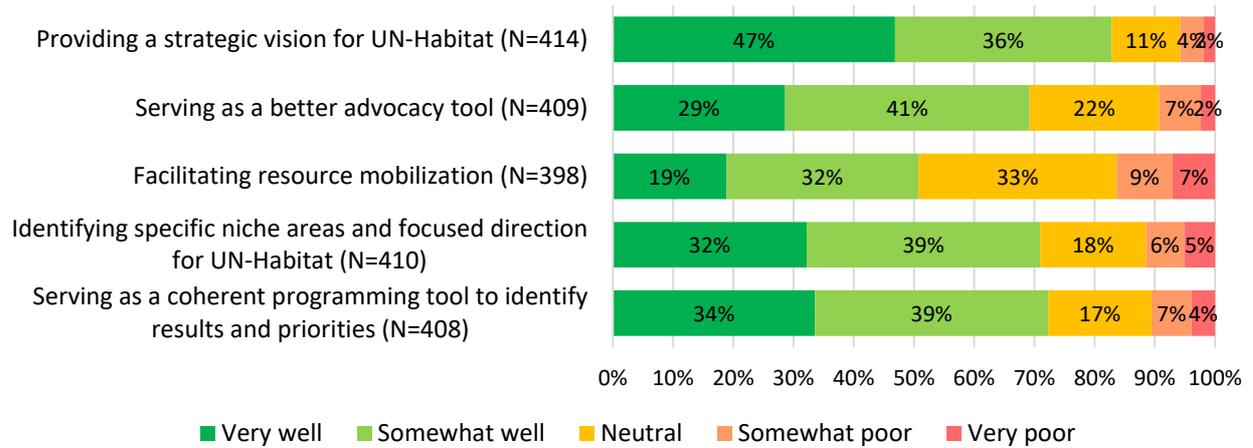
12. The UN-Habitat SP (2020-2025) was developed through a highly participatory process involving over 100 consultations both internally and externally with other UN entities and partner networks. It was also marked by a departure from its usual functional area-based planning to one anchored in a theory of change, with an emphasis on outcomes that encapsulated the entity’s work into the following four DoCs:



13. The SP outlined ambitious goals for sustainable urbanization and was aligned with key global initiatives and priorities.<sup>7</sup> UN-Habitat personnel and country offices considered the SP an improvement over past SPs, appreciating the wide range of urban issues it covered and the flexibility it provided to country offices to tailor their programmes to specific contexts and needs: over two-thirds of the 40 non-case study country office heads interviewed assessed the SP positively in this regard. They found the SP to be highly useful in showcasing UN-Habitat areas of expertise to stakeholders. Similarly, a significant majority of personnel survey respondents (73 per cent) assessed the SP to be an improvement from past SPs and to provide a coherent vision and sense of purpose to guide the work of their work units and for the entity as a whole (76 per cent and 85 per cent respectively). In the same survey, UN-Habitat personnel rated the SP highly in several key areas listed in Figure 5 below.

<sup>7</sup> These included: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development; the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030; the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants; and the New Urban Agenda.

**Figure 5: The strategic plan served as a key tool for programming and advocacy (personnel survey)**



14. Overall, staff and stakeholders interviewed noted the following key strengths of the SP:

**Strengths of the strategic plan**

- Holistic, well-structured, clear, visionary, ambitious, outcome-oriented, flexible and adaptable
- Useful for project development and communication
- Alignment with global and national priorities
- Allows for integrated programming across the DoCs
- Usefulness for country operations
- Strong resonance to staff and stakeholders
- Global champion for SDG-driven urban development
- Highly participatory process

*The SP lacked in awareness and communication*

15. Despite the positive assessments of the SP, there was a lack of awareness about the SP and the engagement with stakeholders to promote it was low (discussed further in result D). Nearly six in ten personnel survey respondents, and Government officials in five out of the six case study countries,<sup>8</sup> indicated challenges in operationalizing the SP because of the limited dissemination and not having full familiarity of the SP details. The SP's technical and theoretical language and complex structure also made it hard for stakeholders to understand, leading to low engagement.

16. Furthermore, 22 per cent of personnel survey respondents identified several areas of UN-Habitat work that were not sufficiently resourced and prioritized in the SP, including: housing and slum upgrading;<sup>9</sup> localization of SDGs; financing and the urban economy; regional planning and development; technology and innovation; and urban governance. UN-Habitat operated five flagship

<sup>8</sup> Philippines, Kenya, Mozambique, Egypt and Iraq.

<sup>9</sup> Greater emphasis on housing as a core mandate, including slum upgrading and advocacy for housing rights, design, construction, decarbonization and finance was desired.

programmes<sup>10</sup> linked to specific SP outcomes to address some of these issues. However, they lacked dedicated start-up funding and suffered from delayed delivery of results.

17. Overall, challenges of the SP as noted by staff and stakeholders interviewed are summarized below:

#### Challenges of the strategic plan

- Limited stakeholder awareness and engagement
- Funding and resource constraints
- Overlapping nature of the DoCs led to challenges in their operationalization
- Invisibility of enablers even though they supported the implementation of core mandated work
- Somewhat abstract and theoretical language
- Inadequate structure and results framework
- Disconnect between global and local priorities and needs in some instances
- Unique value proposition: UN-Habitat's niche compared to other UN agencies (e.g., UNEP, UNDP) not fully distinguished

*UN-Habitat SP DoCs were highly relevant in responding to the pressing urban issues in a changing world, but the entity had limited capacity to respond to the vast needs of stakeholders*

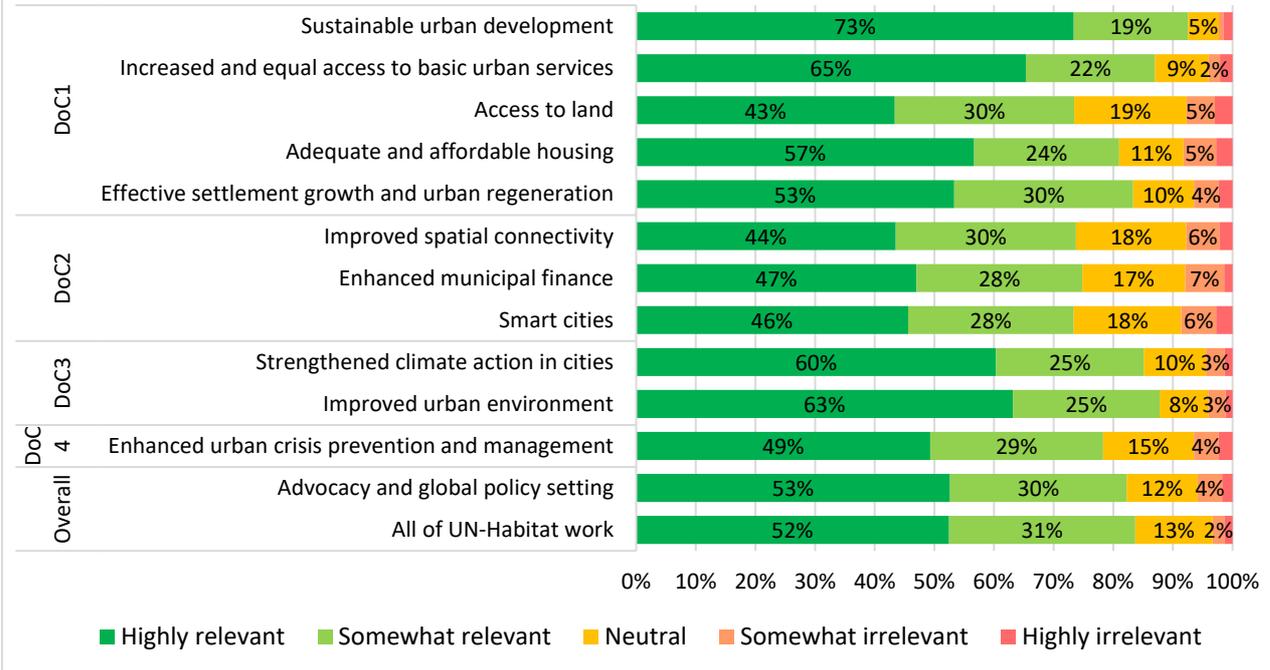
18. The UN-Habitat SP DoCs were aligned with several key global initiatives and priorities as discussed in paragraph 13. Most stakeholders (84 per cent) and personnel (85 per cent) survey respondents considered that the four DoCs were responsive to the global and national priorities for sustainable urban development and aligned with UN Habitat mandates. At the same time, most (66 per cent) also found UN-Habitat to be responsive to the diverse needs and priorities of various stakeholder groups. Both staff and stakeholders considered the entity to be the most responsive to local governments, followed by Member States, beneficiary groups, donors, and lastly, CSO/NGOs.

19. Overall, stakeholders considered the DoCs to be highly relevant to the needs and priorities of intended beneficiaries. Key interviewees in all the six case study countries largely found the DoCs to be highly relevant for their respective contexts. Furthermore, stakeholders surveyed reported that the specific areas of UN-Habitat work under each DOC were highly relevant as shown in Figure 6.

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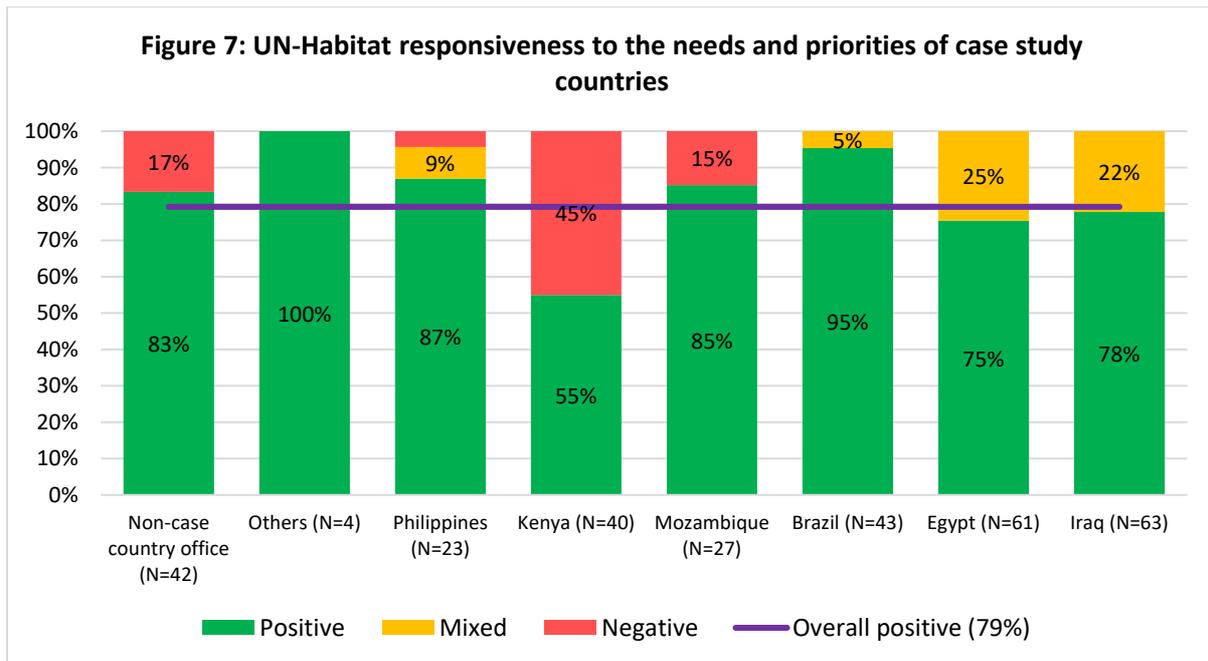
<sup>10</sup> 1. Inclusive, Vibrant Neighbourhoods and Communities; 2. People-Centered Smart Cities; 3. RISE-UP: Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor; 4. Inclusive cities: Enhancing the positive impacts of urban migration; and 5. Sustainable Development Goals Cities.

**Figure 6: Stakeholders rated UN-Habitat areas of work under each DoC to be highly relevant (N=538)**



20. Furthermore, while the majority of interviewees (79 per cent)<sup>11</sup> positively assessed UN-Habitat responsiveness to the needs of its intended beneficiaries, interviewees in Brazil and the Philippines registered the highest positive ratings, while those in Kenya had the lowest ratings, as shown in Figure 7. Interviewees in Kenya - including UN-Habitat staff and stakeholders (e.g., Permanent Mission representatives, donors) whose assessments on UN-Habitat responsiveness pertained to the entity’s work at the country, regional and global levels — highlighted a mismatch between the vast needs of countries and the entity’s ability to respond to them. Interviewed stakeholders across all case study countries noted that while UN-Habitat was responsive, it was unable to address the full extent of needs in most countries due to limited funds and lack of strategic field presence as discussed below.

<sup>11</sup> 240 out of 303 interview assessments.



Note: N represents number of assessments shared by interviewees in the respective countries that were coded into positive, mixed and negative categories using a qualitative analysis software (NVivo).

21. Stakeholders also identified several comparative advantages of UN-Habitat that were well integrated into the SP, including:

- Technical expertise on topics related to urban development
- Global and regional mandates and platforms
- Global thought leader and center of excellence on sustainable urbanization and related issues
- Global advocacy, consensus building and agreements on sustainable urban development issues
- Partnership and cooperation with other UN and non-UN entities
- Professional competence and knowledge of UN-Habitat personnel
- Innovative approaches and use of data to analyzing the challenges of sustainable urban development
- Complementarity of UN-Habitat normative and technical cooperation work
- Neutral analysis and voice on urbanization and related issues

22. Further on responsiveness to beneficiaries' needs, stakeholders in the case study countries commended UN-Habitat for its close consultation with beneficiaries, donors and government counterparts during project development and implementation. For example, its 'People's Process' approach and grassroots level work has resulted in impactful projects in several countries (see result B). Furthermore, the alignment of country offices' work with national development plans and government strategies in some country offices also underscored the entity's client orientation.

*Inadequate resources for the SP implementation and the predominantly donor-driven, project-based UN-Habitat business model impeded strategic prioritization*

23. As noted above (paragraphs 9-10), UN-Habitat started the SP period with a deficit in its non-earmarked funding and severe austerity measures, which resulted in lack of resources for implementation of the SP. The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic also coincided with the start of the SP with significant negative effect on resource availability for the SP implementation and long-term planning. Additionally, the large proportion of earmarked and technical cooperation funds in the UN-Habitat budget resulted in a SP that was largely project-based, which made long-term planning and strategic implementation challenging. This resulted in short-term focused projects and activities with resource instability and limited reach, and often driven by donor priorities. Since there were no resources mobilized from headquarters for the SP implementation at the country level, country offices prioritized projects that attracted donor funding, which were then aligned to the SP DoCs during the PRC process. About half of the personnel survey respondents did not consider that the SP facilitated resource mobilization (Figure 5). There was also a perception among some interviewees that the SP was too broad and tried to be “everything to everyone”.

24. Consequently, the SP was insufficiently localized as majority of field presences did not prepare local-level strategies that were aligned with both the SP and local context and priorities. Several interviewees noted that the SP can feel abstract and theoretical at the field level. Only about a quarter of the field offices<sup>12</sup> navigated this challenge by developing Habitat country programme document that linked the global SP with local needs and priorities, including good examples linking the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCFs).

*UN-Habitat efforts to align its projects and activities with the domains of change were noteworthy, but it still faced many challenges*

25. Given the broad nature of the SP and the retrofitting efforts, as noted above, the majority of personnel surveyed (79 per cent) affirmed that the activities of their immediate work units were aligned with the four DoCs. In a late 2023 UN-Habitat survey, 75 per cent of staff considered the Project Review Committee (PRC) process as supporting alignment of programmes and projects with the SP. Interviewed staff highlighted improvements in the PRC process with the launching of regional PRCs, citing greater awareness of region-specific needs and challenges among regional PRCs. However, there was often a greater focus on alignment during project design phase, but such focus was not maintained during implementation. Legacy projects from the prior SP were mapped to the current SP DoCs although staff faced significant challenges in retroactively introducing legacy projects into the Umoja Integrated Planning, Monitoring and Reporting (IPMR) system, including the allocation to the corresponding DoCs. In the absence of a clear directive on project allocation under the four DoCs and since most projects cut across multiple DoCs, guesswork was often used to assign projects to specific DoCs, rendering the DoC-specific budgeting and reporting unreliable. Several interviewees expressed doubt about the clear understanding and implementation of interlinkages between the four DoCs and called for more clarity and guidance from headquarters on how to apply the DoC framework to specific projects.

26. Furthermore, operational reality on the ground related to the funding situation meant that funding prospect took precedence in the design and initiation of projects over considerations on the most critical needs areas of the SP DoCs at the country level, especially in the absence of Habitat country programme documents outlining such needs. This did not provide the most optimal mechanism for ensuring alignment as there were few examples of project activities with questionable alignment with the DoCs, including exceptions and adjustments made due to the Covid-19 pandemic and donor requests.

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<sup>12</sup> 14 out of 54 field offices reviewed.

*The implementation of the strategic plan was a work in progress and the structure did not support accountability for subprogramme delivery*

27. The UN-Habitat internal change process faced significant challenges in effectively implementing the SP as organizational restructuring planned as part of a four-pillars reform process launched in 2018 was yet to be implemented.<sup>13</sup> A new structure commensurate to the SP was developed in 2019,<sup>14</sup> but was not implemented due to limited financial resources which resulted in large number of posts remaining vacant before being abolished.<sup>15</sup> Importantly, the effort to reform UN-Habitat field presence (regional architecture) was also pending, which affected the entity's ability to make its field presences more strategic and balanced across the regions and subregions, and effectively backstop field operations.<sup>16</sup> Most of the interviewees (59 per cent) did not find the structure and accountability framework for the SP implementation adequate, and importantly, over three-quarters of UN-Habitat interviewees shared negative or mixed assessments.

28. The SP organizational restructuring fell short partly because UN-Habitat equated its SP DoCs (i.e., the visionary goals of the SP) with 'subprogrammes' (i.e., the organizational structure),<sup>17</sup> which created multiple challenges related to misalignment, unclarity of roles and responsibilities, arbitrary subprogramme budgeting and reporting, among others, as below:

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<sup>13</sup> The four pillars of the reform process included: (a) A new governance architecture; (b) The development of a new Strategic Plan; (c) An internal change process; and (d) An organizational restructuring. See HSP/EB.2020/2/Add.1 for additional information.

<sup>14</sup> HSP/EB.2020/2/Add.1

<sup>15</sup> For example, Foundation non-earmarked funded posts were 135 in 2020, reduced to 69 in 2022 and 14 in 2023, with vacancy rates of 74%, 90% and 29%, respectively. Data compiled from HSP/EB.2020/2/Add.1, HSP/EB.2022/15/Add.1 and HSP/EB.2023/CRP.6.

<sup>16</sup> UN-Habitat was developing a scalability model to scale up capacity as funding level improves (see HSP/EB.2023/11/Add.1).

<sup>17</sup> ST/SGB/2018/3 provides that "A subprogramme consists of activities within a programme aimed at achieving one or a few closely related objectives as set out in the strategic framework. The subprogramme structure shall correspond, to the extent possible, to an organizational unit, normally at the division level."

Misalignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The structure did not fully align with the SP, leading to silos, inefficient resource allocation and difficulties translating strategic goals into concrete action</li> </ul>
Resource constraints	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Branches and country offices lacked sufficient staff and funding, making it difficult to implement projects, monitor progress, and fulfill reporting requirements while raising funds</li> </ul>
Matrix system challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The intended matrix system, designed to encourage collaboration, lacked clear accountability mechanisms, was under-funded, not fully systematized and required further assessment</li> </ul>
Unclear roles and responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Roles and responsibilities, particularly for Subprogramme Coordinators, were often unclear. Such coordination roles were understaffed and not equally developed across the subprogrammes.</li> </ul>
Decentralization issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Decentralization efforts were not realized, leaving regional and country offices with inadequate support, resources and clear direction to implement the SP</li> </ul>
Project-centric focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The framework prioritized individual projects over broader strategic goals, hindering the ability to assess the entity's overall contribution to sustainable urbanization</li> </ul>
Frustration and demotivation among staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Constant pressure for staff to raise funds for their own job security along with unpredictable job contracts affected morale</li> </ul>
Unreliable subprogramme budgeting and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Subprogramme budget and performance reporting were arbitrary and unreliable</li> </ul>

*The results framework for measuring progress of the SP implementation and communication on results were inadequate*

29. Despite an ambitious theory of change and emphasis on outcomes, the UN-Habitat SP lacked the necessary results framework to track the progress of its implementation. The initial SP results framework approved by the Executive Board in October 2020 contained 122 indicators, which went through multiple revisions. In 2022, 60 indicators were selected for monitoring, which was further revised to 20 core indicators to be given higher priority for aggregate reporting at the corporate level as of late 2023 — nearly four years into the plan’s implementation period. . Data for these indicators, however, were fully or partially lacking since tracking mechanisms were rudimentary and not yet fully established. The SP therefore lacked clear and systematic indicators for monitoring progress and results.

30. Results monitoring during the period under review was weakened by the following issues:

- a. Subprogramme coordination roles were given to four mid-level staff as additional tasks estimated to take about 10 per cent of their time. They had no supervisory roles over the programme implementing units, and often were not well-known among field offices. Their coordination roles entailed providing guidance to staff, compiling and reviewing spreadsheets to track results under each DoC and quality control. They worked through a network of focal points across the entity. However, this was done unevenly across the subprogrammes due to capacity constraints.

- b. The PRC Secretariat also sought to support implementation monitoring and reporting in the IPMR system. However, reviews of the IPMR project database showed that majority of indicators were at the output level with some vague and irrelevant indicators and large numbers of empty and outdated cells, which made IPMR an inadequate and unreliable system for results monitoring; and
- c. Generally, there was a very low level of dedicated resources for results monitoring and results-based management, although the PRC Secretariat noted its efforts to train staff on results-based management.

31. Furthermore, there was limited communication and dissemination of results to stakeholders, including Member States and donors, hindering advocacy efforts and fundraising opportunities. While the annual reports and budget documents included examples of results achieved by specific projects or initiatives, UN-Habitat did not use its websites adequately to communicate and showcase results and provide basic information on its field presences. There were multiple field office websites independent from the corporate website. Furthermore, results reporting i) was piecemeal and often limited to ‘impact stories’ included in donor reports that were anecdotal, ii) based on specific projects and iii) included mixed reports on activities, outputs and a few outcomes.

32. A detailed review<sup>18</sup> of 22 evaluations conducted by UN-Habitat during 2020-2022 – all project evaluations – showed that most projects performed well in terms of relevance, coherence and effectiveness but less so on impact and sustainability. UN-Habitat limitations in showcasing success stories, scaling-up successful projects and effectively monitoring and evaluating impact affected its ability to secure long-term funding. Separate but related to the weaknesses in the SP results management, the entity also faced general challenges in addressing the critical urban data and knowledge gaps, as SDG 11 had the highest number of indicators with insufficient data to measure progress in 2023.<sup>19</sup>

## B. Implementation of the UN-Habitat SP resulted in significant contributions to improving the lives of beneficiaries and left a positive impact on communities.

*UN-Habitat contributions under the organizational performance enablers and the four DoCs – the main pillars of the SP – ranged from policy formulation to implementation*

33. Despite the challenges discussed above, through its diverse programmes and interventions across the global, regional, country and local levels, the implementation of the UN-Habitat SP contributed to results under its main pillars, i.e., the organizational performance enablers and the four DoCs as depicted in Figure 1. Examples of these contributions are discussed below.

34. Under the **organizational enablers and drivers of change**, UN-Habitat set global norms and agenda, mobilized public and political support and contributed toward important global initiatives on sustainable urban development. Its knowledge products, advocacy, communication and outreach activities facilitated the exchange of knowledge and best practices between countries, governments and communities, including through:

- The quadrennial UN-Habitat Assembly, which supported Government representatives from urban and housing ministries to identify key issues, review major trends, build networks and examine global norms and standards. Officials from all six case study countries benefitted from participating in this event.

<sup>18</sup> OIOS-IED evaluation team reviewed the 22 evaluations conducted for UN Habitat as part of its data analysis process.

<sup>19</sup> <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/progress-chart/Progress-Chart-2023.pdf>

- The biennial World Urban Forum, which offered a unique, non-legislative platform for policy makers, government officials, private and NGO sector leaders and other stakeholders to share experiences and form partnerships. The Forum also served as a platform for reporting processes of the NUA. UN-Habitat also supported regional, subregional and country level urban forms.
- Key publications such as the World Cities Report with wide reach and stakeholder demand.
- The observance of Urban October, World Habitat Day, World Cities Day, and similar events, which raised awareness and visibility of urban issues.

35. Through its leading roles in the monitoring and reporting on global progress in the implementation of the NUA and SDG 11, UN-Habitat supported global dialogue and national capacity-building and also contributed to improved monitoring of SDG 11 indicators. UN-Habitat also led the UN Task Force on Future of Cities and the Local 2030 Coalition of the Decade of Action and established partnerships with many UN and other international and regional organizations.

36. UN-Habitat made specific contributions under each of the four DoCs of the SP, which included, inter alia, the below:

 <p><b>DoC1: Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported construction of housing and slum upgrading in over 200 cities. For example, in Cameroon, Sao Tome and Principe, Kenya and Mozambique, UN-Habitat projects supported the improved living conditions for slum dwellers.</li> <li>• Supported land and property rights action and construction of safe and inclusive public spaces in many countries, benefitting millions.</li> <li>• Supported the physical surveying and titling of 1.2 million properties in Afghanistan, empowering residents with the security of land tenure.</li> <li>• Made notable contributions in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) areas, building on partnerships with water operators (e.g., the Global Water Operators’ Partnerships Alliance or GWOPA) and other UN agencies.</li> <li>• Contributed to Nepal’s achieving ‘open defecation free’ status, and provided improved WASH facilities in Myanmar, Nepal, Burkina Faso, and Sao Tome and Principe, to help reduce the spread of diseases and improve sanitation facilities.</li> </ul>
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 <p><b>DoC2: Enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported 64 countries in developing their national and local urban policies, including in many countries that formulated their first national urban policies with UN-Habitat support, e.g., Jordan, Comoros, Ghana, Burundi, Malawi, Mongolia and Sri Lanka.</li> <li>• Supported several countries formulate their smart city policies in 30 local governments.</li> <li>• Enhanced urban-rural linkages policy development in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal and Tanzania.</li> <li>• Supported increased local revenue collection in several countries (e.g., Somalia, Afghanistan)</li> <li>• Supported SDG impact projects in over 50 cities and supported many cities and regional governments develop their voluntary local reviews.</li> <li>• Supported advocacy work on SDG localization and partnership building with local and regional governments</li> </ul>
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 <p><b>DoC3: Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stepped up its efforts to promote multidimensional climate and urban environment actions in recognition of the criticality of cities for climate change mitigation and adaptation.<sup>20</sup></li> <li>• Supported climate change adaptation plans and resilient infrastructure development efforts through over USD 122 million portfolio of projects funded by the Adaptation Fund in numerous countries (Cambodia, Comoros, Jordan, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Mongolia, Pakistan, Syria, Bahrain, Cuba and Nepal).</li> <li>• Assisted over 30 cities in building climate resilient infrastructure and 20 cities to develop nature-based solutions.</li> <li>• Promoted its Waste Wise Cities tool which were implemented in nearly 100 cities for improved solid waste management. Also supported global advocacy through the Zero Waste Day.</li> <li>• Contributed to global discourse and awareness building on climate change and cities (e.g., Ministerial meetings in the Conference of the Parties).</li> </ul>
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<sup>20</sup> “Cities are critical battlegrounds. They generate 70 percent of global emissions. They house half of humanity. And by 2050, over two billion more people will call them home.” Secretary-General’s message to the 2023 United Nations Habitat Assembly.

 <p><b>DoC4: Effective urban crisis prevention and response</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on 26 countries, territories and areas affected by conflict and disaster,<sup>21</sup> spanning from early response through humanitarian interventions in nine countries to longer-term responses through participatory processes in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of homes in 12 countries and the rehabilitation and enhancement of basic services in 14 countries.</li> <li>• Supported local, regional and national governments in building urban resilience and enhancing disaster risk reduction approaches in 12 countries.</li> <li>• Played instrumental role in needs, vulnerability and capacity assessments through conducting urban profiling activities in 12 countries; e.g., the profiling exercises led to the development of urban recovery approaches in Syria, Iraq and Lebanon.<sup>22</sup></li> <li>• Assisted urban recovery interventions in conflict and disaster affected countries including Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, the State of Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Yemen and Mozambique as well as the Sahel region.</li> <li>• UN-Habitat empowered communities in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of neighborhoods and building safe and resilient shelter for the affected communities in several countries (e.g., Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cuba, Mexico and Nepal), fostering a sense of ownership and leading to durable solutions as well as integration of refugees and migrants into host communities.<sup>23</sup></li> </ul>
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*UN-Habitat interventions led to positive changes in behaviour, policies and capacities at the community, local government and national levels*

37. UN-Habitat technical assistance work through the provision of tools, normative and policy advice, training and co-creation contributed to the capacity-building of institutions, local governments and communities. In interviews, 90 per cent of external stakeholders assessed UN-Habitat capacity-building efforts as positive, and most government officials interviewed (87 per cent) had a positive assessment of UN-Habitat capacity-building support. Additionally, senior officials from the line ministries (i.e., housing, urban development, public works) in all the six case study countries attested to significantly benefiting from such support.

38. Stakeholders particularly commended UN-Habitat’s ability to work directly with communities and grassroots organizations as well as with various levels of government departments while its country-level interventions influenced actions at all levels of national, local and city governments. Examples of UN-Habitat capacity-building support included:

<sup>21</sup> See the annex to Executive Board decision 2022/2 in HSP/EB.2022/13.

<sup>22</sup> HSP/EB.2022/17

<sup>23</sup> Through its hallmark participatory planning methodologies, such as the people’s process —a community development planning and implementation tool.

<b>National government</b>	Supported development of national urban and housing policies
	Provided policy and normative guidance on NUA, SDGs, climate change and national development strategies and visions
	Facilitated cross-sectoral integration and joint efforts by relevant ministries and offices
	Supported formulation and reform of national programmes and institutions
<b>Local government</b>	Supported development of local urban policies in line with national development and urban policies
	Built local government capacity through hands-on support in municipality-level policy development (e.g. in Cuba, Philippines, Argentina, Mozambique)
	Developed and implemented projects with local governments on housing, waste management, land readjustment, sustainable mobility, urban regeneration, water, etc.
<b>Community</b>	Empowered communities through participation in local planning and decision-making process
	Mobilized other actors in support of communities in post-conflict and post-disaster contexts
	Improved living conditions in communities through provision of housing and urban basic services
	Provided training in managing homeowners' association, small-scale corporations, vocational training, public space (e.g. Philippines, Iraq, Brazil, Yemen, Argentina)

*UN-Habitat made distinct contributions in the case study countries despite facing similar challenges*

39. Across the six case studies, UN-Habitat offices localized the entity's global agenda with varying degrees of success. Overall, UN-Habitat was seen as a valuable partner for sustainable development with clear evidence of results across all six countries as discussed in Boxes 1 to 6 below.

*Philippines*

40. Focused on the DoC 1, 3 and 4, UN-Habitat Philippines effectively equipped national and local government agencies with knowledge and skills to address climate change, urban development and waste management challenges. The entity provided crucial support in developing national frameworks and guidelines for its post-disaster response and reconstruction projects.

## Box 1: Philippines case study summary

### Philippines

*Budget (2020-2023): USD 21 million*  
*Personnel: 19 national and 1 international staff (partial)*  
*Major donors: Japan, Germany and Australia*

#### Key Achievements

DoC 1	DoC 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provided crucial support to various levels of government to develop the <b>National Urban Development and Housing Framework</b>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contributed to post-conflict construction and rebuilding of homes and communities in <b>Marawi</b> for around 1,000 families and earned widespread recognition.</li> </ul>
DoC 3	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supported the development of <b>Resilient and Green Human Settlements Framework</b>, and <b>City Planning of Action for Marine Litter (CPOA-ML)</b> project.</li> <li>Empowered local governments to assess climate risks and plan for resilience, with successful pilots of the <b>Provincial Climate Risk Diagnostic (PCRD)</b> tool in Southern Leyte and Northern Samar.</li> <li>Supported the <b>Strengthening Institutions and Empowering Localities against Disasters and Climate Change in the Philippines (SHIELD)</b> project, which brought together stakeholders from the government, private sector and civil society to unlock funding and implement informed and inclusive resilience actions.</li> </ul>	

Number of stakeholders consulted: 122

Women  
66%

🕒

Men  
34%

#### Challenges

- Lack of communication on impact and visibility of results.
- Limited dissemination and scaling-up of successful pilot projects (e.g., PCRD tool, 3Ws eco-bags).
- Exclusive dependency on donor funding inhibited strategic prioritization.

#### Relevant quote

“Because of the permanent shelter provided by UN-Habitat, after living in many temporary places as an IDP, now I have a permanent place and we have a community.”  
 — Resident of Darussalam Village in Marawi

### Kenya

41. With results under all four DoCs, UN-Habitat focused on supporting Kenyan cities to develop and implement comprehensive urban development plans that address housing needs particularly for low-income communities. The country team had a very lean structure with two members seconded from the Kenyan government,<sup>24</sup> demonstrating a sustained interest from the government for UN-Habitat support.

<sup>24</sup> The two seconded staff added to the 4 national staff the office had and the shared resources related to the Director and the international staff of the Regional Office for Africa co-located in Nairobi.

## Box 2: Kenya case study summary

### Kenya

*Budget (2020-2023): USD 19 million*  
*Personnel: 6 national staff and additional shared resources with the regional office for Africa*  
*Major donors: EU, KOICA, UK*

**Key Achievements**

DoC 1	DoC 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supported the development of the <b>National Urban Policy, Vision 2030 Framework</b>, and implemented urban development plans at local levels.</li> <li>Supported residents to accessing affordable housing and land tenure in informal settlements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowered local youths in the <b>Youth Empowerment for the Sustainable Urbanization</b> program, increasing its scope to around 900 villages in Kenya and creating thousands of job opportunities.</li> </ul>
DoC 3	DoC 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Harnessed coastal and marine resources to build sustainable blue economy in the <b>Go Blue initiative</b>, creating jobs for youths and women.</li> <li>Built capacity in local communities to identify and mitigate risks associated with natural disasters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved the living conditions and social integration of low-income communities in the <b>Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme</b> and the <b>Kibera Project</b> in Nairobi, focused on improving basic infrastructure for more resilient communities.</li> <li>Contributed to sustainable and inclusive integration of host communities and refugees in Kalobeyi</li> </ul>

*Number of stakeholders consulted: 55*

Women 42%  Men 58%

**Challenges**

- Limited resources, very lean personnel structure.
- Difficulties in distinguishing regional and country office initiatives from those of HQ, leading to instances of confusion and competition.
- Lack of communication on impact and visibility of results.

**Relevant quote**

*“Mombasa is the only county piloting smart meters now. This could not have happened if it was not for the UN-Habitat report that was disseminated to us.” — Local government representative*

### Mozambique

42. With government counterparts funding 55 per cent of the country office budget, UN-Habitat work was focused on DoC 1, 3 and 4 and contributed to building resilience in Mozambique's infrastructure, housing and urban planning. Its innovative approaches and technical expertise influenced national policies and attracted donor funding.

### Box 3: Mozambique case study summary

## Mozambique

*Budget (2020-2023): USD 38 million (55% by Government)*  
*Personnel: 41 national and international staff*  
*Major donors: Mozambique, USAID, AECID, Canada*

#### Key Achievements

DoC 1	DoC 4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supported the development of the <b>National Urban Policy, provincial plans</b> and introduced <b>risk mapping</b> tools for territorial planning.</li> <li>Demonstrated technical leadership in the <b>CERRP project</b> – a 15,000 houses construction project funded by World Bank.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Empowered communities through local ownership for long-term impact and social integration, addressing the needs of IDPs in Northern Mozambique.</li> <li>Provided training in construction to women displaced by internal conflicts in a participatory approach.</li> </ul>
DoC 3	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retrofitted and built resilient schools in the <b>Safer Schools Initiative</b>, including 517 retrofits and 257 new constructions, using a specific roofing technique that allowed buildings to withstand Cyclone Idai in 2019.</li> <li>Conducted a <b>vulnerability assessment</b> of schools, which was incorporated as an integral part of education policy.</li> <li>Implemented 23 interventions to improve climate resilience, including the reconstruction of bridges, rehabilitation of mangroves and construction of safe havens around the Beira region. Pioneered durable solutions approach for IDPs.</li> </ul>	

*Number of stakeholders consulted: 51*

Women  
41%



Men  
59%

#### Challenges

- Long procurement delays causing slow implementation and frustration among stakeholders
- Lack of communication on impact and visibility of results.
- Unclear roles and responsibilities.
- Limited funding and scaling-up of pilots

#### Relevant quote

“Before the second national urban forum and the work on national urban policy [supported by UN-Habitat], I did not know anything about urban. But now when I speak to other people, they think I am an urban expert. Same thing goes for my other team members present here.”

*— Senior ministry official*

### Brazil

43. With government counterparts funding 87 per cent of the country office budget, UN-Habitat work was highly valued in the country. Most projects were linked to DoC 1 and 2, with three main components of data collection, capacity development and influence of public policies. UN-Habitat helped to inform government planning and decision-making related to poverty, employment, informal settlements, education, health, sanitation, housing, public spaces, social cohesion and infrastructure.

## Box 4: Brazil case study summary

### Brazil

*Budget (2020-2023): USD 14.8 million (87% by Government)*  
*Personnel: 50 national and 1 international staff with support from 196 consultants and individual contractors*  
*Major donor: Government counterparts*

#### Key Achievements

DoC 1	DoC 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducted comprehensive studies and collected data that helped government counterparts target those who are most in need, e.g. improved identification of informal settlements in Maceió.</li> <li>Facilitated access to communities, increased trust with local governments, and fostered a sense of ownership by actively involving community members in its projects.</li> <li>Engaged women, young people and community members for participatory design of public spaces (e.g., a park in the state of Alagoas) using Minecraft and 3D modelling tools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthened the capacity of local governments to develop innovative public policies, plans, and strategies.</li> <li>Worked with government counterparts to develop public platforms and dashboards that can be used to inform the development of more transparent and evidence-based public policies and programmes.</li> </ul>

*Number of stakeholders consulted: 85*

Women  
59%



Men  
41%

#### Challenges

- Overemphasis on diagnoses and planning rather than implementation.
- Mismatch between HQ frameworks (e.g., strategic plan, domains of change, tools, flagship programmes) and local needs and priorities.
- Lack of guidance and support from HQ.
- Difficulty mobilizing resources due to incompatible overhead rules.

#### Relevant quote

*“The work of UN-Habitat is fundamental. It allows us to have the guide of good practices regarding the urban agenda, the tools, the methodologies and thinking that allow us to advance on urban issues, including issues of localization and the implementation of the agenda 2030 and specifically SDG 11.”*  
*— Local government representative*

### Egypt

44. With 69 per cent of the country office budget contributed by government counterparts, UN-Habitat had a longstanding and valued presence in Egypt with projects primarily linked to DoC 1 and 2. Most projects included interventions supporting city urban upgrading, land readjustment, access to clean water and sustainable transportation and technology.

## Box 5: Egypt case study summary

### Egypt

*Budget (2020-2023): USD 34 million (69% by Government)*  
*Personnel: 41 national staff*  
*Major donors: Government counterparts, The Coca-Cola Foundation, Islamic Development Bank, SECO.*

#### Key Achievements

DoC 1	DoC 2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Influenced government policies and interventions,</li> <li>Supported the National Housing Strategy</li> <li>Built trust between landowners and government through participatory land readjustment approach.</li> <li>Improved access to clean water for two million people by introducing innovative and low-cost water filtration technology.</li> <li>Supported sustainable urban mobility and public space initiatives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supported the National Urban Policy</li> <li>Strengthened national and local capacity for improved management, planning, budgeting, implementation, and maintenance of sustainable urban development interventions.</li> <li>Supported transition from only slum upgrading in specific areas to city-wide urban upgrading</li> </ul>

*Number of stakeholders consulted: 82*



Women  
48%
Men  
52%

#### Challenges

- Overemphasis on diagnoses and planning rather than implementation.
- Lack of awareness among stakeholders on UN-Habitat mandate, SP and results.
- Lack of core funds, small staff, high turnover rate

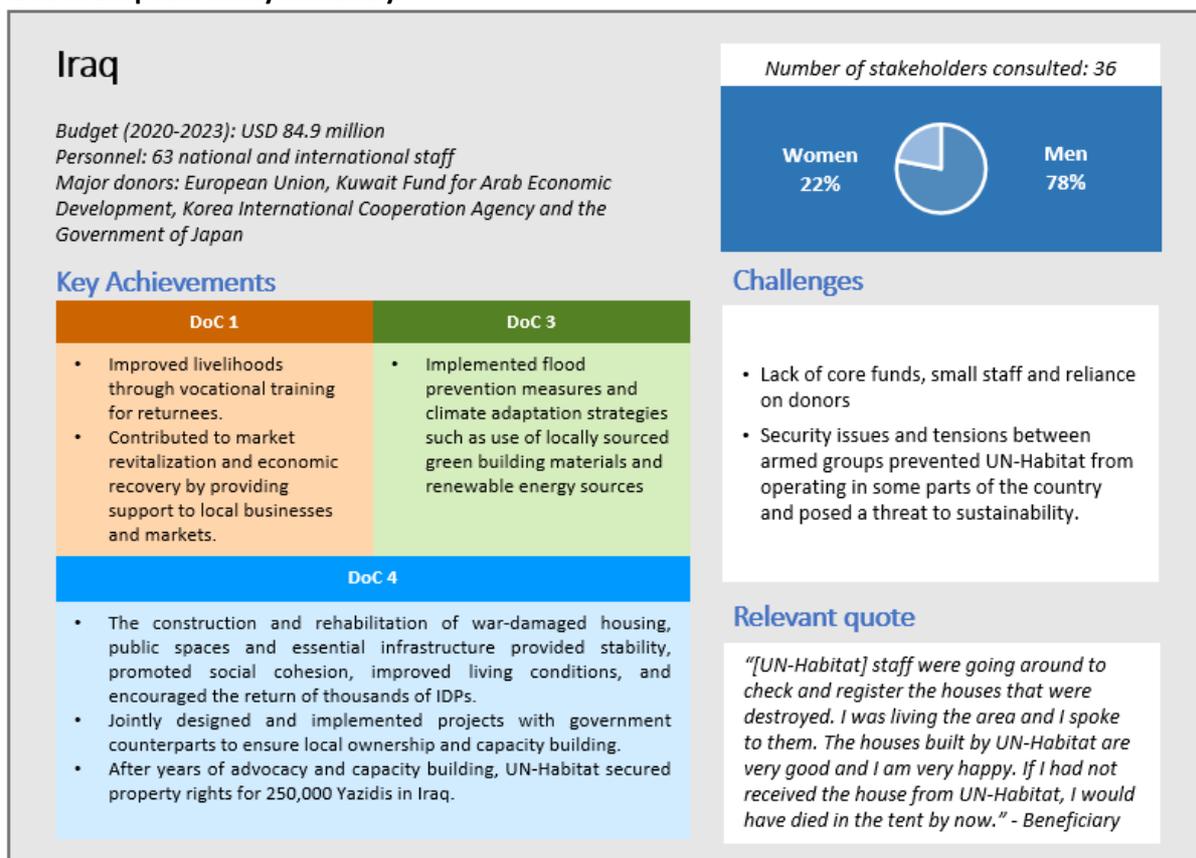
#### Relevant quote

*“We transformed an entire village and not just the swage – it was a bad situation. The sewage was delivered into a lake, and we could not tell them that you cannot discharge in the lake because we did not have any sewage system. Many students did not go to school because we did not have any roads. Sewage was in peoples’ houses. This is one of the most significant [UN-Habitat] results.”*  
*— Local government representative*

### Iraq

45. UN-Habitat supported the recovery and stabilization of conflict-affected areas in Iraq, addressing critical needs in housing, infrastructure, livelihoods and community development. The areas of work included the rehabilitation and reconstruction of war-damaged housing and essential infrastructure (e.g., schools, water networks, boreholes, sanitation systems, installation of solar panels and electric transformers to the rehabilitated houses, pedestrian bridge, markets, parks and public spaces) as well as construction of core housing units, women protection and health centres.

## Box 6: Iraq case study summary



*Overall, UN-Habitat was considered effective in the face of mounting challenges*

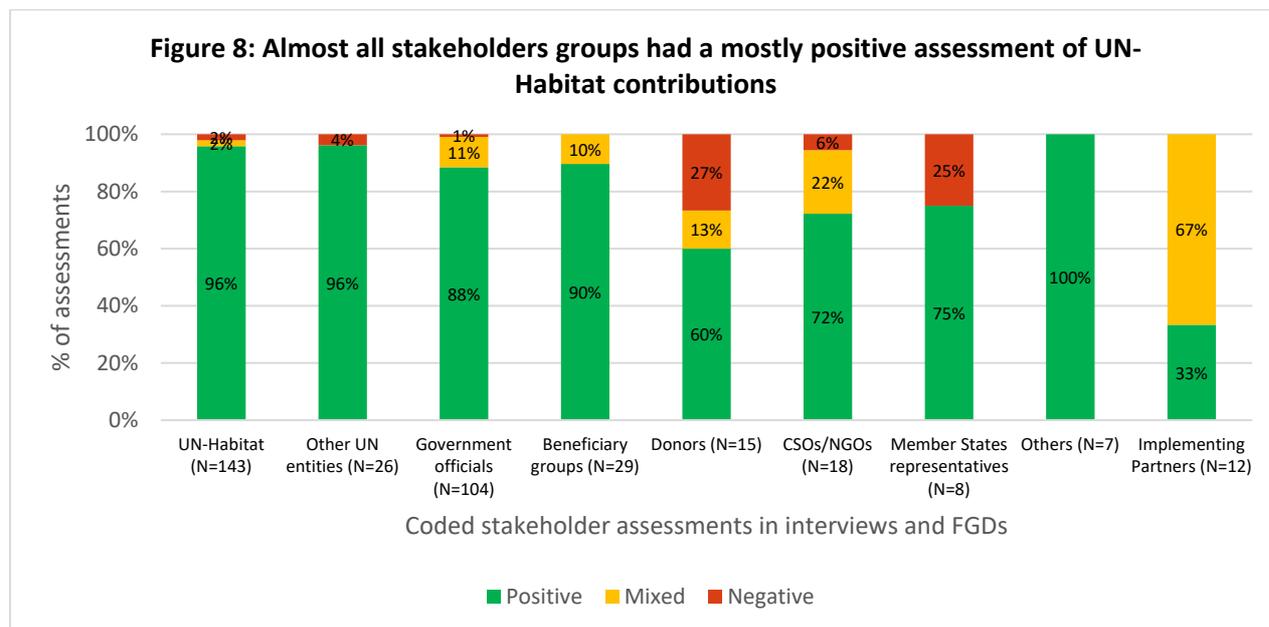
46. The decade-long dire financial state (as discussed in paragraph 10) resulted in a lack of trust in the entity's credibility and created an existential challenge for UN-Habitat.<sup>25</sup> During the evaluation period, UN-Habitat made notable progress in rebuilding trust and confidence through enhanced transparency and frequent reporting on programme effectiveness as affirmed by most Member State and donor interviewees. At the same time, through a combination of austerity measures and increased funding,<sup>26</sup> the entity strengthened its financial position - ending 2022 with a surplus of USD 5.5 million in its Foundation non-earmarked fund for the first time in over a decade. Amidst the efforts to sustain a minimum operational level, and despite the absence of a fully functioning results monitoring framework to assess and manage UN-Habitat progress in implementing the SP (see paragraphs 29-32), as noted above, this evaluation observed important illustrative UN-Habitat results (see paragraphs 33-45).

47. In interviews, a majority of all stakeholder groups painted a positive picture of UN-Habitat contributions, and confirmed its influence on results, although with some variations across stakeholder type, as shown in Figure 8. Donors and Member States representatives noted frequent delays in project implementation and weaknesses in reporting and communication on results while

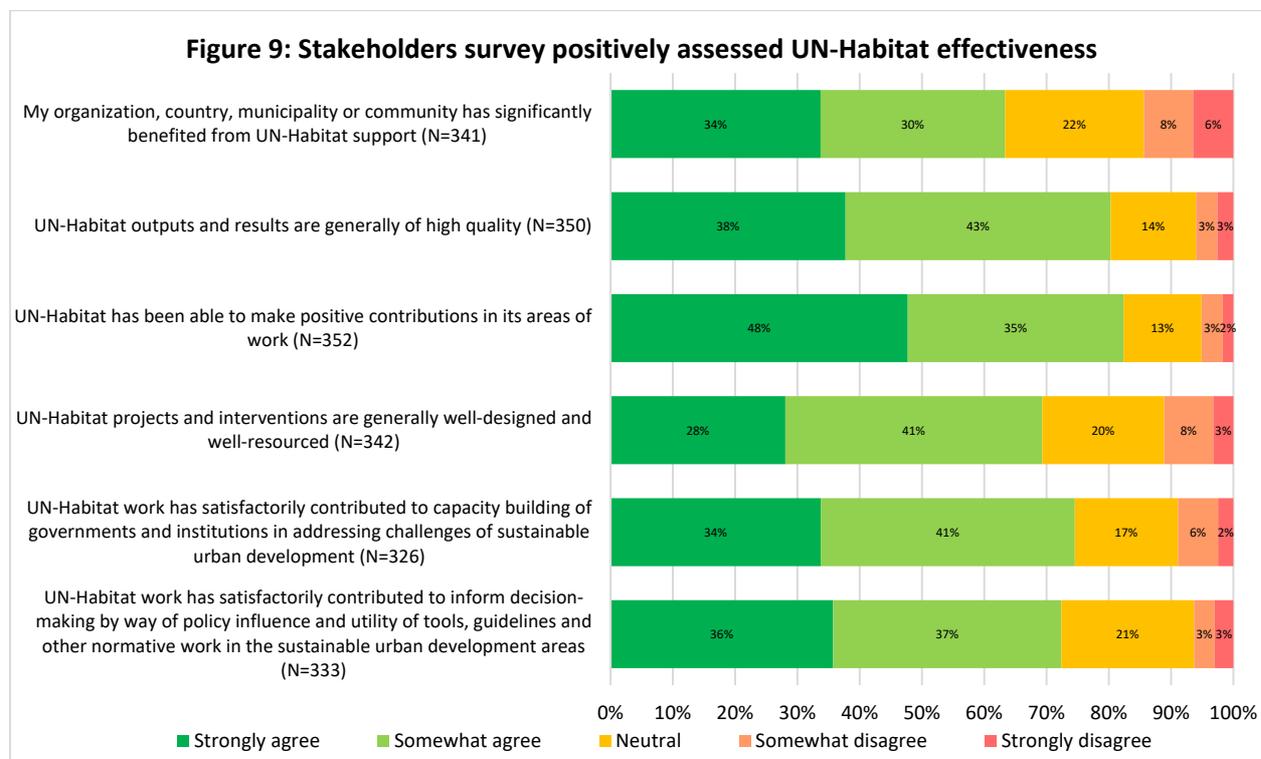
<sup>25</sup> Several donor and Member States interviewees indicated lack of trust in UN-Habitat's previous management, including examples of questionable project expenditure reports and lack of transparency in the use of project funds. Senior managers of UN-Habitat also echoed this sentiment. There were also talks with UNDP senior management about a possible takeover of UN-Habitat by UNDP in view of its financial challenges. The EOSG also nearly dispatched a team to oversee job cuts in UN-Habitat but stopped at the last moment as UN-Habitat scrambled to fund its existing staff positions.

<sup>26</sup> Voluntary contributions to the Foundation non-earmarked fund increased from \$4 million in 2020 to \$7.5 million in 2022 (88% increase).

implementing partners cited the need to improve collaboration with implementing partners, CSOs and NGOs as the key factors affecting UN-Habitat effectiveness.

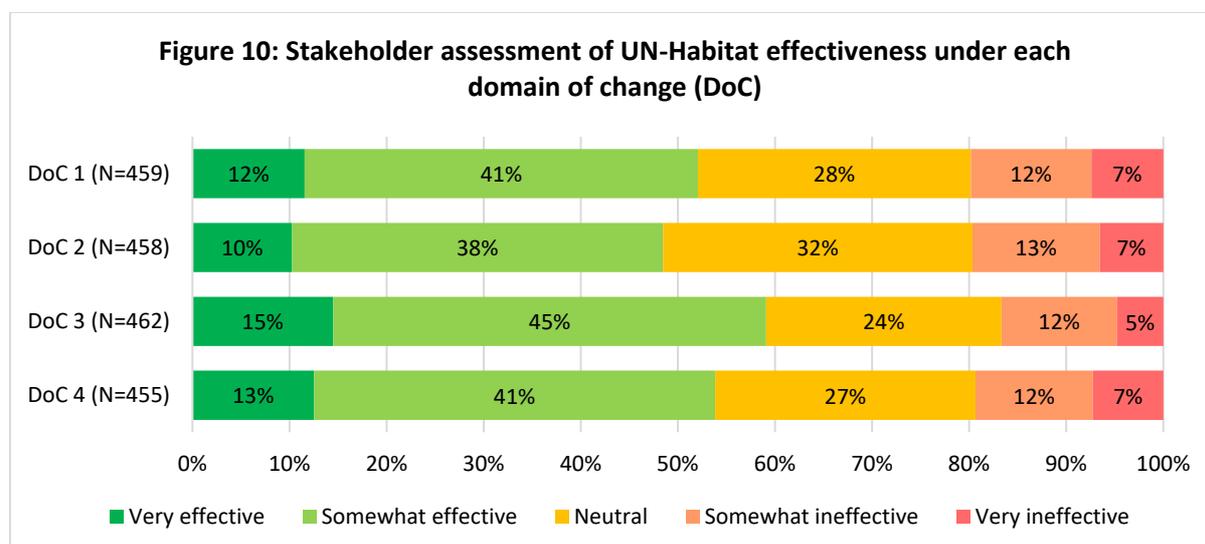


48. On average, 74 per cent of stakeholders survey's individual respondents assessed UN-Habitat's effectiveness positively, agreeing with all effectiveness indicators as shown in Figure 9. Notably, nearly two-thirds of the respondents indicated benefiting from UN-Habitat support, which contributed to informing decision-making and policy formulation.



49. Across the four DoCs, stakeholders surveyed had mixed assessments, with most (53 per cent) on average assessing them as effective. Shown in Figure 10, stakeholders considered DoC3 as the most effective and DoC2 as the least effective. Overall, stakeholders interviewed considered that UN-

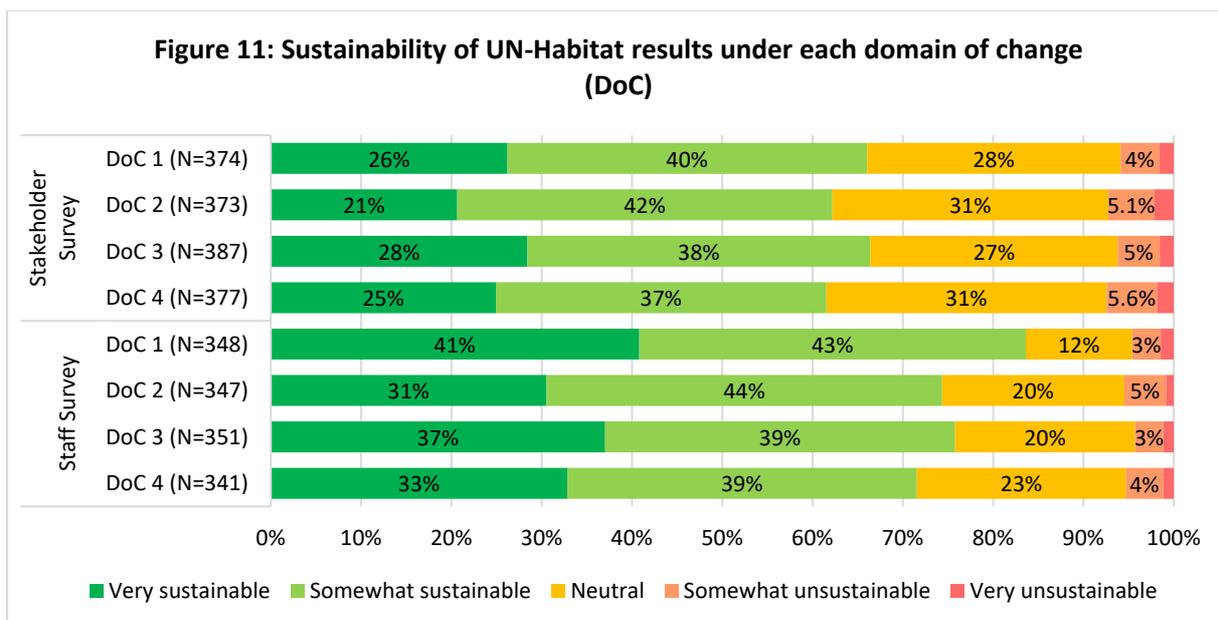
Habitat successfully supplemented its normative work with technical assistance projects at country and local levels, resulting in an overall positive evaluation of the entity’s effectiveness across all data sources. Projects delivered on the ground positively contributed to the livelihoods of beneficiaries and enhanced capacities of government counterparts and local communities.



**C. While some UN-Habitat results demonstrated strong evidence of sustainability, others faced significant challenges.**

50. UN-Habitat strengthened the sustainability of its results through a number of approaches, including: capacity building; fostering local ownership and participatory approaches, training local authorities and community members; partnerships with academia, CSOs and NGOs; and involving stakeholders in the design and implementation of projects. Additionally, most UN-Habitat country office personnel were national staff with local knowledge and expertise who were often embedded within their government counterpart offices, thereby facilitating communication, collaboration and ownership with the host government. Government funding of UN-Habitat projects also ensured that projects were need-based and aligned with government policies and plans, which was a key contributing factor for sustainability. Project type and level of stakeholder commitment also contributed to sustainability. For example, construction of housing and infrastructure (e.g., schools, embankments, parks, markets) and provision of basic services such as water and sanitation had more ownership by stakeholders and were the most sustainable across case study countries.

51. Most interviewees (72 per cent) and survey respondents (64 per cent of stakeholders and 76 per cent of personnel) confirmed this positive assessment of sustainability of UN-Habitat results. Interviewed beneficiaries, government officials and representatives of other UN entities at the country-level considered UN-Habitat results, especially on policy influence, infrastructure, housing and basic services as highly sustainable. In contrast, CSOs/NGOs representatives had a less positive assessment on sustainability. Survey respondents considered results under DoC 1 and 3 as the most sustainable, shown in Figure 11.



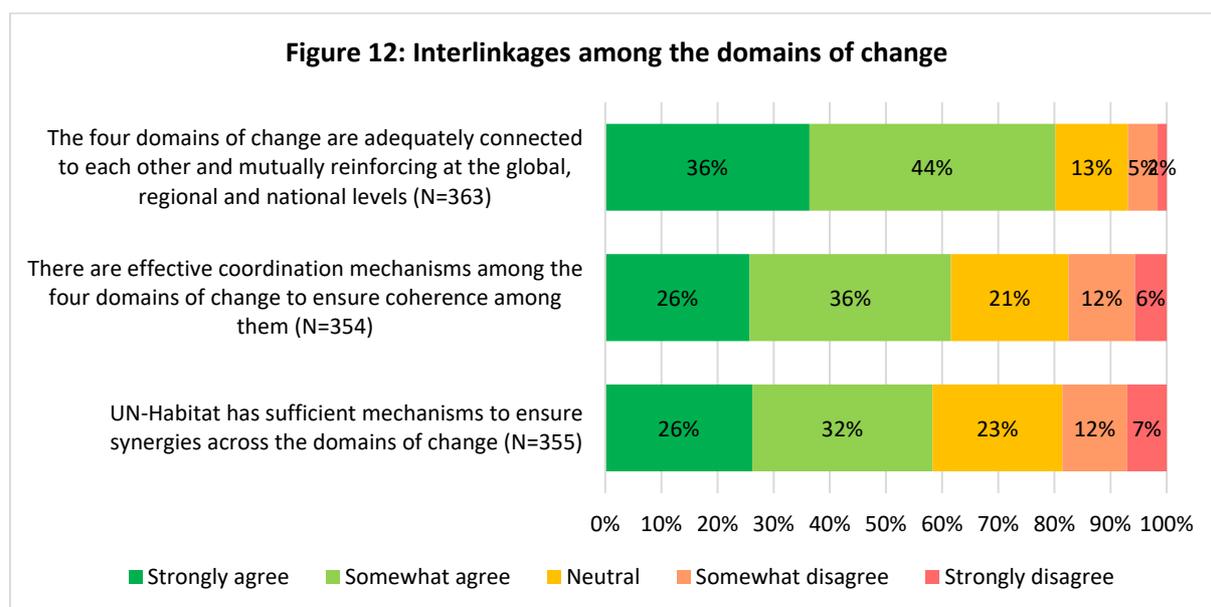
52. Sustainability of UN-Habitat results in the case study countries varied and stakeholders raised questions regarding the long-term impact and scalability of projects. Frequent changes in government leadership, high turnover among government staff and shifting policy directions were reported to have detrimental effect on sustainability. Similarly, limited funding and reliance on short-term project funding restricted the entity's ability to sustain long-term and strategic interventions and scale-up successful initiatives, leaving a lingering doubt about the lasting effects of its interventions. This was particularly pronounced in Iraq, Mozambique, Kenya and Philippines where vast needs were mismatched with limited, disjointed efforts. Furthermore, challenges faced in the case study countries made it difficult to assess the long-term sustainability of UN-Habitat work. These challenges included:

- a) Weak results monitoring and evaluation system;
- b) Limited visibility and communication of results;
- c) Inadequate scaling up and replication of successful pilots;
- d) Lack of country-specific programme of work aligned with the SP and local priorities;
- e) Slow administrative and procurement process leading to delays in project implementation causing frustration among stakeholders;
- f) Competition and duplication of efforts with other UN agencies and sometimes other UN-Habitat teams;
- g) Overemphasis on diagnoses, planning and normative work against high demand for operational work; and
- h) Limited staff with unpredictable job security and high turnover

D. In its implementation of the SP, UN-Habitat made progress in internal coherence and collaboration with other UN agencies and external organizations; however, challenges remained in communication, resources and efficiency.

*While UN-Habitat made progress in internal coherence, there was room for improvement in communication, internal collaboration and support, application of tools and methodologies and monitoring and evaluation*

53. The evaluation period has seen some progress in internal communication and coordination, and leadership emphasis on collaboration across different divisions and branches for an integrated, ‘one-house’ approach was noted by many interviewees. The PRC process was also generally seen as a positive step towards improving internal coherence. Many examples of effective use of normative Headquarters guidelines and tools in the field operations were also observed.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, most personnel survey respondents (80 per cent) strongly or somewhat agreed that the four DoCs were interlinked and mutually reinforcing (Figure 12). However, a portion of respondents felt that there was room for improvement to make the coordination mechanisms and synergies among the DoCs more effective.



54. Similarly, around 70 per cent of interviewees shared a mixed or negative assessment of internal coherence in UN-Habitat. Key challenges pertained to project allocation, reporting and backstopping arrangements due to the overlapping nature of the DoCs as discussed in paragraph 24. Furthermore, due to the add-on nature of the subprogramme coordination roles, there was less coordination among the DoCs and tendency to work in silos.

55. Due to the staffing and financial shortages and unimplemented regional architecture, which was intended to strengthen and realign UN-Habitat global presences for integrated mandate delivery in the field through expansion of regional offices and establishment of multi-country offices, regional

<sup>27</sup> Examples include Waste Wise Cities, Block by Block, Her City, Building Back Better, City Resilience Action Planning (CityRAP), National Urban Policy Guiding Framework, gender mainstreaming.

and country offices often felt inadequately supported. With 92 per cent of the entity budget contributed by extrabudgetary resources, most UN-Habitat offices were responsible to raise their own funds for project implementation, which was particularly challenging for field offices as they did not get any share of the programme support cost (PSC) they generated, nearly all of which was consumed at the headquarters.<sup>28</sup> All costs of country offices were funded from project budgets, including general operating costs, which, combined with the 13 per cent PSC and the 1 per cent coordination levy, made UN-Habitat country offices less competitive among donors. A review of two sample project budgets indicated that between 20 per cent to 25 per cent of resources were dedicated to these charges. The absence of any non-project resources for country offices to maintain basic capacity for advocacy, communication, fund raising or needs assessment made it further challenging for country offices to manage for results.

56. Furthermore, there were instances of internal competition for limited donor resources, especially in the headquarters. In an internal UN-Habitat survey, some respondents considered the PRC process bureaucratic, time-consuming, lacking transparency and not effectively promoting collaboration between workstreams. The question of coherence between global programmes, which often implemented projects in multiple countries – at times parallel to the work of country offices and without engagement of local teams – needed to be examined to ensure complementarity and ‘one-house’ approach in delivery. Similarly, instances of country offices implementing projects without reference to the corporate normative guidelines and subject-matter expertise should be addressed for maximum synergy between normative and operational activities.

*As part of the organizational enablers of the SP, UN-Habitat leveraged collaboration with other UN agencies and partnered with external organizations in support of the urban development agenda*

57. UN-Habitat established effective partnerships with other UN agencies and international organizations, leading to joint initiatives and knowledge sharing. Both surveys and interviews provided positive examples of such collaboration, including:

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<sup>28</sup> ST/AI/286 provides that “Programme support resources should be used in areas where a demonstrable relationship exists between the supporting activity concerned and the activities which generated the programme support revenue.” OIOS audit report 2020/062 raised concerns about transparency in the collection and distribution of PSC in UN-Habitat. For example, UN-Habitat regional offices generated 72% of \$20.2 million PSC revenue during 2018-2019 but received only 4%.

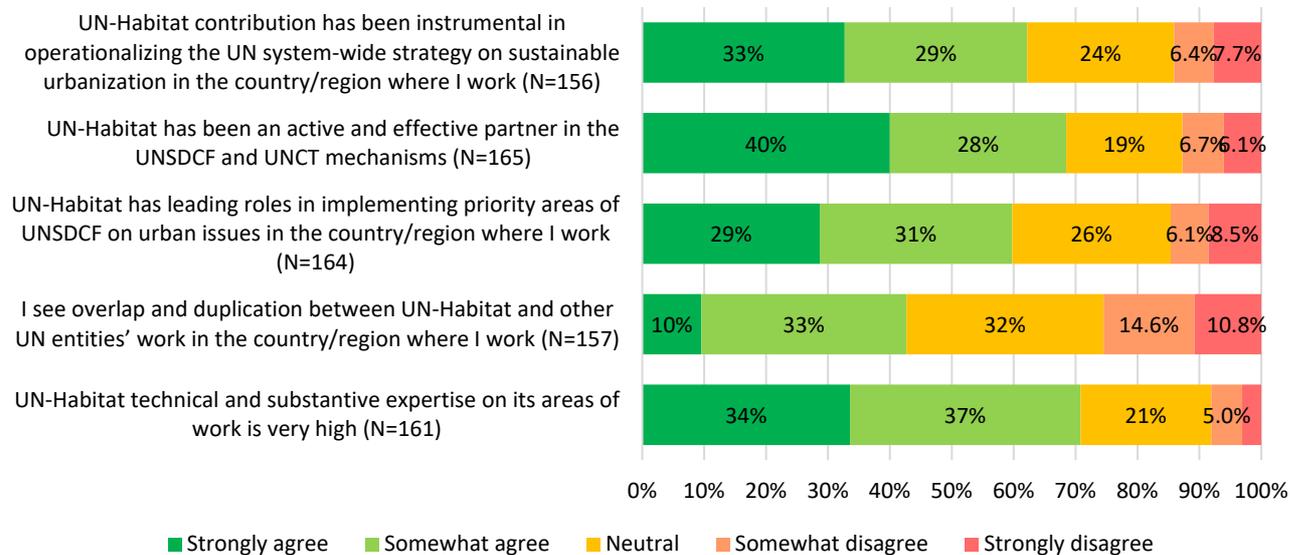
UNDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong and multifaceted partnership across diverse projects and initiatives</li> </ul>
UNICEF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on collaborative efforts in placemaking, child-friendly cities, sanitation, and climate-related projects</li> </ul>
FAO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frequently involved in initiatives concerning land access, resource management and disaster resilience</li> </ul>
UNHCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborated on displacement and resettlement issues, particularly in response to crises and urban displacement</li> </ul>
IOM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnered in projects on urban development, displacement response and land rights</li> </ul>
UNOPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnered on infrastructure projects, smart cities and public space development</li> </ul>
UNEP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborated on environmental projects, including waste management, blue economy and urban wastewater management</li> </ul>
UN-Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborated on gender-inclusive urban planning and project implementation</li> </ul>
UNESCO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worked on creative cities, education and cultural heritage initiatives</li> </ul>
UNFPA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partnered on projects in slums and informal settlements, on population and health issues and women protection centers.</li> </ul>
OCHA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborated on technical support and emergency response projects</li> </ul>

58. At the country level, other UN entities interviewees were also largely positive about their collaboration with UN-Habitat, and generally considered it as an active member of the UN Country Teams (UNCTs). Additionally, 82 per cent of UNSDCFs (65 out of 79) reviewed included UN-Habitat activities at varying degrees, and there were also examples of successful collaboration with other UN entities in all six case study countries. However, there was a general lack of awareness on the UN system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development among UNCT interviewees and stakeholder survey respondents,<sup>29</sup> and not a single reference of it in the UNSDCFs reviewed.

59. External stakeholders surveyed also generally assessed coherence of UN-Habitat activities with other UN entities generally positively, as shown in Figure 13. The Secretary-General's development reform initiative was seen highly positively by UN-Habitat interviewees, who considered that as a smaller entity, their voices were being better heard in the reformed UNCTs, often with the full support of the UN resident coordinators.

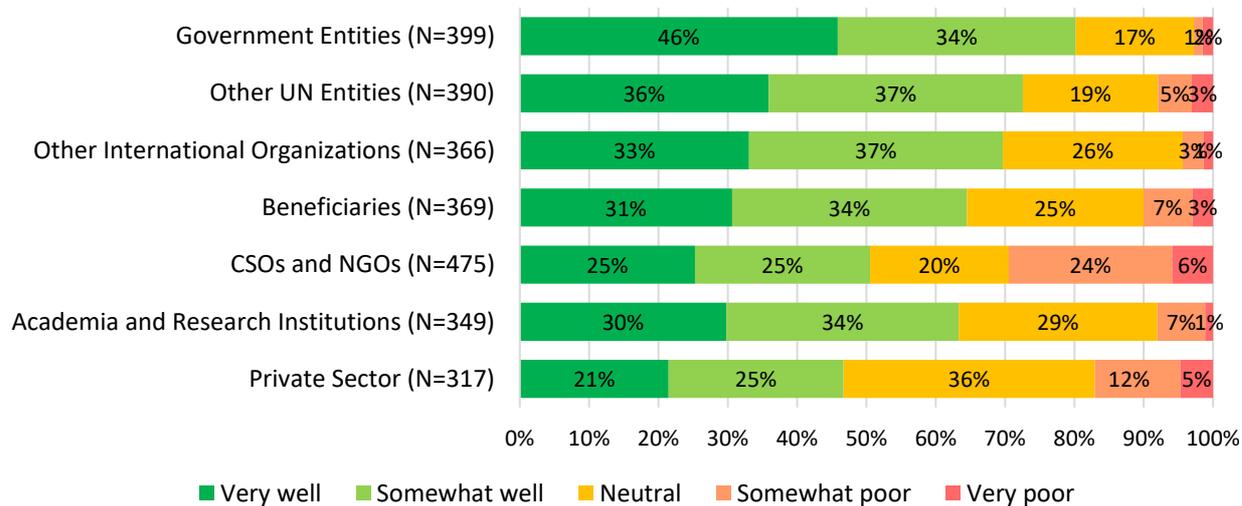
<sup>29</sup> 57% of stakeholder survey respondents were not familiar with the system-wide strategy.

**Figure 13: UN-Habitat is an active member of the UNCT**



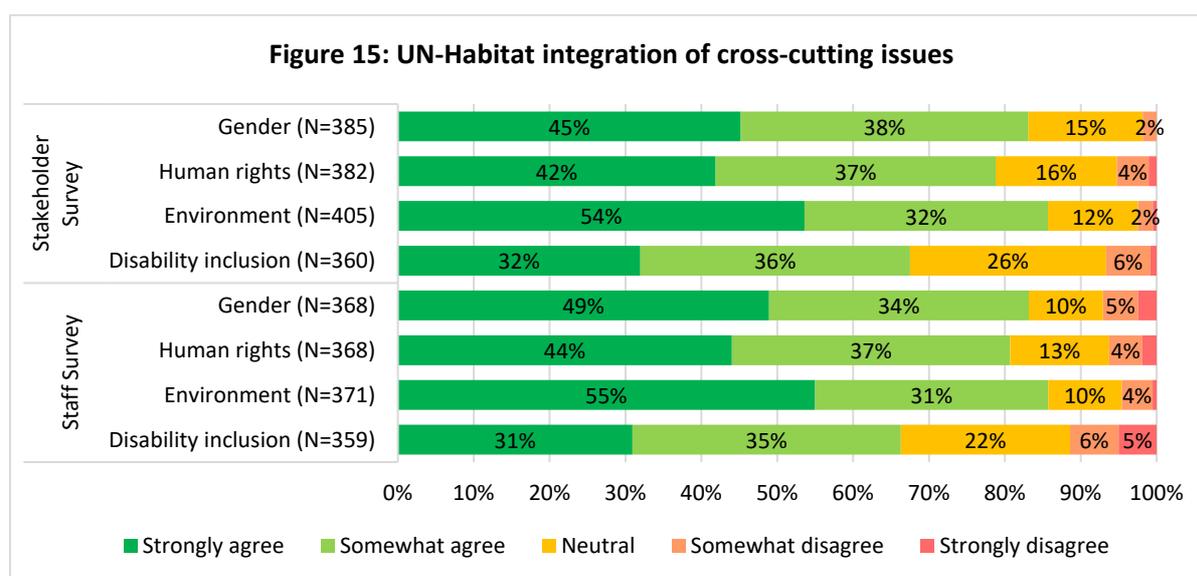
60. Beyond UN entities, UN-Habitat also routinely collaborated and partnered with government counterparts and external organizations to implement its projects as shown in Figure 14. However, across all data sources, partnership with CSOs, NGOs and the private sector was flagged as needing improvement.

**Figure 14: Assessment of UN-Habitat partnership and collaboration with external stakeholders**



E. UN-Habitat largely integrated gender, environment, human rights and disability inclusion into its activities as inherent elements to its SP but faced several challenges.

61. With its motto of 'leaving no one and no place behind', UN-Habitat efforts to incorporate gender, environment, human rights and disability inclusion were generally visible in both its normative and operational activities, although with varying degrees of prioritization among the four issues. On average, most stakeholders and personnel surveyed (79 per cent) agreed that UN-Habitat integrated the four cross-cutting issues into the design and implementation of its projects and activities, shown in Figure 15, although environment and gender received higher ratings than human rights and disability inclusion.



62. While environment was explicitly incorporated in DoCs 3 and 4, gender, human rights and disability inclusion were integral components of the entity's promotion of rights-based approach for urban development. The UN-Habitat Environmental and Social Safeguards System (ESSS)<sup>30</sup> also supported the entity's efforts to strengthen results on environment and social inclusion issues. Many examples of successful incorporation of the four cross-cutting issues were observed, as identified below.

<sup>30</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/12/esss3.1.pdf>

#### Gender

- Developed normative resources and tool on gender mainstreaming
- Strategically targeted women among beneficiary groups in project activities
- Employed participatory methodologies and advocated for inclusion of women, ensured women participation in urban development process
- Provided vocational training and job opportunities for women and youth, including access to affordable finance for business and commercial activities
- Explicitly considered women's needs and safety issues in the design of transportation infrastructure, open spaces and housing

#### Environment

- Dedicated portfolio of projects addressing climate change, built environment and disaster risk reduction
- Promoted environment-friendly initiatives, e.g., solar energy, eco-tourism, sustainable and local building materials
- Promoted a culture of green and open spaces in urban environment
- Supported coastal resilience building initiatives and enhanced climate resilience of housing and public infrastructure (e.g., schools, cyclone shelters, embankments)

#### Human rights

- Promoted a rights-based approach to urban development, including advocating for rights to land, housing and basic services
- Organized workshops, training for field workers and community engagement initiatives
- Prioritized vulnerable and marginalized groups (e.g., refugees and IDPs, landless squatters and informal tenure holders) in project activities
- Implemented projects focused on crime and violence prevention, public spaces and security

#### Disability inclusion

- Recognized the importance of accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities through including accessibility features such as ramps, handrails and specially designed toilets
- Developed normative guidance and provided workshop and training on 'leaving no one behind' principle

63. However, the entity grappled with limited resources to substantively backstop field offices and train personnel on incorporating these cross-cutting issues into their plans. While the ESSS provided useful tools and guidance on incorporating the cross-cutting issues, there was room for improvement in defining clear indicators and methodologies to measure and monitor progress.

## V. Conclusion

64. As urbanization surges, with projections anticipating 68 per cent of the global population residing in cities by 2050, particularly in less developed regions, and existing urban challenges like environmental degradation and energy consumption already at critical levels,<sup>31</sup> UN-Habitat mandates hold unparalleled relevance, both now and in the foreseeable future. However, significant gaps remain in meeting the robust demand for thought leadership and intellectual, analytical, and technical support from UN-Habitat on integrated solutions to the multifaceted challenges of sustainable urban development. While UN-Habitat has been effective given its size, financial resources, and other challenges; it has done so, in part, through strategic partnerships with other UN and external partners. In this context, a stronger focus on leveraging the UN System-Wide Strategy on Sustainable Urban

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<sup>31</sup> Globally, cities accounted for 80% of gross domestic product, two-thirds of energy consumption, 70% of carbon emissions and over 70% of resource use. See UN-Habitat World Cities Report 2022 and the International Energy Agency's 2021 report on Empowering Cities for a Net Zero Future: Unlocking resilient, smart, sustainable urban energy systems.

Development and mobilizing the whole UN system for the urban development agenda would be a step in the right direction.

65. While the UN-Habitat SP provided a strong vision and aligned with Member States' needs, an ineffective structure and accountability framework, lack of results framework and resource constraints hampered its ability to effectively deliver on all SP commitments. Nevertheless, UN-Habitat work demonstrably addressed stakeholders' needs and delivered results under the SP's four DoCs despite financial difficulties. As the entity regains trust and on a path to financial recovery, addressing the identified weaknesses in the SP's implementation is crucial to maximize UN-Habitat results and solidify its role in shaping sustainable and inclusive urban development.

## VI. Recommendations

66. OIOS-IED makes six important recommendations, all of which were accepted by UN-Habitat.

### Recommendation 1: (Result A)

67. **UN-Habitat should strengthen the implementation of the strategic plan by:**

- a. Aligning the programme structure (i.e., subprogrammes) and the organizational structures (e.g., the three divisions) while articulating their respective contributions to the visionary goals of the strategic plan (i.e., four DoCs);
- b. Vesting the subprogramme responsibility to higher-level officials at the division level as provided in ST/SGB/2018/3; and
- c. Developing and communicating clear and consistent guidance on applying the DoC framework (i.e., allocation of projects and reporting on results for each DoC) across the programme and providing training and ongoing support to field offices.

*Indicators of achievement: a) An action plan to distinguish between the DoCs and subprogrammes is developed and implemented and subprogramme accountability is assigned to higher-level officials. b) Clear and consistent criteria to apply the DoC framework developed and communicated; training provided to staff.*

### Recommendation 2: (Result A)

68. **UN-Habitat should enhance the localization and results management framework of the strategic plan.** This should include:

- a. Requiring field offices to develop country and regional programmes of work, with substantive support from the headquarters as appropriate, that clearly link UN-Habitat SP with local needs, priorities, national development plans, and the UNSDCF where relevant;
- b. Implementing the strategic plan results framework approved in November 2023 through a robust and systematic progress tracking mechanism, including prioritization and resource allocation for monitoring and reporting functions; and
- c. Improving knowledge management and dissemination through sharing of best practices and cross-learning among country, regional and headquarters offices.

*Indicators of achievement: a) Country programme documents developed by all field offices clearly showing strategic priority areas, implementation strategies and linkages with the strategic plan and national priorities. b) Results framework developed and implemented; progress routinely monitored, and actions undertaken to improve field office capacity on results-based management. c) Strategy to increase horizontal learning opportunities between field offices.*

### **Recommendation 3: (Results A, C and D)**

**69. UN-Habitat should strengthen its communication strategy, including clear corporate messaging on its mandate and impact on sustainable urban development.** This should include:

- a. Enhancing the website for coherent dissemination and reporting on results across field operations, including vertical integration of communication and synchronization of the global, regional and country operations websites;
- b. Clear and consistent reporting on field offices operations including location, contact details, human resources, key projects and results for each field operations accessible via the website;
- c. Addressing the existing inefficiencies in sharing results from field operations and enhancing the visibility of the entity through a combination of publications, social media campaigns and targeted outreach;
- d. Enhancing communication and outreach about the strategic plan both internally and with external stakeholders at the global, regional and country levels; and
- e. In cooperation with the Chief Executive Board (CEB), UN-Habitat should disseminate and re-emphasize the UN System-Wide Strategy on Sustainable Urban Development (CEB/2019/1/Add.5) among UN system entities with a view to enhancing inter-agency collaboration and advancing UN system -wide coherence for sustainable urban development.

*Indicators of achievement: a) Communication strategy developed and implemented. b) Websites are enhanced and used as an effective means to communicate about UN-Habitat global operations and results. c) UN System-Wide Strategy on Sustainable Urban Development disseminated among UN system entities and operationalized at the country-level.*

### **Recommendation 4: (Results A, C and D)**

**70. UN-Habitat should strengthen its field operations by implementing the ‘Regional Architecture’ proposal and the scalability model for the non-earmarked Foundation to address key resource requirements to implement the strategic plan, including:**

- a. Strengthening capacity of field operations to retain expertise and provide clear career pathways to attract talent;
- b. Developing long-term strategies for field offices to enable prioritization and resource allocation, especially in countries where needs are the highest;
- c. Prioritizing filling core staffing deficits and ensure adherence to officially approved organigram to the extent possible;

- d. Strengthening field operations by providing seed funding from PSC revenue to allow them to maintain a minimum operational capacity for advocacy, communication, fund raising, results-based management and representational purposes;
- e. Exploring alternative funding mechanisms, including through launching of thematic appeals and region-specific fund-raising strategies; and
- f. Developing an action plan to address the excessive delays in procurement and administrative processes that are hindering project delivery and undermining stakeholder confidence in the entity.

*Indicators of achievement: a) Regional architecture and scalability model proposals are implemented. b) Long-term strategy for field presences developed. c) Transparent distribution of PSC revenue to field operations generating such revenue. d) Procurement action plan developed and implemented.*

#### **Recommendation 5: (Result C)**

**71. To enhance long-term sustainability, UN-Habitat should seek to scale-up and replicate successful pilots for wider dissemination and adoption, including:**

- a. Strengthening sustainability markers in the review of projects at formulation and post implementation evaluation;
- b. Periodic and systematic reviews of sustainability of initiatives at global, regional and national levels based on a defined framework, including reporting and communication on sustainability impact; and
- c. Strengthening scaling up of initiatives through partnerships, institutional mainstreaming and uptake.

*Indicators of achievement: a) sustainability markers are developed and applied. b) a methodology for scaling up initiatives and projects defined. c) evidence of corporate priority and messaging on scaling-up of successful pilots leading to interventions being scaled up and replicated across different contexts.*

#### **Recommendation 6: (Result A and C)**

**72. To become the global center of excellence in an increasingly data-driven world, UN-Habitat should leverage its mandate and expertise in addressing the critical urban data and knowledge gaps. This should include:**

- a. Developing and rolling out of an implementation and monitoring plan for the Secretary-General's UN 2.0 strategy at UN-Habitat;
- b. Addressing the staffing and resource deficits for data, knowledge, best practices and monitoring and reporting functions; and
- c. Leveraging operational and normative work to strengthen core data and statistical capabilities, including upgrading the Urban Indicators Database and strengthening coherence in data practices and applications.

*Indicators of achievement: a) A data strategy and UN-Habitat 2.0 strategy developed and implemented. b) Action plan for addressing resources gaps developed. c) Action plan to strengthen the core data and statistical capabilities developed and implemented.*

## Annex I: UN-Habitat management response



UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME  
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FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

### MEMORANDUM

To: Mr. (Eddie) Yee Woo Guo, Director  
Inspection and Evaluation Division Office of  
Internal Oversight Services. Reference: OED-OM-240405-03

From: Mr. Michal Mlynár, Assistant Secretary-General  
and Acting Executive Director Date **04 April 2024**  
United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

Subject: **Formal Management response on Draft Final Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Mid-term Evaluation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme Strategic Plan 2020-2025**

1. I thank you for your memorandum dated 28 March 2024 and sharing the draft final report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the Mid-term Evaluation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme Strategic Plan 2020-2025.
2. UN-Habitat management welcomes the draft report and I take this opportunity to thank the OIOS evaluation team for their good engagement with UN-Habitat in the whole evaluation process. The resulting evaluation findings and recommendations will be used to improve the implementation of the strategic plan for the remaining period, up to 2025.
3. We shared our comments on the informal draft report and we are pleased that most of our comments were considered and incorporated in the formal draft report. However, while appreciating the overall findings, the Management also notes some that were beyond means and control of UN-Habitat. For instance, insufficient resources led to some of the priorities captured in the strategic plan not being implemented; the disconnect between global and local priorities having roots in the fact that UN-Habitat country offices rely on project budgets and donor priorities which affects effective localization of the strategic plan; UN-Habitat limitations of showing success stories being attributed to insufficient resources for core functions of monitoring, evaluation and communication; etc.,.
4. Whereas UN-Habitat Management agrees with most of the conclusions in paragraph 64 and 65, we do not believe that UN-Habitat's significant gaps lie in meeting demand for thought leadership and intellectual, analytical and technical support, on integrated solutions to the challenges of Urban development. On the contrary, the technical expertise of UN-Habitat has contributed to addressing the challenges of sustainable urban development throughout its programmes and implementation.
5. All six recommendations resulting from the evaluation are accepted by the UN-Habitat management and we will work on the action plan to implement the recommendations, giving timeframe and responsible offices for the implementation in the course of next week.

6. Once again, I thank the OIOS evaluation team for the excellent cooperation and active engagement with UN-Habitat, in the whole evaluation process. And we look forward to using the evaluation findings to improve the implementation of the strategic plan for the remaining period, and to steer the development of the new Strategic Plan 2026-2029.

cc: Ms. Fatoumata Ndiaye, OIOS  
Mr. Juan Carlos Pena, OIOS  
Mr. Rakib Hossain, OIOS  
Mr. Erfan Ali, UN-Habitat  
Mr. Martin Barugahare, UN-Habitat  
Mr. Eric Kaibere, UN-Habitat