



Responses to questions raised by Member States related to the Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation (SURGe) initiative during the 49th and 50th meetings of the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters of the Executive Board

Note by the Secretariat

This note serves as written responses to the questions raised by Member States on the Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation (SURGe) initiative during the 49th and 50th meetings of the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters of the Executive Board which were held on 8 April 2024 and 17 April 2024, respectively.

Questions and Answers

1. What is the process to become a member of SURGe?

The SURGe initiative was initiated by the COP 27 Presidency and conceptualized and launched through a multilevel and multistakeholder process that attracted high interest and visibility across national and subnational governments, the Local Government and Municipal Authority Constituency of the UNFCCC and its city networks, as well as a wide range of think tanks, international NGOs, academia, and other urban stakeholders. To unify the interests of different stakeholders, a simple registration process was set up to join the SURGe initiative in September 2022 by UN-Habitat and ICLEI. It allows stakeholders to express their interest in joining the SURGe initiative as well as indicate the SURGe sectoral track that the interested institution wishes to support. Within 3 months, the SURGe initiative attracted over 160 registrations (and to date more than 180). This created momentum at the UNFCCC COP27 and allowed the mobilization of key urban stakeholders for the 1st Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change. Subscribed organizations now receive updates on the SURGe initiative, and engagement opportunities at high-visibility events such as the 59th SB, the Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly, the UNFCCC regional climate weeks, and COP28.

Under options 2 and 3, UN-Habitat would be able to take the lead on further developing different ways to join SURGe, including becoming a partner. This will require further due diligence and a vetting system of applicants, in consultation with key partners. For national and local governments, this will be based on established procedures. Lessons learned from other multi-stakeholder engagements such as the Global Land Tool Network and the World Urban Forum will be applied. The Terms of Reference for the Secretariat, Steering Committee, and options for engagement in the SURGe initiative, as a multi-stakeholder platform, will also be detailed at that stage.

2. Which Member States take part in the SURGe initiative?

The full list of member states that expressed interest is available on the [SURGe website](#). Among the national government representatives that expressed interest in joining the SURGe initiative are Costa Rica - Ministry of Housing and Human Settlements; Egypt - Ministry of Local Development; Japan - Ministry of the Environment; Morocco - Department of Housing and City Policy; Nauru - Permanent Mission to the UN; Qatar - Planning and Statistics Authority; Syria - Ministry of Local Administration and Environment. A formal process for national government participation would be formalized if Option 2 or 3 are prioritized by the Executive Board. The Government of France

has taken an active role in promoting work on local governments in decarbonizing the building sector and has started work through the Global ABC in support of the sectoral track on Buildings and Housing at the Buildings and Climate Global Forum in March 2024 in Paris, France.

3. What is the added value for UN-Habitat to host the Secretariat? What are other experiences of UN-Habitat in such a role?

Key functions of the UN development system are its convening role and partnership development as set out also in the Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review. For UN-Habitat, hosting the secretariat of SURGe would position it well to execute its convening role and build broad partnerships across different types of stakeholders to advance climate action, in line with subprogramme 3 of its Strategic Plan 2020-2025. As such its impact reaches beyond its own directly executed programmes and projects.

As the SURGe initiative aims to accelerate multilevel governance, UN-Habitat's Secretariat function, defined under Option 2 and 3, would allow to leverage the full potential of the SURGe members in a coordinated and meaningful manner. This may include mobilizing national and sub-national governments supported by partners of the SURGe initiative, ensuring symbiosis between SURGe operations and [CHAMP pledges](#) for the updated NDCs, as well as utilizing its role as focal point for the Ministerial Meetings on Urbanization and Climate Change for accelerated multilevel climate action.

Option 2 and 3 would, for example, allow UN-Habitat in its role as a UN agency and SURGe Secretariat to liaise with UNFCCC connecting the outcomes of the Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change with the UNFCCC processes, mechanisms, and programmes. From a programmatic perspective, UN-Habitat's accreditation status, and its role as a Delivery Partner to vertical climate funds, allow UN-Habitat to access a multilateral donor portfolio to support SURGe programming through project implementation.

The [Global Land Tool Network](#) is an established and successful example where UN-Habitat has played the role of the Secretariat for a dynamic and multisectoral alliance of 87 international partners, including bilateral and multilateral organizations, international professional bodies, training and research institutions, and civil society organizations, committed to increasing access to land and tenure security for all.

4. Why is it necessary to have regional representation of the SURGe initiative under option 2?

Lessons learned from strengthening the interlinkage between UN-Habitat's normative and operational work as well as from the practice of having established climate focal points in each regional office, show that a decentralized implementation approach facilitates contextualized solutions, issue-based programming, ownership, knowledge exchange, meaningful partnerships, and swifter communication channels between national and sub-national governments and regional offices among other benefits. The SURGe initiative as well as the CHAMP pledging countries are active across all regions. Utilizing the existing regional climate focal point structure, Option 2 would allow for the integration of regional SURGe activities in the annual work planning of the regional climate focal points while hiring additional support personnel for the ongoing climate change and urban environment work in the region. Leveraging resources through a decentralized operationalization approach has particularly been a salient success criterion of the RISE UP flagship programme, while also enhancing regional capacities. A similar approach is thus sought for the regional SURGe focal point role to enhance the operationalization and scaling-up of the SURGe initiative.

5. By whom has SURGe been funded to date and who has demonstrated interest in financing Option 2 and 3?

Since its launch in November 2022, the SURGe initiative has been operationalized through the key partners involved, including UN-Habitat with the support of broader soft-earmarked funding for climate work available to UN-Habitat (ex. SIDA, GCoM), working closely with the COP28 Presidency. There are indications of potentially earmarked contributions by a variety of donors that would allow the operationalizing of Option 2. A mandate to operationalize Option 3, would require an expanded resource mobilization effort. In both Option 2 and 3, UN-Habitat is well placed to develop proposals for multilateral climate funds conjunctively with the regional SURGe focal points.

6. How is SURGe currently governed and what are ongoing activities?

The SURGe initiative is currently governed by an informal core group, consisting of UN-Habitat, ICLEI, and the COP27 Presidency, and a provisional steering committee including the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM), UNEP, Global ABC, WRI, UITP, FMDV, ITDP, C40 Cities, World Green Building Council. (see also section VIII). All institutions that expressed interest in joining the SURGe initiative are also engaged. Regular steering committee meetings take place to coordinate the work under the sectoral tracks as well as the commitments of the steering committee members which supported the holding of two Ministerial Meetings on Urbanization and Climate Change, the first Local Climate Action Summit at COP28, the Multilevel Action Pavilion at COP28 opened by former US Vice-President Al Gore, and many other activities since the launch of SURGe. Members of the steering committee have taken the role of leading the technical dialogue of the sectoral working group tracks. Upon the decision of the Executive Board on UN-Habitat's role in operationalizing the SURGe initiative, the core group and steering committee will be finalizing the 2-year work programme of the SURGe initiative ensuring scalability and impact from the COP28 UAE achievements to the COP30 in Belem, Brazil.

7. What are the linkages between SURGe and other ongoing activities and the complementarities to ongoing initiatives?

Currently, the SURGe initiative has established synergies with the RISE UP Flagship utilizing the SURGe initiative as a dissemination platform for tested RISE UP solutions at global SURGe events. It will also allow to promote good practices emanating from the Building Climate Resilience for the Urban Poor Initiative (BCRUP), launched at the Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit in 2018 and sponsored by Kenya and Turkiye with support from UN-Habitat. BCRUP offers a nationally-led model to focus on the urban poor country-wide, for which Kenya has set an example with support of UN-Habitat, building on the solutions tested through RISE UP. . Under Option 2, UN-Habitat will actively seek stronger synergies with institutional and external activities such as the work on SDG localization, SDG Cities, urban regeneration, and the BCRUP Initiative with its focus on multilevel governance and other ongoing activities aligned with the sectoral tracks.

The SURGe initiative and the Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships (CHAMP) for Climate Action Pledge were developed in close consultation with the SURGe initiative core group and provisional steering committee. Synergies, in particular around the global framing of multilevel climate action and NDC support and complementarities, with the SURGe initiative providing national and local implementation support were considered.

In addition, SURGe and LOTUS, the COP27 Initiative dedicated to low-carbon urban transport, have joined forces to create further synergies between the two initiatives under the urban transport track. Efforts are underway to frame LOTUS and SURGe jointly as a vehicle to advance sustainable, affordable and safe transport Formalization of this partnership is expected after the Executive Board meeting and in advance of COP29, also in view of upcoming potential initiatives of the COP29 Presidency.

In addition to the elaboration under section VI, SURGe is a multiplier for reaching scale and impact utilizing the comparative advantages of engaged partnerships and networks. The SURGe initiative welcomes partners of ongoing initiatives to join the SURGe network, such as the Global ABC, and showcase their comparative advantages to SURGe which then will allow for further dissemination of relevant good practices and advocacy. Option 2 and 3, will further allow for heightened visibility of best practices of the SURGe Alliance through an established SURGe Portal.

8. What is the specific mechanism for engaging local governments and civil society organizations?

The engagement of local governments has been central to the objective of accelerating multilevel climate action. The SURGe Initiative, especially through its partners ICLEI, a focal point to the LGMA, and GCoM, as an umbrella network for local climate action, has acted as a facilitator bringing national and sub-national government actors together at the Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change. One of the key success criteria of these Ministerial Meetings was to allow for non-state actor statements, which enabled inter alia joint and coordinated statements of national and sub-national governments at the Ministerial Meetings that influenced the Joint Outcome Statement on Urbanization and Climate Change and other outcome documents.

Under Options 2 and 3, funding will be sought to pilot city-level SURGe activities in selected cities. The selection will be informed by the establishment of national SURGe strategies, the advice of the SURGe steering committee, and the advisory of the regional SURGe focal points and UN-Habitat Country Offices who are already closely working with sub-national governments on the ground.

With the experience derived from the stakeholder engagement approach for the World Urban Forum, the registration to the SURGe Alliance is open to all stakeholders including civil society organizations. The level of engagement depends on the level of commitment per organization. With no differentiation between non-state actors, grassroots and civil society organizations are equally welcome to engage in the sectoral tracks and provide technical expertise. To take part in the governance of SURGe, a more formal system of vetting and due diligence will be put in place, under Options 2 and 3, in consultation with the SURGe steering committee and in line with established practices within the UN secretariat.

9. What will happen if there is no funding?

If Option 2 or 3 are the preferred options, but no extra-budgetary funding can be secured, then UN-Habitat will operate as per Option 1 and scale towards Option 2 or 3 as earmarked funding is mobilized. The focus will be on securing multi-year or recurrent funding to ensure some level of continuity.

10. Which option would the Secretariat recommend prioritizing?

Some member states asked if the Secretariat could recommend an option amongst the ones proposed. The discussion clarified that the Secretariat should not do so. The options provided in the paper illustrate different ambition levels which will depend also on the level of earmarked resources (XB) that the Secretariat can mobilize for UN-Habitat-led coordination activities of the SURGe initiative. The Secretariat can immediately operationalize option 1. There are indications that earmarked resources could be mobilized to activate option 2 within year 1 (see also question 5 above).