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**Progress made in implementing the UN-Habitat programme
of work related to adequate housing, including addressing
homelessness and slum upgrading**

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Report of the Executive Director

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared pursuant to United Nations Habitat Assembly resolution 2/7 on adequate housing for all, adopted at the second session of the Assembly, in June 2023. In paragraph 1 (d) of that resolution, the Assembly requested the open-ended intergovernmental expert working group to consider the progress made in implementing the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) programme of work related to adequate housing.
2. The report provides: (a) a synthesis of the UN-Habitat programme of work; (b) an overview of projects according to type of intervention; and (c) reflections for future programming, in particular programming aimed at the bottom 40 per cent of the urban population.
3. The report is based on 138 housing projects in the current strategic planning period (2019–2023) and on the impact evaluation of the UN-Habitat housing approach during the period 2008–2019.
4. UN-Habitat projects have largely been undertaken on interventions related to emergency housing (post-crisis recovery and reconstruction). Other significant areas have included facilitating and enabling projects on housing construction and finance and aided self-help housing (slum upgrading and prevention interventions). The normative approach of UN-Habitat has been geared towards implementing the housing policy and strategy frameworks that have been adopted in many countries as a result of its policy advice.

II. Mandates and background

5. UN-Habitat supports Member States in the development of sustainable cities and human settlements through its normative and operational work at the global, regional, national and local levels. UN-Habitat also leads and coordinates the monitoring of and reporting on global progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11. The mandate derives from priorities established by General Assembly in its resolutions and decisions, including

resolutions 3327 (XXIX), 32/162 and 56/206. The Programme's support is aimed at developing the capacity, at all levels of government and among other key stakeholders, to formulate and implement policies, plans and concrete activities for sustainable urban development. Such support is also provided through the implementation of projects under the regular programme of technical cooperation and the Development Account.

6. Housing is central to the work of UN-Habitat, with an emphasis on the right to adequate housing for all. International conferences, in particular the United Nations conferences on human settlements (Habitat II) and on housing and sustainable urban development (Habitat III), have agreed on the need for policies and regulations that support effective housing systems, including reforms to facilitate the land development and transfer process, expand housing finance and provide both supply side strategies that support the construction and management of new homes and demand-side incentives such as subsidies. With all of these initiatives, it has been a struggle to reach the extremely poor since such initiatives require livelihood stability and effective targeting.

7. The Habitat conferences held every 20 years since 1976 have shaped the UN-Habitat programme of work. Habitat I, held in Vancouver, Canada, in 1976, addressed the challenges of rapid urbanization, most notably the widespread growth of low-income informal settlements in the global South. Habitat II, held in Istanbul in 1996, addressed the need to ensure adequate shelter for all and an agenda to support sustainable communities. Most recently, Habitat III, held in 2016 in Quito, addressed the goal of advancing a "new urban agenda" with housing at the centre of sustainable urban development.

8. The UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 includes an objective of increasing secure access to adequate and affordable housing. In 2019, UN-Habitat strategic plan estimates indicated a population of 22.5 million people with access to adequate housing in partner cities, with targeted incremental growth to 30 million people as of 2023. At the same time, the proportion of the urban population living in slums, informal settlements or inadequate housing in partner cities was estimated at 23.3 per cent, with a targeted reduction to 22.5 per cent as of 2023.

9. To achieve this mandate, the Programme's project approach to housing addresses a range of housing interventions, including through housing policy; facilitation or enabling projects (involving either the construction industry or housing finance); public works and public-private partnership projects to produce or sell market-rate or affordable houses; aided self-help (such as site and service, cooperatives, technical assistance and construction subsidies, either in kind or in cash); rehabilitation and slum upgrading; public or social housing; and emergency housing and reconstruction, including for those experiencing homelessness, internally displaced persons and refugees. The projects build the capacity of local institutions, taking a comprehensive approach to improving and localizing government systems to strengthen housing sector delivery, including through policy, planning and regulation; build capacity; strengthen construction practices; and improve resilience systems, sites and services, taking into account the needs of all subsectors of the communities in which they are situated, including women, children, older persons, disabled persons, internally displaced persons, returning migrants and all represented ethnic groups.

10. An impact evaluation of the UN-Habitat approach to adequate and affordable housing and poverty reduction for the period 2008–2019 showed that the Programme's contributions to the housing sector through its housing approach at the global, regional and country levels are widely acknowledged among housing stakeholders. The Programme is seen as a leader in the creation and dissemination of knowledge on housing issues, a consistent advocate for the right to adequate housing, and a promoter of transforming the lives of slum dwellers. The evaluation found significant interregional and intraregional differences and inter-country variations on how the housing approach is operationalized and the way in which housing strategies are approached. The evaluation also identified a number of challenges that have affected the Programme's work on housing. Of critical significance is the Programme's limited capacity to ensure that governments follow through on commitments made at global events and in signed declarations and agreements, its limited support for national housing programmes owing to capacity limitations, and its limited capacity to support and implement large-scale housing programmes. UN-Habitat is also considered to have reduced its earlier role as a forceful promoter of housing rights. Some stakeholders are of the belief that the Programme's earlier linkages to civil society have weakened.

11. Achievements with regard to the housing approach of UN-Habitat over the evaluation period (2008–2019) include the following:

(a) *Knowledge management*: More than 100 thematic reports at the global, regional and country levels, 52 publications on housing rights and 30 national housing profiles;

(b) *Advocacy*: World Urban Forums drew thousands of participants, while 167 countries adopted the New Urban Agenda, and the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme benefited nearly 10.5 million people living in 39 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and 190 cities;

(c) *Policy advice*: A total of 34 national housing policies, 21 national slum upgrading and prevention policies and/or strategies, and 32 citywide slum upgrading and prevention strategies;

(d) *Technical assistance and capacity-building*: The League of Arab States is to develop the Arab Strategy for Housing and Sustainable Urban Development 2030, and 200 ministries, local governments, non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations and private sector actors were trained on the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme approach;

(e) *Implementation*: A total of 1 million housing units were constructed according to the VII Impact Evaluation of the UN-Habitat housing approach to adequate and affordable housing and poverty reduction for the period 2008–2019 in Asia-Pacific countries through the “People’s Process”, tenure security was improved for more than 800,000 slum dwellers and living conditions were improved for more than 500,000 slum dwellers through the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme.

III. Distribution of housing project interventions in the current strategic planning cycle

12. Of 138 housing projects listed in the current strategic planning cycle, the Arab States and Latin America have the largest number. Most successful interventions by the Regional Office for Arab States have been in emergency and refugee contexts, addressing conflict- and climate-induced displacements, with a relatively large-scale outreach on temporary housing solutions, which have a different dynamic and directly affect the mainstream housing system in only a limited manner. On the other hand, many of the interventions by the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean tend to be on a relatively small scale, supporting housing policies aimed at addressing maintenance, internal growth and equity, and often reaching only a few thousand households with some degree of infrastructure upgrading.

13. In terms of funding, the Arab States and Africa top the list of the 10 countries with the most housing funding. Iraq and Mozambique have allocations of \$126,298,144 and \$48,004,920, respectively, with Egypt, Lebanon, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Ghana, Syrian Arab Republic, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Kenya rounding out the list. In the area covered by the Regional Office for Africa, most of the funding focus seems to be directed towards strengthened housing policies, which would address some of the challenges connected to rapid urbanization, in particular, with regard to capacity-building, data availability and overall governance frameworks. In the area covered by the Regional Office for Arab States, the funding focus is on the humanitarian-development nexus, addressing emergency housing or reconstruction.

IV. Distribution of types of housing intervention in the current strategic planning cycle

14. Of 138 listed projects, emergency housing (42), housing policies (37) and aided self-help housing (24) top the list of types of housing intervention.

15. On a global scale, the Arab region leads in emergency housing interventions, while Latin America leads in housing policies. The housing portfolio in Africa is made up largely of facilitation and enabling projects (seven in total), while the Arab States and Asia-Pacific portfolios are made up mostly of emergency housing and the Europe and Latin America portfolios of housing policy interventions. Global and multiregional projects are shaped largely by housing policy and aided self-help interventions.

16. In terms of funding allocation by type of intervention, emergency housing tops the list with \$129,907,778. Facilitation projects receive \$96,944,788, public-private partnerships projects receive \$33,346,066, housing policy receives \$32,733,266 and aided self-help projects receive \$29,547,936.

17. In the light of the global housing approach of UN-Habitat being focused largely on emergency housing, facilitation and enabling housing projects, and aided self-help housing projects, it would be important not only to analyse the impacts and achievements of the approach in improving access to adequate housing, but also to better understand the implications of the largest number of projects and funding being dedicated to emergency housing interventions mainly in the Arab States in conflict- and climate-induced displacement contexts, while a negligible amount of funding goes to public or social housing interventions. In the light of the different strategies deployed in each region, it is paramount to

analyse the geographical imbalance of housing projects and which approach is more effective in providing adequate housing for all according to significantly different contexts and housing market dynamics, in particular for the most vulnerable households.

V. Conclusions

18. The programme of work shows a focus on emergency housing and on facilitating projects, with a greater need to diversify the portfolio across types of interventions and with an enhanced focus on the lower income bracket of urban inhabitants, who typically benefit most from aided self-help and public housing programmes.

19. While the Sustainable Development Goal target on achieving safe and affordable housing construction (target 1 of Goal 11) is embraced in several UN-Habitat project documents, many projects do not have a direct impact on housing per se.

20. The geographical spread of projects is not balanced, with a concentration of projects in the Arab region focusing on emergency housing and a clear need for greater attention to medium- to long-term development issues arising from rapid urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of Asia-Pacific.

21. There is a clear opportunity for UN-Habitat to expand on its niche in the role of housing in the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

22. There is a clear need to expand on the work of UN-Habitat on housing and climate change, in the areas of both mitigation and adaptation.

23. There is potential for UN-Habitat to develop partnerships and collaboration with international financial institutions, as well as with other development partners, international non-governmental organizations and philanthropic organizations, to maximize contributions and geographical outreach as a group, including through convergence around core standards on adequate housing for all, and with agreement on a joint strategy to tackle the challenges of the 40 per cent of the population in the lower income bracket.

24. While UN-Habitat has extensive and recognized experience in most aspects of housing strategies, policies and programmes, its relatively limited resources mean that, while many of its interventions have been technically successful, they tend to be on a relatively small scale, often only reaching a few thousand households. Most successful interventions have been in emergency and refugee contexts, which have a different dynamic and directly affect the mainstream housing system in only a limited manner.
