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**Update by the Executive Director on the preparations for the
resumed second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly.**

Outcomes of the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum and of the Africa Urban Forum

Report of the Executive Director

A. Summary of the outcomes of the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum

1. Introduction

1. The World Urban Forum (WUF) was affirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in 2001 (A/RES/56/206) as a nonlegislative technical forum in which experts can exchange views in the years when the Governing body of the United Nations Human Settlement Programme does not meet. A subsequent resolution of the United Nations General Assembly in 2018 (A/RES/72/226) reaffirmed the role of the World Urban Forum as advocacy platform for all stakeholders in the fields of human settlements and sustainable urbanization, based on its non-legislative nature. Following the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urbanization (Habitat III), the General Assembly in 2016 (A/RES/71/256*) also asked that the United Nations Secretary General's Quadrennial Report on the New Urban Agenda should build on existing platforms and processes such as the World Urban Forum.
2. The twelfth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF) was held from 04 to 08 November 2024, in Cairo, Arab Republic of Egypt under the theme "*It All Starts at Home: Local Actions for Sustainable Cities and Communities*". With strong participation from stakeholders, the Forum demonstrated once again UN-Habitat's ability to mobilize a wide range of partners representing national, local and regional governments, parliamentarians, civil society, older people, women, young people, children, people with disabilities, grass-roots groups, indigenous peoples, local communities, the private sector, foundations and philanthropic organizations, academia, professionals and other relevant stakeholders of the New Urban Agenda. It also

* HSP/EB.2024/14.

demonstrated a global interest in advocating for local action towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. WUF12 was a major UN conference held after the UN Summit of the Future (September 2024) which adopted the Pact for the Future along with its annexes. Through the Pact for the Future, Member States reaffirmed their pledge to reinvigorate global action to ensure the future we want and to effectively respond to current and future challenges, in partnership with all relevant stakeholders. Therefore, WUF 12 offered an opportunity to consider key elements of the Pact for the Future together with stakeholders, including the Pact's commitments to ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing; support plan and implement just, safe, healthy, accessible, resilient and sustainable cities; pursue the localization of sustainable development while considering future generations as well as the role of digital technologies in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals.

II. Scale and Scope

4. WUF12 was the largest session ever organized to date with a record-breaking registration of over 37,000, more than 24,000 participants in attendance from 182 countries. The representation of Member States at the Forum was also unprecedented with 4 Head of States, 1 prime minister, 4 deputy prime ministers, 60 ministers and 45 deputy ministers, and at least 96 local and regional governments from 84 countries taking part. Participants represented multiple regions with Africa being the highest (69%) followed by Asia (18.8%), Europe (10.9%), Americas (5.7%) and Oceania (0.29%).
5. More than 700 high-quality events focused on different aspects of the overall theme of the Forum, generating robust and innovative insights, solutions and recommendations to inform action. Of these, UN-Habitat led the main sessions structured around assemblies, dialogues, roundtables, special sessions while partners led events in diverse categories across Networking Events, SDGs in Action, Voices from Cities, One UN, Training Events, Urban Cinema, Urban Library and Urban Expo. In addition, the Ministerial Roundtable convened Ministers and Deputy Ministers to deliberate on matters related to the theme of the Forum as well as broader visions and progress towards adequate housing and sustainable urbanization. Gender parity was achieved at the Forum, with 46.4% per cent of participants being women and 51.7% per cent men. Panel parity for main sessions of WUF 12 was upheld with women representing 50.6% per cent of the more than 400 speakers.
6. UN-Habitat leveraged WUF 12 to share its work and advance partnerships. A total of 29 events at the UN-Habitat Arena showcased UN-Habitat's work and solutions for adequate housing and sustainable urbanization including in the areas of housing, water and sanitation, finance, displacement, climate change, mobility, national urban policies, health, urban planning, infrastructure, data, resilience, smart cities, among others.
7. The communication campaign for WUF12 achieved significant results in media outreach and audience engagement. A record number of media took part, with 905 media representatives from 36 countries registered for the event, and over 500 attending in person. The global coverage of WUF 12 in media was significant with more than 285 reaching 120+ million impressions across 50+ countries. Social media platforms saw a significant boost in activity and engagement. Mentions of WUF12 on major platforms reached millions, notably on X (formerly Twitter) achieving 72.5 million impressions.
8. WUF 12 also registered milestones in sustainability and accessibility. Through eco-friendly measures, plastic waste was reduced out of total waste by 13%. Effective waste management was enabled through 40 segregation bins placed in key high-traffic locations, supported by multilingual infographics to educate attendees, aligned collection schedules for efficiency, and achieved 100% on-site waste sorting into five streams in accordance with international standards. WUF12 also diverted waste from landfills through local recycling partnerships.
9. The Forum upheld the benchmark for accessibility. WUF12 provided full interpretation in all six official United Nations languages in the main sessions, as well as Arabic sign language, and enhancements for participants with physical, visual, and auditive disabilities. Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) speech transcription and numerous other mechanisms providing improved access for people with disabilities demonstrated that transformative action to ensure accessibility for all through universal design is possible in the built environment.

III. Shaping knowledge and action

10. WUF12 ended with the sharing of its main outcome document, the Cairo Call to Action, during the closing ceremony. A multi-stakeholder Advisory Group was formed to support the Executive Director in the conduct of the World Urban Forum and in the preparation of the main outcome document – [Cairo Call to Action](#). The Advisory Group met daily to identify the key messages arising from the Forum’s deliberations.
11. The Cairo Call to Action captures the most salient messages arising from the Forum to shape and inform multi-level and multi-stakeholder action. It acknowledges that it all starts locally as local action is essential to achieve sustainable development; it all starts together as accelerating progress towards sustainable cities and communities requires all actors to join hands across sectors, levels and locations; and it all starts now as it is urgent to tackle unprecedented and interlinked global crises.
12. At its core, the Cairo Call to Action calls for:
 - urgent action to address the global housing crisis
 - achieving global goals through local action
 - sustaining a systemic representation of local actors at all levels
 - sharing urban spaces and opportunities inclusively
 - urban planning to deliver better local outcomes
 - unlocking finance for cities and communities
 - ensuring equity and justice for sustainable cities
 - leveraging local and grassroots data for decision-making
 - harnessing culture and heritage as an asset for sustainability
 - building coalitions and alliances to scale local impact
13. A number of institutions and actors are already disseminating the Cairo Call to Action including professional organizations, associations of local and regional governments, UN system, research think tanks, and media. UN-Habitat will also disseminate the Cairo Call to Action widely at local, national, regional and global fora to advocate for urgent actions for sustainable urban development and for the localization of global goals.
14. The Cairo Call to Action will be complemented by the WUF 12 report which will capture key data and facts about the Forum, and by WUF12 Perspectives, which will provide more detailed policy analysis to identify the key issues and recommendations that emerged from all events that took place at WUF12.
15. WUF 12 also served as a platform for knowledge exchange and enhancement for participants. UN-Habitat undertook assessments to ascertain the expectations and takeaways for participants of WUF 12. Most participants indicated that their priority for attending WUF 12 was to gain knowledge, network and gain skills (63%). In a post Forum assessment, the majority indicated that they were very satisfied or satisfied with WUF 12 (94%), and that they would very like or likely attend WUF again (94). Importantly, 74% of the respondents indicated that their perspective on localization of the SDGs had changed after attending WUF 12, demonstrating the Forum’s key role in shaping knowledge and narratives for sustainable urban development.

IV. Dialogues: Key highlights

16. The Forum’s theme was further elaborated around 6 main high-level dialogue sessions which conveyed the following key messages:
 - (a) Dialogue 1 “Housing our Future” reflected on the global housing crisis and strongly reiterated that access to adequate housing is a human right. It noted the need to elevate adequate housing as a priority in countries’ national development agendas to respond to the housing crisis based on the context – informal settlements, affordability crisis, homelessness, destruction of homes in conflict areas, among others. The dialogue emphasized the importance of land-use policies and of integrated financing frameworks to deliver solutions at scale. It further highlighted the strong connection between housing and climate action.

- (b) Dialogue 2 “Cities and Climate Action” underscored that cities are at the forefront of the climate crisis, both in terms of vulnerability and capacity to provide solutions. Cities require urgent action and greater consideration in national and global climate frameworks to both reinforce their resilience to climate shocks and reduce their impact on global warming – for instance through the integration of urban stakes in Nationally Determined Contributions. The dialogue highlighted existing gaps in urban planning to promote resilient solutions and highlighted the need for innovative funding for climate action in cities.
- (c) Dialogue 3 “Stronger Together” noted that partnerships are key to achieve global goals at all levels. Speakers emphasized multilevel governance, community engagement, and inclusive policymaking, focusing on gender, disability, and empowerment for urban renewal. Public-private investments in were highlighted as vital for equitable urban development.
- (d) Dialogue 4 “Financing Localization and Localizing Finance” highlighted the challenge for cities to respond to local issues due to financing constraints. It noted that cities have limited access to international capital, and limited capability to raise their own revenues, leading to a strong dependency to intergovernmental transfers. The need to develop new revenue streams while improving financial and budget practices was emphasized. The need for evidence-based urban planning, expanded property taxes, and greater financial accountability and transparency was a prominent message.
- (e) Dialogue 5 “Putting people first in a digital era” focused on leveraging technology to create inclusive, resilient cities, emphasizing the importance of robust governance, digital literacy, and addressing the digital divide. The essential role of digital technology in improving urban planning and quality of life was noted. The opportunities for equitable urban development and informed decision-making were highlighted. Yet, barriers also require urgent action including for ensuring digital safety, regulating artificial intelligence and being responsive to people’s needs first.
- (f) Dialogue 6 “The loss of home” highlighted the challenges caused by urban displacement and emphasized the need for long-term investment in host communities beyond short-term aid. The interrelated impacts of conflict, climate change, and economic instability on displacement were noted. Calls were made for justice, secure land tenure, and collective rebuilding to benefit both displaced people and host communities as well as the importance of voluntary resettlement, integrating housing and livelihoods, and mobilizing international resources for sustainable solutions.

V. Other Sessions: Key highlights

17. Key stakeholder groups convened at WUF12 around 5 Assemblies and 13 Roundtables. The sessions served as a platform for key stakeholders to convey their messages for action representing women, local and regional governments, children and youth, business and foundations, and grassroots communities, persons with disabilities; indigenous peoples; professionals; older persons; parliamentarians; civil society; and academia to convey messages on strengthening their role in urban development policy and practice. Across the sessions, a call was made for the role of these stakeholders to be better recognized, institutional, financed, leveraged and scaled to accelerate local action for the achievement of the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda and other global development goals. They conveyed a clear message for inclusive and participatory processes for the design, implementation and financing of policy interventions at multiple levels from local and global. In addition, the opportunity to leverage the resources, skills and expertise of key stakeholders for local action was underlined, including from the private sector entities.
18. Further, the Ministerial Roundtable convened over 70 ministers and senior representatives of national government. The roundtable focused on how to accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda by empowering local action. Ministers and officials emphasized the value of a collaborative approach among national, regional, and local governments to ensure that SDG implementation aligns with local realities. The meeting also stressed the importance of mobilizing financial resources through innovative methods such as public-private partnerships for urban infrastructure and housing investment needs. The deliberations concluded that strengthening local capacity is fundamental to achieving urban growth that is both resilient and inclusive.

19. Further, special sessions were organized at WUF12 with eight led by UN-Habitat and one by the Host Country. Special sessions focused on topics that were not directly captured in the six dialogues of the Forum while also introducing innovative direction and framing involving alternative formats such as art performances. The sessions covered topics such as health and wellbeing in cities, waste management, empathy and inclusion, and the wisdom of civilizations, among others.
20. There was also robust UN system engagement at WUF 12 with more than 50 UN entities attending the Forum. At the “One UN” Roundtable, participants underscored the urgent need to close the financial gap for SDG localization. The discussions highlighted the significance of localization for multinational development banks. Participants also recognized that linking national climate frameworks to local priorities is critical for financing and implementing Nationally Determined Contributions. They stressed that development strategies must be localized to support local governments in fulfilling their service delivery responsibilities, particularly in areas such as disaster management. The roundtable also explored the vital contributions that the UN system can make to advance localization efforts, including through the Local 2030 Coalition. The discussion highlighted that local actors’ voices need to be strengthened in international financing discussions and stressed the need for the UN system to work more closely with local actors to strengthen the New Urban Agenda and find innovative solutions for sustainable urban development.

V.II Strategic insights and directions

21. WUF 12 delivered a clear message from relevant stakeholders on the critical role of local action and the role of local and regional governments in achieving sustainable cities and communities as envisaged in the New Urban Agenda and SDG 11, as well as accelerating global development goals. All participants made a resounding call for strengthening the role of stakeholders at all levels, with the Cairo Call to Action conveying this clearly. In this regard, the WUF 12 aligns with the request in the Pact for the Future of Member States to the UN Secretary-General to provide recommendations on how engagement with local and regional authorities could advance the 2030 Agenda, particularly the localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, by the end of the seventy-ninth session for Member States’ consideration. It also well aligned with the resolution of the second session of the United Nations Habitat Assembly on “Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals” (HSP/HA.2/Res.6).
22. WUF 12 also provided useful insights on the key ideas and priority issues of stakeholders that could enrich UN-Habitat’s draft strategic plan 2026-2029. In this respect, UN-Habitat conducted a survey related to its draft strategic plan 2026-2029. A total of 610 respondents representing international organizations and UN Agencies (31%), National Governments (29%) and Local and Regional Governments (29%) shared their views. Most respondents found issues of housing, land and basic services to be very relevant or relevant possible focus areas for UN-Habitat’s strategic plan 2026-2029 (91%); consider housing, land and basic services a priority in their country (81%) and completely agree or agree that it is not possible to achieve the SDGs without resolving the global housing crisis (81%). Overall, WUF 12, including through its Call to Action, underlined the critical urgency of addressing the global housing crisis reiterating that adequate housing is a human right, and conscious that global housing crisis interacts with others including those climate and humanitarian crises.
22. Moreover, WUF 12 demonstrated a high demand from all stakeholders for a greater focus on practices and solutions to inform scaling and action. Participants consistently underscored the need to showcase and make available good practices for policy design, implementation, monitoring around the priorities of the New Urban Agenda and the urban components of the 2030 Agenda. While WUF 12 enabled the wide sharing of practices, there is a clear opportunity to take this aspect to scale at the next session through a systematic track of featuring practices and solutions at the Forum. The need to maximize WUF to capture, share and learn from practices and existing solutions in order to accelerate action for adequate housing and sustainable urbanization at scale was thus an evident conclusion at WUF 12.
23. In addition, many of the deliberations and engagements at WUF 12 underscored the urgency of significantly improved financing for urban sustainability. Strong calls were made to address the resource gaps faced by local and regional governments and other stakeholders to fulfill their role in promoting sustainable cities and communities. At the same time the need and immense opportunity to unlock untapped finance in cities especially through better urban planning, and land across its social, economic and ecological functions as one of the critical assets that opens up finance. A roundtable discussion at WUF 12 with International Financing Institutions provided valuable insights on opportunities for increased and more targeted financing for housing and urban infrastructure, laying the grounds for future global collaboration.

24. Overall, WUF 12 presented a tremendous milestone for UN-Habitat to undertake its role as a global convener of stakeholders and actors relevant to sustainable urban development. The Forum illustrated the power and potential of coalitions and partnerships to leverage resources and expertise and act at scale to respond to the complex and unprecedented challenges and opportunities of urban development. For UN-Habitat, the Forum indeed remains a strategic platform through which to strengthen and build impactful partnerships and coalitions with relevant stakeholders, including also within the UN system.

B. The Africa Urban Forum

23. The WUF 12 was preceded by the inaugural Africa Urban Forum (AUF), co-organized by the Government of Ethiopia and the African Union Commission with UN-Habitat and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) as technical partners 4 to 6 September 2024 in Addis Ababa on the theme “*Sustainable Urbanization for Africa’s Transformation – Agenda 2063*” with two sub-themes on “financing urbanization for socio-economic transformation” and “sustainable and resilient urban development in Africa”.

24. The Forum convened over 30 line ministers and deputy ministers, along with key stakeholders, including representatives from national and local governments, international organizations, private sector leaders, academia, civil society, and youth groups. It featured high-level panels, technical workshops, and stakeholder roundtables that addressed key urban themes of relevance to the continent. The discussions underscored the pivotal role of sustainable urbanization in driving Africa’s development under Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) providing strategic insights that informed regional engagements at WUF 12.

25. The Africa Urban Forum Specifically, the AUF considered the following key thematic areas:

- *Financing Strategies for Urban Development*: the urgency of innovative financing to address Africa’s urbanization challenges, tapping into private sector financing, land value capture, informal and digital economies while strengthening capacities for better local financial management.
- *Building Climate Resilience*: the need to address the vulnerability of cities to climate change risks including through climate informed urban planning, resilient infrastructure, green infrastructure, support for conflict affected populations and investments in data-driven planning and local government capacity building.
- *Strengthening Governance and Inclusivity in Urban Development*: advancing effective urban governance and management to respond to and manage urbanization effectively including through strengthened decentralization and local and regional governments’ capacities as well as community engagement in urban planning processes.
- *Youth Engagement in Urban Transformation*: the opportunity to leverage the role of youth in urban transformation, through innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship including through dedicated engagement platforms and mechanisms to support sustainable urban development.
- *Housing, Land, and Urban Basic Services*: the critical need to promote adequate housing through infrastructure investments, secure land tenure, and expanded access to essential services, including through affordable and climate-resilient housing prioritizing low-income and vulnerable populations.

26. A key outcome of the Forum was the adoption of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Sustainable Urbanization in Africa, which outlines actionable commitments to guide regional efforts in achieving sustainable urban transformation. Through the Declaration, member states of the African Union and participants of the Forum committed to strengthen political will, implement institutional framework and policy alignment, promote resource mobilization and financial planning, advance capacity development and knowledge, reporting and accountability, strengthen partnership, advocacy, outreach, and communication to harness the transformative force of urbanization in Africa to achieve the African Agenda 2063 vision and the Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, the urgent need to leverage national urban and territorial planning was underscored, while the potential of the housing sector for social inclusion, economic and environmental transformation was emphasized.

C. Towards WUF 13

25. The handover of the next session of the World Urban Forum (WUF 13) took place during the closing ceremony of WUF 12. Accepting the handover from the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt and UN-Habitat, Mr. Anar Guliyev, Chairman of the State Committee for Urban Planning and Architecture of the Republic of Azerbaijan, expressed his gratitude to the Egypt as the host country and UN-Habitat for hosting a successful WUF 12, and noted Azerbaijan's commitment to sustainable cities and communities. The Chairman took the opportunity to welcome the participants to Baku, Azerbaijan, for the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF 13), to be held from 18 to 22 May 2026.
26. In the lead to WUF 13, UN-Habitat will follow a roadmap of interconnected initiatives and activities to disseminate the outcomes of WUF 12, continue engagement with participants, and leverage a global ecosystem of multi-level urban Forums and stakeholders to shape narratives and action for sustainable cities and communities, also noting the significance of 2026 as the midpoint of the New Urban Agenda. In this regard, UN-Habitat will continue to be guided by the mandates of the World Urban Forum as envisaged by the UN General Assembly.