

Statement of Intervention by Stewards of Change Community-Based Organization

Agenda Item 3: Consideration of the outcome of the preparatory intersessional meetings, including draft recommendations

Honorable Co-Chairs, Distinguished Delegates, Colleagues,

Stewards of Change appreciates the opportunity to address this Working Group. We are a community-based organization operating at the frontlines of urban inclusion, working directly with residents in informal settlements to secure tenure, upgrade housing, and foster resilient communities.

We commend the Co-Chairs, UN-Habitat, and Member States for the robust and participatory process that has produced the comprehensive set of draft recommendations before us. The detailed background papers and the validated outputs from the intersessional meetings provide a solid foundation for our collective work.

Our intervention today is framed by our on-the-ground experience, which affirms the critical pathways outlined in the documents while highlighting essential perspectives that must be centered as we move from recommendation to implementation.

First, on Informal Settlements and Tenure Security: We must move from recognition to institutionalization.

The recommendations rightly champion in-situ upgrading, community participation, and a continuum of tenure rights. We see this not as a menu of options, but as an interconnected system. From our work, we assert that tenure security is the non-negotiable entry point for any sustainable transformation.

We strongly endorse the call to adopt and institutionalize simplified, incremental tools for tenure documentation, as detailed in the Tenure Security **report (HSP/OEWG-H.2025/INF/3)**. For years, Stewards of Change has facilitated community-led participatory mapping, creating trusted, localized land records that often form the very first official acknowledgment of residents' existence and rights. These are not interim measures; they are the bedrock upon which formal systems can be built. **We urge Member States to empower local authorities with the mandate and resources to recognize these community-generated data as legitimate evidence for securing rights and accessing services.**

Second, on Social Housing: We must redefine "inclusion" to mean co-design and community stewardship.

The Social Housing report (HSP/OEWG-H.2025/INF/5) powerfully argues for moving beyond a safety-net approach to viewing social housing as critical infrastructure. We

add that for this infrastructure to be truly transformative, it must be co-produced with communities.

The document's emphasis on "incremental, mutual-help, and cooperative delivery systems" aligns perfectly with our model. We do not just build houses; we build capacity. We train community members in construction, financial management, and maintenance, creating not only homes but also local skills and economies. We therefore urge that financing frameworks, as recommended, must include tailored, low-bureaucracy channels that are accessible to community-driven entities like ours. The current architecture is often designed for large developers, excluding the very actors who can ensure cultural adequacy and long-term sustainability.

Third, on the Enablers: Championing Community-Powered Data and Financing

The analysis across all thematic areas consistently identifies two foundational enablers: the need for improved data systems and long-term, resilient financing. We recommend a paradigm shift in how these are implemented, centering on community power.

Recommendation 1: Empower Communities as Data Creators and Owners.

We propose the adoption of community-led methodologies, such as enumeration and GIS mapping augmented by artificial intelligence. These are not merely technical data collection exercises; they are transformative processes that equip communities with the information and agency to advocate for themselves. This ground-truthing, as validated in our Informal Settlements report, is indispensable for developing policies that are both context-specific and effective.

Recommendation 2: Catalyze Community-Managed Finance.

The proposal for community-managed funds and inclusive credit solutions is vital. Mechanisms like micro-finance and community savings schemes—which we have direct experience in administering—often constitute the only financial infrastructure available to informal dwellers. Scaling these proven models requires a concerted effort: public co-investment and strategic de-risking from national governments and international development partners.

In conclusion, our key message is that sustainable progress hinges on placing data and capital directly into the hands of communities.

1. Empower Local Implementation: The excellent recommendations will only succeed if local authorities and grassroots organizations are formally recognized as implementation partners and are provided with direct access to capacity-building and funding.

2. Formalize Community-Generated Data: Mandate the integration of data from participatory enumerations into official planning and monitoring systems, particularly for the Housing Monitoring Framework.

3. Invest in Community Stewards: Prioritize funding and technical assistance for community-based organizations as the primary agents of in-situ upgrading, tenure formalization, and social housing management.

Honorable Co-Chairs, The unwavering commitment to ensuring that the right to adequate housing becomes a lived reality for the communities must be achieved.

We look forward to collaborating with all of you to translate these transformative recommendations into action on the ground.

Thank you.