

As an outcome of the Shanghai International Expo 2010, the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 68/239 of 27 December 2013, designated every 31 October as World Cities Day.

Over half the world's population now live in cities. With this figure expected to increase to 68 per cent by 2050, urbanization is one of the world's most transformative and challenging trends. As recognized by United Nations Member States in the New Urban Agenda, urbanization can bring several sustainability challenges related to housing, environment, climate change, infrastructure, basic services, food security, health, education, decent jobs, safety and natural resources. Urbanization can however also be a critical tool for sustainable development, if it is done right.

There is an urgent need to turn urbanization into a force for good and take full advantage of the opportunities presented by the benefits of many people living together – including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social and cultural development and environmental protection. By ensuring cities are planned, designed, financed, developed, governed and managed properly, it is possible to use urbanization to achieve sustainable development.

World Cities Day is an opportunity to discuss how urbanization can be used to achieve sustainable development. It aims to promote the international community's interest in implementing the New Urban Agenda globally and in enhancing cooperation among countries in meeting opportunities and addressing challenges of urbanization in cities. The general theme of World Cities Day is Better City, Better Life, with different sub-theme each year. This year's sub-theme is "**Innovations and a Better Life for Future Generations**". World Cities Day 2019 will be the culmination of Urban October, a month that starts with the World Habitat Day and provides an opportunity for the world to reflect on our common urban future and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

This year, World Cities Day will be hosted by the City of Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation and is jointly organised by UN-Habitat, the Shanghai People's Government and the City of Ekaterinburg.

Cities and innovation

Cities have always been drivers and incubators of innovation, industry, technology, entrepreneurship and creativity, creating prosperity, enhancing social development and providing employment. At the same time, cities have also been shaped by innovation – including sewage systems, elevators, public transport, traffic lights and many others. It is often said that the battle for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will be won or lost in cities. In order for this to happen, cities will have to continue to drive innovation in ground-breaking ways to achieve a lasting impact in communities and to ensure that "no one and no place" is left behind.

At the same time as the world is experiencing transformative change due to urbanization, it's also becoming more digital. More than half of the world's population is now connected to the Internet. By the end of 2019, the number of mobile phone users is expected to reach 5 billion. The world we live in is both urban and digital, presenting opportunities for inclusion, efficiency and innovation. But half the world's population remains unconnected and unable to participate in the digital economy in a meaningful way. Concerted efforts are needed to eliminate digital divides – related to gender, social status and geography.

The new digital economy, sometimes called 'the fourth industrial revolution' built on data, reduced transaction costs and sharing platforms, is already having a profound effect in many cities in the world. Innovations in mobility, including autonomous transport, electric vehicles and drones will require fundamentally different approaches to urban planning. Technologies such as artificial intelligence, virtual, augmented and mixed reality and the internet of things present efficiency and communications opportunities but also require new governance frameworks. This rapid rate of innovation also puts pressure on urban policy makers and managers to strengthen their capacity when it comes to understanding, procuring and regulating new technologies.

However, innovation is not just about supporting the new digital economy; it is also vital for addressing deep social and global challenges of some of marginalized groups in our cities like children, youth, women, people with disabilities and the elderly. Innovation spurs education, skills and wellbeing throughout life too. At the same time, innovation can contribute to inequality, which is why it needs to be accompanied by appropriate economic and social regulatory policies. Youth and women need the opportunity to participate and contribute more fully to innovation in cities. Furthermore, investing in youth and innovation in cities can help move young people from social dependence to self-sufficiency, by enabling them to spearhead sustainable development in their cities.

UN-Habitat innovates for sustainable urban development

UN-Habitat is the thought leader and go-to agency which sets the global discourse and agenda on sustainable urban development, drives political discussions, generates specialized and cutting-edge knowledge, shapes technical norms, principles and standards and acts as a multiplier in the exchange of knowledge, experience and best practices in getting cities and human settlements right.

Innovation is integral to UN-Habitat which continuously develops new normative guidance, tools and knowledge to respond to changing global realities and the urban challenges faced by cities. UN-Habitat innovates on processes, products and partnerships, to enable new services and approaches to capture the positive and sustainable development opportunities provided by good urbanization.

The main goals of World Cities Day 2019 are to:

- Increase awareness of how digital innovations can be used for urban service delivery to enhance quality of life and improve the urban environment;
- Highlight and share promising best practices on new frontier technologies that can create more inclusive cities; and
- Present opportunities for renewable energy generation in cities.
- Explore how frontier technologies can promote social inclusion in cities; including those furthest from behind

An exciting and insightful agenda has been developed to enhance the understanding, promote debate and address the innovation challenges and opportunities presented by frontier, digital and renewable energy technologies in cities across the world. A mixture of keynotes, panel sessions and in-depth seminars will provide ample opportunity to fully explore urban innovation and how it relates to an improved quality of life for future generations.