



National Urban Forum to Support Participatory and Inclusive National Urban Policy

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A National Urban Policy (NUP) is a central tool available to governments and policy makers to facilitate the management and direction of urbanization. A NUP works to turn the challenges of urbanization into opportunities by facilitating discussion and emphasizing the importance of planning and coordination. This planning will facilitate the conditions that are required to turn urbanization into a productive force. This can ultimately increase international competitiveness at the local, regional, and national levels as well as promote the socially, economically, and environmentally sustainable growth of human settlements.

A National Urban Forum (NUF) provides a national platform for discussion and dialogue regarding the process of urbanization. A NUF provides the opportunity to bring together stakeholders in an environment that promotes discussion regarding past achievements and the future direction for a particular country's human settlement. NUF activities include, but are not limited to, consultations at the local, regional, and national levels, including inter-ministerial consultation, capacity building and training, and advocacy and consensus building activities.

“UN Habitat strongly advocates for the consolidation of these multi-stakeholder gatherings into permanent platforms that can substantively contribute and mobilize the necessary support towards improved urban policies and programming” (UN Habitat website)

Both a NUF and NUP aim to capitalize on the opportunities of urbanization through facilitating dialogue, promoting coordination between stakeholders, and building capacity. By linking these

processes and implementing a permanent NUF platform, a partnership is formed with stakeholders and civil society, communication is two way, and stakeholders as closely involved in the shaping of the agenda of the policy. This creates an element of validation and consent from stakeholders for the policy. A permanent National Urban Forum, therefore, is an enabler for a participatory and inclusive National Urban Policy.

“Achieving a true participatory approach to policy-making means integrating participatory processes throughout the formation of policy” (UN Habitat, 2015)

Box1: National Urban Policy and National Urban Forum

A **National Urban Policy (NUP)** is understood by UN Habitat to be:

“A coherent set of decisions derived through a deliberate government-led process of coordinating and rallying various actors for a common vision and goal that will promote more transformative, productive, inclusive and resilient urban development for the long term.” (UN Habitat, 2014a)

A **National Urban Forum (NUF)** is understood by UN Habitat to be:

“a multi-stakeholder platform to support sustainable urban development processes and debates at the country level, including feeding national contributions and participation to global development strategies.” (UN Habitat, 2014b)

UN Habitat (2014a). New Generation of National Urban Policies, Nairobi, Kenya: UN Habitat.

UN Habitat (2014b). Guidelines for a National Urban Forum, Nairobi, Kenya: UN Habitat.

Box 2: Benefits of a Permanent National Urban Forum for National Urban Policy

- **Creation of a Policy Feedback Loop:** When policy progress is evaluated and validated with stakeholders throughout the policy process, any lessons learned during these processes can then be fed back into the policy in order to improve and adjust the policy, thus creating a **feedback loop**. A policy feedback loop promotes iterative policy practices that are based on this continuous review of experiences and feedback. This iterative process allows for lessons learned from initial stages or pilot projects to be taken into account and help inform and shape future NUP stages. **Maintaining a dialogue through a permanent NUF allows policy makers and stakeholders to continuously look forward and reflect back in order to ensure that feedback and lessons learned help shape the process moving forward.**
- **Mainstreaming of Participatory Practices:** While developing a NUP, mainstreaming the participation of stakeholders throughout the process is very important. By encouraging inclusion through the whole policy process as opposed to seeking input at the end of the process, stakeholders can have a say in developing the urban agenda, identifying problems and challenges, and developing and assessing different policy options. **A permanent NUF that occurs throughout the NUP process can be a vehicle for mainstreaming stakeholder participation. This process helps with building ownership of the policy amongst stakeholders and adds an element of validation and consent from stakeholders for the policy. This, in turn aids with the building of political will and support.**
- **Moving from Policy Action to Direct Action:** Grounding public policy in direct action ensures that the policy is translated from policy action to concrete interventions. This is important in order to ensure that a policy moves from the policy arena to projects and programmes which are actionable and implementable. As shown through the case of Liberia's National Urban Forum, a NUF can aid with this process. **In this case, through the organization of a NUF, the political will for a NUP was translated into a concrete NUP roadmap, therefore providing a tangible plan for the development of a National Urban Policy.**

Box 3: National Urban Forum and National Urban Policy in Liberia

Liberia's National Urban Forum took place 24th-25th June 2015 in Monrovia, Liberia. The Urban Forum aimed to bring the issue of sustainable urbanization fore and facilitate knowledge sharing between experts, policy makers, and civil society. Also during the NUF was the launch of Liberia's first National Urban Policy. Taking advantage of the multi-stakeholder arena of the NUF, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and other stakeholders established a roadmap that detailed the formulation and implementation of the NUP. The roadmap highlighted the key goals of Liberia's NUP, stating that it would address urban issues such as governance, housing and building in wetlands, environment degradation, sea level rise and flooding, access to infrastructure and services particularly health and education.

The NUF in Liberia was successful in building both political will and will among stakeholders for establishing a NUP. By producing a roadmap towards NUP, the NUF produced a concrete result showing how a NUF and contribute to a NUP. By the end of the NUF, the Resolution of the National Urban Forum for Liberia stated that:

"WE welcome...the political will to prioritize urban development through a National Urban Policy. WE understand that a National Urban Policy is central to sustainable urbanization as it shapes organizational structures that underpin the process of urbanization, coordinates the work of different sectors and tiers of government, establishes the incentives for more sustainable practices and allocates resources accordingly. WE recall that a National Urban Policy provides a national vision, principles and direction. An integrated development policy linking legal and regulatory frameworks, financial and urban planning frameworks that are developed in participation with all stakeholders is opportune for a changed approach towards urbanization in Liberia." (Resolution of the National Urban Forum for Liberia, 2015)

Making the Link: How National Urban Forums Benefit the National Urban Policy

The benefits of a National Urban Forum to the National Urban Policy process change and evolve depending on the national state of NUP. Outlined below are the benefits that a NUF can bring to the NUP process depending on the particular state of NUP. Also outlined below are suggestions for activities that are suited to be undertaken in parallel with a NUF that can benefit a NUP.

1. No National Urban Policy

Benefits of a National Urban Forum: To facilitate and support the beginning of the NUP process

Before beginning a NUP it is essential to build government and stakeholder support for the process. By organizing a NUF prior to the beginning of the NUP process, the initiative can be introduced and support can be built for the NUP. With the ability of a NUF to promote dialogue and enhance a country's urban policy debate, a NUF is an excellent opportunity to build political will and stakeholder support for a NUP prior to the beginning of the policy process.

Suggested Activity During the NUF:

National NUF and NUP Awareness Campaign

The organization of national and local awareness campaigns can work to promote the NUF and NUP processes. These campaigns can spread messages on sustainable urban development to the general public, increasing awareness and ownership of the public in these processes as well as share opportunities for engagement.

2. National Urban Policy: Diagnosis

Benefits of a National Urban Forum: To Map Stakeholders for NUP and Validate Country Diagnosis Report

Mapping Stakeholders for NUP allows for the identification of stakeholders in the policy process, as well as of the needs, interests, and capacity of the stakeholders. The result of the stakeholder process is a firm map of stakeholders, as well as a more complete idea of how to engage and include them in the NUP process.

A NUF provides the opportunity to gather all actors together for a Forum that can be used not only to help to map stakeholders that are vital to the NUP process but also to validate the Diagnosis report which should be prepared at the beginning of a NUP. Using the dynamic and participatory nature of a NUF to map stakeholders in a participatory way and to validate conclusions from the Diagnosis report begins the NUP process in a way that is both inclusive and participatory.

Suggested Activity During the NUF:

Stakeholder Participation and Engagement Analysis

A Stakeholder Participation and Engagement Analysis can identify stakeholders that are essential for a participatory and inclusive NUP process. The result of the stakeholder analysis process is not only a map of stakeholders but also an outline of the priorities of those stakeholders and recommendations on how to engage and include them in the NUP process.

3. National Urban Policy: Formulation

Benefits of a National Urban Forum: To Verify NUP Policy Proposal and Build Consensus with Stakeholders

During the NUP Formulation phase, it is important to develop a policy proposal. This Proposal is one way to formalize the policy route that will be taken. The Proposal will act as a guide to the NUP. When a policy proposal is generated, it is very important to validate the proposal with stakeholders prior to moving forward to implementation. Engaging in a NUF at this point in the NUP process is an excellent way to present the NUP Policy Proposal to stakeholders. The NUF also allows for the gathering stakeholder inputs and builds ownership of the policy amongst stakeholders through the process of incorporating their viewpoints into the policy. Through building ownership of the policy it increases the likelihood for a successful and impactful NUP.

Suggested Activity During the NUF:

Consultation Workshop to Verify Policy Proposal

Once the Policy Proposal has been finalized, it is necessary to gain the verification of stakeholders in order to build consensus and support for the Proposal. This can be undertaken in the form of a Workshop that can take place during the NUF. The goal of the Workshop could be verification of the policy proposal and a commitment by stakeholders to the upcoming NUP activities outlined in the proposal.

4. National Urban Policy: Implementation

Benefits of a National Urban Forum: To Understand Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities and Build Stakeholder Capacity

Before undertaking the implementation of a complex policy like a NUP, it is important that all stakeholders are aware of their different implementation roles and responsibilities. Different actors at different levels will implement a NUP and therefore coordination is indispensable. A NUF has the power to bring all stakeholders who are important to the implementation of the NUP into one venue. Having all stakeholders together facilitates the clear delineation of roles and responsibilities that is essential for successful implementation of the NUP.

Depending on the way in which roles and responsibilities are delegated amongst stakeholders, it may be necessary to build human, financial and institutional capacity. Assessing and building capacity prior to and during NUP implementation can identify and fill gaps that could hamper the ability of various stakeholders to implement the NUP. The multi-stakeholder environment of the NUF makes it not only an excellent opportunity for dialogue and discussion but also for capacity assessment and development. In this way, a NUF is not only a discussion forum but can include elements of capacity development and advocacy activities in the form of workshops and training in order to build capacity of multiple stakeholders on the development of urban policy.

Suggested Activity During the NUF:

Overall Capacity Assessment and Capacity Development Session

Once the initial NUP policy Formulation has been undertaken, an Overall Capacity Assessment of the key implementation actors can be undertaken in order to identify any implementation gaps. If gaps are identified then tailored Capacity Development sessions can be recommended in the report.

5. National Urban Policy: Monitoring and Evaluation

Benefits of a National Urban Forum: Monitoring and evaluation to promote a feedback loop and institutional learning

As discussed earlier in the document, it is when lessons learned are fed back into the policy cycle in order to improve and adjust the policy that a policy feedback loop is created. A NUP Process Evaluation can evaluate the process that was used to undertake a NUP to date, making key statements on stakeholder involvement, horizontal and vertical coordination, working arrangements, etc. A process evaluation can shed light on the outcomes of the policy to date but also on how and why these outcomes were or were not achieved. This information, in turn, provides opportunity for institutional learning that can improve the ongoing performance of the NUP and also provide a basis for the improvement of future policy initiatives and the performance of institutions. Engaging with stakeholders during the evaluation process is important to gather various opinion and insights regarding the policy. Doing this in a forum such as a NUF also enhances the visibility of the evaluation and increases the likelihood of the results being regarded as useful. This in turn, increases the likelihood of a feedback loop and institutional learning. Maintaining a dialogue through a permanent NUF allows policy makers and stakeholders to continuously look forward and reflect back in order to ensure that feedback and lessons learned help shape the process moving forward.

Suggested Activity During the NUF:

NUP Process Evaluation

Evaluation of policy should not only reflect on the outcomes of the policy but also evaluate the process that was undertaken to develop and implement the policy. A process evaluation focuses on a review of the policy processes that were used to achieve the outcomes. Process evaluation is undertaken with the view to inform policy revision/review for future policy interventions and will review the efficiency of policy development, institutional involvement, etc.

6. Established National Urban Policy but no National Urban Forum

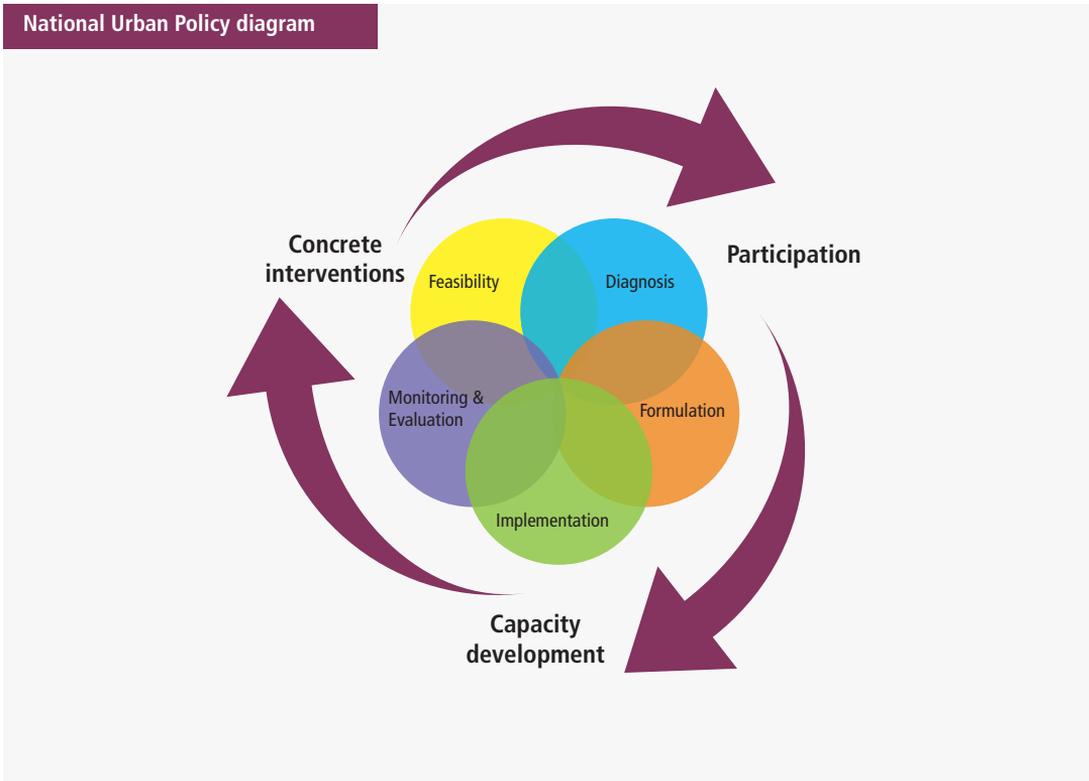
Benefits of a National Urban Forum: Reaffirming the commitment to a National Urban Policy

Once a NUP is implemented a NUF offers the opportunity to reaffirm the commitment of stakeholders to the NUP process. A NUP is a complex multi-stakeholder process. A permanent NUF can facilitate discussion and debate regarding urban policy and NUP, thus encouraging all stakeholders to remain engaged in NUP. Furthermore, the NUP process is always subject to the interplay of complex and competing influences. Effective policy development will have the ability to accommodate and adjust to such contingencies, based on a continuous review of experiences and feedback. A permanent NUF also provides an opportunity to continuously review and revised the NUP. By doing so, the NUP remains a dynamic and growing document that can build on progress and achievements and avoids being static.

Suggested Activity During the NUF:

NUP Achievement Campaign

An achievement campaign can highlight the NUP achievements and share these achievements with NUP stakeholders and the general public. Conducting an Achievement Campaign ensures that NUP successes are well known by stakeholders and the public and can also build momentum and commitment to continuing the NUP process.



Further Reading and Resources

The Evolution of NUP
National Urban Policy: Framework for a Rapid Diagnostic
A New Generation of NUP
Guidelines: National Urban Forum



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