

# NATIONAL SAMPLE OF CITIES

A MODEL APPROACH TO MONITORING AND REPORTING  
PERFORMANCE OF CITIES AT NATIONAL LEVELS



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A TOOL TO MEASURE  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



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# INTRODUCTION

Cities are home to more than half of the world's seven billion people. The outcome document of Rio+20, *The Future We Want*, recognizes that "if they are well planned and developed, cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies. The recognition of a standalone SDG on cities (Goal 11-Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable) further reaffirms the role that cities can play in national development and shared prosperity. More and more cities are identified as the locus for change and the venue where policies and actions are mobilized. They have been able to forge new linkages among actors and offer innovative solutions that have the potential to be included in national agendas with greater possibilities of influencing regional and global development. Cities have been catalysts of productivity, creating innovative solutions and institutional arrangements that contribute to the enhancement of equity, social inclusion and quality of life.

However, poor planning, the absence of effective governance and legal frameworks, fragile institutions, low capacity of local authorities and the

lack of a sound monitoring mechanism diminish the possibility to promote integrated and long-term sustainable urban development.

It has been widely recognized that cities both from developed and developing countries require monitoring systems with clear indicators, baseline data, targets and goals to support a city vision and a long-term plan for sustainable development. Cities require a monitoring system that can track progress and identify setbacks using new approaches and techniques in order to support the formulation of more informed policies. They also require periodic assessments on their state of development and accurate tools to evaluate policy outcomes and the impact of specific plans and actions.

Goal 11 monitoring and reporting creates major challenges that other SDGs do not necessarily confront. National statistical systems need to coordinate with local authorities and service providers to collect information at city level, using conventional and modern forms of data collection, including the integration of spatial data. Without a

standardized method of measurement and clear techniques of aggregation, countries will face serious problems to create a consistent set of cities that is representative of their territory, geography and history as well as challenged by the difficulties to report on national (urban) progress in a systematic manner. Without a national sample of cities, this national aggregation problem will make it difficult, if not impossible, to report at regional and global levels on locally produced urban data.

## EXPERIENCE FROM THE UN GLOBAL SAMPLE OF CITIES



UN-HABITAT released the 'UN Global Sample of Cities' in advance of the Third UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). It was tested and applied in the Urban Expansion Program, a collaboration between UN-Habitat, New York University (NYU), and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. The Global Sample of cities is a stratified sample of 200 cities by region, by city-population and city-size that represent the urbanized world. The 'UN Sample of Cities' tracks and interprets trends

related to urban life such as air and water quality, housing affordability, access to enjoyable public space, physical proximity to employment and time to travel from home to work, in order to examine impacts of global and regional urbanization on the quality of human life. Data from 200 cities is used to examine similarities and differences in cities' evolution, with the broader aim of identifying ways to harness the power of cities to improve the lives of urban dwellers. The project also has the potential to

contribute to SDG 11. Working with a sample like this represents an added value in data collection and analysis that allows for concentrating efforts and resources in selected cities, as well as combining social, economic and spatial indicators in the same cities, using various statistical tools and techniques. Lessons from this project have demonstrated the feasibility of applying the concept of National Sample of Cities (NSC) at the country level

## THE NEED FOR A NATIONAL SAMPLE OF CITIES



*Land use efficiency*



*Public transport*



*solid waste*



*land consumption*



*air quality*



*public space*

National Governments and statistical offices recognize that it is a major challenge to study each city in a given country to monitor national trends on SDG urban indicators. After the adoption of SDGs framework, UN-Habitat has received numerous requests from the national governments to assist them in preparing: *Conditions to monitor nationally on indicators that are collected at city level (Land use efficiency (11.3.1) Public transport (11.2.1), land consumption (11.3.1), solid waste (11.6.1), air quality (11.6.2) and public space (11.7.1) and conditions to monitor and report on a consistent set of cities that will enable them to produce time series analysis to measure national progress in a more systematic and scientific manner.*

The aggregation of the city level data and information at sub-national and national level presents a challenge that requires appropriate tools and techniques to ensure comparability and proper systematization. A carefully constructed sample that takes into account sub-regional and city specific characteristics and variances can be used to monitor the dominant pattern in the country's cities in an aggregated manner.

Based on the Global Sample of Cities, the same method and concept will be adapted to develop the National sample of cities. The National Sample of Cities will help to harmonize urban data and indicators using an agreed number of cities that are statistically representative of the country's urban human settlements. In addition, National Governments will have an opportunity to add additional criteria for addressing other national interests, while at the same time ensuring that national reports are based on the same number of cities and conditions.

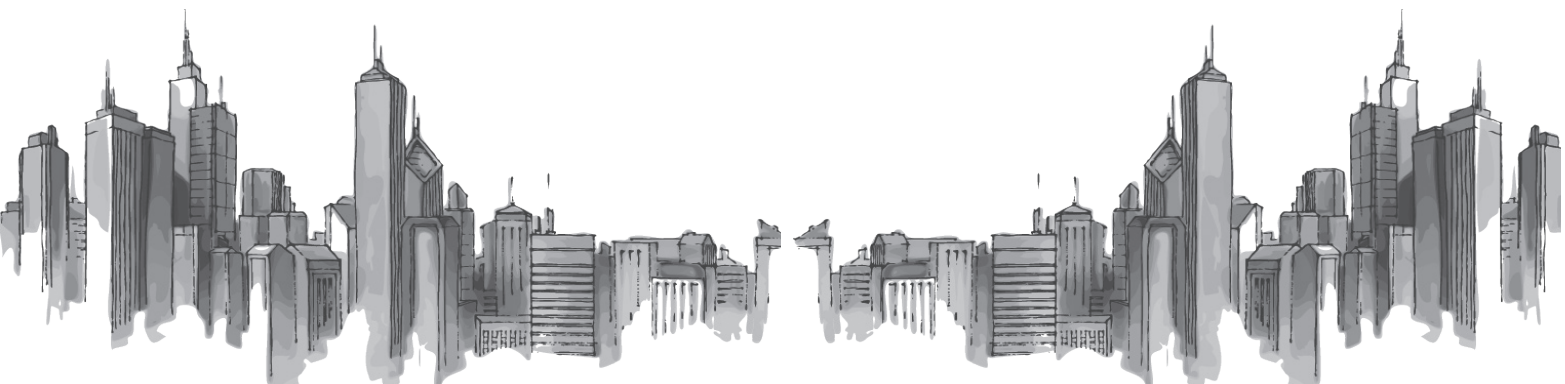
Monitoring and reporting using this sample will allow for better comparability, the production of time series analysis, and the possibility to connect consistent urban data and information to national policies. Member States can aggregate or disaggregate information at national and sub-national level for the refinement of the analysis and the formulation of more appropriate policies. Additionally the sample of cities approach will make it possible to assess progress at the national level and further resolve the bias on major cities leaving behind intermediary and small cities in the reporting exercise.

## CRITERIA FOR SELECTING A NATIONAL SAMPLE OF CITIES

The national sample of cities will be drawn using sound statistical and scientific methodologies based on, but not limited to the number of cities, the population and the city size, geographic location, functionality, economic and political importance and other factors decided by the national government.

The following procedures describe the main steps being undertaken in the preparation of the national sample of cities:

- A complete listing of all cities in the country will be undertaken
- Collection of relevant city descriptive data for each city as per the criteria adopted.
- Grouping of cities using major categories/dimensions of interest defined and agreed upon at the international and national levels, and a simple random sampling (SRS) of cities applied in each category.
- Review of and agreement on a final list of sampled cities by selected stakeholders under the guidance of the national statistical agency.
- Analysis of the statistical representation of the sample of city concerning the national universe of cities will be performed.
- Testing of the National Sample of Cities using an example that involves monitoring and reporting using SDG data and indicators.
- Preparation of Regional and global reports aggregating data and information produced by the National Sample of Cities to prove the feasibility and suitability of the method.



The adoption of National Sample of Cities by Member States will bring the following advantages:

- ▼ Adopt an integrated approach of the city with the possibility to assess city performance in a more systematic manner.
- ▼ Integrate cities of all sizes, functions and types as part of a national system of cities that can help to amalgamate the disjointed energies and potential of urban centres.
- ▼ Assist in the aggregation of locally produced city indicators for national monitoring and reporting, and for the production of regional and global reports and analysis.
- ▼ Provide a platform for collecting different layers of data with a unified methodology that can be used to report on national progress on the SDGs or other elements of the urban agenda. Data collected for all cities can be generalized to produce regional and global estimates and reports.
- ▼ Calculate an un-weighted national average as well as weighted national averages on the overall urban SDGs indicators.
- ▼ Facilitate a systematic disaggregation of information at national, sub-national and city levels along key SDGs indicators and dimensions of development.
- ▼ Create baseline data and information for selected cities of the national sample and redefine local and national targets, propose strategies for improvement, identify setbacks, and monitor progress over time in a more consistent manner.
- ▼ Establish benchmarks and national targets with the same technique of standardization that will enable for comparisons of indicators and city measurements.
- ▼ Articulate a regional and territorial perspective to the monitoring and reporting of the SDGs.
- ▼ Produce consistent data and information that can be used to prioritize activities, ensure strategic investments, monitor coverage of plans and measure their impact.



## LIMITATIONS

- 1 The adoption of National Sample of Cities can reduce but not to eliminate the lack of consistency and comparability in the use of indicators.
- 2 A combination of data sources at different administrative levels could make it difficult to homologate information and aggregate values. Monitoring progress on urban SDGs requires a focus on cities as the unit of analysis. There is a need of a common understanding

of what is the definition of the city and its limits. A global operational definition of the 'city' will be fundamental in guiding national statistical systems in the compilation of the list of cities or urban areas and in the collection of information.

- 3 In many countries, it is possible to find a mismatch between city boundaries and urban data associated to municipalities, metropolises or urban agglomerations. National level guidance is crucial in identifying the number, boundaries and sizes





of cities. Countries with a large number of cities are expected to experience more complications in the selection of cities than cities with few cities. The methodology will mostly apply if a country has

more than 10 cities to select a representative sample. Countries with less than 10 cities may not need to apply a National Sample of Cities.

## WORK PROGRAM FOR IMPLEMENTING THE NATIONAL SAMPLE OF CITIES

- 1 Four pilot countries will be selected in modelling and testing the NSC approach
- 2 UN-Habitat will work with national statistical systems to select the sample of cities.
- 3 Capacity building workgroups will be organised in regions and at global levels.



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