



2016

A new 'Urban Agenda'
for the 21st Century

Habitat III

Third United Nations Conference on
Housing and Sustainable Urban
Development

Partners Consultation Paper - 1
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LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

It has been 16 years since the adoption of the Istanbul Declaration and the “Habitat Agenda” – solidifying a global, multi-stakeholder commitment to a set of principles and plan of action in pursuit of adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world. The 1996 Istanbul Declaration and its accompanying Habitat Agenda, catalogued a myriad of issues concerning human settlements. More importantly, it called upon policy makers and leaders to build and reform national policies in accordance with these principles and action areas. However, while its comprehensiveness was its strength, it proved to also be a weakness.

A strategic choice: breadth or depth?

Highlighting the need for priority attention to be given to urban conditions and its attendant concerns, such as; slums, housing, land, infrastructure and basic services is clearly an important achievement. Equally significant are the suggested remedies for addressing the identified problems, including: strategic planning, increased domestic/international financial investment, and strengthening of local government institutions. It also called for improved engagement of community based organizations (including groups of slum dwellers, women and youth), the private sector, professionals, and academia. However this approach has had the unfortunate consequence of perpetuating the view that the city is an assembly of

parts, rather than a whole. The inherent limitations of this view are all too evident when one considers how overlapping and conflicting jurisdictions or local, regional and national authorities result in weak urban governance and management. The results are plain to see; costly inefficiencies, poorly defined projects, unsustainable development- problems cities cannot afford, especially when undergoing rapid urbanization.

Focusing on the essence of the city

This disembodied view of the city has also served to obscure three fundamental principles of the city which are as true today as they were when the first cities were established along the Euphrates some 6000 years ago – **the city is made of people, stones and rules.**

Cities are first and foremost about **people**. As such they are governed by organic processes which are constantly in flux changing continuously in nature and character. Tomorrow’s city is the product of an on-going struggle between economic, political, ecological, social and gendered interests and forces. Balancing these and creating public goods which all can benefit from is key to creating a dynamic, integrated, productive, job creating society.

The first **stones** laid to build homes, roads, and market places were put in place based on a basic plan.

MANDATE

Sustainable Urbanization as the key to realizing socio-economic TRANSFORMATION

On 1 March 2012, the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 66/207 decided to convene in 2016, in line with the bi-decennial cycle (1976, 1996 and 2016), a Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development (Habitat III) to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization that should focus on the implementation of a new “Urban Agenda”.

In the coming months, Member States will discuss the preparatory process leading to HABITAT III.

Habitat Agenda partners, are invited to share their thoughts, aspirations and innovations on how to make the Habitat III process inclusive, engaging and transformational.



The most visible aspects of unplanned rapid urbanization has been the spontaneous growth of slums and informality. This reflects a cities failure to plan for the growth of the city and provide employment, transport, service and affordability needs of people in today's world. Lastly, beyond the plan, a set of **rules** is necessary to govern the use of land in defined development areas and common space. The nature of land use rules has evolved throughout the history of urbanization: from customary rules, to autocratic rules and then to democratically formed written legislation. When applied and enforced, rules can unlock enormous wealth for all, not just a few well connected elites. Cities can thrive through the judicious allocation of land to common goods such as streets and public spaces, allowing for the creation of integrated developments, promotion of mixed land use, sustainable densities and development planning which ensures resident proximity to employment.

Leadership is required, but too few countries have adopted comprehensive **National Urban Policies**. These can provide key policy leavers for maximizing the potential of urbanization working in partnership with all spheres of government. A second critical step is to plan for **City Enlargements** while seeking to optimize the use of land, discouraging speculation and insuring affordability and compact design close to employment and existing infrastructure.

Sustainable urbanization: Source of national development

A second strength but also limitation of the Habitat Agenda, is the perception that human settlements have been a rising development “challenge”, pathology in search of cure. Prior to 1996, global debates regarding sustainability, poverty and development scarcely had a spatial element which was assumed to be predominantly rural.

It is precisely this kind of thinking which created the false dichotomy of rural vs. urban, ignoring the fact that the process of urbanization is a virtuous cycle which brings tangible benefits to all forms of human settlements. Habitat II marked a change, whereby the role of cities and the consequences of urbanization became a regular feature of both international fora, as is the case most recently at the **Rio+20 Summit**. Policy makers and media alike are replete with examples of the ingenuity and creativity of urban youth in the informal economy, the resilience of women's groups in post conflict reconstruction, and the capacity of slum dwellers and civil society to innovate where others have failed. They emphasize the growing influence of cities and regions as international players in their own right, the contributions of academia to solving real world problems, and the significance of private sector investment in the creation complex urban global networks of trade, ideas and technology which have little concern for national boundaries. While we may take for granted this shift in perspectives today, by defining cities as another development “challenge” amongst other worthy challenges, we have fundamentally misjudged the potential and **transformative power of urbanization**. This power is especially salient in the developing world, where cities have become the basis for achieving national, regional and global development. Too few countries have firmly grasped this inherent opportunity.

This fundamental shift in views on urbanization is embedded in the title of the Habitat III conference. In 1996 the Habitat Agenda called for sustainable ‘human settlements development’. The focus for Habitat III in 2016 is sustainable ‘**urban development**’. In short, this entails harnessing the economic potential of urbanization latent in cities through effective, transparent and participatory urban planning, economic development, legislative processes and management.

Certainly, progress has been made in the intervening years since 1996. UN-Habitat's Governing Council has sustained momentum in the implementation of the agreed objectives by adopting several resolutions emphasizing elements of the Habitat Agenda such as the right to adequate housing, guidelines on access to basic urban services for all, public-private partnerships in financing affordable housing as well as cities and climate change. Self-

organizing initiatives involving international and national NGOs have been multiplied through the creation of urban poor federations and grassroots women's networks which make serviced land and housing accessible by those excluded from formal housing finance and scarce public housing programmes.

Over the past two decades, cities have gained considerable profile and visibility within international fora on sustainable development, with increasing roles in mitigation and adaptation to climate change. These gains are being made through adoption of more appropriate land-use planning and new urban patterns, more efficient urban management and green building practices. This in turn imposes new imperatives for housing policies and urban planning and design, especially in terms of housing typologies, urban density and transportation in urban settings. Given that one out of the worlds every three urban dwellers lives in slums, and one sixth of humanity lives in sub-standard housing conditions (*with the threat of that doubling in the next 20 years*), the issue of access to serviced land and housing remains one of the greatest challenges of cities in the 21st century.

At home in the city

By widening housing choices and enabling the provision of housing opportunities at appropriate scale; of affordable price; in a diversity of sizes, prices and types; and in suitable locations vis-à-vis access to income generating opportunities, housing can be central to the development of cities impact on the future of cities. As such, the housing sector remains an economic powerhouse by linking key areas of the economy, generating jobs, advancing poverty reduction efforts and having a direct bearing on local economic development.

Among the most significant urban challenges that Governments have to address in the next few decades, especially in developing countries, is how to respond



to increasing poverty and inequality, a rapidly expanding urban informal sector and growing urban decay. Regardless of the scenario that future urban societies will have to face, new capacities will have to be developed to stay on course in the pursuit of sustainable urban development. This will necessitate the building of local resilience and to take action to remedy critical information gaps which inhibit strategic urban development.

Central, regional and local governments together with civil society, the private sector, academia and urban citizens and their grassroots organizations should all rally around the goal of sustainable urban development. While the Habitat Agenda has remained a national-local agenda, Habitat III will consider mechanisms for global implementation and reporting as well as international conventions on how to optimize conditions for sustainable urban development and generate relevant data and indicators to track progress.

Habitat III – Heralding a new urban era

Habitat III will bring together cities, governments, civil society, the private sector, education institutions and interest groups to review urban and housing policies affecting the future of cities within an international governance architecture and to generate a new ‘Urban Agenda’ for the 21st Century which recognizes the ever-changing dynamics of human civilization. Habitat III will benefit from recent experiences of cities and their partnerships with different stakeholders, including city-to-city partnerships, private sector participation and engagement of different types of grassroots federations that demonstrate the potential to create greener, more resilient and more livable cities.

At Habitat III, agreements will be sought to enhance, among others:

- Consolidation and learning from previous programmes;
- Up-scaling and wide-scaling programmes that configure best practices to address the critical needs in terms of urban governance, urban planning and design, urban economic growth and employment generation, housing, land and basic infrastructure;
- mobilization of resources for specialized technical assistance in sustainable urban management and for the design and implementation of slum prevention strategies;

- networking for synergies between urban and other spheres of sustainable development to integrate themes that are otherwise fragmented and boxed in unproductive sector approaches will be up scaled.

The objectives:

- **Undertake** a comprehensive critical review and assessment of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and relevant internationally agreed goals, including the MDGs;
- **Identify** major constraints hindering implementation of the Habitat Agenda;
- **Address** new challenges and utilize the opportunities that have emerged since the Habitat II Conference;
- **Outline** a new ‘Urban Agenda’ for the 21st Century that can respond to the new challenges and the new role of cities, strengthening of institutional frameworks for sustainable urban development and housing;
- **Redefine** the governance structure of UN-Habitat and its strategic development partners in light of new developments.

Help us design a roadmap to Habitat III

The road to Habitat III will require enormous effort at local, national, regional and global levels. Throughout the process, valuable information will be gathered, shared and reflected upon. Habitat III is a process which will lead to real, meaningful change in cities around the world, not just an event.

At City Level:

Engagement of local leaders, grassroots organizations, civil society, academia and private sector organizations assessing their own progress towards sustainable urbanization and making practical recommendations for meaningful action.

At National Level:

An in-depth and comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and relevant international goals will be undertaken in each country. A platform for this process should be convened under a National Urban Forum and / or National Habitat Committee, based on broad-based

and inclusive dialogue with all stakeholders and involving a network of cities through national local government associations.

At Regional Level:

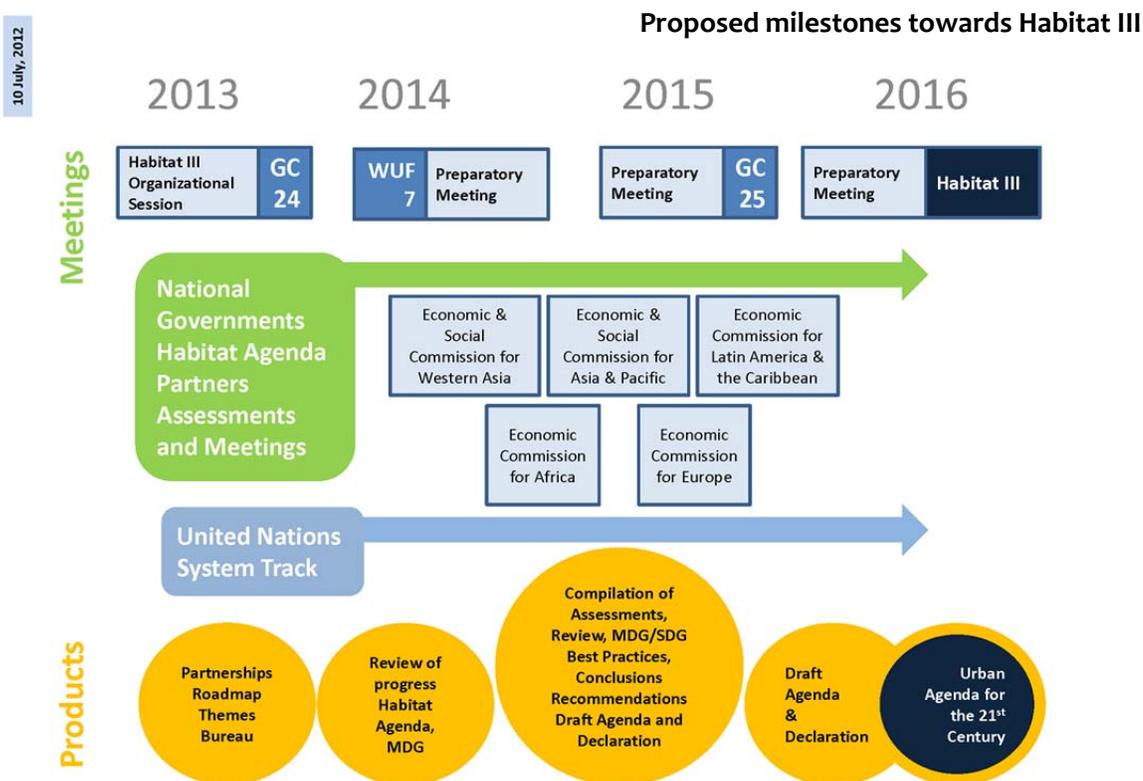
It is anticipated that five regional as well as subregional preparatory meetings will be held in conjunction with meetings of subregional and regional intergovernmental bodies wherever possible. Regional preparations should bring the regional perspectives into the review process. Given their responsibility for regional integration and regional cooperation, as well as for support to the sustainable development of countries of the region and their unique mandate for the analytical, normative and operational activities, the United Nations regional commissions will take a lead role in the preparatory process. The focus will be on an in-depth and comprehensive assessment of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda in the region.

At Global Level:

The global preparatory process will build on country and regional reviews of other major United Nations conferences and stocktaking exercises taking place between 2008 and 2015, and their relevant outcomes in the lead-up to Habitat III.

Five questions to reflect on:

- (1) What are the key emerging issues which Habitat III should address? And how do you see UN-Habitat’s role changing to meet these challenges.
- (2) Bearing in mind “conference fatigue” and the need for cost efficiencies, how can Habitat III process be innovative, inclusive and participatory?
- (3) In which key or emerging areas that impact on housing and sustainable urbanization are we lacking reliable and relevant data and information? How could the Habitat III process be used to address these deficits?
- (4) How could the proposed preparatory process be improved?
- (5) Beyond 2016, what should the legacy of Habitat III be, and what contributions could your partner organization make to realize this?



GC: UN-Habitat Governing Council
WUF: World Urban Forum

Sessions of the Economic Commissions are hosted in: Beirut, Bangkok, Santiago, Addis Ababa, and Geneva.

Venues for WUF 7, the Preparatory Committee Meetings and for Habitat III have not yet been determined.



Note that the suggested format and dates are provisional and subject to change. They are provided purely for the purpose of generating debate and discussion to enhance on-going decision-making processes.