



YOUTH AND THE **NEW URBAN AGENDA**

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

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Sponsor: Government of Norway

First published in Nairobi in 2016 by UN-Habitat.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Amidst record high youth unemployment rates, a global financial crisis and youth-led demonstrations, cities play a key role for realizing the rights of youth. With people between the ages of 15-24 comprising a staggering 1.8 billion globally¹ and urbanization currently one of the key driving forces of human development², this paper seeks to create awareness around the relevance of focusing on youth as an integral part of urban development, and outline the core ideas of what drives UN-Habitat's work in this area with focus on the three pronged approach.

In order to create a positive correlation between urbanization and development – addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality - urban regulations and policies need to be reflective of the realities affecting young people. Cities can benefit from new thinking on how a youthful population provides opportunities for local economies to close income gaps and expand revenues for local authorities. Coupled with plans that account for larger youth populations living in and migrating to urban areas, cities can increase their potential for becoming prosperous, equitable and innovative. Ensuring youth have a voice and are recognized as stakeholders in legislative frameworks allows cities to harness the potential inherent in the urban demographic youth bulge.

¹ *State of the World Population Report (UNFPA, 2014)*

² *Human development is here defined as the choices people have, to lead lives that they value, improving the human condition beyond economic development to encompass social and political aspects of society.*



INTRODUCTION

The majority of the world's population is now urban, and approximately 600 urban centres generating around 60 percent of global GDP,³ cities are gaining political and economic importance globally. Meanwhile, populations continue to gravitate towards cities in search of prosperity, enhanced quality of life, knowledge and more diverse opportunities. With people forming its core, the dynamics of urbanization are bringing new issues to the forefront of environmental, political, social and economic development.

This paper is produced at the outset of an international negotiation around urbanization and its implications for human development. The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) will in 2016 bring UN Member States together to agree on a new paradigm for sustainable urbanization. As the third conference of its kind, Habitat III will have a fundamental impact on the future development of cities, creating a new global agenda for sustainable urban development. Habitat III will promote a collaborative, transparent and responsive form of governance and planning for cities that recognizes the multiplicity of government and non-government actors who are – and must be – involved in order to harness the potential of urbanization for sustainable development, bringing together those who are living their lives in cities and those who decide on policies to strengthen support and ownership of sustainable urbanization.

³ Urban world: Mapping the economic power of cities (McKinsey, 2011)

Simultaneously, the Post-2015 Development Agenda is being negotiated, including whether it should focus on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.⁴ Going beyond targeting improvements in housing, sanitation and water facilities,⁵ the proposed Sustainable Development Goal on cities and human settlements represents a conceptual shift in the ways urbanization is understood, encompassing a more holistic perception of the opportunities and challenges inherent in cities.

*In line with these global processes,
UN-Habitat is pioneering a new approach to
urban development – **the New Urban Agenda**
– **which presents a sustainable, integrated and
inclusive model for urban development.***

Representing a paradigm shift towards a renewed model of urbanization, the pillars of sustainability, integration and inclusiveness shapes UN-Habitat's response to the challenges of our age. It advocates that urbanization should be based on integration in bringing the environmental, social and economic objectives of sustainability to the centre of development, while

⁴ Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals (2014)

⁵ Millennium Development Goal 7, Ensure Environmental Sustainability, Target 7.D: Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers

THE THREE-PRONGED APPROACH (UN-HABITAT 2015)



ensuring the protection of human rights and the empowerment of civil society to expand democratic participation and collaboration.⁶ It advocates for a new strategic approach based on two premises; the positive correlation between urbanization and development, and the importance of urban legislation, planning and finance to ensure urbanization creates positive outcomes.⁷

⁶ *Urbanization and Sustainable Development: Towards a New United Nations Urban Agenda, Policy Paper presented to the High Level Committee on Programmes, Twenty Eight Session UN HQs (New York) (CR-6), 10 October 2014*

⁷ *Urban Solutions (UN-Habitat 2015)*



In operationalizing this new urban paradigm, UN-Habitat promotes compact, mixed, and connected urban growth. UN-Habitat recommends integrating urban planning and design, legislation and regulatory frameworks, and urban and public finance in order to successfully implement sustainable patterns of spatial development in urbanizing areas. Planning in advance of urban growth is necessary to direct growth in efficient, equitable, and environmentally healthy directions. However, planning is not enough to achieve sustainable urban development. Legislative and regulatory structures guide the implementation of plans, and urban finance pays for their enactment. Thus, the integrated, three pronged approach is the means and method for achieving sustainable, inclusive outcomes.

This paper intends to strengthen awareness and collaboration between UN-Habitat and its partners with the goal of promoting the relevance of issues pertaining to youth living in cities; present and future. It will emphasize the importance of ensuring that any urban development outcomes, as a result of UN-Habitat's own programmatic interventions, Habitat III or the Sustainable Development Goals, are attentive to and inclusive of youth, providing recommendations that build on foundations of human rights and youth-led development to create integrated, inclusive and sustainable cities as part of the three pronged approach and the New Urban Agenda.



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