



UN-HABITAT'S HUMAN LIBRARY CONFERENCE REPORT



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The Human Library Conference was a successful event and a pathfinder in the history of the UN-HABITAT's knowledge management practice.

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Group photo of the participants in the first Human Library Conference, Nairobi, 15 February 2011.

Foreword



Dr. Joan Clos
Executive Director,
UN-HABITAT

The main objective of the Human Library Conference was to provide an opportunity to draw lessons from 25 years of UN-HABITAT's technical and regional cooperation, as well as to explore new perspectives to guide the future work of the Agency particularly in developing countries.

Since 1978, country-level activities have been an important component of the UN-HABITAT's mandate. Also known as technical cooperation activities, they aim to support central and local governments in the development of their institutional capacities and in the formulation and implementation of sustainable urban development policies and strategies.

UN-HABITAT's technical cooperation activities are relevant to both the external support community and the beneficiary governments. They contribute to enhancing the capacities of developing countries for sustainable urban development and poverty alleviation.

We know that any decline in technical cooperation activities and a lack of ownership by the stakeholders could lead to the vicious circle of poverty and under-development particularly in least-developed countries (LDCs) and countries in crisis.

A stronger collaboration of development agencies and beneficiary governments in a renewed partnership with international organizations such as UN-HABITAT will provide a platform to create the necessary synergy for success at country level.

In this connection, the involvement of local authorities, private sector and non-governmental organizations in our development efforts is crucial to ensure accountability and ownership.

After the adoption of the Millennium Declaration in 2000 and the related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2001, a new context emerged promoting a greater coordination and harmonization of the UN interventions in an attempt to "Delivering as One".

Slum conditions in many countries, persistent urban poverty and growing inequalities have led UN-HABITAT to focus its interventions on the MDG 7, targets 10 and 11, as well as in countries confronted with conflict, disaster and post-disaster challenges.

The Human Library Conference was therefore meant to learn from our technical cooperation activities over the last decades at country and regional levels, and to clarify the terms of the debate on normative versus operational activities.

This was a timely and crucial exercise of knowledge management and generation, as highlighted in the motto of this event: *"the present only needs the past to move into the future"*.

UN-HABITAT's mandate is very clear: to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities. I see policy reforms at country level as a key aspect of this mandate, both on urban development and on housing and services.

UN-HABITAT's technical cooperation is not only about operations and on the ground project activities. There are many elements of policy, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation at country level which should be supported by sufficient human and financial resources from both development partners and beneficiary countries.

I intend therefore to strengthen UN-HABITAT technical cooperation through the ongoing institutional reform with the aim of developing programmes, projects and activities, which promote stronger in-country synergies and feed into the UN global efforts towards poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Our focus will be on (i) urban land, legislation and governance, (ii) urban planning and design, (iii) urban economy including municipal finances, (iv) urban basic services, (v) housing and slum upgrading, (vi) risk reduction and rehabilitation, as well as (vii) research and capacity development.

I have followed the Human Library discussions with a lot of interest and am committed to continue supporting this initiative. Institutional memory should be strengthened if we wish to progress in all our programmes. Lessons have to be learnt, best projects have to be disseminated, as well as mistakes analysed. I invite senior staff members to provide their support to younger experts in the fulfilment of their duties. This is a stimulating task ahead of us.



Dr. Joan Clos
Under-Secretary General
Executive Director

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