



Chief Executives Board for Coordination

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Summary of deliberations

Addendum

United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development

I. Introduction

1. At its thirty-sixth session, held at the headquarters of the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Rome on 9 and 10 October 2018, the High-level Committee on Programmes of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) approved a proposal to develop a system-wide strategy for sustainable urban development to be submitted to the Committee for consideration at its thirty-seventh session. According to the proposal, the strategy should build upon earlier analytical work and be aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other relevant global agreements, as well as reflect several global policy developments. The Committee called for a time-bound, consultative inter-agency process through a Committee task team and requested the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to lead the consultation process through the task team. Since the Committee had carried out its earlier analytical work in 2016, the General Assembly had endorsed the New Urban Agenda by its resolution [71/256](#), and had adopted resolution [72/279](#) on repositioning of the United Nations development system, with a view to ensuring greater coherence across the United Nations system to better support Member States in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. At its session held on 6 June 2018, the Senior Management Group recognized urbanization as a “megatrend” and called upon UN-Habitat to facilitate cooperation among agencies in order to advance United Nations system-wide coherence for sustainable urbanization. The mandate of the task team was to prepare a paper to guide the manner in which the United Nations system coordinates its efforts to assist Member States in harnessing opportunities and meeting the challenges of rapid urbanization for the attainment of the Goals and other global agendas.

2. In order to carry out its mandate, agencies participating in the task team completed a brief survey on sustainable urban development. In their responses, agencies clarified how they were addressing urban issues and what they viewed as



the major challenges of working in cities. They also indicated what strategies they planned to implement to ensure that they could fulfil their respective mandates in a rapidly urbanizing world.

3. The present paper follows the logic of the annotated outline approved by the Committee at its thirty-sixth session, beginning with a consolidated overview, in section II, of the potential that sustainable urbanization holds as a transformative force for the attainment of the 2030 Agenda. In keeping with the spirit of the Committee's analytical work, the task team then considered frontier issues that would have an impact on sustainable urbanization. Sections III and IV below serve to highlight the intended outcomes that can be achieved with greater coherence across the United Nations system and the means of implementation afforded by the key drivers of sustainable urbanization, as endorsed by Member States in the New Urban Agenda. Sections V and VI provide forward-looking suggestions on how the United Nations can more effectively assist Member States in harnessing opportunities for sustainable urban development by organizing efforts collectively to advance aspects of urban data, policy, partnerships and financing. They also contain recommendations for utilizing the reform processes and the strategic results groups of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to advance United Nations system-wide coherence for sustainable urban development. Section VII contains suggestions about the role of UN-Habitat in the implementation of the system-wide strategy and the promotion of sustainable urban development, and the role of the Committee going forward.

II. Potential of sustainable urbanization as a transformative force

4. The present section retains the sequencing of the earlier analytical work of the Committee and is organized roughly along the sequential logic of the Sustainable Development Goals. As with the interlinkages between their targets, there is an overlapping correspondence between each of the Goals and the subsections below; therefore, strict correlations and categorizations have been deliberately avoided.

A. Spatial dimension of poverty

5. Although poverty has fallen dramatically at the global level, urban poverty continues to grow in many countries. Urban poverty is characterized by low income levels and low levels of access to justice, housing, water, sanitation, education and health services, as well as by high levels of hunger and malnutrition. Almost half the world's children live in urban areas, with many residing in informal settlements, and an estimated 300 million living in slums. Poverty also has a strong spatial dimension, with high concentration and entrenched marginalization in specific locations. Although many of those challenges also affect rural dwellers, the price of food, health services and education are usually higher in urban areas, often outpacing the income gains of urban dwellers. Even when such services are available, they may be unaffordable and inaccessible to the poorest, disproportionately affecting children and their families. This is frequently exacerbated by a lack of opportunities for food self-sufficiency and fragmented informal social safety nets. Urban livelihoods are highly dependent upon monetary income, and therefore upon predictable income, which is particularly scarce in informal economies. This makes the poorest households especially vulnerable to internal and external economic factors outside their control. Spatial inequality manifests itself in the different experiences and opportunities that people can have and the rights that they can exercise, including access to adequate housing, clean drinking water, sanitation, pollution-free living environments,

domestic energy, transport, health, education, culture, safety and public space. No country in the world has reached middle-income status without urbanization. Cities presently account for 80 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP).¹ Many developing countries have witnessed high annual rates of economic growth of over 7 per cent since 2010, and most of this growth is concentrated around the industrial activities of towns and cities, with employment opportunities similarly located. Cities, as the main sources of industrial and high-tech employment, can still be pathways out of poverty. It is often true that the poorest and most vulnerable lack the skills required for high-tech employment, but if cities are planned and managed correctly, they have considerable power to address poverty at the national level.

B. Health and well-being

6. Health gaps in cities are increasing, owing to poor access to health services, inadequate housing, food and nutrition insecurity, malnutrition and obesity, problems with water safety and availability, inadequate sanitation and solid waste disposal services, air pollution, traffic congestion, poor road safety, epidemics of both communicable and non-communicable diseases and occupational health problems and accidents at work. Poor dietary habits are among the leading risk factors for global deaths and global disease burden.² Besides overweight and obesity, child and maternal undernutrition are also among the top risk factors for the global burden of disease.³ The risks are even greater in urban settings, owing to poverty and unequal access to healthy food. The proximity of people living in environmentally poor conditions increases the risk of and vulnerability to maternal mortality, infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and vaccine-preventable diseases. This is further exacerbated by the congestion and high population densities that often characterize most cities and provide an environment for epidemics. Cities, especially those in the developing world, are fast becoming hotspots for cholera and other communicable diseases, mostly affecting children. Young children are especially susceptible to diseases. They lack immunization coverage and adequate childcare facilities and, in the absence of public and green spaces, have limited options for play and leisure. Furthermore, urban environmental pollution is a problem that has particularly egregious effects on children's physical and cognitive development; 300 million children live in areas where air pollution exceeds the World Health Organization air quality guidelines by more than sixfold. Cities also bear a large and increasing share of the global HIV/AIDS burden. Deaths from road traffic crashes account for a high number of mortalities among children and young adults between 10 and 19 years of age, and this is more visible in an urban context. Well-planned and managed urbanization offers many opportunities for increasing collaboration between urban planners and health and non-health actors to reduce health inequalities and increase well-being. Fostering education and awareness raising, leveraging traditional knowledge and facilitating participatory processes is equally critical to ensuring wider access to health care and improved levels of well-being. Changes in built and

¹ See: www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/Urbanization/Urban%20world/MGI_urban_world_mapping_economic_power_of_cities_full_report.ashx.

² Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 84 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks, 1990–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study, 2016 Risk Factors Collaborators, *Lancet* 2017; 390: 1345–1422. Available at http://simonihay.com/sites/default/files/publication_attachments/GBD_84_b_risk_factors_2017_final_SI.pdf.

³ Global, regional, and national age-sex specific mortality for 264 causes of death, 1980–2016: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study, 2016 Causes of Death Collaborators, *Lancet* 2017; 390: 1151–1210. Available at http://simonihay.com/sites/default/files/publication_attachments/GBD_age-sex_specific_264_2017_final_SI.pdf.

social environments, such as making cities more walkable or bikeable and increasing green space, have demonstrable impacts on reducing traffic incidents and many non-communicable and infectious diseases and on improving environmental conditions, including air quality. The leadership shown by cities, by engaging urban planners and health professionals, has resulted in successes in areas such as reducing obesity, tobacco use and cases of tuberculosis.

C. Women and the city

7. For women and girls, urbanization is often associated with greater access to education and employment opportunities, lower fertility rates and increased independence. Women's equal right to the city is still far from being realized, however, especially among lower-income women. This is evidenced by women's lack of personal safety when using public transport, the frequent discrimination they face as workers in public spaces, their limited access to land and property ownership and the disproportionately detrimental consequences of the lack of services on their health and well-being.⁴ Women living below the poverty line tend to be concentrated in low-wage, low-skilled jobs in the informal sector and experience more insecurity and vulnerability to violence, including sexual violence, both in the public space, and within the household. Moreover, women in poor communities often do not enjoy the same rights to land, infrastructure or adequate housing. However, the greater cultural diversity found in urban areas can provide an enabling environment for questioning social norms, promoting equal rights, overcoming discriminatory gender stereotypes that are barriers for women and perpetuate gender-based discrimination against women and girls and against young people in general. Cities may offer better social and physical infrastructure, including access to justice and sexual and reproductive health and opportunities for practising sports, recreation and cultural activities. There are a growing number of opportunities in cities for women to gain access to fairer wages and engage equally in the labour market, including in high-skilled or leadership positions. Despite the fact that few cities have mainstreamed a gender perspective into their policies, the increase in the representation of women in local governments, both at the political level and in technical departments, has begun to combat discrimination and inequality and increase expectations of gender parity.

D. Urban equality and in equality

8. In many cities, there is a growing concentration of overlapping forms of social exclusion and marginalization among various populations, including homeless persons, immigrants, ethnic minority groups, indigenous people, young people at risk, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex communities, political minority groups, households headed by women, older persons, persons with disabilities, and those who are unemployed or underemployed. Unfortunately, racism, discrimination, xenophobia, homophobia and intolerance are being exacerbated by populism. As long as large proportions of urban populations are socially and economically excluded, they are vulnerable to violence, stigma and discrimination, sometimes as a result of heavy-handed responses by police forces. For young people in particular, such vulnerability can be in the form of self-harm or crime, which, in extreme cases, may involve the trafficking of guns or drugs or trafficking in persons. In addition, intolerance contributing to violent extremism and terrorism can have drastic consequences on communities. Many cities are combating exclusion and promoting

⁴ United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2018).

economic, social and cultural rights with regard to adequate housing, education, land tenure security and water and sanitation, as well as sexual rights. A human rights-based approach to urbanization is vital to making cities places of equal opportunity for all, where people can live in security, peace and dignity. It is also gaining more traction in many cities and countries, as well as in city governments, which, through their autonomy, networks and proximity to populations, are increasingly effective in combating discrimination and integrating social cohesion into sustainable urban development strategies.

E. Infrastructure and connectivity

9. Cities and regions are increasingly interconnected, not only through their physical infrastructure such as transportation, power and communication facilities, but also to distant and multiple locations through financial capital, resource flows and commodity chains. The landscape of urbanization is rapidly changing, affecting the scale, rate, location, form and function of human settlements. This is true between regions, across the rural-urban continuum and within cities. Spatial inequalities in cities and across territories perpetuate other forms of social, economic, political and cultural inequalities with the poorest and marginalized populations mostly affected and which in turn could lead to social tensions and eventual violence. Placing people at the core of planning policies and strategies is essential to tackle spatial, economic and social inequalities as well to enhance the liveability of the urban environment, building on the diversity of cultural activities and urban heritage and promoting tailored, place-based planning solutions. Cities that are better connected with each other, with their regions and with the rest of the world can add to productivity growth, mutually beneficial trade of goods and services and more effective and accessible service delivery. The benefits of agglomeration, when combined with smart industrial and economic policies, create opportunities to enhance human well-being and prosperity. However, cities and towns must also ensure that their citizens equally benefit from agglomeration factors, that networks of roads and infrastructure reach low-income settlements, that urban spaces also provide the poor with productive opportunities and that regulations allow them to be service providers as well, including adequate infrastructure for markets. Cities may also need to tackle issues such as overcapitalization of housing and land speculation that have a serious impact on affordability in cities and the rights of citizens to an adequate standard of living and housing. By being physically, socially and economically connected, the expected growth in cities can be better distributed among all stakeholders, including low-income communities. Urbanization, through balanced territorial policies, can transform territories, bringing services and infrastructure within reach of the rural poor. As cities constitute a common space for a diversity of actors, with a corresponding impact on the resources available to those actors, it is essential that cities be built for citizens, investors and visitors alike, with special consideration for the specific needs of the poor and most marginalized populations.

F. Housing and slums

10. In much of the developing world urban expansion is increasingly beset by informality, whether owing to a lack of planning and/or affordability measures. Approximately 880 million slum dwellers suffer from poor sanitation, inadequate access to clean water, food insecurity, lack of educational facilities, poor health, crime, unemployment, insecure tenure and overcrowding.⁵ Meanwhile, speculative

⁵ *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.18.I.6).

behaviour and inadequate financial regulation triggered a financial crisis that has led to foreclosure on millions of homeowners, evictions and homelessness as well as a shortage of housing even for the middle class. Speculative behaviour in many countries continues to finance urban expansion beleaguered by poor design of streets and infrastructure that inhibits mobility and access, excessive mobility and high rates of resource usage. Moreover, decades of considering housing as a commodity and not as a human right, coupled with a lack of infrastructure planning and a gap between policies and the realities of housing markets, has led to an increase in housing demand which has exacerbated the unaffordability of housing. Unfortunately, neither the public nor the private sector has been able to provide affordable housing for the poor at the scale that the current crisis requires. More than half of city space is composed of residential areas. Despite and indeed because of this, urban housing brings an opportunity for social, economic and spatial integration. In recent years approaches to housing policies have expanded beyond criteria of affordability to include security of tenure, accessibility, habitability, cultural adequacy and access to healthy food. When appropriately planned and designed, housing can contribute to optimal densities that enhance the benefits of agglomeration, including proximate livelihood opportunities, reduced infrastructure costs, preservation of public space, and better public and non-motorized transport. However, it is essential that urban expansion not infringe upon the legitimate land tenure rights of people, including residents of informal settlements, local smallholder farmers and indigenous peoples. Community-based slum upgrading processes build upon the human, social and cultural capital of informal settlements as a driving force to gradually upgrade services and improve living conditions in urban neighbourhoods.

G. Crime and violence

11. Cities are host to significant levels and different forms of crime and violence, including extortions, robberies, trafficking in drugs and persons, sexual violence and violent extremism that can lead to terrorism, as well as the criminal depredation of urban spaces and infrastructure perpetrated by gangs, organized criminal groups, armed individuals and militias, and sometimes even state security and law enforcement agencies themselves. They affect overwhelmingly the most deprived urban communities, where city governments and law enforcement agencies fail to fulfil their public security role, while richer sections of society resort to private security provision, often operating outside of legally defined boundaries.⁶ Disadvantaged children living in cities are among the most vulnerable, facing heightened risk to exploitation, violence, crime and drugs. Cities play a crucial role in maintaining law and order. Integrity in law enforcement entities is a prerequisite for public trust and for maintaining peace and security; local police forces and local governments must be aware of the eroding risks associated with corruption and should initiate appropriate responses to address these risks. Abuses of power carry the potential to radicalize young people and push them towards violent extremism. As such, cities need to consider implementing anti-corruption policies to ensure the integrity and human rights compliance of their law enforcement forces. To achieve meaningful and sustainable solutions to violence, cities must tackle its root causes through integrated preventative strategies. Multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary initiatives at the city government level have resulted in increased community engagement and support mechanisms that extend the reach of law enforcement, improve responses to criminal incidents and include close cooperation with civil society to prevent armed violence. These initiatives also tackle dimensions of urban

⁶ UN-Habitat, *Global Report on Human Settlements 2007: Enhancing Urban Safety and Security* (London, Earthscan, 2007).

life critical to creating safer public spaces and environments, including job creation, education, culture, health and access to justice.

H. Agglomeration and efficiency

12. In developing countries, where the second wave of urbanization is well under way, cities are facing the need to invest in new urban infrastructure on a massive scale to meet the rapidly growing needs of expanding populations and economies. In 2012, it was estimated that 60 per cent of the built environment required to meet the needs of the world's urban population by 2030 still needed to be constructed.⁷ In the light of the already enormous infrastructure backlog facing many growing cities, this is an alarming figure. A very dynamic system is emerging in which the form and function of cities is being determined by institutional and corporate decisions and choices, which are sometimes corrupted by vested interests, thereby limiting individual choices. This complexity requires solution-driven approaches that bring together all these actors, their processes and the impacts of individual and institutional decision-making. Fortunately, urban agglomeration allows cities to lever proximity and scale for greater productivity and innovation at lower costs. In fact, well-planned urbanization is a cost-effective means of extending infrastructure and services across an entire country, and of improving the living standards, productivity and overall well-being of the whole population. The concentrated demand for goods and services in a limited area allows urban areas to combine greater productivity and innovation with lower costs. With the right degree of innovation and entrepreneurship, synergy in infrastructure development, management and service delivery can reduce overall material consumption, while at the same time improving the well-being of citizens.

I. Natural resources and ecosystem health

13. Urbanization can produce environmental challenges associated with intensive and inappropriate land use, resource and energy consumption, and rising difficulties in ensuring efficient and sustainable food systems. When not well planned and managed, urbanization can even increase environmental health hazards, damage ecosystems and deplete natural resources. The material flows – of people, goods, food, and environmental and other services and waste – required by the functioning of cities draw deeply on their hinterlands, complicating and blurring the transition between urban and rural areas. In many ways these transactions are depleting critical resources – fresh water, nitrogen, phosphorus, arable land – and endangering the survival of other species and indeed the viability of entire ecosystems. However, the concentration of traditionally compact, mixed-use cities can limit the overall spatial footprint of urban development, allowing for the preservation of valuable peri-urban agricultural land and habitat in which countless, often unacknowledged, ecosystem services are delivered. Furthermore, the economies of scale inherent to cities make it possible to achieve lower rates of resource use and energy consumption per capita, and the large-scale reuse and recycling of materials. When combined with a policy environment that enhances urban-rural linkages, cities can even champion sustainable food production and consumption systems. Urbanization is a process that can transform territories, connecting human settlements across the urban-rural continuum, including small market towns, intermediate cities and main urban centres, and ensuring access to adequate and affordable housing, basic services and

⁷ Michail Fragkias and others, “A synthesis of global urbanization projections”, in *Urbanization, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: Challenges and Opportunities*, Thomas Elmqvist and others, eds. (Dordrecht, Netherlands, Springer, 2013).

infrastructure for all. In this way, cities offer fertile ground for putting the circular economy into practice.

J. Climate change, natural hazards and disaster risk reduction

14. Cities are both significant contributors to and victims of climate change. They are generally high consumers of energy and producers of pollution. In fact, in its 2018 special report entitled *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change identified urbanization as one of the four megatrends that needs to be addressed to achieve the target of limiting the average global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees. At the same time, urban areas are inherently more vulnerable to risks and stresses, as set out in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, brought about by climate change and natural hazards owing to their high concentrations of population and economic activities. This is exacerbated by the fact that cities are frequently located in low-lying coastal areas, with particularly vulnerable populations often living on outright hazardous land. Nevertheless, many cities are extremely well positioned to affect both mitigation and adaptation measures. Cities that are compact and achieve a mix of residential and commercial uses offer reduced per capita rates of resource use and greenhouse gas emissions as compared to other non-urban settlement types. Moreover, cities' economies of scale and propensity to innovate make possible the use of renewable energy, the recycling of solid waste and, particularly with information and communication technologies, the detection, forecasting, and delivery to policymakers of early warnings of natural disasters. Even more importantly, when they incorporate nature-based solutions into their design and management, urban systems can benefit from multiple ecosystem services including carbon sequestration, local climate regulation, storm water capture, and water and air purification.

K. Migration

15. Human mobility, whether forced or not, has historically shaped urbanization. However, its development potential can only be harnessed with policies and frameworks that ensure that migrants, irrespective of their status, are able to integrate into and contribute to their communities. Migrants are disproportionately affected by spatial inequality and tend to settle in poorer areas with inadequate housing and limited access to land. It is therefore important that urban governance and national urban policies consider the effects of migration and the needs of migrants in order to ensure inclusive and prosperous cities. If no one is to be left behind, cities and urban areas must be inclusive in their policies and service provision from health to housing and from social protection to education. However, decisions related to migration are often State-led, which limits the ability of cities to act. Higher levels of government need to empower cities as first responders to migration by providing them with the necessary legislative frameworks, competencies and financing. Countries need cities with the capacity to leverage the potential of cultural diversity and ensure social cohesion. To achieve this, a whole-of-government approach to migration governance is essential, including at the local level with a view to enhancing both horizontal and vertical policy coherence.

L. Cities in crisis, displacement, resilience and peacebuilding

16. Global crises are increasingly complex and multidimensional. They are cyclical, recurrent, interconnected across geographical and regional boundaries and increasingly protracted. They are also increasingly urban in nature: as cities are

exposed to an ever-wider variety of hazards, they are accumulating more and more risk. Countries in fragile settings have very high rates of urbanization, often fuelled by crisis-related displacement. Extreme weather events, conflicts, forced evictions and land grabs are displacing growing numbers of people, including internally displaced persons and refugees across and into urban areas. In fact, cities have become the preferred choice of internally displaced persons and refugees, with 80 per cent of the world's 38 million internally displaced persons⁸ and 60 per cent of the 22 million refugees residing in urban areas,⁹ hoping for better livelihood opportunities, safety, and housing and shelter, as well as access to services. Cities often lack the capacity to respond to demands for infrastructure, housing and livelihoods, particularly when the shocks are acute. This is especially true for secondary cities that had weak urban management capacities and systems to begin with. In crisis situations, inequalities in access to services, housing and livelihood opportunities get exacerbated, undermining social cohesion and stability. These displacements can create societal and cultural tensions between the displaced persons and the host communities and these are sometimes ignited or worsened by political discourse. Cities have a unique opportunity to manage and integrate urban displacement into sustainable urban development strategies. During a crisis response, there is always a risk that specific neighbourhoods, in particular informal settlements, get re-engineered to change their demographic set-up or to make space for profitable development projects. All crisis response and recovery processes offer opportunities to rebuild in a better way and strengthen overall resilience, requiring a better alignment of humanitarian and development efforts. Cities in post-conflict settings, however, can become critical spaces for rebuilding the social contract, reviving institutions so that they can become more accountable and inclusive and creating transitional justice mechanisms in support of peacebuilding. Safeguarding cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible, can also facilitate peacebuilding and intercultural dialogue, while also helping to guide and support post-conflict or post-disaster reconstruction and recovery processes.

M. Regional and local governments

17. In many countries the functional accountabilities between national and city governments remain unclear. Even when they are clear, they are rarely matched with adequate financing. This can be doubly disadvantageous because financial decentralization without sufficient capacity for financial control also carries the risk of corruption. Smaller and remote administrative units may be unable to address the integrity challenges associated with strict financial management requirements, particularly in public procurement. Conflicts of interest at the local level are numerous as close interaction with the private sector and revolving door practices continually challenge the integrity of local governments. However, chapter II of the United Nations Convention against Corruption provides a framework for local governments to effectively identify, manage and prevent corruption risks. Meanwhile, local urban governments are emerging as key institutional drivers of more equitable growth and concrete action. Increasingly their work, vision and solutions are transcending local political confines and exerting regional and global influence. Local governments are increasingly decentralized, representative and autonomous, which allows them to be more responsive in general because they can be held more directly accountable for delivering progressively higher standards of living for most of their citizens – and suffer the short-term political consequences if they fail.

⁸ See <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/Habitat-III-Issue-Papers-report.pdf>.

⁹ See www.citylab.com/equity/2017/10/the-refugee-crisis-is-a-city-crisis/544083/.

III. Frontier issues

18. There are several risks and opportunities for sustainable urban development associated with the megatrends of urbanization and technology innovation, and the United Nations needs to look ahead in order to grasp their long-term impact on sustainable urbanization. The “frontier” is a concept in the making, and, in the present section it is acknowledged in its different forms: social, technological, political or environmental. Frontiers can be positive or negative for sustainable urbanization. They can be imagined but only predicted and measured to a limited extent, making the effort of anticipation an utmost necessity. The present section serves to identify key frontier areas in which the United Nations system can engage in efforts to support Member States. Each frontier issue is a force to reckon with and requires forecasting and foresight, as well as a better in-depth understanding of its impact on the future of cities and people in order to better calibrate the actions of the United Nations in the short term. An integrated response from the United Nations is crucial to enhancing the ability to capture these outlier events, mitigating their threats and maximizing their potential.

A. Digital transformation and new technologies¹⁰

19. The global economy is transforming into a digital economy, and the future of work¹¹ is one of the major structural changes. Artificial intelligence is at the heart of it and will likely be the next technology to disrupt the status quo. The reproduction of human intelligence by computer-controlled robots that can discover meaning, generalize approaches and solve problems will shape deeper and more fundamental changes in cities, from self-driving autonomous vehicles, and urban aerial ride-sharing to public safety systems informed by behaviour patterns. With new technologies come risks and challenges. What will cities look like when artificial intelligence is everywhere? Will self-driving cars eliminate parking and free space for parks, pedestrian paths and bike lanes? Are the data that drives deep learning in artificial intelligence biased? Is there any ethical concern over collecting the data needed to develop artificial intelligence applications? Since most retailers are moving their businesses online as a result of new technologies, what will the ultimate impact be on brick-and-mortar retailers and mixed, lively neighbourhoods? The answers to these questions hinge on the uptake of megatrends in technology and how they will be best suited to individual cities and countries. Yet, critically, sustainability in cities will not be primarily about tech-filled buildings, cars and tools, but about people, communities, mixed, walkable neighbourhoods and interconnectivity.

20. Artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies can play an important role in sustainable urbanization and in making cities “smarter”, more inclusive and more sustainable. Technological innovations, especially those in the realm of information and communication, can help to change the urban space in terms of connectivity, proximity and distance. They can make spaces more inclusive for persons with disabilities. Geospatial and mapping technologies coupled with artificial intelligence can further an understanding of urbanism, how the urban environment affects people and it is affected by people and the precise location of where events happen. This in turn can provide new ways for local policymakers to engage in a dialogue with their citizens and increase accountability. Tools and systems that can master housing preferences, land markets and the impact of urban revitalization will inform decision makers about topics such as taxation, infrastructure engineering and

¹⁰ See www.un.org/en/newtechnologies/.

¹¹ See CEB/2019/1/Add.2.

the delivery of public services. Artificial intelligence-based solutions can help to optimize energy usage and the artificial intelligence-enabled Internet of things can give marginalized population groups access to health-care and social and financial services that would otherwise be out of their reach.

21. It is vital to align the embedded values in these new technologies to universal values. Collective efforts are needed to increase the understanding of the impact of the digital transformation and new technologies on the future of urbanization and its potential. Efforts¹² are needed to maximize the value created by artificial intelligence and new technologies in support of more sustainable, inclusive, lively and non-discriminatory societies and cities, in particular for the urban poor and other marginalized groups. The focus should be on solutions and market mechanisms that are able to surpass technology and their systematic application when required, without affecting the rights of inhabitants, including their rights to privacy and work.

B. Sharing, privatization and anti-multilateralism

22. Since their first incarnations as trading centres, cities have always been based on the premise of sharing: their inhabitants sharing the space itself, the infrastructure embedded in it and the resources flowing through it all.¹³ However, there is an increasing tendency to privatize public goods, such as open space and water supply, commodify human rights such as housing and food, and increase dependence on monetary income. Large-scale corporate purchases of urban land and property sharply increased after the 2008 crisis, essentially functioning as storage space for capital. Similarly, an increasing number of mega real estate developments have tended to support existing segregation, thereby reproducing unsustainable urban models and undermining public control over planning and public space. The overall effect of this type of privatization is the risk that cities will be “de-urbanized”, reducing publicly owned space and more complex organic growth on a smaller scale.¹⁴ Simultaneously, existing welfare and other social protection floors are further weakened, accelerated by austerity measures, causing loss of well-being and, ultimately, productivity. This privatization is exacerbating socioeconomic vulnerability and is being exploited by xenophobic populist movements that pit socioeconomic groups against one another, drawing increasingly hard lines on the basis of ownership and leading to resistance to translocal cooperation (anti-multilateralism). This is making it harder and harder for cities to deliver on something they are uniquely good at: facilitating sharing. It remains to be seen whether pluralistic cities could help the world to re-embrace multilateralism when it is needed the most.¹⁵

C. Cities without fuel: land use and resource scarcity

23. Across all regions, urban land expansion rates are higher than or equal to urban population growth rates, suggesting that urban growth is becoming more expansive than compact.¹⁶ This dispersion has both enabled and been accelerated by the segregation of land uses. Together, the two are making cities less and less resource

¹² The High-level Committee on Programmes is finalizing a system-wide strategy on the capacity development of artificial intelligence for developing countries to respond to these needs.

¹³ Nestor M. Davidson and John J. Infranca, “The sharing economy as an urban phenomenon”, *Yale Law and Policy Review*, vol. 34, No. 2.

¹⁴ UN-Habitat, *The Quito Papers and the New Urban Agenda* (New York, Routledge, 2018) pp. 26–31.

¹⁵ See www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/populism-is-poison-plural-cities-are-the-antidote/.

¹⁶ See <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0023777>.

efficient.¹⁷ This sprawling settlement pattern is predicated on a twentieth century assumption of limitless resources, that land and oil were virtually infinite, and that people could live virtually anywhere since they could still access increasingly remote jobs and services thanks to cars and computers. Although technologies that facilitate telecommuting and low-carbon public transport can mitigate the impact, ultimately technology cannot trump geography; the current reality is one of dwindling fossil fuels, increasing air pollution, growing emissions, ever-scarcer arable land and diminishing rare earth metals. In cities in emerging economies with growing middle classes, development continues in ignorance or defiance of increasing scarcity. What will happen after peak oil, when people can no longer afford to commute such long distances? When land that has been paved with impervious material is suddenly more valuable for the soil beneath it?

D. Cities at the frontline of climate change: adaptation, de-carbonization and migration

24. In its special report entitled *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change indicates that cities are among the most vulnerable places to the impacts of global warming. If the current rate of warming continues, the world could be 1.5°C warmer as early as 2030. Regional warming could be double the global average in certain places. According to the report, at least 136 megacities (port cities with a population greater than 1 million in 2005) are at risk from flooding owing to sea level rise unless further adaptation is undertaken. This would affect 280 million people, including many informal settlements. Fifty per cent of the world's population lives within 3 km of a surface freshwater body, and over 40 per cent lives in coastal areas.¹⁸ Out of the world's 22 megacities with a population of more than 10 million, 15 are located along the ocean's coasts,¹⁹ and it is expected that 8.7 million people will be displaced by 2050 owing to sea and water level rise in Asia alone.²⁰ The economic and social viability of some cities, as well as the absorptive capacities, may be seriously compromised. Ongoing urbanization, especially in low-lying coastal areas, seems to ignore climate change and its impact, thereby rapidly increasing vulnerabilities and exposure to hazards. There would be a significant increase in death and illness from extreme weather, including heat waves exacerbated by urban heat islands. The population suffering water scarcity would double, while food insecurity caused by decreased crop yields and nutrition would result in significant increases in migration from rural to urban areas.

25. In its report, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that in order to stay under 1.5°C and prepare for warming, drastic measures to transform the way we build and manage human settlements are needed. Such measures require cutting carbon emissions almost in half over the next 12 years, thereby transforming urban and rural economies and ways of living. Efforts should be unprecedented in scale and speed to ensure social stability, economic prosperity and ecosystem integrity in the face of rapidly changing weather patterns. More work is needed to rethink current and planned urbanization, carbon-neutral building and climate-resilient infrastructure, which all can play a major role in mitigation and adaptation. Awareness-raising, education and knowledge generation will be key to promoting shared values and shifts

¹⁷ See <https://www.pnas.org/content/early/2017/01/03/1606035114>.

¹⁸ Juan Manuel Barragan and Maria De Andrés, "Analysis and trends of the world's coastal cities and agglomerations", *Ocean and Coastal Management*, vol. 114 (September 2015) pp. 11–20.

¹⁹ Susan Brown and others, "Sea-level rise impacts and responses: a global perspective", in *Coastal Hazards*, Charles W. Finkl, ed. (Dordrecht, Netherlands, Springer, 2013), pp. 117–149.

²⁰ Asian Development Bank, *Impacts of Sea Level Rise on Economic Growth in Developing Asia* (Manila, Asian Development Bank, 2017).

in attitudes and lifestyles, on a par with the need to transform economies and manage planning and building.

E. Nexus between frontier issues

26. It is important to further explore the nexus between the different frontier issues in order to advance the overall debate on the future of urbanization, the challenges it poses to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and other global agendas and the role the United Nations can play. This is particularly the case for the nexus between urbanization, climate change and migration. Climate-induced drought, flooding, sea level rises and shifts in global food production, for instance, all result in massive loss of habitat, thereby generating new accelerated migration flows. Taken together, the frontier issues increase the likelihood for social and political upheaval, regional and local conflict and subsequent further displacement. In some parts of the world this is compounded by extreme violence and protracted conflict. They present a daunting future for humanity, reshaping the urbanizing world and its demographics, and presenting a massive obstacle to sustainable urban development. Any attempt to leave no one behind will be complicated exponentially. It strengthens the argument that the United Nations should scale its collective efforts to support Member States and other stakeholders in pursuing sustainable urbanization by fully embracing the challenges and opportunities provided by the frontier issues. It offers the States Members of the United Nations concrete opportunities to leverage each other's knowledge and expertise and align its actions, building on the respective mandates.

IV. Expected outcomes

27. There is a need to enhance coherence and coordination across the United Nations system in its efforts to assist Member States in the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and related global agreements through better planned urbanization, drawing upon the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the Global Compacts for Migrants and the New Urban Agenda. It is understood that harnessing the transformative force of sustainable urbanization, as set out in section II above, through the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, can accelerate progress towards the social, environmental and economic dimensions of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. It is also key to the fulfilment of the goals and targets of other agendas, all of which have important urban and territorial dimensions. Those interrelations and the interdependencies amongst the global agendas offer a powerful instrument to articulate the coherence across the mandates and expertise of different agencies and entities of the United Nations system. Understanding the range of interdependencies among them is key to unlocking their full potential and optimizing resources within the United Nations system and across all sectors and stakeholders.

28. The Sustainable Development Goals contain an integrated set of goals and targets. The achievement of the targets under Sustainable Development Goal 11 (“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”) – to get cities right – has a transformative impact on the achievements of targets under other Goals (see figure I). There are also several “urban-critical” targets under other Goals that are essential to the attainment of good urbanization (see figure II).²¹ It is increasingly understood that achieving the Goals requires their localization, and

²¹ It could be argued that all targets of the Goals have an urban dimension. The Goals/targets captured in figure I and figure II are therefore indicative and should be viewed as strategic entry points to other targets and goals.

collaboration with local actors, including local governments, and that it is within cities that the localization of the Goals can be most effective.

Figure I
Interlinkages between Sustainable Development Goal 11 and the other Goals

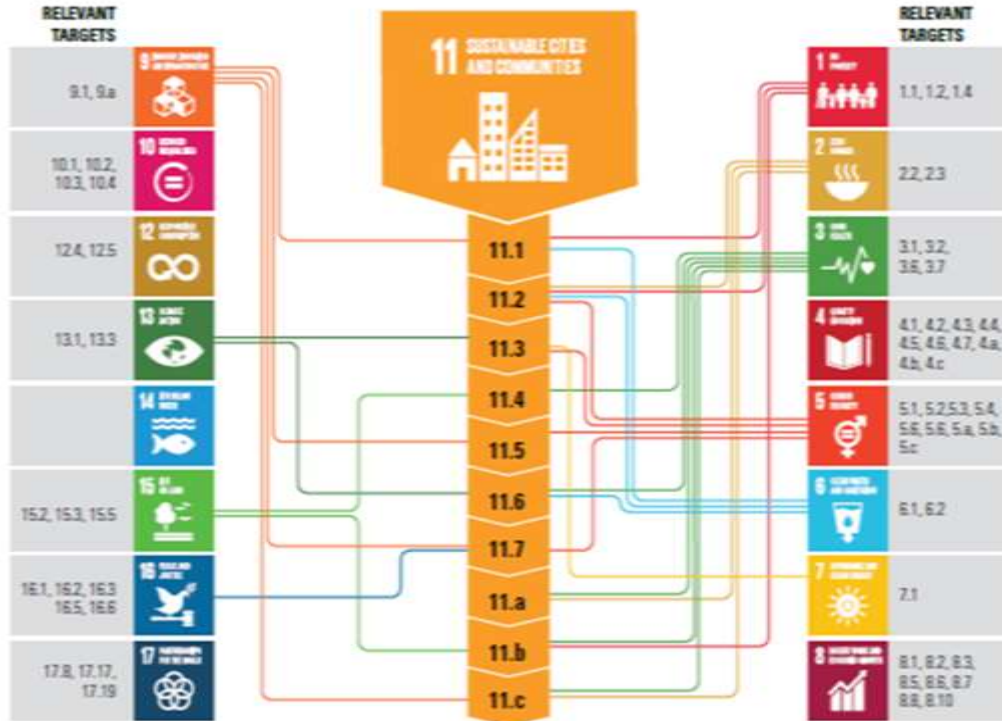


Figure II
“Urban-critical” Sustainable Development Goals and targets



29. If sustainable urbanization is seen as a driver of development and peace and is aimed at improving living conditions for all, then the it can be broken down into four overarching expected outcomes to guide joint United Nations efforts towards building on the transformative commitments of the New Urban Agenda:

- Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum
- Enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions
- Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment

- Effective urban crisis prevention and response

30. These expected outcomes will be underpinned by human rights and gender, as well as specific attention to groups at risk of being left behind, including children, migrants and displaced persons, young people, older persons and persons with disabilities. This will ensure inclusive societies and cities and harness the role of these groups, particularly women and young people, as key actors in social transformation.

Expected outcome 1

People: reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum

31. Sustainable development cannot be achieved without addressing the basic human rights of the millions of urban dwellers living in poverty and marginalization by improving access to adequate housing, healthy food, basic services and infrastructure, high quality public spaces, livelihood opportunities, mobility options, nutritious food, culture and education, and safe and healthy living environments. The principle of leaving no one behind is key to the 2030 Agenda and has its spatial equivalent. In that regard, it will be necessary for the United Nations to promote more territorial and integrated sectoral approaches at the country level by understanding the spatial dimensions of poverty and marginalization across regions, across the rural-urban continuum and within the same city, and by creating collective outcomes that connect across the relevant Goals and targets. In order to achieve this, the United Nations should support more inclusive and people-centred decision-making and planning processes that maximize connectivity, integrate formally and informally segregated urban areas and include diverse socioeconomic and marginalized groups. They should address the needs of communities across the urban-rural continuum in a coordinated way – taking advantage of synergies in mutually beneficial exchange of goods and services – to help to eradicate poverty in all its spatial forms.

Expected outcome 2

Prosperity: enhanced shared prosperity for cities and regions

32. Urbanization contributes a disproportionately high share of GDP. Well-planned and effectively managed urbanization can generate wealth, maximize the benefits of economies of scale and agglomeration, allow for integrated territorial development and connect rural and urban development. Genuinely inclusive, well-connected and prosperous cities have the capacity to transform lives across territories, thereby overcoming inequalities. The prosperity of cities is closely related to the prosperity of regions, with infrastructure supporting spatial connectivity and the productivity of both urban and rural economies, including food systems. In that regard, it will be necessary for the United Nations to assist countries in optimizing urbanization in order to transform their respective economies, for example, from agrarian to sustainable industrial systems of production; from agriculture-based employment to economies that combine services, smart agriculture and green industry; or from heavy industry to a sustainable and inclusive industrial society. Country-specific strategies will be required in order to leverage the subtle interdependence of formal and informal sectors, adopt a social and solidarity economy,²² rebalance economic, social and environmental objectives, apply a whole-of-government approach to migration governance and mobilize a digitalization process and new technologies. Such efforts should help to create collective outcomes that connect across the urban-related targets

²² See http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/cooperatives/projects/WCMS_546299/lang--en/index.htm.

of associated Goals, generating decent jobs and livelihoods, while putting the overall well-being of people at the centre.

Expected outcome 3

Planet: strengthened climate action and improving urban environment

33. Cities, including their buildings and infrastructure, can play a catalytic role in contributing to combating climate action, both in terms of mitigation and adaptation, as evidenced in the nationally determined contributions put forward by Member States. Sustainable urbanization is not possible without addressing unsustainable consumption and production patterns, the loss of biodiversity and pressure on ecosystems. The sustainable management of natural resources in cities and human settlements protects and improves the urban ecosystem and environmental services, reduces greenhouse gas emissions and promotes disaster risk reduction and management. A stronger focus is needed on water and air pollution and the causes of the spread of communicable and non-communicable diseases in urban areas. In that regard, enhanced collective action by the United Nations will be necessary in order to maximize the contribution of sustainable urbanization to taking climate-related action, creating healthy urban environments and encouraging supportive measures on transitioning to a circular economy that connects across relevant Goals and targets.

Expected outcome 4

Prevention/response: effective urban crises prevention and response

34. Sustainable urbanization is considered key to addressing some of the underlying risks of natural and human-made hazards and/or the root causes of instability and conflict, such as social and spatial inequalities, unplanned growth, unequal access to land and public goods, inadequate housing, a lack of basic services and pressure on natural resources. Sustainable development and urban development strategies can play a key role in mitigating drivers of conflicts, mitigating disaster risks and crises, building long-term resilience and contributing to the collective responsibility to sustain peace (see General Assembly resolution [71/243](#)). If crises do occur, it is crucial to base humanitarian response on a proper shared understanding of the urban crisis environment and to focus on fast-tracking recovery and on a return to more sustainable, inclusive and resilient urban development trajectories. Effective crisis prevention, preparedness, response and recovery requires a much stronger focus on social cohesion, disaster risk reduction, institutional resilience and inclusive planning and policies. In addition, addressing the needs of migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and returnees requires the full integration of such needs into urban development strategies, in order to maximize their positive contribution to sustainable development. In that regard, it will be necessary for collective outcomes to be articulated across the humanitarian, peace and development areas of the United Nations, connecting the urban-related targets of relevant Goals.

V. Implementation of the New Urban Agenda at the regional, national and subnational levels

35. With regard to urbanization, while the Goals set out mainly what the world should try to achieve, the New Urban Agenda is more focused on how to achieve it. The New Urban Agenda offers great opportunities to increase coherence and

coordination across the United Nations system, working collectively on the four fundamental drivers of change, namely: (a) developing and implementing urban policies at the appropriate level; (b) strengthening urban governance; (c) reinvigorating long-term and integrated urban and territorial planning and design; and (d) supporting effective, innovative and sustainable financing frameworks and instruments. It focuses on creating synergies across the mandates and strategic plans of different United Nations entities (e.g., making urban planning child-friendly), including actions that make it possible to maximize the impact of the drivers (e.g., ensuring accountable institutions). Norms need to be established to ensure that these drivers are applied with maximum impact. In addition, it is important for the United Nations to support the contextualization of these drivers at the regional or country level and to help to identify complementary drivers in order to maximize the transformative potential of urbanization. The United Nations should also recognize that urbanization increasingly transgresses local and/or national boundaries, requiring new forms of collaboration at different levels. In the New Urban Agenda, Member States also call for urbanization to be implemented in countries that are in situations of conflict or affected by natural and human-made disasters.

36. The United Nations supports pro-poor and inclusive urban policies at all levels in order to bring together the disjointed energies and potential of urban centres within national systems of cities and to integrate relevant sectoral policies. At the national level, urban policies offer Governments an opportunity to plan spatially, anchor urbanization as a transformative force and facilitate integration with national development plans. Urban policies can guide public and private investments in infrastructure, agriculture, multimodal transport systems, transit-oriented development and industry to support balanced territorial development. Such policies serve as excellent instruments not only for allocating resources but also for redressing social inequalities and discrimination, within and between urban areas, in order to align urban and environmental policies and to integrate urban and rural policies.

37. At the local level, municipal governments can address spatial inequalities by adopting urban policies that guide planning for commercial, industrial and residential land use, the delivery of basic services, adequate housing, access to nutritious food and creative options for urban mobility. It is equally important to ensure that the urban and territorial dimensions of sectoral policies are articulated. Integrated policy support on food systems, for example, will require the development of urban policies that have a food-related dimension. This means, for example, making a connection between food and health, water, the environment and economic development within a locality to preserve finite natural resources and meet healthy urban food consumption patterns. Effective urban policy also needs to recognize the politics of refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons that often prevent migration and displacement from being part of urban planning, without which spatial inequality is reinforced by the exclusion of migrants from services and jobs, affecting social cohesion. Legal and institutional frameworks for urban development are needed to guide urban development and ensure they respond to real needs, actual capacities and available resources on the basis of good governance, accountability and the rule of law.

38. The United Nations also focuses on supporting adequate and coherent multilevel mechanisms for urban governance. Such mechanisms should therefore be adapted to the different territorial realities as poor governance leads to the waste of resources, inefficient sectoral interventions, exclusion and an overall lack of progress. Good territorial and urban governance can deliver sustainable urban development when it is human rights-based, environmentally friendly, participatory, accountable, transparent, effective, equitable and inclusive, both in law and in practice. The United Nations supports a multiplicity of national, regional and local governmental agencies

and organizations with competing interests and influence. Improving urban governance requires the institutional framework to be as coherent as possible. The United Nations works towards strengthening urban governance, with reliable institutions and mechanisms that empower and include representatives of urban stakeholders and constituencies, as well as appropriate checks and balances that provide predictability and coherence in urban and sectoral plans to enable food and nutrition security, social inclusion and lasting, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and environmental protection. The emergence of various global, regional and thematic networks of cities and urban stakeholders makes it possible to accelerate the sharing of knowledge and encourage the development of innovative solutions to tackle complex urban challenges. The United Nations supports this networked governance, which complements the multilateral collaboration of States.

39. The United Nations supports urban and territorial planning and design as integrative and participatory processes that help to reconcile competing interests and maximize synergies between different goals and targets within a specific territory or locality. Well-planned and designed cities and human settlements can optimize economies of agglomeration, increase connectivity, facilitate sustainable mobility, protect the natural and built environment and encourage social inclusion, gender equality and child-friendly cities. The areas undergoing urbanization most quickly, which often have the weakest planning systems and capacities, should be a focus for States. As a driver of change, urban planning and design can strengthen the public good and be rights-based. It must be supported by a renewed and context-specific urban governance paradigm.

40. The United Nations needs to scale up its focus on helping to develop effective, innovative and sustainable financing frameworks and instruments to finance sustainable urbanization. Central to the achievement of a sustainable urban development agenda is the ability of national and local governments to mobilize, sequence and make effective use of a wide variety of financial sources and instruments. More and more countries and cities are aiming to use an increasingly diverse set of instruments, including blended finance, impact investment, public-private partnerships, climate funds, property taxation, land value capture, borrowing and bond issuances. Country/city ownership, multi-stakeholder partnership and higher accountability are critical to the use of these funds. Development finance by bilateral and multilateral funds should support innovative projects, pilot interventions and critical investments of capital. Financing instruments should be climate-sensitive, engage with environmentally sound activities, founded on the principles of human rights and help to overcome inequalities. A key resource is municipal finance. This is especially true of countries where local governments have the authority to levy taxes, utilize public land for coordinated planned extensions (land capture) and issue bond instruments to mobilize capital from private and institutional investors. Other important areas are community savings invested in improvements in sanitation, housing and basic urban services at the individual residential level that, when aggregated, constitute substantial resources.

VI. Collaborative implementation framework

41. Many agencies have developed urban strategies to pursue their respective mandates. Whether the mandate concerns education, culture, trade, food security, health, children or migration, such agencies are increasingly orienting their work to meet the needs of rapidly urbanizing populations. The “urban turn” of the United Nations is a good sign. However, opportunities for synergies are underutilized, and there is a very real risk of a duplication of effort by agencies and a lack of collective learning. In the follow up to the ninth session of the World Urban Forum, agencies

agreed on an informal and collaborative implementation framework organized into four functional areas, namely: data, policy and technical support, partnership and financing. The first quadrennial report (A/73/83-E/2018/62) on progress on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda allowed for agencies to map their activities in support of sustainable urbanization. Further details on those activities were provided by agency responses to the survey prepared for the present report.

A. Urban data

42. A key rallying point for coordinated United Nations action is urban data. There is an urgent need for data collection, management and analysis – and associated capacity-building requirements – in order to provide a strong evidence base and understand the interrelations among global agendas, goals and targets. Central to the effort is the need to generate and interpret data that is disaggregated by geographic location, income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status and disability. Data gaps are apparent in many policy areas and there is a significant lack of reliable data to inform urban and urban-related policies. Equally challenging is the ability of Member States to measure indicators for areas such as public space, child safety and migration. Furthermore, there are no agreed standardized methods for aggregating municipal data to establish national estimates on urbanization. Regarding data access and management, countries are only beginning to agree upon open source data and address issues of privacy. At the country level, there is no clear mechanism for sharing data across the United Nations system. The United Nations itself has not yet fully promoted a human rights-based approach to data.²³ There is a need for a United Nations system-wide approach to urban data management that would align protocols for data sharing at the global level. A further data-related challenge is the ongoing effort within and outside the United Nations to increase the data management capacities of local and national governments, including the ability to standardize, analyse and disseminate results.

43. It is encouraging to note that entities of the United Nations system have taken responsibility for relevant Goals and their indicators, which has improved coordination across the system. Several of the entities have developed systems of thematic indicators in different policy areas (notably risk reduction, resilience, culture and education), aimed at providing a more transversal understanding of the contribution of public policies in implementing the 2030 Agenda in the context of various Goals. Progress is being made in developing a global functional definition of urban and rural areas. Over 250 cities have applied the city prosperity index of UN-Habitat with the involvement of a growing number of entities. The index provides a unified indicator framework for countries and cities. Big data and information technologies are increasingly available and have created the conditions for trends to be monitored at the city level. Citizens and their organizations are using handheld devices to gather information on their neighbourhoods to engage local governments in urban planning.

44. These positive developments are a clear sign of progress. However, many countries lack an understanding of the power of data and therefore do not invest in establishing a base line from which to measure the performance of policy options, investments and programmatic interventions. This is particularly relevant in view of the emphasis placed in the 2030 Agenda on ensuring no one is left behind and the integrated nature of the Goals. Analysis and policies relating to urban food systems, for example, require data that we often do not have or that is not systematically

²³ See: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/GuidanceNoteonApproachtoData.pdf>.

aggregated (e.g. the energy and natural resources needed to produce commodities and services or to dispose or reuse surplus). The Global Migration Data Analysis Centre of the International Organization for Migration has made considerable progress in disaggregating data at the local level and measures rural-urban movement and follow-on. However, here too there is no common method for analysing and collecting data on the linkages between migration and urbanization. Migration data is already renowned for being difficult to obtain, with many different areas of government and other actors collecting partial and fragmented data or no data at all, particularly in the case of migrants with whom it is difficult to make contact, such as irregular migrants and victims of trafficking and smuggling. This continues to make it difficult to apply an evidence-based approach to policy planning and mitigate negative public perceptions around migration. There remains a similar lack of data on informal settlements. Limited access to data runs the risk of reinforcing historical and spatial inequalities, preventing those left behind from asserting their voices and agency.

B. Integrated policy and technical support

45. The New Urban Agenda itself falls short of offering practical strategies and concrete action areas for the United Nations system to support member States. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/226](#), Member States expect the United Nations system to continue generating evidence-based and practical guidance for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the related dimensions of the 2030 Agenda, as well as to further develop the action framework for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, which was drafted by UN-Habitat in consultation with the United Nations system prior to the convening of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III). Developing these guidance notes and their use in support of United Nations country teams, offers concrete opportunities to maximize synergies, avoid overlaps and gaps in the support provided to Member States by the United Nations, while considering the typology of countries. They can be the basis also to identify ways on how United Nations planning exercises (e.g. United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks) and coordination mechanisms (e.g., resident coordinator offices) can be supported with urban specific expertise.

46. In order to make sustainable urbanization policies more robust at all levels of government, a system-based approach to development is needed. Stronger collaboration within the United Nations can support the integration into such policies of various issues (food, children, environment, education, culture, migration, water, sanitation, disaster risk, health, employment, etc.). There is often a lack of coherence in terms of key policy choices (e.g. social integration, moving away from automotive transport, etc.) across sectors at the national level and across levels of government, hampering the ability of countries to move towards sustainable urban development. This calls for more integrated support for national and local governments and joined-up expertise can be easily deployed. Developing integrated policy support and aligning different levels of government is a significant challenge and needs to take widely diverse policy environments into account. Many countries continue to have centralized forms of public administration, where municipal governments lack the central government support needed to formulate urban policy and where public access to the information vital to formulating inclusive policies is not readily available. Even where devolved public administration and the right to freedom of organization exist, there are significant capacity constraints that hinder policy formulation.

47. It is equally important that the urban and territorial dimensions of the implementation strategies and plans for the other global agreements, such as the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement and the global compact on refugees are duly

developed and used to maximize the mobilization of relevant expertise across the United Nations system. In this regard, the first quadrennial report points out that significant positive interactions can be achieved through multisectoral and multi-stakeholder governance and partnerships. This can be enhanced by promoting more systems-based territorial approaches. It is also increasingly clear that achieving the Goals requires the United Nations system to focus more on localizing the Goals and working with local governments and local actors.

C. Subnational implementation and multi-stakeholder engagement

48. A major focus for the United Nations going forward – and an important aspect of inter-agency cooperation for sustainable urban development – will be for the United Nations to work with municipal and local governments while advocating the use of enabling frameworks at the national level. That is, for the United Nations to engage a country’s government at the subnational level in supporting participatory planning, urban economic development, basic service delivery and affordable housing, among other aspects of sustainable urban development. In order to enhance national legislation and policies that support the work of local governments, the United Nations should then work with ministries responsible for such areas as planning and economic development, agriculture, land, environment, health, industry, gender, education, culture, transport, housing and migration. The legislation may be as ambitious as to encompass constitutional reform aimed at the devolution of public administration or more modest in scope, such as the development of policy guidelines that help to orient local governments to implement in their localities food, health, education, water, sanitation or labour policies. By working with national Governments through local governments, the United Nations can be more effective in localizing the Goals.

49. The partnership strategy that emerges from this way of working is not confined to the public sector and is, in fact, used to assist local governments in introducing planning processes with diverse actors at the subnational level. These may include urban social movements, the real estate industry, non-governmental organizations, diaspora and migrants’ associations, institutional investors, professional associations and/or central government line ministries operating at the local level. The approach to facilitating partnerships is determined between local governments and specific groups as well as multi-stakeholder bodies convened by local governments to bring these specific groups together in a planning platform. Again, the partnership strategy at the local level should inform how the United Nations works with partners at the national level to facilitate public-private partnerships and direct engagement between duty bearers and rights holders and their organizations.

50. It is important to understand that cities are becoming self-organized, and that the United Nations can both contribute to and learn from them. Thematic city networks and campaigns, such as the campaign entitled “Making Cities Resilient: My city is getting ready”, provide ample opportunities for cities, in addition to public servants and industry, to share knowledge and best practices, augmenting United Cities and Local Governments and other traditional associations. Cities unite around common challenges and create an interconnected global market for innovation. A new generation of city networking involves framing global challenges as urban questions and suggests that cities have the leaders to tackle them, most notably the challenge posed by climate change. Non-traditional policy partners, including private foundations (e.g., Rockefeller Foundation and Bloomberg) are diversifying the scenario further. Through the proliferation of city networks there is a potential threat of fragmentation that could lead to several parallel tracks, with international organizations and foundations creating and funding their own thematic city networks.

It will be important for the United Nations system to revise its way of collaborating with city networks. More complex problems will require more heterogeneous networks and demand a certain level of social capital to enable collaborative processes to be effective. The United Nations will have to focus on building trust and establishing well-targeted incentives for cooperation in order to further strengthen the role and potential impact of city networks.

D. Local financing

51. A further rallying point for the United Nations is local financing. Resources for sustainable urbanization, including both new development and regeneration, are immense and will require massive outlays for infrastructure, utilities and adequate housing. In addition, there are costs associated with retrofitting structures and investing in the technologies necessary to achieving energy efficiency and carbon neutrality. The United Nations development system reforms that are under way, particularly at the country level, seek to equip the United Nations with the capacity to assist Member States in mobilizing the necessary public and private, and domestic and international resources to finance urban development.

52. A particularly important task for the United Nations – and one that can improve coherence – is aggregating ad hoc projects into large-scale, bankable programmes to attract multiple forms of financing. Such an effort will require discipline within United Nations country teams to overcome the tendency to seek to manage hundreds of small-scale projects and to collaborate on putting disparate projects together into thematic municipal programmes. They will also involve consolidating the norms, tools and monitoring systems of various United Nations agencies into a pre-investment vehicle that the World Bank and regional development banks can use to finance the programmes with appropriate loan instruments. By collaborating in such a way, the United Nations and international financial institutions can lower transaction costs and align investments in ways that increase the coherence of support to Member States. In moving towards larger bankable programmes, the United Nations can also mobilize domestic capital and public investment, which will entail working with Governments and private institutional investors to explore direct investment and debt financing through the issuance of bond instruments. Together with loans from international financial institutions, such resources can attract the investment needed to scale up efforts.

53. Engagement with the private sector needs to be guided by norms, standards, procedures and regulations, and to be structured in the form of mutually beneficial business models. Private developers are particularly important players in urban development, and the United Nations should seek to facilitate compacts with them and local governments to mobilize funding for infrastructure and services. Similarly, capital investment involves creating incentives and enabling regulations for the private sector. There is great potential for the United Nations to support the mobilization of domestic resources, including through property taxation and targeted land value capture. Such efforts should go hand in hand with a focus on municipal finance instruments, strengthening the fiscal capacity and the development of strong and accountable institutions and mechanisms for participatory governance.

54. In addition to mobilizing resources, the United Nations also needs to focus on the effective use of existing finances in order to ensure that public and private investment is deployed in a manner that is environmentally, socially and economically sustainable, that actively helps to overcome spatial inequalities, that is inclusive of groups with specific needs (e.g., children and persons with disabilities) and that recognizes the assets of communities, including the remittances and investments of migrants and displaced persons. The effective use of finance also requires a risk

assessment to be carried out, and risk transfer and risk insurance-based systems to be put in place for the most vulnerable.

VII. Implementation of the system-wide strategy through existing structures/processes

55. The emerging collaborative implementation framework outlined above provides the beginnings of more effective coherence and coordination across the United Nations system, in support of stronger strategic inter-agency partnerships and joint programming. The World Urban Forum, and its regional, subregional and national equivalents, as well as other global forums, such as the high-level political forum on sustainable development, can take stock of the progress made, ensure that lessons are learned and advance partnerships within and beyond the United Nations. Nonetheless, at the global level, the United Nations does not have a dedicated, inter-agency platform on sustainable urban development akin to the Environment Management Group. For the short to medium term, the existing inter-agency structures provide opportunities to promote the integration of relevant elements of the United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development into broader United Nations coordination mechanisms and reform processes, taking regional needs, contexts and United Nations assets into account. UN-Habitat, as the leading United Nations entity in this area, will continue to play a role in facilitating and promoting collaboration and coordination to realize the implementation framework.

A. Flagship United Nations reform processes

56. The system-wide strategic document to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda provides an opportunity to put urban issues among the key megatrends that the United Nations is addressing in its implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Placing sustainable urban development as part of the document demonstrates both the relevance and added value of the United Nations, specifically, in assisting Member States in achieving Goal 11 and the urban-related targets of the associated Goals on equality, economy, climate and crisis prevention and response. As highlighted in the document, the need for the United Nations to work at all levels of government makes it possible for the system to develop effective responses to assist Governments and facilitate the effective engagement of local and non-State actors.

57. United Nations Development Assistance Framework guidelines help to clarify how resident coordinators can ensure that United Nations country teams operate in a coherent manner to assist member States in managing the challenges and harness the opportunities of rapid urbanization. The common country assessment, which comes replete with urban data and diagnostic tools, will strengthen the manner in which the United Nations assists Governments and local and non-State actors in analysing urban trends and, where appropriate, in situating urban development within the United Nations Development Assistance Framework. The implementation of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks can promote sustainable development through an integrated, systems approach in which United Nations country teams help Governments to channel urbanization to achieve social cohesion, economic development, ecological sustainability, resilience and political stability.

B. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals strategic results groups and funds

58. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals offers agencies opportunities to cooperate on various aspects of sustainable urbanization and localizing the Goals. The dedicated Task Team on Integrated Policy Support can align efforts to strengthen municipal policy and planning, which can be used as a basis for promoting national urban policies. Similarly, there are a number of other task teams, including: on the issue of leaving no one behind, which is charged with developing and field testing guidelines and provides a space for agencies to contribute to spatial equality and balanced territorial development; on Sustainable Development Goal data, which enables agencies to build upon the coordinated monitoring of urban goals and targets and on methods for delineating cities and rural areas in order to develop strategies at the country level to strengthen the capacities of national and local governments to collect, manage and analyse data; and on transitions and recovery, which affords agencies opportunities to implement guidelines on land and conflict prevention and other initiatives that further development, humanitarian and the peace nexus.

59. Partnerships are excellent vehicles for promoting system-wide coherence in terms of sustainable urbanization. The task team on multi-stakeholder engagement, which is also tasked with developing guidelines, can identify ways to utilize the various global conferences to foster, monitor and evaluate partnerships. The World Urban Forum, now open to all agencies, enables the United Nations system to engage urban leaders from government, industry, social movements, local governments and financial institutions. In addition to participating in the World Urban Forum, the United Nations system can bring urban actors into global forums on such areas as health, food, children, refugees, migration and women's empowerment.²⁴ The task team on the private sector offers agencies operating in cities the opportunity to establish standards on mutually beneficial business models.

60. Financing and the Joint Fund for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are mechanisms designed to implement the transition within the United Nations system from funding (the United Nations) to financing (the Goals). The Fund, its prospective thematic window on urban issues and the various task teams of the results groups can help the United Nations to strengthen its internal capacity to identify sources of financing and large-scale bankable projects for sustainable urban development. They can also mobilize networks and public and private, and domestic and international investment at the municipal level, and facilitate the financing of Goal 11 and the urban-related targets of associated Goals.

C. Thematic inter-agency platforms

61. The United Nations Network on Migration offers a platform for promoting the inclusion of cities and other local and regional authorities. It will help to ensure that, across all sectoral areas, urban policy planning is inclusive of and capitalizes on the opportunities brought by migration and displacement. The network will serve to ensure that national and international frameworks and cooperation on migration are

²⁴ The intergovernmental meetings that are organizing local government dialogues include the High-level Political Forum (Regional and Local Governments' Forum), the United Nations Environment Assembly (Cities Summit) and the United Nations Habitat Assembly (Mayors Forum). Similar dialogues are likely to emerge at the sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women, the World Health Assembly and other meetings of international bodies.

supportive of cities and sub-national government authorities and empower them in their key role as first responders in addressing migration and displacement.

62. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee is the mechanism that allows agencies to adapt their humanitarian response to an urbanizing world. It provides opportunities to create a better understanding of urban crisis environments as a basis for improved collaboration with local stakeholders, including local government and contextualized planning and response. It also offers the basis to improve the recovery of urban areas after crises.

63. The Joint Steering Committee to Advance Humanitarian and Development Collaboration is the platform for fostering synergies and collective results between the humanitarian and development efforts of the United Nations. In urban areas it offers great opportunities to bring a swift end to humanitarian crises, strengthen the resilience of urban areas and set cities on a more sustainable trajectory for urban development. One of the aims of the Joint Steering Committee is to ensure that urban development strategies and plans include advice on the management of urban displacement.

D. Regional inter-agency platforms

64. Emerging regional coordination mechanisms for the Sustainable Development Goals offer the same kinds of collaboration platforms at the regional level as the global collaboration mechanisms for implementation of the Goals. The mechanisms will enable regional representatives of regional economic commissions, the Development Coordination Office and agencies to promote aspects of sustainable urban development. They will vary by region, with some focused on integrated policy and others on data, financing and/or crisis prevention.

65. United Nations regional coordination mechanisms on urban development are emerging in several regions. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has developed detailed guidelines on integrating urbanization into common country analysis and United Nations Development Assistance Framework processes for resident coordinators and United Nations country teams throughout the region. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) works with national statistics systems to foster inter-agency collaboration on data/statistics that strengthen regional coordination on measurement and capacity-building related to Goal 11.

66. The regional urban platforms of the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and ECLAC are in varying stages of development. All regions are building upon the action plans prepared for Habitat III to identify ways to rationalize the regional assets that can be deployed in support of sustainable urbanization. In Latin America and the Caribbean, UN-Habitat and ECLAC are working with the regional conference of housing ministers and developing an initiative, led by UN-Habitat and the United Nations Development Programme, on localizing the Goals. Similar initiatives are under way in other regions.

E. Role of the High-level Committee on Programmes

67. At the strategic level, the Committee should, as appropriate, review the implementation of the United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development and the United Nations system's collective impact at the global policy level. Such a review can serve to address (or alert CEB as appropriate) systemic issues

or structural hurdles, if any, that are hindering the smooth implementation of the strategies.

VIII. Role of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme in the implementation of the system-wide strategy and the promotion of sustainable urban development

68. The demographic shift of the world's population to urban areas has warranted the attention of the international community, as evidenced by the decision to adopt a Goal on cities and communities. Entities of the United Nations system have responded to urbanization by adjusting their strategies to fulfil the urban dimensions of their respective mandates. Established in 1978 as a member of the funds and programmes of the United Nations system with the aim of promoting housing and urban development, UN-Habitat is keen to define its role in supporting such efforts. It is committed to strengthening the manner in which entities in the United Nations system respond to the urban megatrend and channel United Nations assets in ways that are useful to Member States at the global, regional and country levels. An exemplative, but not exhaustive, list of the types of support UN-Habitat will provide to United Nations system entities is set out below. The list builds upon ongoing joint initiatives with a view to guiding the development of direct collaboration and modalities for joint programming. It can therefore serve to help the United Nations to operationalize the collaborative implementation framework in order to better support Member States in their efforts to harness the opportunities afforded by sustainable urbanization. By making the best use of these capacities and expertise, UN-Habitat will contribute towards bolstering the coherent and coordinated realization of this system-wide strategy. The types of support are as follows:

- **Standardization of urban policy, legislation, planning and financing.** This will be crucial as agencies seek to further their respective mandates by operating in cities. Rather than reinvent these drivers, the entities can work with UN-Habitat to adopt the standard practices and approaches developed by the organization over the past 40 years.
- **Provision of advisory support to agencies.** This can benefit agencies as they develop strategies to fulfil the urban dimensions of their respective mandates. Agencies are encouraged to work with UN-Habitat to design, implement and monitor urban strategies, including on health, children, environment, culture, employment or food.
- **Application of urban data and diagnostic tools.** These will be essential to agencies intent on assisting Member States in promoting urban-related policies (including on health, food and human rights). UN-Habitat will make tools available to agencies and spearhead inter-agency efforts to promote the agreed standards of measurement.
- **Provision of guidance notes on the New Urban Agenda.** This can assist resident coordinators and United Nations country teams in utilizing the New Urban Agenda in practical ways in order to situate urban data and tools in common country analyses and, where appropriate, to integrate urban development into the design of United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks, as well as implementation, monitoring and coordination mechanisms.
- **Harmonized support for Member States to monitor progress in attaining Goal 11.** Agencies are encouraged to continue to participate actively in monitoring platforms (global and regional) convened by UN-Habitat on the

quadrennial review of the New Urban Agenda and on the five-year review of Goal 11 and in supporting cities to prepare local voluntary reviews.

- **Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals.** This is of paramount importance for the United Nations system as the attainment of the Goals will be decided at the local level. In their prospective programme partnerships with UN-Habitat, agencies are encouraged to include capacity development initiatives that will assist local governments in strengthening inclusive planning, multi-stakeholder consultation and the mobilization of financing for achieving the Goals.
 - **Coordinated engagement with city networks.** This will be extremely useful for the United Nations as agencies seek to assist Member States in harnessing the opportunities provided by urbanization. Agencies are encouraged to engage directly with networks in consultation with UN-Habitat in order to improve coordination and align engagements with other city networks.
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