Habitat for Humanity International

RECOMMENDATIONS for the United Nations' Third Conference on Housing & Sustainable Urbanization

(Habitat III)

NOVEMBER 2015

In 1976, governments around the world were just beginning to recognize the effects of rapid urbanization. To address challenges and opportunities brought by this changing landscape, the United Nations convened global leaders in Vancouver, Canada to create a plan for supporting human settlements in the midst of rapid urbanization and development. The conference produced the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements, established the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-HABITAT), and would later be known as Habitat I, the first UN conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. Twenty years later in Istanbul, Turkey, the Habitat II conference would build on this momentum and establish housing as a basic human right.

Habitat III, the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, will take place in Quito, Ecuador in October 2016. The purpose of Habitat III is to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization with the focus on producing and implementing a "New Urban Agenda." Just as Habitat I and Habitat II shaped human settlement policies for subsequent decades, the "New Urban Agenda" will define urban priorities for the next 20 years. As one of the first major United Nations' meetings after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Habitat III should work to implement these global goals, especially Goal 11 which focuses on cities and human settlements. Habitat III should result in a measurable, forward-looking and action-oriented document, providing guidance and next steps for cities throughout the world.

Habitat for Humanity's Role

At the time of Habitat I, Millard Fuller was just returning to the United States after three years of building houses in Africa. Inspired by the conference's name and the strong, inclusive sense of community that the term "Habitat" embodied, he called what was previously just an idea, "Habitat for Humanity." By the time of Habitat II in 1996, Habitat for Humanity had expanded into a global organization and Fuller addressed a plenary session at the conference, stating "the task at hand, namely to assure adequate shelter and livable, sustainable communities…is too big, too daunting to leave any potential ally standing idly by on the sidelines… let us stand united to declare that miserable living conditions are unacceptable."

Leading up to Habitat III, Habitat for Humanity is playing a central role in preparation for the conference. Activities involve:

- Facilitating engagement by co-chairing the civil society working group in the World Urban Campaign's General Assembly of Partners;
- Co-leading the housing expert working group ("policy unit") established by the UN;
- Participating in regional and thematic meetings and contributing to their outcome documents;
- Presenting during the UN-sponsored "Preparatory Committee Meetings;"
- Hosting "Urban Thinkers' Campuses," interactive dialogues promoted by the World Urban Campaign; and
- Contributing to national Habitat III reports prepared by individual countries, including serving on the US National Committee.

The Housing Challenge: Urbanization

The world has changed drastically since Habitat I in 1976, but governments around the globe are still facing formidable challenges. In 2014, 54% of the global population lived in urban areas, up from 34% in 1960.[1] Urban population growth is expected to continue and the UN estimates that by 2050, 66% of the global population will live in cities.[2] This growth is predominantly occurring in Asia and Africa in countries that are often unprepared and unable to meet the growing needs of urban residents. Paired with global population growth, urbanization could add another 2.5 billion people to our cities in the coming decades.[3]

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were adopted by the United Nations in 2000, attempted to address these issues. The MDGs set a target of "by 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers." In the last 15 years, more than 320 million people gained access to either improved water, improved sanitation, durable housing, or less crowded housing conditions, meaning that the original MDG target was met and surpassed.[4]

Elements of Slum Upgrading

Community-led Development builds the capacity of local and community institutions and supports civic participation through activities such as participatory mapping and planning, education and training, youth programs, and other mechanisms to build social capital and promote inclusion.

Access to Basic Services such as improved water and sanitation, energy for cooking and heating, electricity, drainage, roads, footpaths and transportation, waste management and street lighting.

Securing Land Rights through formalization, recognition of different types of tenure options, and mapping or enumeration for recognition.

Housing renovations and repairs, structural retrofits, resilient construction and expansions to support livelihoods.

Access to Affordable Financing options such as microloans, subsidies, savings schemes, and other income opportunities.

Community Facility Improvements such as health clinics, schools, day care, parks, markets, and community centers.

However, the absolute number of people living in slums continues to grow. Today, approximately 1.6 billion people around the world are being denied the basic human right of adequate shelter. While progress has been made, the world's ability to meet the housing needs of the global urban population is currently outpaced by the rate of urbanization.

---

[1] http://www.who.int/gho/urban_health/situation_trends/urban_population_growth_text/en/
[2] http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/publications/2014-revision-world-urbanization-prospects.html
[3] http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/news/population/world-urbanization-prospects-2014.html
[4] The Millennium Development Goals 2015 Progress Report

The Importance of Land

Residential land use occupies 65 to 75 percent of the surface area of cities, yet 1 billion people in cities around the world lack secure land rights.[56] Secure land rights refer to the ability to use and control the use of land and helps define the relationship between people — as individuals or groups — and land. These rights bring with them the freedom to live without fear of eviction or property theft and can apply to a variety of formal and informal arrangements.

Land use regulations and planning, land development and management also play important roles in determining how effectively land is governed and administered.

In many countries, no formal land administration system or framework is widely available. In fact, only 25 to 30 countries in the world have a formal land system that provides nationwide coverage.[7]

Secure land rights can provide people with:
A legal right to the use and control of property and the opportunity to be full citizens with rights and responsibilities.
The ability to qualify for and acquire municipal services and infrastructure.
A social and economic base to consolidate and improve their livelihoods.
The ability to buy and sell their ownership or user rights.
The opportunity to invest in their property with greater assurance that they will enjoy a return on that investment.
The option to use their ownership rights as collateral for business or investment purposes.

Most developing countries have less than 30 percent coverage of a formal system.[8] Even when a formal registration and administration system is in place, the process of establishing a right to land can be complicated with numerous steps, lengthy delays or high fees. In Haiti, for example, the average time to properly register land is 312 days.[9] Poor governance, lack of transparency and corruption also adversely affect land transactions.

As a result, many households in the developing world are forced to operate in complex informal arrangements, making them vulnerable to displacement, evictions, and loss of livelihoods and property, and unable to gain any of the social and economic benefits associated with security of tenure. Fortunately, in many cases where a country's laws do not provide formal land rights, incremental options exist to provide households with the security they need to invest in their homes. As secure land rights increase, both in perception and in reality, households are able to gradually feel more confident in their right to the land, which translates into investment in homes, communities and families.

The fundamental nature of secure land rights presents a substantial opportunity for Habitat III: Strengthen and enforce secure rights to land and thus help achieve myriad other development goals.

---

[5] http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Habitat-III-Issue-Paper-20_Housing-2.0.pdf
[6] Habitat III, United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, Issue Paper 9: Urban Land.
[7] University of Twente, Social Domain Tenure Model, www.itc.nl/Pub/services/Major-projects/Social-Tenure-Domain-Model-STDM.html.
[8] University of Twente, Social Domain Tenure Model, www.itc.nl/Pub/services/Major-projects/Social-Tenure-Domain-Model-STDM.html.
[9] World Bank, "Doing Business: Measuring Business Regulations," available at doingbusiness.org.

The Solution: A New Urban Agenda

While urbanization can pose challenges, cities are also the engines of economic growth and provide opportunities for better health, schools, access to basic services and infrastructure. Transforming slums into sustainable communities must be a key component of the New Urban Agenda, and provision of secure tenure and housing are key catalysts to achieve that transformation. In the context of an increasingly urban world, Habitat III and the creation of an actionable New Urban Agenda is more important than ever. Habitat III will bring together cities, governments, civil society, the private sector, education institutions, and interest groups to review urban housing policies. The participation of local communities and their partners is particularly important as community members understand their needs and what works best given their particular contexts. Involving local constituencies can ensure policies are appropriately targeted and have necessary buy in.

Habitat III will also be one of the first UN global summits held after the adoption of the SDGs and offers a unique opportunity to address the challenges of urbanization, offer specific recommendations and help shape the implementation of the new global development goals. That framework, which the UN General Assembly adopted in September 2016, includes a goal to "make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" and a target to "ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums." The outcome of Habitat III – the New Urban Agenda – will determine whether the world achieves this target.

Recommendations for Habitat III

The outcome of Habitat III will influence housing policy around the world for years to come. If Habitat III is to integrate all facets of sustainable development to promote equity, welfare and shared prosperity, it must:

- **Emphasize housing.** Housing, both in the informal and formal sector, reduces poverty, generates jobs and economic growth and is critical in addressing energy consumption and climate change. As the Sustainable Development Goals confirm, the availability of adequate and affordable housing is essential in fostering safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

- **Prioritize security of tenure and access to land**. People shouldn't live in constant fear of eviction and must have the ability to use and control their land. The foundational nature of secure land rights presents a substantial opportunity for Habitat III: Strengthen and enforce access to land, land rights and secure tenure to develop both communities and cities in which they reside.

- **Foster community-led development.** Communities know their needs and should be able to define their future. Habitat III must incorporate the priorities of citizens and communities, especially for women, the poor, and vulnerable groups, as well as the organizations supporting them. Beyond input, community organizations should be included in decision making processes and be formally part of implementing the New Urban Agenda.

- **Set specific and accountable measures.** To end poverty, the world needs more than good ideas. Habitat III must produce an outcome document with specific and measurable commitments that contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and account for how cities will grow and evolve over the next two decades.

SOLID GROUND

This report was prepared in conjunction with Solid Ground, a global advocacy campaign of Habitat for Humanity. Solid Ground's mission is to change land policy and systems to ensure that more people around the globe have a decent home.