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THE ROLE AND CONTRIBUTION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES, THE PRIVATE
SECTOR, PARLIAMENTARIANS, NGOS, AND OTHER PARTNERS IN THE
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HABITAT AGENDA

Note by the Secretariat

Summary

At its third substantive session, held in New York in February 1996, the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) decided to include in the provisional agenda of the Conference an item on the role and contribution of local authorities, the private sector, parliamentarians, NGOs and other partners in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. The present note has been prepared by the Secretariat to facilitate the work of the Conference under this item which will be taken up by Committee II. Accordingly, the note provides a brief rationale of the need for a broad partnership for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and describes the proposed process by which the views of non-State partners on their respective roles in the implementation of the Agenda, as well as their potential contribution, will be elicited. This leads finally to a series of suggested recommendations by the Conference on a framework of cooperation between the international community, national governments and non-State partners, and the relationships amongst them, in carrying out the programmes and objectives of the Conference plan of action, the Habitat Agenda.

I. BACKGROUND

1. The collective power of people to shape the future is greater now than ever before, and the need to exercise it is more compelling. Mobilizing that power to make life in the twenty-first century more democratic, more secure and more sustainable is the foremost challenge of this generation. The world needs a new vision that can galvanize people everywhere to achieve higher levels of cooperation in areas of common concern and shared destiny*.

2. For there is no doubt that recent decades have seen a radical transformation of the world and the agenda of global concerns and that this transformation gave impetus to the series of major United Nations conferences of the 1990s, beginning with UNCED and culminating with Habitat II, intended to respond to emerging global challenges, whether political, economic, social or environmental, reach agreement on a common agenda and harness the energies and talents of people everywhere around a shared vision of social and economic progress in the century to come.

3. For the Habitat II Conference, two trends in particular stand out which will significantly shape the course of human settlements development and management in the twenty-first century: the progressive urbanization of the globe and the devolution of powers and responsibilities away from national governments to other institutions, organizations and sectors of civil society. The reasons which underlie these defining phenomena range from profound global and national economic and social change to the acceleration and deepening of processes of democratization and participation in many countries, with a host of new political and social organizations demanding a voice in national and local affairs, fuelling what has been called elsewhere an "associational revolution".

4. This has had a powerful impact also on the mechanics and modalities of international cooperation. One figure is illustrative enough: whereas the number of international non-governmental organizations operating in three or more countries was less than 200 at the beginning of the century, and barely changed for the next six decades, since the 1960s the number has grown to a phenomenal 30,000 today and is increasing yearly. When combined with the activities of other organizations which fall outside the traditional intergovernmental framework, this amounts to a parallel network for international cooperation which must be taken fully into account and appreciated in the follow-up to the Habitat II Conference, at the international, national and local levels. Further, as responsibility for economic growth, investment and development is progressively shifting to the private sector, any plan of action, to be successful, must be able to enlist the support of private economic agents, among others companies, banks and financial markets.

* See, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, the Report of the Commission on Global Governance, Oxford University Press, 1995.

A. Habitat II: A New Partnership for Development

5. This is particularly critical in the case of the Habitat Agenda, for in a more and more urbanized world, human settlements, large and small, will be the primary locus and focus of economic activities of social and political transformation and of efforts to improve the quality of human life, as well as that of the environment. This not only requires the active engagement of local authorities, but of all of those with a stake in human settlements, given the growing diffusion of political and economic power and responsibilities in societies today. For no single actor will have the resources, nor the power - economic, social or political - to determine the course of human settlements growth and development; it requires the cooperation of others. All of this has profound implications for the new partnerships needed at the international, national and local levels to achieve sustainable development. It also has profound implications for the international community, and for national governments, on how to conceive effective strategies for sustainable development.

6. The need for broad partnerships to achieve sustainable development was already foreshadowed at the "Earth Summit" in Rio de Janeiro in 1992: Agenda 21, the global plan of action adopted in Rio, specifically calls on those outside central government, all "major groups", to take up specific tasks and responsibilities in the implementation of the Agenda. The preparatory process for the "City Summit" has taken up where the "Earth Summit" left off, with the goal of making the preparatory process and the Habitat II Conference a true exercise in partnership, with the ultimate aim being to carry the partnership forward in the years following the Conference, as it will be absolutely essential to successful implementation.

B. The Habitat II Preparatory Process: The Role of Partners

7. The preparatory process for the Habitat II Conference has already demonstrated the efficacy and wisdom of this partnership approach. It has enriched the preparatory process and the draft Habitat Agenda. Local authorities and their associations, relevant United Nations agencies and other multilateral institutions, parliamentarians, the private business sector and private foundations, non-governmental and community-based organizations, research institutes, investors, professional associations, religious communities and women's and youth organizations have all made significant contributions during the preparatory activities which synthesized the principal issues of sustainable human settlements development to be addressed in the Agenda. During the preparations for the Conference, their understanding of and perspectives on the challenges encountered in every facet of life and work in urban and rural settlements were taken up: from transportation to participation; from housing to water supply; from health to governance and conflict resolution; from land tenure to finance. All these issues were addressed by Habitat II partners both exterior to and within the open national committees established by Governments, at regional meetings and at expert gatherings. Following their substantial contribution to its content, it is reasonable to expect that the various non-State participants in the formulation of the Habitat Agenda will also become active partners of national governments and the international community in its implementation.

C. A New Division of Tasks and Responsibilities

8. Given the newly emerging political, economic and social realities at the national and international levels, the new responsibilities of both national governments and institutions, agencies and organizations active at the global level will be primarily one of enablement, of facilitating a process whereby all participants in human settlements development and management act synergically towards common Agenda goals. In other words: at the national level, central governments would promote development through partnership, mediate conflicting positions and take the leading role in coordinating the political process of the new partnership within the framework of overall agreed-upon national economic, social and environmental objectives. At the international level, multilateral institutions and organizations, in particular the agencies of the United Nations system, will assume a similar role, and reach out to new partners, sharing costs and responsibilities, while working towards mutually shared goals.

D. The Emerging Major Partners

9. And who will be their new partners? Firstly, they will be the local authorities, the level of government with daily responsibility for sustainable settlements growth and development, and secondly, the private sector, which in coming decades will have primary responsibility for investment in infrastructure, jobs, housing and services. To these must be added the growing "third sector" of civil society, from foundations to non-governmental and community-based organizations, which are more and more frequently taking on tasks which until now were public responsibilities: in the social arena, in the fields of health care, housing, service provision and education, among others. The "third sector" also includes advocacy groups, from women's and youth organizations to environmental and human rights activists, all of which form part of the social mosaic of human settlements and have a vital role in ensuring that they are just, equitable and sustainable.

10. The major partners also include other important groups of actors whose contributions will be essential in articulating human settlements needs and concerns at the national, regional and international levels. These include parliamentarians, on whose actions as legislators will depend to a significant degree whether human settlements receive the kind of political and economic support at the national level which can facilitate sustainable local development. Included among the new partners are also trade unions and professional organizations, whether active nationally or internationally. For with globalization and urbanization come new and unanticipated challenges and technological and social change, affecting not only employment structures and the perspectives for work, but also confronting human settlements professionals with new tasks, related to the physical design of settlements and the environmental, social and economic sustainability of their growth and development. New avenues of research must be explored, new technologies designed and put on stream.

E. The Habitat Agenda as a Global Social Contract Among Partners

11. Recognition of the contributions of the various actors to future human settlements development has informed the preparatory process for the

United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) from the outset, and was the primary reason for adopting the partnership approach that has been so successful in the run-up to Istanbul. Just as success in the preparatory process was inconceivable without the active involvement of these partners, the implementation of the Habitat Agenda cannot remain on course without their active engagement. For human settlements development to proceed, all partners must commit themselves to undertake specific actions within the framework of the Agenda, turning it, in effect, into a global social contract for sustainable local development. National governments, even those working in conjunction with existing multilateral institutions and agencies, cannot do it alone, especially in view of the consequences of globalization and urbanization. In the coming decades, although human settlements, particularly towns and cities, will become the focus of attention as the keys to economic and social progress and environmental sustainability, the decisions that will ultimately determine whether they prosper will be made by private investors and companies and by other civil institutions and organizations. At the same time, given the centrality of human settlements to a sustainable future, it is evident that it is ultimately in the self-interest of all, whether entrepreneur or slum dweller, government official or artisan, that they flourish. The challenges are immense, whether from an environmental, social or economic perspective. The financial resource requirements for infrastructure, services and housing alone are enormous, and beyond the capacity of the public sector and multilateral institutions to provide on their own. But they must be found if development, economic growth and employment generation are to proceed at the pace required to guarantee global political and social stability. Everyone therefore has a vital stake in the sustainable development of human settlements, and this is why all have a stake in the Habitat Agenda and its implementation.

12. It is this understanding which initially compelled all those outside of central government to join the preparatory process, and unless the goals and programmes of the Habitat Agenda are taken up by civil organizations and institutions everywhere, and internalized and reflected in the activities of economic actors, professionals, political groups and social organizations, the Agenda will not succeed in its aims. The consequences of this would be enormous, for the issues addressed in the Habitat Agenda are issues which every country, every locality, will need to confront and resolve over the coming decades, with a Habitat Agenda or without one. Having the Agenda, however, and following its recommendations, will allow the international community as represented at the Habitat II Conference to do so in a collective, coordinated, deliberate and, ultimately, less costly manner.

II. The Role and Contribution of Partners in the Implementation of the Habitat Agenda

13. The second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) was conceived from the beginning as a Conference of partners and partnership, as reflected in its preparatory process and in the workings of its Preparatory Committee, and partnership will have to be, for the reasons indicated, the guiding principle underlying the implementation strategy for the Habitat Agenda as well. One of the main tasks before the Conference at Istanbul will be to forge a practical, mutually-beneficial, evolutionary modality that will create a dynamic and sustained working relationship between State and

non-State partners for the successful implementation of the Agenda, supported at the international level by multilateral institutions and, in particular, by the United Nations system. For this to be fully realized, it is essential that the following be kept in mind by all partners:

- (a) The facilitating role of the State and central government institutions;
- (b) The need to create a positive enabling environment, at the national and local levels, that will encourage the full participation of all actors in human settlements development;
- (c) The need to implement institutional restructuring to accommodate meaningful participation of non-traditional partners in decision-making leading to sustainable human settlements development;
- (d) Acceptance of the fact that in the twenty-first century, development will become increasingly a function of a wide range of partners, prominent among which will be the private sector in all its forms;
- (e) The need for greater accountability and transparency among the cooperating partners;
- (f) The need to avoid duplication and to encourage functional specialization among the cooperating partners, whether at the international, national or local levels.

Enabling Partnership

14. Furthermore, to enhance the contributions of all partners in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, and to ensure their sustainability over time, the Conference may also wish to consider in its recommendations a strategic enabling approach which includes, *inter alia*, the following:

- (a) Development of planning and policy-making procedures that facilitate partnerships and cooperation between governments, at all levels, and civil society, including the private sector;
- (b) Facilitating business enterprises to pursue investment and other activities, including non-commercial activities, that can contribute to sustainable human settlements development, especially in the generation of employment opportunities, provision of social support services in the community, and the acceleration of the construction of housing and infrastructure;
- (c) Enabling and encouraging all major groups outside of government to participate in the planning and implementation of human settlements development programmes, especially in relation to employment opportunities, access to social services such as health, education and training, and the rational use and conservation of non-renewable and environmental resources;

- (d) Encouraging the creation of viable and equitable settlements and shelter development finance mechanisms, ensuring access to land and security of tenure, and ensuring gender equality in the settlements development process, among others;
- (e) Encouraging research institutes and institutions of learning to undertake results-oriented research in the field of sustainable human settlements development and housing provision;
- (f) Supporting, at the international level, the creation of an effective, coordinated framework for cooperation in the areas of shelter and sustainable human settlements development and growth.

15. A strategic approach that includes these suggested measures, among others, will do much to facilitate the contribution of non-State partners to implementation in such critical areas as, for example, shelter delivery, sustainable land use, urban and rural finance, provision of infrastructure and basic services, employment creation, environmental protection and conservation, sustainable transport and communication, preservation of cultural heritage, and disaster prevention and mitigation. However, experience has shown that the building of partnerships for human settlements development can be complex, difficult and sometimes diffused. Although no easy solutions are available, a consensual approach to the forging of practical modalities must remain the accepted guiding principle at the Conference when these issues are addressed at the "Partners' Hearings" conducted by Committee II.

III. The Partners' Hearings at Istanbul: Building Consensus, Making Commitments

16. These "Partners' Hearings" will be central to making the Habitat II Conference a true conference of partnerships, and especially for forging a consensus among partners as to the manner by which they - along with national governments and international agencies and bodies - will apportion tasks and begin to commit themselves to the implementation of the aspects of the Habitat Agenda closest to their individual interests, expertise and area of responsibility. The Hearings will also provide a conduit between the formal Conference and the parallel meetings and events at Istanbul, in particular the meetings of the major groupings of Habitat II partners which will take place there just prior to the Conference.

A. The Role of the Partners' Forums

17. At the "Partners' Forums", local authorities, non-governmental organizations, unions, professionals, the private sector, parliamentarians and foundations will, *inter alia*, discuss their own future role in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and will be requested to prepare a written statement which will include:

- (a) A brief description of the non-State partner's role in the preparatory process for the Conference as well as of the proceedings at their respective Partners' Forum;

- (b) A succinct summary of the issues involved in "housing for all" and "sustainable human settlement development in an urbanizing world", from the point of view of the global constituency of each of the partners' forums;
- (c) Specific commitments on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, the plan of action of the Conference, as well as suggestions on the implementation strategy for the Habitat Agenda;
- (d) Constraints, at the international, national and local levels, that in the view of the partner, should be removed or attenuated so that the specific commitments made can be fulfilled;
- (e) A summary declaration, if deemed necessary.

These written statements from each of the partners' forums will be forwarded and presented to Committee II to facilitate its work and the preparation of its report to the plenary of the Conference. It is expected that there will be seven partners' forums in which local authorities, non-governmental organizations, private sector enterprises, professionals, foundations, trade unions and parliamentarians, respectively, will take part. With the exception of the NGO Forum, most of these will be one- or two-day events. An additional day will be reserved for a Partners' Assembly, which will allow for an open exchange of views across sectors and among all the partners.

B. The Hearings: Expected Procedure

18. It is envisioned that the Partners' Hearings of Committee II will begin on the second day of the Conference and last approximately five days, with both morning and afternoon sessions. Each of the Partners' Forums will select the names of their representatives at the hearings and forward them to the Chairman of Committee II. Following an invitation by the Chairman of Committee II to address the Committee on a specific day and time, the representatives will present their statement to Committee II sitting in session. At the conclusion of the reading of the Statement, it is anticipated that Delegations will have the opportunity to direct questions at the representatives or to elicit explanations or clarifications on aspects of their respective statements. It is expected that the Bureau of the Conference, during the pre-Conference consultations from 1 to 2 June, will finalize the rules of procedure to be adopted for the Hearings.

C. Contribution to the Conference

19. The aim of the Hearings will be to allow the partners to present to the Conference their views on the implementation strategy for the Habitat Agenda, how they see their respective roles in that implementation and what they consider to be the priorities for implementation. At the conclusion of the hearings, the Committee, informed by the partners' forums through their representatives, will deliberate on its report, which is expected to include a series of recommendations, to be adopted by the Conference in the form of resolutions, on the implementation strategy for the Habitat Agenda and the specific roles of the various partners in it. It is also expected that Committee II will make recommendations in its report to the plenary of the

Conference on measures to be adopted by Governments and the United Nations system to facilitate the role of non-State partners in the implementation of the global plan of action of the Habitat II Conference. Further, it is also expected that the Committee, informed by the Hearings, will also include recommendations on the future framework for cooperation among the various partners at the national, international and local levels. For this reason, one session during the hearings will be taken up by presentations by representatives of United Nations agencies to elicit their views on this critical aspect of implementation. It is also envisioned that the deliberations of Committee II, and its report and recommendations, will be further informed by the presentations of the Chairmen of the Habitat Dialogues for the Twenty-first Century, a series of 10 high-level exchanges of views among experts on key issues of human settlements development, which will be open to the public and which is expected to generate recommendations which will be presented to Committee II during the second week of the Conference.

D. Globalizing a Shared Vision

20. In essence, the principal aim of the Partners' Hearings to be held under the auspices of Committee II at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul will be to define the priorities for action and to lay the groundwork for the practical modalities of post-Conference cooperation. The Partners' Hearings should also allow the Conference to reach a consensus on the role of the Habitat II partners, on their interrelationships as well as their relationships with central governments, and on their respective contributions to achieving sustainable human settlements development within the framework of the Habitat Agenda, based on their views, testimony and commitments. It is also expected that their commitments and views on implementation will be annexed to the Agenda and reflected in their respective Post-Istanbul policies and work programmes, leading to a globalized vision of human settlements development, to shared priorities and to new forms of cooperation at the international, national and local levels. Such diffusion of the goals, recommendations and programmes of the Habitat Agenda in society at large will ultimately be the best guarantor of success.
