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Economic and environmental questions: human settlements

New strategic orientation of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

Note by the Secretary-General

Summary

In response to resolution 26/3 of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the Executive Director led the formulation of a results-oriented strategic plan for the period 2020–2025. The plan was subsequently endorsed on 6 December 2018 by the Committee of Permanent Representatives, which is the Governing Council's permanent intersessional subsidiary organ. The plan will be presented for approval to the newly established United Nations Habitat Assembly in May 2019. The plan, along with the related proposed changes to the subprogramme structure of UN-Habitat, will inform the proposed programme budget for 2020 for UN-Habitat.

Pending the consideration and approval of the strategic plan for 2020–2025 by the Habitat Assembly, the Secretary-General requests that the Economic and Social Council authorize him to proceed, on an exceptional basis, with the preparation of the proposed programme budget for 2020 for UN-Habitat based on the new strategic orientation of UN-Habitat as detailed in the draft strategic plan for 2020–2025 (HSP/CPR/71/10), without prejudice to any subsequent action that the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly may take on the report of the Habitat Assembly.

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I. Background

1. In its resolution 26/3, adopted at its twenty-sixth session, in May 2017, the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) requested the Executive Director to consult and work closely with the Committee of Permanent Representatives during the preparation of a results-oriented six-year strategic plan for 2020–2025 and present it to the Governing Council at its twenty-seventh session.

2. Accordingly, a strategic plan for the period 2020–2025 was formulated in 2018 and was subsequently endorsed by the Committee of Permanent Representatives, which is the Governing Council’s permanent intersessional subsidiary organ, at its seventy-first meeting, on 6 December 2018 (HSP/CPR/72/L.1, para. 58).

II. Rationale for a new strategic orientation: changing to increase impact

3. The strategic plan for 2020–2025 will be the first plan following the adoption of a number of important global agreements in 2015 and 2016, including, in particular, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (including Goal 11 on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and the New Urban Agenda.

4. The strategic plan for 2020–2025 presents a strong narrative of change, clearly articulating the relationship between sustainable urbanization and the overall notion of sustainable development. The plan is focused on generating a positive impact and outcomes for those furthest behind, in particular women and youth in cities and other human settlements. The plan sets out a recalibrated vision and mission and brings into sharper focus how UN-Habitat proposes to serve Member States, subnational and local governments and other key urban actors in fulfilling its commitment and contributing to the implementation of the global development agendas, in particular the premise of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind”.

5. The strategic plan for 2020–2025 is repositioning UN-Habitat as a major global entity, a centre of excellence and innovation. In that respect, UN-Habitat is refocusing on its niche as the thought leader and principal entity that sets the global discourse and agenda on sustainable urban development, drives political discussions, generates specialized and cutting-edge knowledge, shapes technical norms, principles and standards and acts as a multiplier in the exchange of knowledge, experience and best practices in relation to cities and human settlements.

6. As a centre of excellence and innovation, UN-Habitat also advocates sustainable solutions through demonstration, pilot and innovative operational projects that can be adapted and scaled up by countries and other partners, while ensuring that normative outcomes inform transformative operational solutions and that, in turn, field operations influence normative work. By catalysing networks of partners, including local authorities, and policymakers in leading the large-scale implementation of cutting-edge solutions, UN-Habitat will be able to bring about transformational change to benefit millions of people, ensuring that no one and no place is left behind.

7. Urbanization is one of the global megatrends of the present day – unstoppable and irreversible. In 30 years, two thirds of the world’s population will live in urban areas. Ninety per cent of urban growth will occur in less developed regions such as

East Asia, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, at a rapid pace and in situations where capacities and resources are most constrained and development challenges are most intense. Urbanization in such parts of the world is largely unplanned, fuelling the continuous growth of informal or slum settlements. Indeed, in developing countries, slums and informal settlements, which currently accommodate close to 1 billion people, are the physical manifestation of urban poverty and inequality. In 2015, about 2.3 billion people still lacked access to basic sanitation services, and 1.2 billion people lacked access to clean drinking water worldwide. Waste water from less than 35 per cent of the cities in developing countries is treated. Moreover, today, 1.6 billion people globally live in inadequate housing and often do not have security of tenure.

8. Cities play a key role in mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change, but are also often most at risk from its effects. Urgent and radical action to transform urban systems is required well before 2030 to contribute to limiting global warming to 1.5°C. Rural areas are also affected and often do not benefit from overall growth, feeding continuous rural-urban migration, which adds complexity to the numerous issues that must be dealt with in relation to cities and other human settlements. There are currently 763 million internal migrants and 224 million international migrants in the world, most of whom live in urban areas, which means that every seventh person in the world is a migrant.

9. Poverty, humanitarian crises and conflict are becoming increasingly urban phenomena. According to figures in 2016, 80 million people globally were displaced by conflicts and disasters.

10. In sum, the challenges posed by the current model of urbanization have global ramifications that, if not addressed adequately and innovatively, could jeopardize the chances of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

11. Despite the challenges, urbanization presents an opportunity for change at all levels and for all types of human settlements, from small rural communities, villages, and market towns, to intermediate cities and metropolises. Research has shown that urbanization can have a positive catalytic impact on development and deliver improved living conditions to the furthest behind. Cities and towns can help drive the sustainable agenda in connection with social and cultural change, environmental protection and economic growth, as the principles of the circular economy are embraced. Contributing about 80 per cent of global GDP, cities function as catalysts, driving innovation, consumption and investment, making them a positive and potent force for addressing issues related to poverty, social exclusion and spatial inequality, shared prosperity, climate and the environment, and various forms of crisis. Most importantly, sustainable urban transformation presents an opportunity to work with all types of actors and communities, in particular those traditionally excluded from such processes.

12. The implementation of the strategic plan for 2020–2025 will provide pathways to accelerate the transformation towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Getting cities right, which is the overarching aim of the New Urban Agenda and Sustainable Development Goal 11, will make it easier to attain other development goals and targets and to achieve meaningful progress in realizing gender equality and the inclusion of youth. However, this will require creativity, human and financial capital and joined-up efforts at the global, regional, national and local levels, in countries at every stage of development.

III. Process of formulating the strategic plan

13. The process of formulating the strategic plan for 2020–2025 took into account lessons learned from the implementation of the strategic plan for 2014–2019, the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Sendai Framework and the New Urban Agenda and was guided by the internal change process being carried out by UN-Habitat, as well as the overall United Nations reform process, in particular the reform of the United Nations development system.

14. Between April and May 2018, as a basis for the development of the new plan, the strategic planning team carried out a comprehensive situation analysis, taking into account the findings, lessons learned and recommendations of the main reviews, audits, evaluations and assessments of UN-Habitat.

15. To ensure that the work of UN-Habitat has a real effect on transforming lives, notably for the furthest behind, and to strategically consolidate and improve the positioning of UN-Habitat as a centre of excellence and innovation, a theory of change approach was used to drive the development of the strategic focus for 2020–2025. As a result of applying the theory of change approach, new vision and mission statements for UN-Habitat were crafted.

16. The vision statement is: “A better quality of life for all in an urbanizing world”.

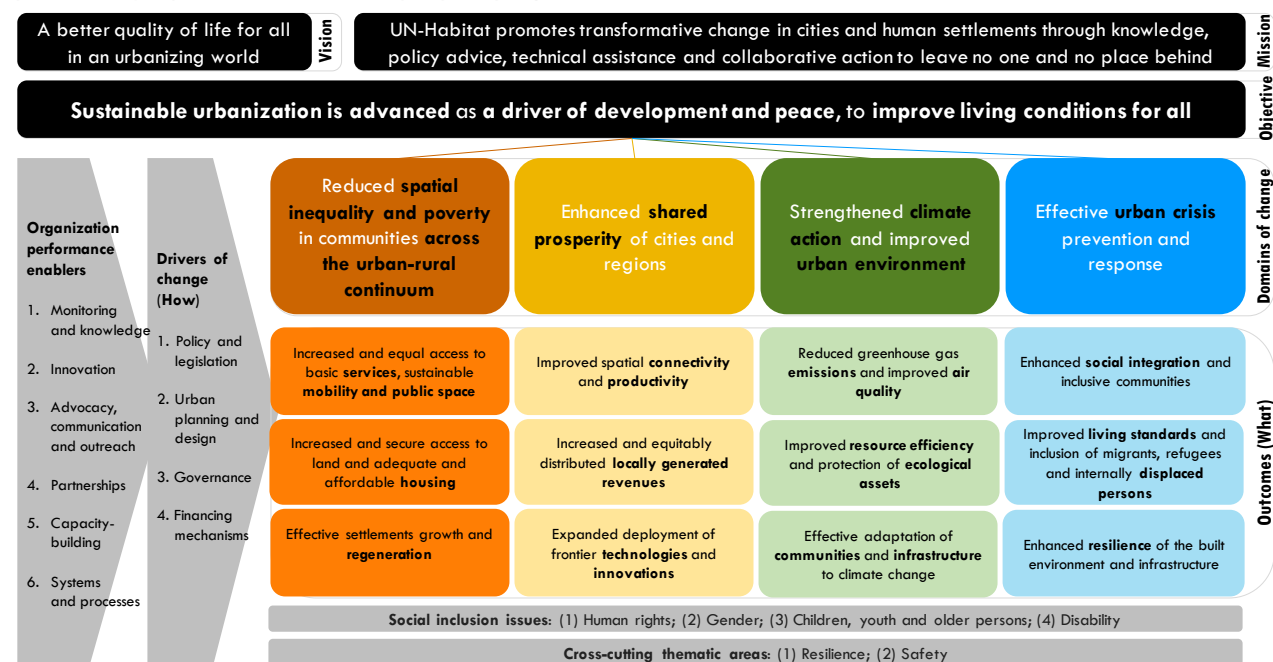
17. The mission statement is: “UN-Habitat promotes transformative change in cities and human settlements through knowledge, policy advice, technical assistance and collaborative action to leave no one and no place behind”.

18. The vision and mission statements inspired the objective of the strategic plan for 2020–2025, defined as: “To advance sustainable urbanization as a driver of development and peace, to improve living conditions for all”. Four mutually reinforcing domains of change or goals were identified for achieving this desired change (see figure below):

- 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

UN-Habitat theory of change

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR 2020-2025



19. In describing these four domains of change in the strategic plan for 2020–2025, UN-Habitat elaborates on its niche and value proposition and how it will collaborate with other United Nations agencies and other stakeholders to achieve these goals and to ultimately reach its objective over the six-year period. The Sustainable Development Goals and the sections of the New Urban Agenda to which each of the 12 outcome areas contributes is specified. This approach will allow UN-Habitat to use the plan to play an increasingly catalytic role in response to previous feedback from members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives.

Endorsement of the strategic plan on 6 December 2018 by the Committee of Permanent Representatives

20. The Subcommittee on Policy and Programme of Work of the Committee of Permanent Representatives met on 5 November 2018 to discuss the zero draft of the document, and again on the 29 November 2018 to discuss the advanced draft, which addressed Member States' comments on the zero draft.

21. At the last meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives of 2018, held on 6 December 2018, agenda item 9 concerned the endorsement of the proposed draft strategic plan for 2020–2025. The final draft of the strategic plan for 2020–2025 was well received by Member States and was endorsed by the Committee of Permanent Representatives at its seventy-first meeting.

IV. Implementation of the strategic plan

22. UN-Habitat strategic plans are implemented through rolling work programmes and budgets (proposed programme budget). Traditionally, three consecutive strategic frameworks were derived from the strategic plan, which were ultimately developed into work programmes and budgets.

23. Following the reform of the United Nations planning and budget cycle, and subject to further decisions by the General Assembly in this respect, the strategic plan for 2020–2025 will be implemented through six annual work programmes and budgets. This, however, will require the seamless alignment of the annual work programmes with the strategic plan.

24. In the light of the above, the proposed programme budget for 2020 will comprise the subprogrammes detailed below.

Subprogramme 1: Reduced spatial inequality and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum

25. Under this subprogramme, UN-Habitat will consolidate its vast experience in the area of basic services, housing and slum upgrading, land, urban mobility and public space. The International Guidelines on Decentralization and Access to Basic Services for All and the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning are essential frameworks for guiding outputs under this subprogramme. Building on these, and other normative guidance and extensive experience in implementing field projects in areas such as public space, sustainable mobility, water and sanitation, basic social and physical infrastructure and energy, the efforts in these areas will be scaled up. The expanded focus on effective settlements growth and regeneration is in response to explicit demands for UN-Habitat support from Member States, local authorities and partners, and will utilize the experience of UN-Habitat with planned city infills and urban renewal, as well as in-situ upgrading, including in heritage areas. The outcomes in this subprogramme represent the core business of UN-Habitat. However, in exercising its focal point role, it will collaborate with a number of other United Nations coordination bodies, such as UN-Water, UN-Energy and Sustainable Energy for All, and United Nations entities, such as the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as well as a large number of non-governmental partners and stakeholders and the private sector.

26. The following thematic areas covered in the strategic plan for 2014–2019 are consolidated in this subprogramme:

- Urban basic services (current subprogramme 4)
- Urban legislation, land and governance (current subprogramme 1)
- Housing and slum upgrading (current subprogramme 5)
- Urban planning and design (current subprogramme 2)

Subprogramme 2: Enhanced shared prosperity of cities and regions

27. Under this subprogramme, UN-Habitat will need to build its knowledge and expertise. The expanded focus on connectivity and regional planning is determined by several studies that have demonstrated the strong connection between urban and regional planning and the promotion of shared prosperity. Working with strategic partners, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the World Bank and others, UN-Habitat will support government authorities at different

levels to develop policies, frameworks and actions to boost the productivity of cities and regions through an integrated territorial development approach. Working with the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the International Organization for Migration and other organizations, UN-Habitat will promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all, in particular women and youth through specific policies and actions.

28. This new subprogramme represents an expanded area of work for UN-Habitat, consolidating the work on locally generated revenue or municipal finance and inclusive economic growth covered under current subprogramme 3, Urban economy and municipal finance.

Subprogramme 3: Strengthened climate action and improved urban environment

29. Under this subprogramme, UN-Habitat will act as a catalyst for connections and actions in the global climate arena, linking global actors and policies to national and local contexts. The agency will build these linkages through a strategically designed process combining policy advice, technical support, advocacy, thematic expertise, knowledge production and sharing on international best practices. In this manner, UN-Habitat climate action programmes will create a platform to facilitate linkages in both directions, from global to local and from local to global, as local and regional governments engage in these processes. In order to support Member States in taking climate action and improving the urban environment, UN-Habitat will work together with United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Environment Programme to mainstream environmental considerations into local, national and global urban policymaking, as well as highlight local-global linkages in relation to environmental issues. UN-Habitat will also work with the secretariat of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to enhance awareness of climate change issues and the dissemination of knowledge and international best practices to support the implementation of climate change strategies. It will also work with the World Health Organization to help governments to develop and implement clean air action plans. In the area of adaptation, building the climate resilience of the urban poor will be a particular area of attention.

30. Under this new subprogramme, UN-Habitat will expand its work on climate change adaptation and mitigation carried out under current subprogramme 2, Urban planning and design.

Subprogramme 4: Effective urban crisis prevention and response

31. On the basis of its decades of experience in crisis-affected countries and its specific urban and human settlements expertise, UN-Habitat is called upon: (a) to better support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in countries affected by conflict and natural and human-caused disasters; (b) to ensure that its work contributes, in a coordinated manner, to the United Nations system commitment to sustaining peace and a comprehensive whole-of-system response to complex emergencies; (c) to better support Member States in their efforts to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030; and (d) to better support Member States facing challenges caused by the mass influx of migrants (Governing Council resolution 26/2). UN-Habitat is in a position to offer integrated solutions in support of broader humanitarian, development and political efforts led by other United Nations entities, in particular the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The work of UN-Habitat on land, for instance, supports the broader conflict prevention work led by the United Nations Development

Programme, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, the Peacebuilding Support Office and others. It is important for UN-Habitat to contribute its expertise to relevant United Nations networks, such as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the United Nations Network on Migration, and to provide urban advisory services to humanitarian and resident coordinators.

32. Under this new subprogramme, UN-Habitat will consolidate its work on resilience, recovery, reconstruction and crisis response covered under current subprogramme 6, Risk reduction, rehabilitation and urban resilience.

33. The work of UN-Habitat currently carried out under subprogramme 7, Urban research and capacity development, is being consolidated under organization performance enablers (i.e. monitoring and knowledge, and capacity-building). These cross-cutting functions must be performed across all subprogrammes in line with the repositioning of UN-Habitat as a centre of excellence and innovation.

V. Conclusion

34. Pending the consideration and approval of the strategic plan for 2020–2025 by the Habitat Assembly, the Secretary-General requests that the Economic and Social Council authorize him to proceed, on an exceptional basis, with the preparation of the proposed programme budget for 2020 for UN-Habitat based on the new strategic orientation of UN-Habitat, as detailed in the draft strategic plan for 2020–2025 (HSP/CPR/71/10), without prejudice to any subsequent action that the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly may take on the report of the Habitat Assembly.
