

Guide on National Habitat Committees (NHCs): Purpose and Composition

Background

In preparation for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul in 1996, many countries established National Habitat Committees (NHCs). These were innovative in that they combined central government, civil society and private sector representatives to engage productively in the urban debate. The committees were reconvened to prepare for Istanbul+5 in 2001. For both events, the NHCs were effective in identifying challenges as well as reporting on achievements in addressing urbanization, housing and slum issues.

The United Nations General Assembly (GA) has recently decided to convene a third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), to be held in 2016 (GA Resolution 66/207). In preparation for this Conference, as well as in the implementation of other key high level urbanization activities, UN-Habitat would like to engage extensively with Governments and key Habitat Agenda Partners in the UN Member States. In paragraph 22 of its resolution 62/198, the UN General Assembly encourages "... Member States to strengthen or establish, as appropriate, broad-based national Habitat committees with a view to mainstreaming sustainable urbanization and urban poverty reduction in their respective national development strategies." UN-Habitat sees NHCs as an excellent mechanism to enhance its interaction with key Habitat Agenda Partners at the national level.

This brief guide describes the purpose and proposed composition of the National Habitat Committees (NHCs). UN-Habitat encourages every Member State to establish a NHC or, if it already exists, to strengthen it in line with the purpose and proposed composition outlined below. Some countries already have National Urban Forums (NUFs), which could add on the functions outlined below, while continuing with their current mandates.

Purpose

As a result of its substantive rethinking of sustainable urbanization, UN-Habitat has decided to more vigorously promote planned and inclusive urban development so as to comprehensively address the challenges of slums and informal urban growth, avoid the emergence of new slums, and use urbanization as a means of enhancing national development. In the next few years, NHCs, and NUFs, will be invited to collaborate with UN-Habitat in the following major areas:

1. Country level preparations for Habitat III;
2. Impact of urbanization on national and local development;
3. Urban job creation directly through construction and urban basic services industries, and indirectly as an investor multiplier of the national economy;
4. Improved economic and social efficiency of the city, better mobility plans, better water and sanitation services, better drainage and energy provision;

5. National urban policy, including population growth forecasts, transportation and energy corridors, intermediate cities, market towns and small settlements and the promotion and formulation of a Global Housing Strategy;
6. Engagement with the World Urban Campaign.

In addition, NHCs could provide inputs to national preparations for sessions of the UN-Habitat Governing Council and the World Urban Forum, and be involved in UN-Habitat activities at the country and city levels in their respective countries.

Composition

It is proposed that the NHC be composed normally of representatives of the following actors, and be open to additional ones, as deemed appropriate by the Committee:

- National government**, represented by the key ministries and institutions dealing with urbanization, including but not exclusive to, local government, urban planning and development, housing, lands, infrastructure, labour, economic development, finance, and gender;
- Local authorities**, including their national associations and/or the capital city, as well as medium and small towns, the latter being also geographically, functionally and historically important;
- Civil Society and the Private Sector**, including NGOs, the media, professional societies, the private sector, women's and youth groups, minorities and special interest groups;
- Academic institutions**, including universities, as well as research and training institutions; and,
- External support agencies**, including bilateral and multilateral donors, the United Nations, international NGOs, and other support agencies.

Periodicity of meetings

It is proposed that the periodicity of meetings be decided upon by each Committee, in line with their areas of engagement with UN-Habitat, and the issues under consideration. There are, however, several key events for which Member States will be invited to provide inputs to UN-Habitat, or to participate in, including the following:

- March 2013:** Twenty-fourth Session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council
- 2014:** Seventh Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF 7)
- Mar. 2015:** Twenty-fifth Session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council
- 2016:** Habitat III

Proposed Time Line

In order to start, in good time, preparations for the organizational meeting of the Preparatory Committee for Habitat III and the twenty-fourth session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council, it is proposed that Member States establish their NHCs by June 2013, and, at the same time, provide to UN-Habitat information on the composition of their Committees as well as on their Committees' focal points.