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Dialogue on urban sustainability**Environment, economy, society: commitment to a culture of partnerships for sustainable urbanization****Abstract**

This paper builds on the notions formulated by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and its partners relating to sustainable urbanization, one of the outcomes identified for implementation by the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and the methods for its attainment. The concept calls for a culture of partnerships, namely: increased commitment by all development partners to support a coalition of joint efforts, particularly in the area of the urban environment at the local, national and global levels. The concept also links these commitments to the Millennium Development Goals, the outcomes of the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development (on water, sanitation and human settlements), and global environmental issues. A culture of partnerships can help make sustainable urban development both achievable and effective, through increased resources, stronger action and better implementation and impact. Achieving “sustainable urbanization” as defined by UN-Habitat is a process towards a goal, and a very dynamic and multidimensional one at that. It includes not only environmental, social and economic dimensions, but also political and institutional aspects. This paper does not attempt to address all these dimensions, but primarily focuses on partnerships in the area of environmental sustainability. “Sustainable urbanization” has no ready-made menu to follow; there are no quick or easy answers, and no short cuts either. Instead, UN-Habitat has opted to look at it as a process of challenges and responses – which in practice comes down to improving urban governance in such areas as municipal autonomy and empowerment (including decision-making and effective participation), effective decentralization, adequate basic urban services, social justice including balanced environmental impact, gender responsiveness, local capacity development and mobilization of local resources. The paper reviews several instances of practical partnerships at the local, national and global levels. It also identifies challenges for the future and suggests how they might be met.

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Discussion points

- There is a need to increase participation of different kind of partners and institutions at local, national, regional and global levels to realize sustainable urbanization;
- More participation of local authorities in national decision-making on urban environmental topics is necessary to support the development of sustainable urbanization;
- More linkages between global environmental topics and local concerns and actions are needed;
- More coordination and synergy are needed between United Nations agencies and their programmes to strengthen the outcomes in the field of sustainable urbanization.

Dialogue on urban sustainability

I. Introduction

1. The notion of “sustainability of cities” which UN-Habitat and its partners discussed and developed during the first World Urban Forum has now been refined into the concept of “sustainable urbanization”. Subsequently, and for the twin purposes of implementation and building partnerships, this concept has given rise to the Coalition for Sustainable Urbanization that was launched at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development as a contribution to the type-2 outcome on partnership commitments for implementing Agenda 21. The present paper focuses on this coalition and its commitments in the area of the urban environment at the local, national and global levels. Its central tenet is that a strong culture of partnership commitments can help make sustainable urbanization both achievable and effective.

2. In 2000, 2001 and 2002 respectively, the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements in the New Millennium and the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development further reinforced the commitment of the international community to sustainable urban development and poverty reduction. The normative and operational responsibilities of UN-Habitat are well reflected in the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, specifically in the above-mentioned Coalition for Sustainable Urbanization, one of the World Summit’s partnership implementation commitments. The notion of “sustainable urbanization” plays an increasingly important role in the pursuit of global objectives, and particularly Millennium

Development Goal 7, which is to “ensure environmental sustainability”, and more specifically its target 11: “Improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020, gradually moving towards cities without slums”. UN-Habitat and UNEP are jointly promoting and leading three urban environment partnerships, known as “Demonstrating local environmental planning and management”, “National capacities for upgrading local Agenda 21 demonstrations”, and “Local capacities for global agendas”.

A. Sustainable urbanization and Millennium Development Goal 7, target 11

3. Sustainable urbanization has a number of defining features. It is a very dynamic and multidimensional process. It includes not only environmental but also social, economic and political institutional sustainability; it brings together urban and rural areas, encompassing the full range of human settlements from village through town and city to metropolis. In this way, sustainable urbanization links cities and their environment at the local, regional, national and global levels. For instance, it provides a framework for the environmental impact of cities on their hinterlands. This broader scope enables sustainable urbanization to move beyond pointless arguments about urban versus rural. Sustainable urbanization accepts the reality of urban growth and migration among human settlements, and it concentrates on effective management of the process.

4. Poverty, gender inequality and deprivation of the quality of life are central challenges to sustainable urbanization; no process of urbanization or development will be sustainable unless it successfully tackles these issues. Accordingly, the economic and social dimensions are crucial to sustainable urbanization in human settlements of all sizes. Another consequence is that the scourge of HIV/AIDS, which has such powerful effects on cities and poverty, is a vital concern that must be integrated into sustainable urbanization.

5. Good governance (including local and central government and civil society) is another core concern. It has an essential role to play in the urbanization process. When endowed with adequate powers, resources and operational capacity, combined with empowered and capable communities and local partners, local authorities can play a central role in sustainable urbanization. For instance, safe water supply and good sanitation in human settlements are vital for health and economic prosperity – especially for the poor – and for sustainability (as indicated by the Commission on Sustainable Development at its twelfth session). Such facilities can only improve when communities, civil society and local government work together.

6. Sustainable urbanization has both short-term and long-term perspectives. It is not only concerned with current problems and immediate improvements. It also looks ahead, emphasising capacity development for better urban environmental planning and management practices and institutional arrangements, to deal with future issues and situations. This is valid not just in relation to the environment, but also in tackling poverty and social exclusion.

7. With regard to the Millennium Development Goals, the thrust of UN-Habitat/UNEP environmental partnerships and other similar programmes responds particularly well to the target of cities without slums and others mentioned under Millennium Development Goal 7, on ensuring environmental sustainability, through such approaches as normative measures and advocacy, capacity-building and knowledge management, as well as operational activities and outputs, as briefly illustrated below, in the following section on challenges and responses. The overarching strategy is that for development planning achievements to be truly sustainable, cities must find better ways of balancing the needs and pressures of urban growth and change with the opportunities and constraints of local environmental resources.

B. Challenges and responses

8. It is accepted that the main challenges to, and constraints on, sustainable urbanization lie in lack of planning, implementation and management capacities on the part of local governments and their local partners. Overcoming these barriers, which have many dimensions, requires major efforts if sustainable urbanization is to become a reality.

9. The challenges, and appropriate responses, can usefully be considered under the heading of “good governance”, which includes:

- (a) Democratization of decision-making and enabling effective participation of all local stakeholders, including women and the urban poor;
- (b) Municipal autonomy and empowerment, including an appropriate legal, regulatory and financial framework for local government;
- (c) Public sector reform, including a shift from a supply-led to a demand-driven approach to public services;
- (d) Effective decentralization of authority and resources, both from national and regional government to local authorities, and within the local government to subunits and communities; and
- (e) The vital role that local authorities and their local partners must play if sustainable urbanization is to become a reality.

10. These challenges call for a variety of responses, particularly with regard to capacity building directed at the full range of local stakeholders: local authorities, non-governmental organisations, communities, youth and the private sector. In addition, there is a need for exchange of information and mutual learning, including city-to-city and community-to-community cooperation. Another capacity building task is to make cities aware of, and responsive to, their broader effects on the environment. Equally important is the development of institutions, procedures and capabilities for communities (especially the poor) to become significant and active partners in local urbanization.

11. A key challenge is to integrate gender and youth concerns and responsiveness into operational procedures and actions at the local level. Women and youth groups play a leading role in many of the most successful community-level initiatives, especially in poor areas. They are in any case best placed to articulate their own needs and priorities.

12. Mobilization of local resources, whether public or private, is another key challenge. For instance, several innovative programmes have eloquently demonstrated the ability of poor communities to generate sufficient resources of their own to build and maintain local water and sewerage facilities. Adopting and promoting the approach whereby reliance is placed on a community’s own resources, or other privately owned resources, is a major prerequisite if urban residents are to have access to adequate water and sanitation. Initiatives such as community contracting have also proved effective for mobilizing local resources, building local skills and capacities, empowering local communities, and generating local jobs and income.

13. Lack of coherence and of mutual support among the many international aid programmes often hinders local responses to the challenges of sustainable urbanization. We need a more demand-led approach, where external agents work with local authorities and their partners on a long-term basis and in a more integrated sort of way.

C. Cities, development and the environment

14. The United Nations concerns itself with the urban environment because cities are major engines of development: they absorb two thirds of all population growth, offer economies of scale in the provision of shelter, jobs and services and are efficient production centres. But environmental degradation stands in the way of the contribution to development that cities can make, as it threatens to undermine economic efficiency, social equity and the sustainability of development achievements. Accordingly, efforts must be made to tackle the more pressing environmental issues arising in towns and cities. This is particularly true in the context of crowded neighbourhoods, where environmental issues include: poor sanitation and drainage, impassable roads, unsafe water supply and run-down services, uncollected garbage, polluted rivers and fouled air. These problems generally result in environmental health hazards, poorer living standards, higher costs, productivity losses and slower social and economic development. But environmental degradation is not inevitable. We badly need a proactive management approach based on an understanding of the complex interactions between development and environmental resources. This is because the source of the problems we face lies more often in limited

management capacities – ineffective and non-inclusive governance – than with a lack of technology or capital. Urban environmental problems are complex, multidimensional, interactive and dynamic – requiring better ways of balancing the needs and pressures of urban growth, as well as adjustment to the opportunities and constraints of local environmental resources.

D. Well managed urban environment

15. A well managed urban environment is achievable; the thrust must be on building capacities in environmental planning and management at the local level in cities around the world, developing and using the type of technical cooperation that brings local authorities to the forefront of sustainable development policies.

16. The boxed items in chapter II below show that planning and management capacity-building strategies do deliver. Today increasing numbers of urban partners participate, at city level, in a variety of global urban environment programmes, including the Sustainable Cities Programme jointly led by UN-Habitat and UNEP, and the localizing Agenda 21 programmes. Implementation includes systemwide, broad-based consultative participation in policy-making, and policies looking at improving basic social and community infrastructure (including safe water and sanitation), along with institutional practices for system-wide environmental governance to build and manage stronger local partnerships. Local stakeholders improve development information and expertise, including decision-making, policy implementation capacities, changing management and strengthening institutional arrangements. Local entities are also increasingly resorting to global instruments, collecting data and building networks for the sake of better management of environmental resources and better control of urban hazards and disasters – over and above using cross-cutting planning approaches as a matter of routine.

E. UN-Habitat/UNEP areas of support

17. UN-Habitat and UNEP mandates coincide in the area of urban environment. The extensive operational experience gained by UN-Habitat in project-level local development and its accumulated expertise in practical urban management dovetail with the scientific and technical strengths of UNEP, which include databanks, international networks, global accords, and expertise in all aspects of the environment. Another major area where UN-Habitat and UNEP complement each other lies in their current global campaigns for developing urban governance standards and on environmental agreements and global issues, respectively. Both agencies seek to encourage local responses to, and implementation of, these campaigns which they hope will also rub off on national policies. There is an increasing need to establish local mechanisms and capacities to support a two-way interaction that takes in local priority issues, means and opportunities, together with adaptation and implementation of global standards and methods.

18. Furthermore, UNEP and UN-Habitat jointly act as the secretariat for the urban cluster under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). They also help promote the flagship "Sustainable NEPAD City" scheme, an apt demonstration of how international agencies can contribute to global-local partnerships at the regional level.

II. Partnership, implementation, commitments

19. To implement the above-mentioned responses and to promote sustainable urbanization, a broad range of partners must upgrade their efforts, especially in the area of the urban environment. As mentioned at the outset, a number of urban environment partnerships have joined the "Coalition for Sustainable Urbanization" endorsed during the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

20. Partnerships come in all forms and sizes and involve a variety of targets and partners. Those detailed in the following paragraph are primarily led and promoted by UN-Habitat/UNEP and close partners, and are implemented in coordination with other United Nations agencies, national Governments, local authorities, associations, research institutions and other parties.

A. Local level: practice in environmental planning and management

Box 1. Partnership in environmental planning and management

Partnership in environmental planning and management

This partnership furthers Millennium Development Goals (access to water and sanitation and improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers) through its focus on participatory planning, decentralization, and social inclusiveness in decision-making.

The main partners include UN-Habitat, UNEP, ILO, UNDP, cities and capacity-building institutions.

21. The partnership focuses on strengthening the capacities of local authorities and their public, private and community partners, in order to make urban development more sustainable from a triple – i.e., social, economical and environmental – point of view.
22. Belgium and the Netherlands – the major donors – support the new phases of the localizing Agenda 21 programme of UN-Habitat and the joint UN-Habitat/UNEP Sustainable Cities Programme, which aims at broadening environmental planning and management experiences. Through expanded and more systematic cooperation with related international initiatives such as the UNDP public-private partnership for the urban environment and the Advisory Support, Information Services and Training (ASIST) programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO), this partnership addresses issues such as sustainable mobility and improved basic urban services for the urban poor and marginalized groups, including better employment generation.
23. The key objectives of the partnership are:
 - (a) To provide municipal authorities and their partners in the public, private and community sectors with improved capacity to implement environmental planning and management and to apply policy;
 - (b) To reduce poverty through more efficient and equitable management of environmental resources and hazard controls for sustainable urbanization;
24. The expected results of the partnership include:
 - (a) Improved urban planning through environmental profiles, as well as environmental management information and expertise from a broad variety of stakeholders involved in decision-making on urban environment issues;
 - (b) A strategic development planning framework for the city, including sector-investment strategies and replication of local environmental improvement initiatives;
 - (c) A broad-based participatory process ensuring common visions and commitments for implementation by all stakeholders involved;
 - (d) Local capacity-building programmes on environmental planning and management, organized by the local authorities, and targeting the full range of urban stakeholders, including the public, private and community sectors;
 - (e) Employment through improved urban environmental services to help reduce poverty;
 - (f) Replication of the mechanism to upgrade successful environmental activities at city level;
 - (g) Reviewing of existing arrangements for participatory evaluation and monitoring of environmental and institutional improvement activities.

*Box 2. Localizing Agenda 21 programme***“Localizing Agenda 21” programme**

Since 1996, the “Localizing Agenda 21” programme of UN-Habitat helps cities to mobilize partners with a view jointly:

- (a) To evolving a long-term vision;
- (b) To devising and implementing action plans; and
- (c) To facilitating participation and interaction among stakeholders.

*Box 3. Example of a local Agenda 21 initiative in Cuba***Urban river management in Bayamo, Cuba**

Through its Local Agenda 21 initiative, the city of Bayamo is reclaiming the Bayamo river as a well-managed resource within the urban fabric. A number of actions are underway to meet the challenge; many others remain to be undertaken which require involvement of the full range of local stakeholders (local authorities, industrial firms, specialized institutions, non-governmental organizations, the academic sector and the population).

*Box 4. Health and Agenda 21***Health and Agenda 21: Working with the people to develop a comprehensive vision of a healthy and sustainable city - Preston, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland**

This initiative builds on the work and interests of the borough council and partner organizations, which agree on the need for a holistic overview of quality of life. This endeavour recognizes that a sustainable society is dependent on the interplay between economic, social and environmental factors as they relate to health, as well as the need for major decision makers to work closely together towards a strategy that will ensure full community involvement.

B. National level: upgrading local Agenda 21 experiences*Box 5. Partnership in upgrading local Agenda 21 experiences***Partnership in upgrading local Agenda 21 experiences**

This partnership promotes upgrading of the local Agenda 21 initiatives of local authorities into national policies, bringing in pivotal urban institutions, city-to-city networks and North-South cooperation.

The main partners include: UN-Habitat, UNEP, ILO, UNDP, national Governments, local authority associations, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and capacity-building institutions.

24. The partnership focuses on enhancing the capacities of local and central authorities and urban training institutions to integrate the lessons of local experiences into national policies and legal frameworks as a matter of routine.

25. Based on the large number of joint experiences on environmental issues with municipal authorities, UN-Habitat and UNEP are constantly collating relevant lessons in cooperation with local and central Governments and national urban training institutions. The aim is to build national capacities and policies to enable replication of the successful experiences of other cities, and to multiply the positive impact of the investments made in connection with these experiences.

26. The key objectives of the partnership are:

(a) To integrate the lessons drawn from the experiences of other cities into national sustainable urbanization and poverty alleviation policies, strategies and attendant legal frameworks; and

(b) To develop an institutional framework and national networks for sustained environmental planning and management support.

27. The expected results of the partnership include:

(a) Better organized national networks (mainly through national associations of local authorities) of cities and institutions, to exchange lessons of experience and to identify local issues of common concern which need to be addressed at the national level;

(b) Strengthened national capacities of Governments, local authority associations and urban learning institutions to support localizing Agenda 21 initiatives;

(c) Mechanisms to integrate the lessons of local experience and activities into national sustainable urbanization and poverty alleviation policies, strategies and the attendant legal framework;

(d) A national capacity development programme to strengthen the skills and institutional arrangements needed for environmental planning and management;

(e) National environmental planning and management support anchored with institutions, including adaptation of global environmental planning and management tools and practices; and contributions to regional and global learning networks.

Box 6. Local Agenda 21 initiative in Sweden

Sweden's National Committee for Agenda 21 and UN-Habitat

In June 2000, the Swedish Government appointed a national committee for Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda, consisting of 11 representatives of political parties under the chairmanship of the Minister for Housing. The national committee coordinates Sweden's work on Agenda 21 and sustainable development along with the country's commitments under the Habitat Agenda. Subsequently, many Swedish municipalities took the lead in implementing local Agenda 21 initiatives and placed themselves at the forefront on a world scale.

Box 7. Local Agenda 21 initiative in Morocco

Morocco's local Agenda 21 : From experience to national replication

In 1996, the city of Essaouira began preparations for its local Agenda 21. This exercise contributed to the city's inclusion in the prestigious UNESCO World Cultural Heritage list, among other achievements. Since then, the Moroccan Government has been supporting local authorities in Marrakech, Meknes and Agadir as they took to developing their own local Agendas 21.

*Box 8. Local Agenda 21 initiative in France***France's Committee 21**

Practical action is the guiding line of France's Committee 21. In its early years the committee focused on awareness campaigns. Nowadays it concentrates on supporting, identifying and promoting good sustainable urbanization practice and its integration into management structures. The committee facilitates the translation of the concept of sustainable development into practical action based on consensus and sharing, and subject to ex post hoc evaluation

C. Global level: Local capacities for global agendas*Box 9. Partnership on local capacities for global agendas***Partnership on local capacities for global agendas**

This partnership assists those local authorities that contribute to regional and global environmental policies and implement them through debate and capacity-building, global involvement of local authorities, achieving Millennium Development Goals, and following up on multilateral environmental agreements, the UN-Habitat Agenda, outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. The main partners are: UN-Habitat, UNEP, regional programmes, national Governments, local authority associations, the private sector and international non-governmental organizations.

28. The partnership's role is to develop the local capacities and routine mechanisms required to adapt and implement global environmental standards. It also assists those local stakeholders willing to share local experiences and know-how, priorities and concerns towards the development of global principles and standards. Cooperation with international support programmes and regional initiatives is crucial to this partnership. In addition, UN-Habitat and UNEP are currently looking into defining and establishing a suitable mechanism that would make it easier for local capacities to play a meaningful role in the two-way link between local priorities and opportunities on the one hand, and global concerns and initiatives on the other. These include the global campaign standards of UN-Habitat (namely, transparency and accountability, equity, civic engagement, urban safety) and the environmental concerns of UNEP (e.g., climate change, land-based marine pollution, biodiversity). Dialogue will pave the way for the development of strategies with the international local government community (such as represented by the organization United Cities and Local Governments) and regional councils, as well as for international meetings such as the World Urban Forum at its second session, the Commission on Sustainable Development and the global partners meeting of the Sustainable Cities Programme, among others.

29. The key objectives of the partnership are:

(a) To help cities make critical, effective contributions to sustainable development, focusing on urban poverty reduction, combating social exclusion, improving air quality, water, sanitation and waste management;

(b) To strengthen the capacity of local stakeholders in the planning, implementation and management of sustainable development, with special attention to multi-stakeholder and participatory decision-making regarding access by the urban poor to housing, land, infrastructure, basic services and transportation.

30. The expected results of the partnership include:

(a) Cohesion and collective efficiency of international support to local and national capacity-building, particularly through the exchange and transfer of knowledge, expertise and experience on

environmental issues among local authorities and their business and civil society partners;

(b) Development and mainstreaming of global standards for sustainable urbanization, related environmental issues and multilateral environmental agreements, together with mechanisms to ensure contributions based on local needs and experiences as well as local response;

(c) Adaptation and implementation of global standards at the urban level (e.g., climate change and air pollution, land-based impact on ecosystems and the marine environment, and protection of biodiversity);

(d) Sharing of lessons of experience and expertise between cities and urban and environmental institutions in different regions of the world through regional and global resource and learning networks.

Box 10. UNEP/UN-Habitat global/local concept

UNEP/UN-Habitat global/local concept

These two United Nations bodies have launched an initiative to make municipalities better aware of the crucial role that cities play both as contributors to, and practitioners of, global environmental issues and standards. The initial step is the publication of a number of information leaflets to highlight the linkages between local concerns and major global environmental issues, such as local concerns regarding air pollution and the global concerns regarding climate change. Further publications will include information on technical support and instances of good practice from all over the world.

Box 11. “Cities for Climate Protection” campaign

“Cities for Climate Protection” campaign

The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) launched the “Cities for Climate Protection” campaign in 1993. Since then, the campaign has committed hundreds of municipal authorities – generating a combined 8 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions – to a worldwide effort to slow global warming. The campaign aims at supporting participating cities as they pursue their emission-reduction goals. Technical tools and information, training workshops and overall assistance have been designed to link the global issue of climate change with air quality and other local issues such as energy costs, traffic congestion, waste management and quality of life for communities. Links such as the overlap in the causes of air pollution and global warming, and the adverse impact rising local temperatures have on smog formation, are of the type that gives local leaders strong motivation to participate in a campaign focused on climate protection. These links are especially important in developing countries, where issues such as air quality, health and economic development are pressing concerns.

Box 12. UN-Habitat/UNEP Coalition

UN-Habitat/UNEP Coalition on the Urban Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean

This joint regional initiative aims at strengthening the urban environmental information base as well as decision-making and governance capacities of local authorities, with a view to improving regular assessment of their urban environment. The work feeds into national, regional and global environmental evaluations. In an increasingly urbanized world, it is expected that the UNEP Global Environment Outlook (GEO) report – which has an increasingly regional dimension – will benefit from the GEO city reports.

III. Main challenges for the future, follow-up and next steps

31. Although a substantial number of partnerships between different agencies and organizations have already been established and set in operation, there is further need for committed participants and stronger partnerships. Despite many good initiatives, in many cities environmental problems are growing by the day and, at the very least, this trend must be reversed.

32. On a world scale the challenge seems gigantic. But then experience has demonstrated the effectiveness of certain specific approaches and mechanisms and these, therefore, are among the priorities to be enhanced and pursued through further commitments:

(a) Participation, through a consultative process of different kinds of partners and institutions, is very important as it includes local, national, regional and global participants involved in different sectors of society. Are local government linkages and involvement feasible, how, and what are the benefits and constraints?

(b) Coordination and synergies between the United Nations agencies and their programmes: How can they and the international donor and development partners do more?

(c) More involvement in the process of capacity-building of urban institutions located in developing countries, and of the private sector in the delivery of basic urban services, including acting as a catalyst for local resources. For example, how can equitable, more efficient and yet appropriate and affordable services be ensured?

(d) More effective involvement in, and attention to, the priorities of the urban poor, women and marginalized groups that are diversely affected by urban problems. How can non-governmental and community-based organizations do more to bring this about?

(e) More participation of local authorities in national decision-making on broader urban environmental issues. Are potential stakeholder partners convinced about local authorities' commitments to improved urban management and to more effective and inclusive governance? Are such commitments really there for all to see?

33. The World Urban Forum at its second session will provide an opportunity to highlight some of the achievements made thus far in the urban environment stream of the Coalition for Sustainable Urbanization. The objective is to strengthen existing partnerships and to inform and attract new partners through participants' dialogue and debate on issues such as those highlighted above.

34. In short, for better and more widespread results, the main challenges and needs remain as follows:

- (a) More action and implementation;
- (b) More committed partners;
- (c) More resources, both local and international;
- (d) More impact.