



Distr.: General  
2 June 2009

Original: English

**International tripartite conference on urbanization challenges  
and poverty reduction in African, Caribbean and Pacific countries**

First meeting  
Nairobi, 8–10 June 2009

**Pro-poor land and housing**

**I. Challenge**

1. Unless radical efforts are made to provide a range of affordable housing options and legal and secure land at scale, cities will host some 2 billion slum-dwellers in 2020. The situation is critical and unprecedented. In Africa, for example, urban growth is synonymous with informal urban development. Notwithstanding local differences in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, slum growth has the same roots: the formal land and housing delivery systems are not working for many people; land and housing prices are rising swiftly; individuals are trading land and property rights regardless of legal status as a way to gain access to a place to live and legitimize their right to the city; these settlements are plagued by overcrowding, inadequate sanitation and poor housing conditions.
2. Low incomes and limited household ability to pay for housing form part of the problem. It is increasingly observed, however, that not only the poor live in these settlements, meaning that poverty is not the sole cause of the growth of slums. Increasing numbers of people with relatively high income resort to housing outside the formal and official systems, revealing shortcomings in housing markets and in policies that hinder the delivery of affordable housing opportunities.
3. The lack of local government investment in infrastructure is another obstacle to be considered, as it restricts the supply of housing opportunities and hinders economic activities. It is clear that neither a city plan nor a sanctioned land-use planning system alone can guide urban development and produce slum-free urban spatial structures. Research and practical experience now provide sufficient evidence about the various mechanisms and strategies that individuals and organized groups use and pursue to gain access to land and housing.
4. Local governments are ill-equipped in terms of well-trained personnel and specific urban management policies and instruments to deal effectively with the problem. In addition, they often have a low tax base, poor property tax collection and inefficient and opaque land administration systems. Many countries have an intricate institutional framework regulating land use at the local level that involves locally based town and country planning and land administration units operating alongside a variety of central government agencies, including a ministry of lands and national land administration systems. It is also common to have local governments subordinated to a ministry of local government, thus limiting municipal autonomy and adversely affecting local capacity responses to tackle the problem. Countries with nationalized land may create land administration frameworks that are difficult to manage, resulting in inaccurate land records and duality in land allocation systems. Benefits of land lease to support infrastructure development finance are rarely achieved.
5. Furthermore, often post-colonial institutional and organizational structures must coexist with customary rules and systems of land ownership. In some ways, customary landowners (e.g., chiefs,

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tribal kings and their respective traditional councils) operate much like pirate land suppliers. The latter supply plots by subdividing privately owned land, while the former deliver customary lands to individuals and even to developers, all bypassing or disregarding formal rules and official government regulations. Land prices rise dramatically and serviced land becomes scarcer, resulting in large premiums paid on plots where infrastructure is available. Local governments are challenged to expand infrastructure and supply serviced land at a scale that might help to reduce prices and prevent people from paying a significant premium when purchasing housing at locations served by basic infrastructure.

## **II. Response**

6. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme has a mission to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. Adequate shelter means more than simply a roof over one's head. It means adequate privacy, adequate space, physical accessibility, adequate security, security of tenure, structural stability and durability, adequate lighting, heating and ventilation, adequate basic infrastructure, such as water supply, sanitation and waste-management facilities, sustainable environmental quality and health-related factors and adequate and accessible location with regard to work and basic facilities. All these should be available at an affordable cost. Adequacy should be determined together with the people concerned, bearing in mind the prospect for gradual development. To achieve its mission, UN-Habitat strives to provide support to member States through policy advice, advocacy and knowledge management, programmes and capacity-building.

### **A. Advocacy**

7. UN-Habitat has identified advocacy as one of its main strategies to reach out effectively to member States, cities and other Habitat partners. Ministers of housing and local authorities attend sessions of its Governing Council, together with a wide range of other partners. UN-Habitat also provides technical support and inputs to regional ministerial meetings, including the African Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development, the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Housing and Urban Development and the meeting of Ministers and the High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector in Latin America and the Caribbean. This means that UN-Habitat is committed to the following three outcomes:

(a) To supporting enabling land and housing reforms that can generate diversified and affordable housing opportunities at scale and accessible to various sectors of the population. In that respect, the UN-Habitat approach focuses on the generation of housing opportunities rather than houses, meaning that emphasis is laid on measures that enable individuals, households and various social groups to have access to a range of housing inputs that may result in a dwelling that suits their needs, demands and ability to pay;

(b) To increasing security of tenure so that individuals, households and firms have the opportunity to acquire secure assets and boost equal access to infrastructure and services, and reduce poverty with spin-off effects on property markets. The UN-Habitat approach is predicated on the axiom that secure rights to land encourage people to invest in improved dwelling and the land itself;

(c) To promoting slum improvement and slum prevention so that a consistent and persistent city-wide approach can be established to respond to the needs and demands of those already living in informal areas, but also to provide an alternative to informality. The UN-Habitat approach is coupled with participatory planning and urban governance, capacity-building, institutional development and policy reforms.

### **B. Policy**

8. UN-Habitat is committed to supporting national and local governments and Habitat Agenda partners in their implementation of improved land and housing policies. Many policymakers have not fully understood the complexity of informal land development and the nexus of land markets, housing, and slum development in their cities, meaning that their ill-conceived policies continue to stimulate, rather than slow, informal urban development. Government regulations and costly standards and norms also form part of this equation, hindering rather than facilitating land and housing delivery. It is observed that policy decisions and government measures miss the required evidence and baseline information about the logic of slum formation, among other things.

9. The UN-Habitat approach is guided by the recognition that access to a range of affordable land and housing options at scale are prerequisites for slum prevention. A well-functioning housing sector, for example, requires a variety of inputs, including land, infrastructure and services, finance, building materials supply and skilled labour, to enable individuals and various social groups to gain access to the best shelter option that suits their needs and capacity.

10. The institutional, legal and regulatory frameworks that govern these sectors are essential to maximizing their impact on slum formation. Each input shall be efficiently regulated by its specific normative frameworks and government interventions aiming at affecting the demand or supply side, or both. Policies, actions and strategies should be geared to make these fundamental inputs work differently and as intended, in connection with one another, to increase delivery and decrease costs. The current global financial turmoil has thrown into clear relief the linkages between the housing sector and the economy and with the regulatory framework in the financial sector. Putting into practice the UN-Habitat approach means maximizing the backward and forward linkages with other sectors of the economy and bringing about poverty reduction and economic development.

11. Some of the important activities to be undertaken include: making renewed efforts to promote alternatives to eviction; producing a major new global policy paper on housing; articulating a new normative framework for slum prevention; developing new land tools to implement pro-poor land policies; promoting a range of land rights rather than simply individual titles; and strengthening the United Nations system's capacity to tackle housing, land and property issues in post-conflict and post-natural disaster situations. A specific effort will be made to promote measures to mitigate or adapt to the risks associated with global climate change. All activities will be gender-responsive.

12. In addition, greater knowledge of urban economics by policymakers will have to be generated to enhance understanding of the logics of the market and the strong correlations that exist between land prices, scarcity of serviced land, regulations and buoyant informal land and housing markets. Given that serviced land is one of the fundamental inputs to housing, its supply and availability will undoubtedly influence housing prices and, consequently, affordability. If housing policy and government interventions are incapable of bringing prices to affordable levels this may create a continuous cycle of informal settlements and slum formation that plague many cities in the developing world.

13. A well-functioning housing sector with active government policies will certainly help to boost the delivery of affordable housing opportunities, which is pivotal for slum prevention. Many countries have come to understand that housing policies and active government engagement are of genuine importance if the sector is to fulfil its fundamental role in economic development, poverty reduction and employment generation, in addition to improving living conditions and residential quality in cities.

## **C. Programme**

14. At the other end of the policy ladder, large-scale, city-wide informal settlement upgrading programmes, such as those carried out in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Medellín (Colombia), Indore (India), Ahmadabad (India), Lusaka (Zambia) and Cape Town (South Africa) require significant institutional efforts and sufficient skills to manage multi-year, multi-stakeholder, technically complex urban operations under extremely volatile environments. Designing, managing and implementing large-scale operations that deal with existing settlements while keeping abreast of preventive policies and measures within the realm of city governments remain one of the greatest challenges for local governments in all regions.

15. As an urban intervention strategy, informal settlement upgrading or, as it is more commonly known, "slum upgrading", is a theme that has been circulating for the past 50 years. Experience shows that slum upgrading requires political will and the firm commitment of local governments to sustain long-term programming and implementation. In operational terms, it requires the establishment of an institutional and organizational setting through which the participation of the target groups can be facilitated, the partnerships between public, private and community stakeholders can be realized, financial resources can be mobilized and allocated on a sustained basis, local implementation capacities can be strengthened and the coordination, planning and management of programmes and projects can be organized.

## **D. Capacity-building**

16. UN-Habitat has produced numerous global and regional studies reviewing policy issues, including enabling housing strategies and a variety of housing modalities, such as cooperatives and rental housing. It has also developed a series of quick guides for policymakers for housing the poor.

These pertain to seven areas: urbanization; low-income housing; land; eviction; housing finance; community-based organizations; and rental housing. These tools and resources will be applied in the work undertaken as part of the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme.

17. At the beginning of the spectrum is the right of access to land and housing, including monitoring forced evictions and providing alternatives to evictions. Studies on enabling housing strategies have been undertaken to analyse their effects and to guide the development of future policies and strategies. More specific studies have focused on approaches to housing delivery including rental housing, cooperatives and others. The UN-Habitat approach to bringing about access to land and housing for all relies on three cross-cutting strategies: knowledge management and advocacy; capacity-building at the global and regional levels; and supporting implementation at the country and local levels. Throughout this approach, issues of gender (in addition to those pertaining to young people and the elderly) are mainstreamed. These strategies are implemented in parallel and the implementation of this approach does not follow a linear process. Knowledge and lessons learned, for example, are reaped from existing successes and could thus be used in advocacy campaigns and capacity-building.

18. To deal with issues pertaining to security of tenure, the UN-Habitat-coordinated Global Land Tools Network focuses on tools development, training-of-trainers, institutional strengthening and training impact evaluation. The Network specifically provides normative outputs to strengthen the understanding of capacity-building methods and establishments required to roll out the tools generated through the Network. Training tools and capacity-building packages are developed, piloted and scaled up.

19. The Gender Equality Action Plan seeks to strengthen gender equality and women's empowerment in all areas of its work related to land and housing. Gender evaluation criteria serve as a specific tool for gender analysis, not only of normative products but also at the country level, so as to assess gender sensitivity in areas of housing design and construction, land administration procedures, taxation systems and dispute mechanisms when dealing with housing, land and property rights following natural disasters or conflicts.

### **III. Key issues, stakeholders and roles for effective implementation of land and housing rights through the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme**

20. Successful work in human settlements can only be achieved through integrated approaches based on good governance and wide-based participatory approaches, as stimulated through the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme. The approach ensures that needs are identified and agreed upon by stakeholders. Furthermore, they ensure that the solutions will be properly tailored to local conditions, based on the specific political, social, economic, environmental, technological and other circumstances.

21. Locally, issues of land and housing are physically manifested and experienced directly by the citizens. Obstacles to access are easily identified and diagnosed at the local level. Key stakeholders include local authorities, civil society and citizens. Through profiling and reviewing the land and housing situation, issues are identified to be tackled at the local or national levels. For example, if adequate legislation exists at the national level, then the problem might result from weakness of implementation by the local authorities. The Programme will support local stakeholders in identifying areas for intervention and areas for building institutional capacities and strengthening human resources.

22. National-level frameworks, on the other hand, affect activities at the local level as a result of the policy, institutional, legislative and financial set-ups. These define the roles of all stakeholders and should provide an enabling environment to allow for their concerted efforts in dealing with issues of access to land and adequate housing. At the national level, regulatory oversight should be provided to avoid any abuses of the system. The Programme will provide policy and technical support to the national institutions in defining areas for systemic change. UN-Habitat will provide guidance on how to effect change through methodologies and approaches developed and tested in many countries.

23. Regional-level training and development institutions play a role in supporting countries in the region. The Programme, through regional policy debates, will provide platforms for decision makers to exchange their experiences and to be exposed to best practices and experiences regarding slum prevention and improvement. Discussions about innovative approaches and solutions will be encouraged. Furthermore, technical staff will be trained about approaches and methodologies to improve access to land and housing for slum prevention and improvement based on sustainable principles: local economic development, environmental improvement and human resource

improvement. New partners must be included in implementation of slum prevention and upgrading; this will guarantee that challenges of access to land and housing are met through systemic change and concerted efforts.

24. UN-Habitat facilitates the emergence of networks of urban development stakeholders, maximizing its role as an enabler and catalyst. For example, the Global Land Tools Network, whose secretariat is managed by UN-Habitat, assembles a coalition of diverse stakeholders around a shared vision on land. The Programme will use this model in implementation at the country and regional levels to foster collaboration in critical areas, such as the development of a new analytical framework and regional housing policy linked to the creation of a new normative approach to slum improvement and prevention. This will serve to expand and deepen relationships within African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and with external support agencies.

25. International forums provide an ideal context for the Programme's participating countries to share experiences both among themselves and with other States. UN-Habitat convenes the World Urban Forum biennially, in addition to ministerial meetings that accord member States the opportunity to exchange their experiences in land and housing policy issues and experiences.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

26. Central Governments are responsible for systemic change by championing reforms in policy, institutional, legislative and financial frameworks. Without the political will, commitment and support of central Governments, systemic change cannot be effected. Local authorities coordinate and direct the growth and development of urban areas. Local needs and specificities are best identified by creating an enabling consultative environment. Civil society embodies the needs of citizens for the quality of life they aspire. Civil society stakeholders include: academic institutions, which develop solutions; the media, which reflects society's conscience; and the private sector, which creates economic growth and employment, among others.

27. The international community can provide support based on requests by national and local stakeholders in a given country who take the lead and meet their needs. External support agencies can provide policy and technical advice, proven methodologies and approaches, best practices and case studies for guidance and arenas for policy debates and exchanges of experiences.

28. Access to land and housing can only be achieved through concerted efforts by all the above stakeholders. This should be encouraged by an inclusive environment enabling these stakeholders to participate in defining the future of their cities and meeting their housing needs.

Annex

