Twenty-third session
Nairobi, 11–15 April 2011

Draft proceedings of the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme at its twenty-third session (*continued*)

I. Organization of the session (agenda items 1–4) (*continued]*

D. Credentials

1.   *[To be completed]*

H. Work of the Committee of the Whole

2.   [*To be completed*]

I. Work of the drafting committee and adoption of resolutions

3.   [*To be completed*]

II. High-level segment and dialogue on the special theme for the twenty-third session of the Governing Council (agenda items 5–7)

4.   [*To be completed*]

III. Provisional agenda and other arrangements for the twenty-fourth session of the Governing Council (agenda item 8)

5.   [*To be completed*]

IV. Other matters (agenda item 9)

6.   [*To be completed*]

V. Adoption of the report of the session (agenda item 10)

7.   *[To be completed]*

VI. Closure of the session (agenda item 11)

8.   [*To be completed*]

Annex [ ]

Summaries by the President of the Governing Council of the general debate on agenda items 5–7 and of the dialogue on the special theme of the twenty-third session

I.   Dialogue on the special theme: Sustainable urban development through expanding equitable access to land, housing, basic services and infrastructure

1.   At its 5th and 6th plenary meetings, on Wednesday, 13 April 2011, the Council held a dialogue on the special theme for the session, sustainable urban development through expanding equitable access to land and housing, basic services and infrastructure. The dialogue consisted of a morning and an afternoon session. Each session featured a moderator and a panel of speakers, opening statements, presentations by the panel members, comments from the floor and reactions from the panellists. Ms. Heli Sirve (Finland), the rapporteur for the dialogue, prepared summaries of the two sessions and a list of key messages for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

2.   The first session, which took place in the morning, was on sustainable urban development through expanding equitable access to land and housing. It was chaired by the President of the Governing Council, who introduced it with opening remarks. Additional opening remarks were made by the Executive Director; by Ms. Elizabeth Thompson, Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development; and by Ms. Ana Maria Sampaio Fernandes, Permanent Representative of Brazil to UN-Habitat. The panellists were Mr. Ahmed Taoufiq Hejira, Minister of Housing and Urban and Regional Planning, Morocco; Mr. Peter Götz, President of the Board of Directors of the Global Parliamentarians on Habitat; Ms. Sheila Patel, Chair of Shack/Slum Dwellers International; and Mr. Hugo Priemus, Professor, the Delft University of Technology.

3.   The afternoon session was on sustainable urban development through expanding access to basic services and infrastructure. It was chaired by Mr. Sergey Trepelkov (Russian Federation), Vice-President of the Governing Council, who introduced it with opening remarks. The panellists were Mr. Vincent Karega, Minister for Infrastructure of Rwanda; Ms. Dhamikka Wijaysinghe, Senior Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Construction, Engineering Services, Housing and Common Services of Sri Lanka; Mr. M. A. Masunda, Mayor of Harare and Co-President of the United Cities and Local Governments; and Mr. Stéphane Quéré, Co-Chair, Urban Infrastructure Initiative, World Business Council for Sustainable Development. Ms. Ana Marie Argilagos, Deputy Assistant Secretary, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, gave a closing statement.

II.   Session 1: Sustainable urban development through expanding equitable access to land and housing

A.   Opening remarks

4.   In his opening remarks the President of the Governing Council stressed that land was critical to the effective delivery of housing, infrastructure and services. It was crucial to providing equitable access to decent living space and livelihoods for urban citizens, especially the poor and particularly vulnerable groups. Access to land was of limited use, if unaccompanied by policies, legislation and systems that ensured security of tenure. Empirical evidence and experience demonstrated the importance of inclusive and innovative land policies and a sound land governance framework. Efforts to eradicate poverty and enhance sustainable urban development were futile without equitable access to land and security of tenure for all. Promoting the effective use of land with a view to stimulating compact growth of existing urban spaces and promoting optimal acquisition of land at the urban fringes was critical to avoiding urban sprawl, creating well-planned spaces with infrastructure and services and managing the effects of climate change. It was further stressed that housing was central to development and could generate employment and promote green building practices. The linkages between the housing sector and other parts of the economy constituted a powerful instrument to boost sustainable urbanization, as housing accounted for some 20 per cent of capital formation in countries' gross domestic product.

5.   He noted that the themes of the green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development, and the institutional framework for sustainable development, both of which would be considered at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, would be integrated into the current dialogue as they related to land and housing. Panellists would provide a range of perspectives on key issues. He emphasized the importance of ensuring that urban issues were mainstreamed in the Conference, which represented a key milestone for the implementation of the Habitat Agenda and would set the direction for sustainable development for the foreseeable future. The dialogue was intended to further discussions in that regard and facilitate the development of key messages to the Conference.

6.   In his opening statement, the Executive Director expressed the hope that the dialogue would contribute to solving urban problems in a world in which nearly 1 billion people worldwide were living in slums and substandard housing. Research had clearly established key approaches to urban planning. First, planning had to be proactive rather than reactive as it had been to date. Given that cities were to grow by 50 per cent in the coming 5–10 years, it was essential to plan in advance for such an increase. Second, the concept of urban planning had to be addressed on the scale equal to the scale of the problem. Third, planning had to be effected in phases and had to be pragmatic; it should be affordable if the starting point was taken as public space, i.e., the street, which provided capacity for mobility, social interaction and infrastructure.

7.   He emphasized the great importance of public land in the urban context, saying that enough should be set aside to ensure the functionality of the city. There were many pressures on public land and it was essential to dedicate approximately 30 per cent to streets, with additional land allocated to public spaces and services, churches, sports and health facilities, schools, and other such uses. The result, however, of allocating too much land to streets as in some twentieth-century cities dedicated to the car, was a lack of density, divided neighbourhoods, alienation and the loss of economies of agglomeration. Most African cities had only about 15 per cent of land allocated to streets, which was insufficient to generate a cycle of growth, improvement and value in modern economies.

8.   In conclusion, he emphasized that it fell to Governments to defend public space. Competition for public land was a political issue, and fine-tuning the allocation of public land was a reflection of the culture of a society. He welcomed the participation of representatives of Slum/Shack Dwellers International as they were more keenly aware of the need to defend streets in the interest of mobility and as a means of communication. Recent tragic fires in Nairobi slums had shown the inability of the fire services to act expeditiously as a result of a lack of space for mobility. In his view, the first priority and next step in urban planning was to tackle the issue of public space dedicated to streets.

9.   In her statement Ms. Thompson said that there was inevitable conflict when cities developed in an ad hoc manner without proper planning. Cities were engines of national economies but faced significant demographic changes that were producing urban sprawl and pressure on space. The populations of African and Asian cities would double by 2030, and most immigrants would be poor, uneducated and unable to generate wealth for themselves or their communities. Cities would grow ever more hard-pressed to provide amenities, and due to the shrinking agricultural production of rural communities cities would struggle to provide enough food for their citizens. Climate change and natural disasters exacerbated the stress, and cities were at the nexus of many global crises such as insecurity and water scarcity. The world was witnessing a battle of green versus brown economies and the eradication of slums must be pursued.

10.   Greater collaboration between Governments would be necessary to meet the challenges. Many cities were rising to these challenges with innovative plans and approaches that needed to be strengthened and promulgated. Land use change must focus on a mixed development-planning model. Managers of developing-country cities needed to look carefully at basic services, energy, solid waste and health care to attain the Millennium Development Goals. Environmental issues were at the heart of most of the challenges, including water, energy, sustainable production and consumption, climate change and natural disaster impacts. Urban planners needed to plan for risk management in disasters, as seen recently in India, Japan and other countries.

11.   The green economy would be central to the management and mitigation of the problems. Cities were at the heart of proposed transitions to a green economy, in areas such as logistical planning and transport, market strategies and a transition to a no-carbon future. Governments must develop financial mechanisms and incentives in addition to the means to build on natural capital. There had to be total commitment to devising policies at key interfaces – national-local and Governments-business. Culture was important to many issues relating to cities, and cultural charm and heritage had to be preserved and included in planning, both for the self-esteem of the inhabitants and as a basis for

tourism, which required innovative approaches. The integration of diverse urban cultures was needed to achieve creative pluralistic identities.

12.   She reported on the progress in the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, saying that there had to date been two preparatory committee sessions and two intersessional meetings. The final session would be held immediately before the conference itself. A questionnaire had been circulated to all States to seek their input for the planning of the conference. The response had not been encouraging, and she urged the representatives to put pressure their governments to respond.

13.   The current Governing Council session, she concluded, could be seen as a good start to embedding urban planning into the process of preparing for the Conference. She requested member States to become fully engaged and said she looked forward to work with UN-Habitat to develop sustainable cities worldwide.

14.   In her statement, Ms. Fernandes focused on urban growth in Latin America, particularly Brazil. She said that the Earth was increasingly a planet of cities and that good governance of those cities was at the heart of concerns for the present and future of humanity. Urbanization was not a new phenomenon in Latin America, which was the most urbanized continent after Europe and North America. In Brazil, 86 per cent of people were already living in urban areas. The rapidity of growth had affected the capacity of many cities to respond to the challenge, with proper planning compromised by a constant need to solve problems reactively, and effective land management and provision of adequate shelter had proved difficult to achieve.

15.   In 2001, Brazil had promulgated the Statute of the City, which had arisen from a multi-sectoral movement involving many stakeholders. The Statute provided a legislative framework for the implementation of urban policies, establishing urban planning instruments to be adopted at the national, state and municipal levels of governance. It made available fiscal and legal instruments to respond to urban challenges, for example through progressive taxation of idle land. In 2003, the Ministry of Cities was created to support those policies and to provide a framework for action. In Brazil, municipalities enjoyed considerable autonomy to manage their own territory and the legal right to generate their own resources, for example from self-financing investment plans, charging for services and employing fiscal tools, and several municipalities had been creative and innovative in that regard. A proportion of the income generated was used to invest in infrastructure in poorer zones.

16.   At the national level, supporting processes were in place for such issues as security of tenure, capacity-building and provision of technical assistance. Security of tenure was considered to be particularly important, and an initiative to establish and document property rights in slums had proved a successful tool in upgrading slums and providing basic services. The housing policy of 2004 aimed to ensure access to housing for all and laid down guidelines for slum upgrading. Supportive financing mechanisms had been put in place so that groups of slum-dwellers could secure financing for self-help housing construction. Within the Ministry of Cities, the Cities Council, which monitored urban development policies, was a very participatory body, including many representatives of civil society in addition to representatives of the three levels of governance. In conclusion, she said that equitable access to land and housing was fundamental to achieving sustainable urban development, which was in turn essential component of sustainable development. UN-Habitat therefore had a significant role to play in the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, where it would have the opportunity and responsibility to strengthen the social dimension of the concept of sustainable development.

B.   Panellist presentations

17.   Mr. Hejira, in his presentation, welcomed the theme selected for the current session, which he said lay at the heart of developing countries' concerns in responding to the challenges of urban disintegration, increasing exclusion, lack of security and political instability. Global challenges included the acceleration of urban growth in the context of the increasing scarcity and cost of land, unequal access to land-based resources, an increase in the number of people living in slums, expected to exceed 1 billion in 2012 and 2 billion in 2030, poverty and the increasing marginalization of the poor. There had been a general failure to provide infrastructure and affordable urban housing against a backdrop of increasing national and transnational migration and the negative impacts of massive uncontrolled urbanization and degradation of natural resources. In Africa, the pace of the growth of slums was the highest in the world, and insufficient resources were being allocated to the development of infrastructure and basic services. Land policies were unsuitable as a result of complex legal systems and the absence of standards and reliable land institutional frameworks. Overly cumbersome and obsolete planning systems were not adapted to the dynamic pace of towns and cities and the urban economy was not competitive and did not facilitate wealth creation for most low-income earners.

18.   To respond to the challenges, he suggested the innovative reform of land systems and tools to improve land management and to facilitate access to land; more rational planning approaches and land-use methods; the strengthening of local authorities to facilitate more participatory decision-making; the strengthening of the role of elected representatives, civil society and community groups in the development, monitoring and follow-up of urban development projects; the application of innovative means of financing for housing, infrastructure and services; the strengthening of production systems for the gradual integration of the informal economy to increase personal and collective income; the promotion of land management that was respectful of the environment; and the integration and taking into account of the Millennium Development Goals in the implementation of public policies.

19.   In his presentation Mr. Götz discussed access to housing. In a rapidly changing world in which more than half the population lived in urban centres, international dialogue on sustainable urbanization, particularly against the background of the continuing global economic crisis, was more important than ever. Failure to tackle the issues would have a negative impact on housing supply leading to increasing scarcity, rising costs and declining quality. He suggested that access to housing should form part of integrated sustainable urban development, especially as it was enshrined as a right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and had been incorporated into the national legislation of many countries. Outlining methods to ensure access to housing for the poor, he noted that even some developed countries were grappling with a lack of adequate housing and that the problem was acute in developing countries, where there was a lack of financial resources and clear guidelines.

20.   Parliamentarians had a special responsibility in tackling the challenges and had to demand clear rules in national legislation on sustainable urban development and ensure that increased funding was made available, taking account of the needs of slum-dwellers and working in cooperation with them to ensure that communities maintained ownership and identification with their neighbourhoods. Global Parliamentarians on Habitat aimed to achieve improvements through their parliamentarian network and in cooperation with the public, Governments, non-governmental organizations, urban planners and the private sector. He called for a global comparison of legislation for sustainable urban development as a basis for discussions at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development and as a challenge for UN-Habitat.

21.   Ms. Patel, in her presentation, said that Shack/Slum Dwellers International represented member-based organizations in more than 30 countries. Its members were poor people who wanted to be partners with city and national authorities in the effort to tackle the problems of urbanization rather than mere recipients of development aid. The organization believed that it was crucial to recognize that no existing planning instruments, resources or strategies were adequate to deal with the magnitude of urban woes arising from existing levels of informal settlements in cities. Plans had to be made to cater for the increase in population growth and urban migration that would take place over the coming 30–40 years. The solutions were not yet known and could only be found through strategic partnerships.

22.   She recalled that the Executive Director had enjoined the Governing Council to keep strategies simple and to focus on solutions for streets and public spaces. Shack/Slum Dwellers International proposed that a serious partnership between cities and slum-dwellers should be the first step, as formalizing informality was not the solution. She noted that land was political; therefore, security of tenure and the right to livelihoods had to be designed into the vision of cities of the future.

23.   Environmental issues, she continued, added additional pressure. It was never known with any degree of certainty where the next disaster would strike, but research had found examples, such as in Brazil, of strong partnerships and dialogue with the poor resulting in good policy choices on matters of access and space, both critical for disaster management. She called for the use of the potential of urban land to help attain the Millennium Development Goals, most elements of which could find focus in cities. Membership-based organizations that gave the poor standing could be the platform on which to organize solutions based on negotiation and compromise. She urged politicians and parliamentarians to treat the poor as partners.

24.   Mr. Priemus gave a presentation on expanding equitable access to housing, which, he said, lay at the core of housing policies and was related to such issues as land policy, transport provision, urban planning and use of public space. A well-functioning housing sector had the potential to make a major contribution to sustainable urban development, but housing policies and markets had generally failed in both developing and developed countries. A key factor in that failure was the poor integration of social housing into housing policy, which was often small, declining, and treated differently from the rest of the housing sector. A system designed for the poor was poor by design, with negative outcomes including increased stigma, reduced incentives for investment and distorted property prices.

25.   One housing policy instrument with a positive record was the provision of housing allowances or housing vouchers, which had the capacity to target low-income families accurately. The instrument provided support on the demand side and did not distort the market as much as did property subsidies, and thereby provided a more level playing field for housing providers and led to greater efficiency in housing provision. Housing allowances were an essential component of long-term movement towards a neutral housing policy that did not discriminate between tenants and owner-occupiers. They allowed the market to adopt market prices while focusing policy on people, with the provision of income-related vouchers as an entitlement for households with modest incomes, and were in line with the recognition by the United Nations of the right to adequate housing. They reduced stigma, increased incentives for investment, made land policy more transparent and led to greater stability of house prices.

26.   He then considered the question of whether social housing providers were needed within a market system. Social housing associations offered benefits that responded to the priorities of households with modest incomes. They offered security during times of economic decline; they did not engage in negative risk selection; and they reinvested any surpluses in providing further housing. In conclusion, he said that public policy should be tenure-neutral within a demand-side, people-based system in which non-profit housing associations existed alongside commercial investors. Housing was not only important in itself, but also was the key to sustainable urban development.

C.   Discussion

27.   In the ensuing discussion, one representative underscored the exciting opportunity presented by recent scientific evidence on the linkages between equality and a wide variety of social indicators demonstrating the universal benefit of equality for all members of society. In the long term, policymakers must take fully into account that equality was beneficial for all; he called for a fundamental re-evaluation of sustainable urbanization in the light of that finding. He stressed that land was a key determinant of economic opportunity, especially for women. It was crucial, therefore, that equitable planning should include a gender perspective. In addition, planning must be inclusive of all stakeholders; the knowledge of slum-dwellers was of critical significance in sustainable urbanization as a result of their broad experience of the challenges of living in unplanned settlements.

28.   Another representative urged Governments to develop and implement policies to expand access to land and security of tenure in an inclusive and equitable manner. Land was a source of production, sustenance and human dignity and contributed to physical and economic well-being. Given the existing challenges, transparency and good governance in land administration were of fundamental importance. Security of tenure relied on many forms of tenure other than individual freehold. He voiced support for a continuum of land rights, including documented and undocumented rights for formal and informal, legal and extralegal groups. He expressed satisfaction with the work of UN-Habitat and the Global Land Tool Network on gender criteria and the Social Tenure Domain Model. He called for security of tenure for all through the adoption of intermediate forms of tenure and alternative forms of land administration and management, among other things.

29.   Several representatives advocated the authoritative participation of all stakeholders, including Habitat Agenda partners, human settlements experts, women and young people, in the governance of UN-Habitat. One representative, speaking on behalf of Habitat Agenda partners, proposed the constitution of a platform in that regard to form an integral part of the organization's governance structure. He welcomed the review of the governance structure of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, phase III, set out in document HSP/GC/23/INF/7, and an option elaborated therein, which represented an emerging hybrid system of governance at the transnational level. He drew attention to a draft resolution on that issue and urged member States to ensure that UN-Habitat partners were included and given a strong voice in UN-Habitat as the global authority for sustainable urban development.

30.   One representative, noting the high proportion of young people making up the world's population, almost 85 per cent of whom were located in developing countries, stressed the importance of the effective engagement of young people as key stakeholders in policy development and implementation processes. She called for equitable access to housing for young people, green building practices, socially inclusive development processes and affordable finance mechanisms. She urged young people to advocate fresh approaches to housing and infrastructure in the light of climate change and human-caused natural disasters and said that the green economy concept could capitalize on the strengths of young people.

31.   Another representative highlighted the need for the social and economic empowerment of women to facilitate their access to and control of land. Existing differences in the social and economic well-being of women stemmed in part from the lack of enforcement of human rights legislation related

to women, their lack of access to financial and credit institutions and their lack of participation in decision-making regarding access to and control of land. She called upon UN-Habitat and Governments to find ways to make laws work for women, to ensure the inclusion of women in decision-making at all levels and to strengthen existing community and grass-roots women's innovation.

32.   One representative, reiterating the importance of equitable access to land, said that the provision of housing, basic services and infrastructure were key areas where practical differences could be made. She welcomed the Executive Director's call for a positive approach to cities, saying that sustainable urbanization was key to social progress, economic development and poverty reduction and that the current dialogue should be seen in the context of the multitude of challenges requiring global collective action. She called upon member States and partners to acknowledge the urgency of tackling the urban agenda and the need to work with all partners. Lack of action would have devastating consequences for the whole world, she said, and she welcomed proposals to formalize the participation of partners in the governance structure of UN-Habitat.

33.   One representative sought clarification on optimal means of housing and basic services provision to the population and on the roles of stakeholders, including Governments and the private sector, therein.

34.   Another representative noted the connection between conflicts and human settlement crises, especially as they affected women's health and child mortality. He stressed the importance of the role of the United Nations in the settlement of disputes and highlighted Kenya's positive role in Southern Sudan. He welcomed dialogue with fellow parliamentarians and urged them to do develop legislation on human rights and equitable distribution of land and to allocate adequate budget for housing.

35.   One representative reiterated the importance of disaster risk reduction, without which sustainable development was futile for those at risk. He noted with appreciation the assistance provided to Japan in the wake of the recent earthquake and tsunami that had afflicted that country.

36.   Another representative said that rural development was crucial for many countries as a means of achieving food security and promoting the tourism industry. Her country had earmarked considerable sums for slum upgrading through the construction of low-income housing in eight municipalities. Successful slum upgrading, she said, required that poor people should be at the heart of decision-making.

37.   One representative underscored the importance of reviewing national land tenure systems when planning for land and housing to deal effectively with the fragmentation and mushrooming of slums. She suggested that UN-Habitat should assist in establishing a fund to support the resettlement of the needy.

38.   Another representative said that the housing problem had to be approached from three interlinked levels along the demand and supply chain for land and housing. At the individual level, persons who could not afford housing needed support from the State. The State, for its part, needed to provide land or subsidize the cost of housing for those who could not afford it. The State's resources and efforts were often insufficient, however, and the international community and donors therefore had to step in. If the demands for basic housing could not be met in that way, slums would result, and both the State and international community would be faced with the need for costly remediation. He suggested that a fund should be established at the international level to help States meet the demand for housing for the poor.

39.   Responding to the comments from the floor, one panellist noted the recurring theme of democratization of housing. In his view, housing was linked to supply and demand and both the State and public and local authorities had an important role to play therein. He outlined national-level approaches to find financial solutions such as indirect aid in the form of low rents, tax exemption and bank guarantees, among others. He also emphasized that building programmes were dependent on local conditions and required the mobilization of private institutions in their implementation. A cross-cutting approach involving all sectors was needed, and exploiting the synergies between the sectors was key.

40.   Another panellist also voiced support for the need to work together more than hitherto, saying that urbanization should be the focus of various levels of government. One panellist emphasized the principle that everyone benefited from equality, particularly in the urban context, and said that it was therefore essential for all sectors, including local authorities and civil society, to negotiate on an equal platform with the poor, women and young people, using new language and strategies to achieve agreed goals. One panellist expressed agreement that there was a need for new housing policies to achieve urban sustainability, taking account of human rights while also engaging the creativity of public-

private partnerships. It was also important to consider the ecological aspect of housing and its contribution to energy sustainability. He stressed too that, while infrastructure development, including in development countries, was costly, and that it was always necessary to harmonize policies with financing.

III. Session 2: Sustainable urban development through expanding equitable access to basic services and infrastructure

A. Opening remarks

41.   Mr. Trepelkov opened the afternoon session saying that equitable access to basic services and infrastructure were critical for sustainable urbanization. Globally, population growth and the rapid pace of urbanization had outpaced the provision of basic services such as water supply and sanitation. Inadequate transport systems and lack of access to energy supply also had negative impacts on livelihoods and quality of life, particularly for the urban poor. The consequences of climate change, including more severe and unpredictable droughts and floods, had compounded those difficulties and had added to the challenge of planning and managing infrastructure.

42.   Nevertheless, solutions could be found that resulted both in improved services and amenities and in environmentally sustainable (or "green") growth. For example, improving water supply and sanitation could lead to job creation, improved health and reduced time spent collecting water, resulting in increased incomes and better education, especially for girls. For solutions to be sustainable and at scale, proactive planning was vital, together with governance frameworks to ensure that planning achieved its goals and that results were sustained. In conclusion, he said that it was important for key messages to be developed during the current session of the Governing Council to take forward to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. He expressed the hope that the current dialogue would assist in that regard.

B. Panellist presentations

43.   Mr. Karega gave a presentation on energy supply and its relevance to human settlements. He said that energy was critical for social and economic transformation and for development with dignity, yet had received little attention in recent decades as a key component of poverty reduction strategies, which had often accorded greater priority to such issues as education, access to water supply, health and food. Energy, however, was a cross-cutting issue that enabled all those sectors to function. Shortages in energy provision were, however, alarming; in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, over 600 million people lacked access to modern energy, depending instead on biomass for cooking and heating and kerosene and candles for light. The negative impacts of that reality included deforestation, indoor air pollution and contribution to climate change. The urban poor typically spent over 20 per cent of their income on energy, reducing their effective income in other areas and hampering efforts to improve their quality of life.

44.   The Secretary-General had called upon the global community to achieve universal access to modern energy services by 2030. In addition, the General Assembly had adopted a resolution designating 2012 the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All. The supply of energy needed to take advantage of a range of energy sources, tapping wherever possible into green opportunities and reducing the average costs of generation and supply. Energy should not be considered a luxury for the poor, but a basic right to widen the life options available and to improve health and well-being. In conclusion, he said that much higher priority needed to be accorded to energy supply, and greater recognition given to its capacity to promote proper development for the urban poor.

45.   In her presentation, observing that water gave life and sanitation dignity, Ms. Wijaysinghe highlighted the declining provision of both in urban areas, on account of the increased demand resulting from rapid urban growth. The impacts were particularly acute for the informal sector. She stressed the urgent need to increase services, especially in urban areas, to prevent the outbreak of diseases and to assist in fostering economic development. This could be achieved by adopting new approaches through innovative planning and decentralization with due consideration to growth forecasts for urban centres. Given that the responsibility for service delivery rested with local authorities and that capacities, especially in small towns, were often limited, she called for the promotion of capacity-building for local authorities, the development of new legislation and its enforcement so as to ensure increased transparency in maintaining citizen's rights to the services. This could be achieved through an increased focus on partnerships between local authorities, community-based organizations and communities.

46.   The panellist also advocated the promotion of urban economies through green growth, which in itself created jobs, such as in the plumbing and construction sectors. Other opportunities included the need for improved management of wastewater and solid waste recycling. This could contribute to a reduction of the ecological footprints of urban areas and the current competition between the built and natural environments, which was unsustainable. In conclusion, she said that UN-Habitat served as a link between the various stakeholders in service provision and urged the organization to extend and replicate some of its successful programmes to other locations based on realities and experiences on the ground.

47.   In his presentation, Mr. Masunda spoke of the importance of public services and the key role of local authorities in providing them. The provision of public services helped to reduce inequalities and foster social cohesion, strengthen the economy of the city and create a sense of belonging among its citizens. Good, strong local governance was needed for the provision of basic services and local authorities required a strong public service ethos and accountability. Central Governments should develop enabling legislation to clarify the roles of local authorities and strengthen their capacities and responsibilities. Local authorities were increasingly considered best placed to define policies on basic services and to deliver on the Millennium Development Goals through the provision of energy, water, sanitation, waste management, transport, education, health and public safety. It was not possible to do so without appropriate funding and local authorities should have the ability to generate their own revenue by leveraging the assets that were under the control of cities to provide services, rather than relying on government funding.

48.   Mr. Quéré expressed support for the UN-Habitat guidelines on access to basic services for all and the guidelines on decentralization and strengthening of local authorities. The former would tackle local governance at the political and technical levels, which would assist private service providers in delivering services corresponding to the population's needs and in the framework of agreements with local and national authorities in a transparent and effective way. The latter would be a crucial element in promoting governance at all levels.

49.   He stressed several aspects that were particularly important for the contribution of the private sector: clarification of the roles of the various stakeholders; construction of long-term partnerships; sustainable financing of pro-poor policies; and ensuring environmental sustainability. There was a need for a comprehensive and integrated approach to urban problems. He drew attention to "GDF SUEZ Rassembleurs d'énergie", a programme to facilitate energy access throughout the world via a solidarity fund. He also stressed the willingness of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development to support and contribute to the implementation of the two sets of guidelines, noting that it was already participating in the World Urban Campaign and working through the Urban Infrastructure Initiative to ensure the relevance and long-lasting nature of the various urban projects developed.

C.   Discussion

50.   In the ensuing discussion, one representative expressed support for the panellists' emphasis on the need for inclusive thinking in all areas of sustainable urban development. He drew attention to a forthcoming conference with the theme "The Water, Energy and Food Security Nexus – Water Resources in the Green Economy" to be held in Bonn, Germany, in November 2011, as a contribution to discussions on the green economy in preparation for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. Participants at the Bonn conference would focus on the interdependence of water, energy and food security and the awareness that sustainable economic development was dependent on the ecologically sound growth of core sectors, particularly water.

51.   The representative of the Asian Development Bank emphasized the unprecedented scale of urbanization in Asia and its environmental impact. Saying that access to infrastructure and basic services was the most direct way of tackling poverty, she noted that the Bank was working with countries to build inclusive, green cities. Cities, she said, were increasingly able to leverage funds from the private sector rather than depend on government grants.

52.   Several representatives gave examples of steps taken in their countries to improve basic services. One described energy access in urban settings in his country and measures taken to reduce the dependence on fossil fuels and increase the use of sustainable sources such as geothermal, solar and wind power. Another said the upgrading of basic infrastructures had been increased in recent years with the gains from debt relief and were being complemented by community-based urban development initiatives. One spoke of the need to provide resources for conversion to a green economy and environmentally sound urban standards, and looked to the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development to reinforce the polluter pays principle.

53.   Several representatives acknowledged the work of UN-Habitat, with one saying that it merited wider recognition and further development in line with the principles of the "one United Nations" initiative. One representative laid particular emphasis on the need to widen the discussion to the three pillars of sustainable development and emphasized the need for integrated urban planning as a key element of sustainable urban development, highlighting the sustainable use of energy, energy efficiency in both old buildings and new construction, and greening the work of the construction sector as means of contributing to the green economy.

54.   Two representatives advocated the idea of a compact city with integrated land use and transportation solutions as a way of reducing the segregation of areas and elements of the city. Several representatives stressed the challenges arising from rapid urban growth and also those posed by climate change.

55.   One representative suggested that in many parts of the world the relationships between the various spheres of government left much to be desired; Governments were top-down and not inclusive, resulting in the exclusion of citizens and affecting the delivery of services. He said that many countries' constitutions failed to recognize local governments, that resources were limited and that Governments would do well to examine which level could best deliver what at the most economical cost. United Nations bodies should recognize the need to work with all levels of government and civil society, especially as the problem affected many countries, whether developed or developing.

56.   Several representatives gave details of initiatives in their countries, such as subsidies and exemptions, particularly with regard to the provision of services to the poor. One commented on the need to foster self-help among populations and within countries by linking up with those having new technologies, such as wind or solar applications.

57.   In their response, the panellists welcomed the representatives' comments and gave further detail on relevant activities in their countries. One welcomed the greening efforts described by representatives, particularly those to regulate charcoal consumption for energy use. He suggested that there was a need for all stakeholders to play a role to facilitate their understanding of and investment in energy, so as to improve the population's quality of life in the future.

58.   Another panellist gave examples of challenges faced in her country in terms of water supply, noting that her Government was investigating decentralization and inclusive approaches with a view to resolving those problems. Capacity-building for local authorities was also important. In that regard, support in terms of knowledge and, in some cases, financial assistance from relevant international organizations to provide better water and sanitation services, would be welcome.

59.   One panellist pointed out that local authorities did not operate in a vacuum, as their work had to form part of the larger policy framework laid down by the relevant ministries. In addition, the private sector and community-based organizations had a key role to play, and cooperative arrangements should therefore be promoted.

60.   Another panellist, while calling for a collective, integrated approach to the interconnected issues facing the urban sector, suggested that there was a need to move from the conceptual level to action and to involve all stakeholders, with public authorities taking the lead role. If action was not taken, it would be impossible for the quality of life of urban-dwellers to be improved and the economic competitiveness of cities boosted.

D. Closing statement

61.   In her closing statement, Ms. Ana Marie Argilagos, Deputy Assistant Secretary, United StatesDepartment of Housing and Urban Development of the Government of the United States of America, highlighted messages from the dialogue and gave examples of action in the United States being undertaken in relevant areas.

IV. Rapporteur's summaries of the sessions and the key messages for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development

62.   The rapporteur for the dialogue summarized the two dialogue sessions and the key messages emerging from them for the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. A written version of her summary follows.

63.   During the morning session, high-level presenters, panellists and speakers from the floor raised a number of issues and made many suggestions. The following captures some of the key messages of the discussions:

(a)   The Millennium Development Goals slum target has been achieved ahead of time. The proliferation of slums, however, continues to challenge South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Given current trends, slum upgrading and slum prevention strategies are crucial to deal with fast-growing slum phenomena and to achieving sustainable urban development. The challenges and opportunities of rapid urban growth need to be fully integrated into the current sustainable development debate, including the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012;

(b)   One of the instruments to tackle the challenges posed by slums is improved urban planning practices. The new urban planning has to be proactive and incremental, emphasize density and be implemented at scale;

(c)   To improve access to land and tenure security, protection of land rights should emphasize not only individual rights but also social rights, shared rights, group rights and other rights such as those of slum-dwellers;

(d)   Sustainable housing and building offers opportunities for job creation, eradicating poverty and catalyzing economic growth. It can be a vehicle for low-carbon development and energy efficiency. Housing can therefore contribute to all three dimensions of sustainable urban development;

(e)   Land and housing issues affect social groups in different ways. In many cultures and legal systems, women do not enjoy equitable rights to land and housing. It is therefore vitally important to understand that land and housing policies are effective only to the extent that they recognize and promote rights of the poor and vulnerable groups, including young people and women. The key message here is that equality benefits all;

(f)   Cities contribute significantly to climate change and suffer from its adverse impacts. Many large cities are located on coastal areas and along rivers, which are highly exposed to climate change impacts. The resulting flooding and landslides can be avoided through better urban land management;

64.   From the afternoon session, the following key messages emerged:

(a)   Equitable access to basic services is vital for sustainable urbanization. The inclusiveness with which such services are planned and provided will determine the viability and environmental sustainability of urban areas. Equitable access to services requires investment but can lead to clean and green growth through the creation of jobs in diverse areas, particularly for the poor. Cities need to realize this potential and become more competitive and attract business and commerce;

(b)   The lack of access to energy is a key cause of poverty. This has not been adequately recognized. Consumption of fossil-fuel-based energy is a key contributor to greenhouse-gas emissions and hence climate change. Cities should concentrate on energy-efficiency gains through more energy-efficient urban forms and energy efficiency in buildings. Decentralized energy generation, combining the use of renewable energy sources integrated into smart energy grids, should be explored. Green options should be promoted and where this is not feasible the focus should be on mitigation. Promoting energy security for the poor is a means to fast-track development;

(c)   Public transport and other sustainable modes of transport should be supported; unsustainable modes of transport should be discouraged. Demand for transport should be reduced through better planning. Efforts should be made to ensure that transport systems are safe, available and affordable for the poor;

(d)   Global water resources are under heavy pressure. Efforts should be made to promote universal and affordable access, while reducing water demand and wastage. Demand for pumping should be reduced to save energy. Integrated water resources management frameworks should be adopted. Wastewater should be used and uncontaminated water should be returned to the environment. As part of a five-year drive, the provision of environmental sanitation should be accelerated to protect the health and dignity of citizens and to maintain the city as a centre for economic and social development. Water and sanitation programmes should be promoted for cities, leveraging investments from financing institutions;

(e)   The pathways to sustainable urbanization and green growth are mutually reinforcing. Construction and retrofitting infrastructure leading to energy and water efficiency, or recovering resources from waste, can create green jobs and a high social rate of return. Planning and installing new infrastructure should be done to maximize green gains, including jobs. New forms of energy generation focusing on renewable, including waste to energy sources can create jobs. Efficient transport systems and affordable public transport can lead to more productivity, including on green jobs. Partnerships between local authorities, cities and the private sector present many opportunities. The polluter pays principle should be adopted globally and urban environment standards promoted;

   (f) Collaboration between various spheres of government, strengthening regulatory frameworks and collaboration with the private sector and civil society are critical in realizing these priorities.

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