

HabPost

Updates from
UN-Habitat

UN HABITAT
www.unhabitat.org
unhabitat-info@un.org

ISSUE 04 | 29 APRIL 2020



Life in the Time
of COVID-19

UN-Habitat/Julius Mwelu

Editor's note

We are four months into COVID-19 and the question of when will this all end is still very much on everyone's minds. Essential good producers and service providers are still open for business, while other have paused their activity or filed for bankruptcy. For an organization like ours, maintaining its activity is not only essential, but the scaling up of our activities to protect the people we serve is also a must.

This week's issue of HabPost looks at our response to COVID-19 and how we have worked with partners to achieve our mission. Scroll further down and hear it directly from our Director of Emergencies, Ms. Christine Knudsen, who has answered our questions about the structures and strategies in place to respond to COVID-19.

We hope you enjoy this issue of HabPost.

The HabPost Team



In the oven



Here is a list of themes for some of our issues in the making—keep an eye out for your HabPost email!

► **Reflection on the positive and broad impact of COVID-19**

In the world



As of 27 April, there were **more than 2,810,325 confirmed cases of COVID-19** infections around the world (an increase of 25 per cent since last week), **with 193,825 confirmed deaths** (up 27 per cent) according to WHO. Monitor the situation at <https://covid19.who.int/>.

Highlights:

→ Last week, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom declared: **"We have a long way to go. This virus will be with us for a long time"**. Watch the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/>.



→ The **first human trial in Europe of a coronavirus vaccine** has begun in the UK.



→ **China** has shut down a number of public facilities in Beijing to prevent a second wave of coronavirus cases.

→ **Singapore**, which had been praised for its management of the outbreak, is now facing a second wave of cases.

→ Meanwhile, several countries including **France, Italy, Spain** and **New Zealand** are preparing to ease lockdown measures.

→ **Kenya** will allow some restaurants and cafes showing high levels of health regulation compliance and the ability to arrange for employee testing to re-open.



Get the latest updates on Covid19

[Here](#)

Keeping up with our Mission: We're Better Together

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is placing significant strains on urban systems, essential public services, and communities globally. As the COVID-19 crisis spreads across the world, increasingly threatening the most vulnerable communities, UN-Habitat is acting quickly to intensify its global response.

In the weeks since this pandemic was declared, our Executive Director appointed Ms. Christine Knudsen as the Emergency Director to coordinate our humanitarian response and to ensure our emergency protocols and response are aligned with the UN system – in particular with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). Christine is supported by a Core Humanitarian Programming and Coordination Team¹ which maintains four areas of responsibility related to our humanitarian engagement globally.

The first of these responsibilities is oversight and cross-coordination within the agency and with external partners. Second, the team supports country-led responses and our global programmes. We are responding to a growing volume of requests from both national and local governments to help them prepare, respond, and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The core response team is also facilitating learning and knowledge exchange across partner networks. As this crisis is unfolding at different



UN-Habitat/Julius Mwelu

speeds across the world, we have an opportunity to learn fast on how local governments and communities are preparing and coping. We have launched a very successful initiative with the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and Metropolis – [a live learning webinar series](#) which has provided mayors, governors, and experts of different fields the opportunity to share experiences in crisis management and protection. A video gallery of key messages is available [here](#).

Finally, the team has been looking at urban data and monitoring for informed coordination, decision-making, and humanitarian funding.

A framework for action

We are facing a common threat which we can only defeat together and with a common approach. The effort of building such approach resulted in

[UN-Habitat's COVID-19 Policy and Programmatic Framework](#) which provides guidance for our global, regional, and country-level action. This framework is constantly evolving and looks at the key programmatic areas where we excel and can add the highest value, while focusing on the city-level response to the crisis.

We know the impact of COVID-19 will be most devastating in poor and densely populated urban areas, especially for the one billion people worldwide living in informal settlements and slums as well as for refugees, internally displaced people, and migrants. This is a key area of work for us and central to our response efforts.

With no time to lose, we have moved ahead quickly with implementing emergency projects. An emergency fund was created mobilizing USD 1.3 million of our own internal funds to

¹ The team consists of Graham Alabaster, Filiep Decorte, Bruno Dercon, David Evans, Esteban Leon, Fernanda Leonardi, Robert Ndugwa, Kerstin Sommer, and Mabel Rubadiri.

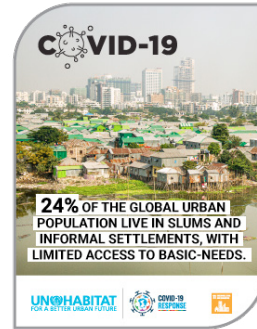
support 13 countries with community preparedness, outreach, and hygiene in addition to the realignment of some projects at the country level for the immediate emergency response. The timeframe for implementation of these projects is three months and we expect to see the direct impact and results to be scaled up and to trigger further community-level action.

A joint response

We reached an important landmark on 23 April 2020 with the launch of the [UN-Habitat COVID-19 Response Plan](#). This is the first time the agency made a funding appeal of this nature – a joint effort of the COVID-19 response team, our donor relations office, the different branches, and especially regional and country offices. The Response Plan outlines the urgent actions to intervene in 64 countries across the world until the end of this year, working to support local governments and community-driven solutions, especially in informal settlements and slums. Alongside this we will produce data to ensure informed decision-making, and work with experts to begin the recovery process.

In order to implement these critical projects, we will need to raise USD 72 million. All hands on deck, the immediate follow-up with donors has started and it includes looking at collaboration with the private sector and philanthropies. At the same time, across the agency, teams are approaching current donors and exploring ways to repurpose the existing funding and reviewing and adapting outputs to contribute to the COVID-19 response.

To amplify the work of partners working in cities, towns, and communities, we also launched the COVID-19 Campaign [#Takeaction4Cities](#). We are asking partners, local governments, academic institutions, community groups, and other stakeholders to sign up and commit to action in solidarity with the most vulnerable and share stories about their actions and solutions to inspire others.



Cooperation for better results

In Kenya, our host country, we have seconded four staff members and are supporting the work of national and local authorities in data monitoring and economic recovery. We are also combatting the spread of the disease in slums through [a wide range of community-based networks and the help of the youth](#). Handwashing stations have been installed and awareness campaigns are being conducted. You can [see this work at a glance](#) through the lens of our award-winning photographer Julius Mwelu working in the Kibera and Mathare slums.

This is indeed a time to step up together. Our partnerships are a strong asset in our humanitarian response. We are working closely with the United Nations system at the country, regional, and global levels to support the health,

humanitarian and socioeconomic tracks of the UN Secretary-General’s report [Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19](#). We are also working closely with national and local governments and community groups to respond to this crisis with a multi-sectoral, equitable, and human rights-focused approach.

Even after cities and countries begin to get their coronavirus outbreaks under control, life will not return to normal all at once. And even with the best of possible outcomes, many aspects of urban life may change. Pandemics have always shaped cities. With a foot in the present and an eye to the future, we are also looking at cities post COVID-19: what will change in the way we move, work, and think about our cities.



UN-Habitat/Julius Mwelu



Not everyone is equal in the face of COVID-19. We've asked **George Gachie**, Community Engagement Officer, Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP), what the pandemic has meant for the Nairobi slums, and we've tried to understand the concerns of one of our interns, **Cheryl Carvalho**, supporting the work of the OED.



“ I work as a community engagement officer with UN-Habitat’s Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP). I have also been seconded by UN-Habitat to the Kenyan Government-led working group supporting the coordination of community engagement in informal settlements to respond to COVID-19. I have been in the frontline of this support by activating existing urban community networks and supporting youth organizations to set up and manage handwashing stations in informal settlements. I lead trainings of youth organizations working to control infections and make sure that those providing help are protected but also trained in proper handwashing techniques. The training also ensures that the youth are equipped with the right information to raise awareness within the communities.

The informal economy has been greatly affected since the government introduced the 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. curfew. Most people are struggling to make any profits since there is restriction on movement.

At the local community level, many people rely on daily wages or are self-employed. The informal economy has been greatly affected since the government introduced the 5 a.m. to 7 p.m. curfew. Most people are struggling to make ends meet — as a matter of fact, the majority fears that a total lockdown may create economic, social, and security challenges. Another worry is that the transmission rate might be a lot higher in urban slums due to the high population density and poor

housing. Having grown up in such a setup, I understand the challenges faced by the residents and that is why I am taking the lead in responding to efforts of curbing the spread of COVID-19.

George Gachie,
Community Engagement Officer, Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP), Land, Housing and Shelter Section



One thing I have learned so far is communication is key to any role, and this couldn't be more salient when working remotely.

“ Working as an intern at the Office of the Deputy Executive Director during these unsettling times has been a memorable experience. I am fortunate to be privy to business continuity plans, meetings and work behind the scenes such as the daily COVID-19 updates to ensure UN-Habitat is able to deliver on its mandate, particularly now, when it is needed more than ever. The COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt given me exposure as to how the UN operates during a time of crisis. However, there are always two sides to a coin. Working from home means I miss out on experiencing the ethos and working culture at the office, the social interaction and the spontaneous assignments I am asked to be a part of. One thing I have learned so far is communication is key to any role, and this couldn't be more salient when working remotely. I am taking advantage of the advanced technology we have, to virtually engage with team members and regularly check in with my supervisor to create a virtual community during these unprecedented times.”

Cheryl Carvalho,
Intern, OED

Interview with Christine Knudsen, Director of Emergencies

We've asked Christine Knudsen, Director of Emergencies, to share her thoughts and insights about the management of COVID-19 at UN-Habitat.



© IISD - WUF10

Q What has COVID meant for you as the UN-Habitat Director of Emergencies?

With the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic and realizing what the response was going to have to be, the global nature of it, the scale, the scope of it, and how it was going to affect all of the organization's operations, we triggered the emergency procedures of UN-Habitat, and I was appointed as Emergency Director. So that was the first that thing that changed for me in my first months in UN-Habitat. And we activated our business continuity plan, which has since been updated. The crisis also meant that we needed to be looking as an organization at three different things: one was looking at staff safety and security and internal communications (Neil Khor), another was our business and operations (Gary Landes), and then it was our programming response, that I've been coordinating. All of this has been under the leadership and daily meetings with the ED and DED. And within that responsibility, I started



The crisis also meant that we needed to be looking as an organization at three different things: one was looking at staff safety and security and internal communications (Neil Khor), another was our business and operations (Gary Landes), and then it was our programming response, that I've been coordinating .

convening an across-the-house weekly coordination meeting for our core humanitarian response and adaptation and an expanded weekly meeting with all the regional offices and key senior management. That's been happening for five weeks now. We have produced a really good programme and policy framework. And we were able to mobilize emergency funding from UN-Habitat's own resources to support 13 countries for quick impact projects. Moving from proposals to the decision only took a week, showing how quickly the whole house was ready mobilize. We've also been raising our visibility and our engagement with humanitarian partners in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

Q How intensely have the UN-Habitat programmes and activities been affected?

I think all of us have been affected in one way or another, both in our personal and our professional lives. Some of the programmes have been and are being repurposed to address the changing needs and the changing priorities on the ground. Some of them are being repurposed to look at the new challenges that local authorities are having to face. And some of them have been temporarily suspended because they cannot go forward without high risk and can be delayed without compromising the programme. Probably all programmes have been affected because all of our staff have been affected, and all of our partners have been affected either in the way that they conduct their business or in the focus of what that business is going to be in order to be most responsive to the crisis within their communities.

Q Since you mention partners, do you know examples of UN-Habitat partners response to COVID-19, how they have been managing the crisis, and have you noticed best practice?

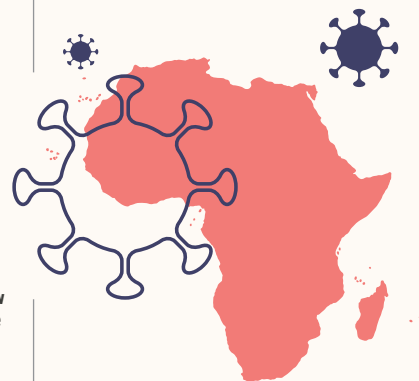
We've started to gather that information with partners for the last few weeks, and I think it's probably a little premature to start identifying best practice right now. But where we see emerging good practice, it's been important to share that. There's a couple of things happening. There's the Live Learning series that we've been doing with UCLG, one of our key partners, and with a group called Metropolis. We've had a dozen live learning series webinars where we have anywhere between 200 to 500 participants. Mayors exchanging with each other, local authorities exchanging with each other, transport unions, utilities managers exchanging around key issues that they've been tackling from safe mobility to the right to adequate housing to choices that have to be made in terms of lockdowns and leaving mobility a little bit more open. We've had a number of mayors from China, from Europe, from South America, and from Africa participating regularly. We're looking at those who are on the earlier side of the curve and those who are on the later side of the curve and looking at what they can learn from each other in terms of practice, but also challenges and exchanging around what worked and why and how. We'll be extracting that for some good learning. And then that model is also now being taken up with UCLG Africa, where it would be more about a continent-wide exchange around some of the challenges because for a lot of the COVID-19

experience so far, the documentation has been in the global North. And so what does that mean? How does that adapt? How does the response and the risk itself look different in Africa? And how are our authorities dealing with that and communities dealing with it? So that's a big piece of it. And then we're engaging in other exchanges like that. The World Economic Forum does a similar exchange around issues at a very senior executive level and the ED has been participating in that, for instance.

We've also, with our key civil society partners, been reaching out to find out what they're doing, what their concerns are and what they want to see in terms of support with UN-Habitat going forward. We have something called the Strategic Advisory Group (SAGE) which is an advisory body which we have constituted from a number of our other civil society networks and who advises the ED on a periodic basis. We facilitated a structured conversation with the ED and SAGE last week, which was important to our thinking about COVID-19 response in the future. The Group includes academics, youth, gender advocates, slum dwellers themselves, and professionals. And they formulated a lot of updates about what they have been doing through their broad networks, but also where UN-Habitat is a bit of a nexus in that. So getting a sense as well about how small enterprise is being affected, how the gender analysis brings a very different sense to not only the response and the prevention, but the recovery itself, the role of young people and what youth networks have been able to do moving forward. The question is where can we provide that significant value added and how do we support our partners from a normative side as well as an operational side?



And then that model is also now being taken up with UCLG Africa, where it would be more about a continent-wide exchange around some of the challenges because for a lot of the COVID-19 experience so far, the documentation has been in the global North. And so what does that mean? How does that adapt? How does the response and the risk itself look different in Africa? And how are our authorities dealing with that and communities dealing with it? So that's a big piece of it.



Q

Are there any global or regional strategies in place to address the impact of COVID-19 and contain its spread to protect populations in the countries or areas where we operate?

Yes, to all of those. Our response plan, launched last week, provides an overall strategy and area of focus for our work. It is also a consolidation of our most urgent funding requirements through the end of the year. We're going to be revising that as the situation evolves and as we're able to do updated assessments and see what the consequences of the pandemic are in specific situations where we operate. The plan is based on our COVID-19 policy and programming framework, which was approved and shared with all staff a few weeks ago. We'll be updating that in the next two weeks because we've had some additional frameworks coming out, including the Secretary General's report on the socioeconomic consequences and impact of COVID-19.

In addition, all the regional offices have strategies or are in the process of developing them. We're looking at how we focus on prevention and preparedness, response, and recovery. Even now there is still a lot that can be done in terms of prevention, including improved sanitation, improved water hygiene, improved consideration of how to support social distancing where possible and also making sure that people have good information that is accurate, available in local languages, and is applicable to their own situation – whether that's in a crowded urban setting, whether that's an informal settlement, or whether that's in a slum. The PSUP programme has done a lot of adaptation in their work in particular. In Kenya, we've been working in expanding and deepening our footprint in some of the informal settlements in slums, seconding staff to the Government of Kenya's emergency operation cell and working with partners to make sure we have the same consolidated messages about how people can keep themselves safe and what to do if they feel ill, how to work within their communities for prevention and response.



©UNHabitat



Even now there is still a lot that can be done in terms of prevention, including improved sanitation, improved water hygiene, improved consideration of how to support social distancing where possible and also making sure that people have good information that is accurate, available in local languages, and is applicable to their own situation – whether that's in a crowded urban setting, whether that's an informal settlement, or whether that's in a slum.



Q

We've received concerns from personnel stranded in non-family duty stations, far away from their loved ones, often in countries where the health system is very weak. Others wonder what to do if they become infected. What do you recommend those people away from Headquarters do?

From where I sit as the Emergency Director, it's absolutely important that we know the situation of all of our staff and we're able to help them in their particular context. So that means their physical safety, it means their mental health, it means their family support structures. And we've been cognizant of that from the very beginning of this crisis. It was the thing we talked about the most and wanted to give the most attention to the most quickly at the corporate level. In terms of the commitment of the organization, I have no doubts that it is first and foremost in minds of the ED and the DED. They want to make sure we are all providing the absolute maximum support that we can. So where there are concerns, they should be brought forward. If people are feeling stranded, we need to know about this so we can support them better. They can write to me directly about any concerns.

Q What do you think is the biggest challenge for UN-Habitat at present?

I've only been with UN-Habitat for three months — and in those three months I've seen the World Urban Forum and then I've seen this global crisis. UN-Habitat has stood to both of those. What I've seen is that we have a huge range of different approaches, knowledge, experience, and we are by far a stronger organization when we bring all of that together for a unified purpose. I saw what that means in terms of the WUF, which was hugely successful for all of us. And I've also seen it looking at the pandemic response, bringing all parts of the house together to think about not only what we do for staff, but what we do for the communities and the localities that we serve. Bringing all that to bear is actually very powerful. And it's a real challenge, I think, to all of us to do that regularly. But I have no question in my mind after three months that the will is there. The desire to do that is there. There's just so many challenges right now on every front and we have to stay focused on what we can do together.

Q Any last comments?

I think the fact that we are mobilizing all parts of UN-Habitat is impressive. I think the fact that we were able to mobilize internal funding for seed funding for 13 countries to scale up their operations and be able to move that through this system in a week was huge. And to me, it was a great demonstration of the commitment to support our colleagues in responding to needs urgently. How we're going to now work together to fund the USD 72 million that we've just appealed for is another big challenge ahead. And we need to make sure that we stay focused on supporting the field level operations where they are. Doing the frontline response is going to be absolutely essential for all of us for the many months ahead. This is — as I've said to a lot of my colleagues — this is a marathon, not a sprint. And we need to realize that every few months we're going to have to take a breath, reassess, and keep moving forward. It's that longer haul challenge, which is also going to be in the back of our minds even as we're doing the humanitarian appeals. We have a lot of work ahead, but I don't doubt for a minute that we'll achieve what we set our minds to.



How we're going to now work together to fund the USD 72 million that we've just appealed for is another big challenge ahead. And we need to make sure that we stay focused on supporting the field level operations where they are.



©UNHabitat



UN-Habitat/Julius Mwelu



©UNHabitat

Resources



Medical

Joint Medical Service (JMS)

+254 20 762 1717 (Hotline)

+254 724 255378 (JMS 24/7)

+254 728 961 939 (Staff Counsellor)

Email: unon-jms-medicevacuation@un.org

<https://medical.unon.org>



Security and emergencies

UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS)

+ 254 (0) 707 722 503 OR + 254 (0) 707 722 505
(UNDSS Security Operations Centre - 24/7)

Email: soc.undsskenya@un.org

+ 254 (0) 720 629 999 OR +254 (0)733 629 999;

+254 20 762-26666 (UNDSS Security Control

Room - 24/7)

+254 (0) 722 667112 (DPU Command Centre)



Links

Travel: <https://hr.un.org/page/travel-health-information>

UN FAQ: <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/covid-19-faqs>

UN information page: <https://hr.un.org/page/coronavirus-disease-covid-19>

UN-Habitat COVID-19 website: <https://unhabitat.org/covid-19-pandemic>

UNICEF information page: <https://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/covid-19>

WHO MythBusters: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

WHO Situation reports: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

WHO Q&A list: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>



ICT

UNON Helpdesk

icts.servicedesk@un.org or 020 762 1111



We want your brains!

HabPost is what you make it. **Last week's survey is still open** so we want to hear from everyone. Let your voice heard by completing the survey or contact us at unhabitat-habpost@un.org.



Editorial Team

Advisors:

Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Executive Director
Victor Kisob, Deputy Executive Director

Leads: Neil Khor, Amy Wood

Coordinator and editor: Rachad Nassar

Sub-Editor: James Ohayo

Design & Layout: Michael Lusaba

Contributors: Fernanda Lonardoni, Christine Knudsen,
George Gachie, Cheryl Carvalho

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



IMPLEMENTING
THE NEW
URBAN AGENDA



**COVID-19
RESPONSE**



**COVID-19
RESPONSE**

**UN-Habitat COVID-19
Response Plan**

COVID-19

Take action with us in
cities and communities