



UN-HABITAT EVALUATION BRIEF

Evaluation of the UN-Habitat Liaison Offices

Evaluation Report 6/2012

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) is the agency for human settlements. It was initially established in 1977 as the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UNCHS) with its headquarters in Nairobi through United Nations General Assembly Resolution 32/162. In December 2001, the General Assembly elevated the UNCHS from a “Centre” to a fully-fledged “Programme” known as the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat).

UN-Habitat’s liaison offices are located in New York, Geneva, Brussels and Washington, D.C. The liaison offices perform functions of coordination and representation. Their responsibilities include forging partnerships with United Nations agencies, intergovernmental and regional organizations, donors and civil society at global centres; advocating and marketing of UN-Habitat key priorities, programmes and products; resource mobilization; information sharing; and follow-up.

The New York office opened in 1978 serving as a link between headquarters and the UN Secretariat, the General Assembly and national delegations as well as other New York based agencies and organizations. The office in Geneva was initially established as the information office for Western Europe in 1978. Its functions have over time shifted with UN-Habitat’s increasing involvement in post-conflict and post-disaster work. The liaison offices in Brussels and Washington were established much more recently and primarily focused on resource mobilization from major donors and funders and strengthening of partnership of major development institutions.

In 2012 UN-Habitat adopted a project-based management approach and initiated a restructuring of the institutional structure as part of organizational reforms improving efficiency, productivity, transparency and accountability. The evaluation of the UN-Habitat liaison offices was conducted at the request of UN-Habitat Management. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess the roles, relevance, efficiency and effectiveness and the implications of the UN-Habitat organizational reform on its liaison offices in New York, Geneva, Brussels and Washington, D.C.

2. EVALUATION PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was managed and conducted by the Evaluation and Monitoring Unit (now the Evaluation Unit) with the support of an external consultant, Ms. Nefise Bazoglu. The evaluation took place over the period from November 2011 to March 2012. Different methods of data collection were used, and included desk review of documents, visits to the liaison offices to conduct interviews with staff and other stakeholders, and a questionnaire was administered to staff at headquarters and liaison offices. No cost-benefit analysis was carried out due to difficulties encountered in collating the different sources. Another limitation was that it was not possible to interview all stakeholders, in particular national officials in the host cities.

3. MAIN FINDINGS

Organizational and Technical Representation

- The offices have represented UN-Habitat at political and technical levels within United Nations agencies, intergovernmental and regional bodies and civil society.
- The New York office has played a

critical role in following up on UN-Habitat’s work programme approval processes lobbied delegates to the United Nations General Assembly for negotiating critical resolutions of interest to the agency and participated in a wide range of working groups, task forces and executive committees, including the United Nations Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC).

- The liaison office in Geneva has focused more on programmatic aspects of humanitarian aid, representing UN-Habitat in meetings aimed at resolving humanitarian challenges. The office has actively represented UN-Habitat and participated in the Consolidated Appeal Processes, and the United Nations Central Emergency Relief Fund.
- The Brussels office has represented UN-Habitat in the European Union and its subsidiary bodies and institutions, advocating policy dialogue that has led to improved working relationships between the agency and the European Union.
- In Washington, D.C., the office has represented UN-Habitat in political and technical meetings of the Global Environment Facility, the Organization of American States, and the World Bank. This representation has improved UN-Habitat’s visibility and, among its partners, demonstrated its unique technical capacity.

Partnerships

- The liaison offices have forged key partnerships with humanitarian partners such as IASC, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the World Health



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon (front, centre) and Executive Director, UN-Habitat, Joan Clos with mayors and regional authorities on sustainable development and the UN Rio+20 Conference at United Nations Headquarters in New York. The meeting was organized by UN-Habitat, 2012 © United Nations

Organization, the International Labour Organization, and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, including the Norwegian Refugee Council and non-governmental organization consortia in Geneva, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, and the United Nations Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs.

- Other partners include the United Nations Development Group in New York, European Union institutions in Brussels, the World Bank, Cities Alliance, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Organization of American States, and the Inter-American Coalition for the Presentation of Violence in Washington, D.C. These partners have

appreciated UN-Habitat's activities, events and contributions.

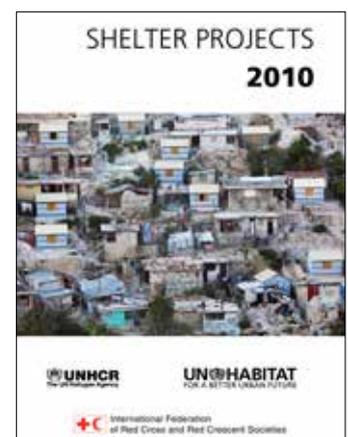
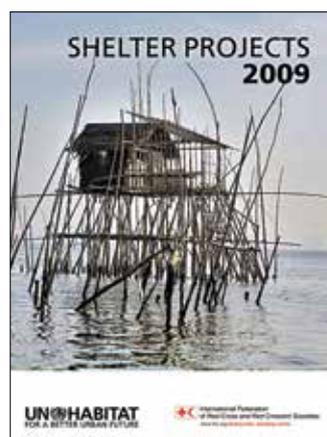
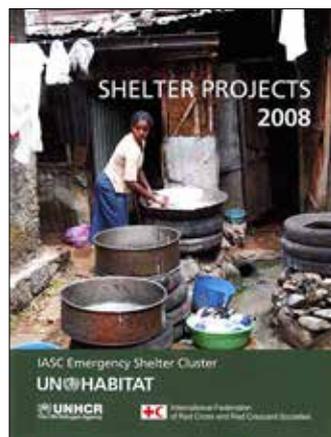
Advocacy

- New York, Geneva, Washington, D.C., and Brussels host a range of events—international conferences, forums and meetings—through which liaison offices have promoted UN-Habitat's mission and priorities.
- The liaison offices have played a key role in promoting UN-Habitat major events including World Habitat Day, the World Urban Forum, World Water Day, ministerial conferences and the launch of publications such as the biennial Global Report on Human Settlements.
- The office in New York serves as the UN-Habitat focal point for the Department of Public Information of

the United Nations Secretariat and this has improved the communication and advocacy of UN-Habitat activities.

- UN-Habitat has developed a number of normative products on humanitarian issues under the Geneva office's leadership, including the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Strategy and Action Plan for Meeting Humanitarian Challenges in Urban Areas, the post-disaster and post-conflict land guidelines, risk mapping and shelter needs assessment model and shelter project catalogue.
- The Brussels office has added value to advocacy and marketing of UN-Habitat priorities within European Union institutions. As a consequence, sustainable urban development issues are a priority on the European Union agenda.

The annual Shelter Projects publication provides a compilation of shelter programmes targeting humanitarian managers and shelter programme staff from local, national and international organizations. © UN-Habitat



- In Washington, D.C., the office has elevated discussions on sustainable urbanization issues among United States policymakers by engaging them through the global celebrations of World Habitat Day 2009, and the process of the World Urban Forum 2010, which led to attendance of a 50-member United States delegation at the fifth Forum and the development of a framework for sustainable urbanization. These efforts have led to the introduction of legislations on urban development and poverty reduction.

Information Sharing

- Sharing of information with other United Nations agencies and relevant intergovernmental, regional organization as well as civil society organizations has increased the visibility of UN-Habitat. But sharing of information between the liaison offices and headquarters has been less than adequate in the view of those interviewed for the evaluation.

Fundraising

- The liaison offices in Brussels, Geneva and Washington, D.C., have leveraged their representational and advocacy work in substantial resource mobilization for UN-Habitat projects and programmes.
- The Geneva office has participated in Consolidated Appeals Process and the Central Emergency Relief Fund, which has resulted in increased humanitarian financing for UN-Habitat field projects over the past three years (USD 6.1 million in 2009; USD 18.7 million in 2010; USD 80.4 million in 2011).
- In 2008, the Brussels office lobbied the European Commission resulting in a contribution of about USD 7 million earmarked funds to UN-Habitat for the implementation of the first phase of projects in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States. The European Commission further approved about USD 14 million for the second phase to projects in these countries. Pipeline projects and programmes worth EUR 77 million (more than USD 100 million) are under negotiation with the Commission.
- The liaison office in Washington, D.C., has been instrumental in raising the

U.S. government's contribution to UN-Habitat programmes. Contributions of non-earmarked United States funding increased from USD 148,000 in 2007 to USD 2 million in 2011.

4. LESSONS LEARNED

- There seems to be a disconnection between UN-Habitat Headquarters and the liaison offices not only caused by time and space. The offices feel isolated from much of the work of headquarters while many of the Nairobi staff are less than satisfied with the support provided by the offices to those of their activities which are outside the primary focus of the work of the offices.
- There is a lack of a clear policy or guidelines for each of the liaison offices to deliver on their core responsibilities effectively and efficiently in view of many ad hoc and time consuming assignments from headquarters.
- While the liaison offices have demonstrated a high degree of efficiency in the use of their limited human and financial resources, an increase in demands as a consequence of reorganization may overstretch their current capacity. The New York and Geneva offices have less than ten staff, including support personnel and interns. Brussels has one professional and one support staff, Washington, D.C., just one professional. Workloads have to be commensurate to capacity and taking into consideration preparations for the upcoming Habitat III conference.
- Another challenge is presented by the current reporting lines of the liaison offices. With the exception of the Geneva office, which has direct lines of communication with those at headquarters dealing with technical cooperation and reconstruction, the heads of the offices report directly to the Executive director and see themselves as his/her representative. All four offices are structurally in the Office of the Executive Director. This has created a situation which is not optimal for cooperation between the offices and the rest of the agency.

5. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enhance the contribution of the liaison offices in the new project-based management structure. Changes should be considered in view of three scenarios (*maintain status quo, concentrate on liaison functions, or strengthening of the offices*) for long-term decision-making on the future of the liaison office. Strategic guidelines should be developed based on the roles and tasks of each office with key priorities, contribution to the project-based management approach, and expectations of headquarters as well as contribution to partnerships.
- Develop terms of reference to spell out the priorities and tasks of each office. Heads of offices would then be held accountable for the delivery of the tasks. Job descriptions of office staff also need to be reviewed to ensure their alignment with the new project-based structure.
- Establish reporting and communication lines in alignment with the project-based management structure. Liaison offices could report on the administrative and management matters to the Office of Executive Direction and the Office of Management, and provide substantive reports to the Project Office. The reporting lines should also take into consideration the extent to which technical contribution is expected from liaison office staff and ensuring support from substantive offices at headquarters.
- Establish as *modus operandi* that technical advice should be the domain of headquarters substantive offices to the liaison offices. While the existing office staff should strengthen their "generalist" profiles, there should also be a minimum number of staff specialized in the technical competencies relevant to the particular office.
- Clarify fundraising expectations for offices and develop appropriate fundraising strategies while linking them horizontally or vertically to the resource mobilization structures at headquarters.