UN-HABITAT
Youth

"2050 will be the first time in history that the majority of our global population is living in cities."

Youth and Urbanization

Cities are home to an increasing number of youth. This brings new issues to the forefront of economic, political and human development globally, given that the majority of these youth overall are better connected, educated and informed than previous generations.

At the same time, inequalities are putting obstacles in the ways of youth inclusive development. Youth find themselves at challenge with lower salaries and less job opportunities (underemployment and unemployment), limited control over assets and property, and unequal participation in governance and public and private decision-making.

This type of marginalization is a barrier in terms of the collective productivity and progress of cities and countries. Urbanization requires new solutions that bring youth on-board as partners to find legitimate and inclusive ways to enhance the sustainability and quality of life for all living in cities; ultimately supporting the realization of people's human rights.

Youth and Urban Public Spaces

UN-Habitat has as a core mandate the development of inclusive urban public space. Research by UN-Habitat has shown that youth are one of the principle users of urban space, due both to their large demographic presence in cities, as well as to their utilization of public amenities and space. The research is also clearly pointing towards the need for a stronger focus on young women and urban public space to address issues of dual discrimination in terms of age and gender. UN-Habitat's State of the Indian Urban Youth Report (2012/2013) shows that young women are barred from using urban public space due to safety concerns, as they "cannot hang out on street corners the same way as young men".

Perceived as a threat or challenge, youth often encounter numerous difficulties in accessing public spaces for their social, cultural and material development. Concerns over security and criminal gangs translate into the exclusion of urban youth, especially those from low-income and minority groups.

Public space is not only a venue for recreation and social interaction. Urban public spaces are critical for youth to use for shelter, community innovation and entrepreneurship in support of economic development. As a means to this end, ensuring youth engagement in the design and governance of public spaces has been shown to foster community ownership and social cohesion, something which is a fundamental component to stable, prosperous and safe cities.

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The One Stop Youth Centre Model

The Youth Unit has developed different models to address issues of youth and urban public space, with the most well-known model being the One Stop Youth Resource Centres. This model addresses the need to create a safe and generative space where young men and women can access services in areas such as health and recreation, develop their skills and receive training based on existing needs. These activities, primarily designed by youth themselves, contribute to improved livelihoods, acquisition of skills, and increased employability.

UN-Habitat seeks to further develop the model, and is working with key regional and national partners to refine the model to scale. The model has already been adopted by the governments of Rwanda and Uganda where UN-Habitat has provided experience and knowledge in support of these efforts. UN-Habitat is also currently working to establish the model in Mogadishu in collaboration with the Federal Government of Somalia, supporting urban reconstruction and local economic development for youth.

Action Research on Youth and Land

Utilizing the knowledge gained through research and evaluation of the Urban Youth Fund to develop better policy at the local and national levels has been a core focus of UN-Habitat. Along this line, the Youth Unit partnered with the Global Land Tool Network to undertake a 2-year action research project on youth and land.

GLTN and the Youth Unit evaluated and selected 5 best practices from the Fund that focused on youth and land issues, and refunded them to for two years to focus on refining and expanding their work. Concluding at the end of 2014, the project has already resulted in a strengthened knowledge base on youth's access to land and public space. Youth responsiveness criteria for land governance and tangible youth and land tools have been developed, building the capacity and awareness of youth on land challenges in the cities of Sao Paulo, Brazil; Kathmandu, Nepal; Sana'a, Yemen; Nairobi, Kenya; and Harare, Zimbabwe.

Youth as Development Partners

Key to the work on UN-Habitat is the recognition and support of youth as development partners, versus youth as clients. The anchor program of this focus area is the **Urban Youth Fund** with its various components (grants, training and capacity building, e-learning, and mentor program) which has now been running for 4 years, supported over 240 youth-led groups, based in 63 countries and 172 cities. The Fund is unique in the UN and multilateral system in that it supports youth-led agencies directly to achieve specific development goals through projects developed by the youth themselves, aligned with UN-Habitat's thematic areas. The key significance of the Urban Youth Fund for UN-Habitat is the direct access to lessons-learnt and data on youth-led development to inform the normative policies of UN-Habitat.

Youth Engagement and Inclusive Governance

UN-Habitat supports the inclusion of youth in the social and economic life of cities. The issue of inclusion in either area is dependent upon the other – youth cannot have a sustainable and decent livelihood without being able to participate in decisions which directly affect their own and the life of their communities, and vice versa.

UN-Habitat works at a programmatic and normative level to engage youth in the social and economic life locally, nationally and internationally. The Youth 21 initiative was created by UN-Habitat, youth organizations and member states in 2011 to seek ways to better engage youth in international governance, specifically within the UN system. Youth 21 was expanded at the request of the stakeholders involved to include the engagement of youth using a multi-level governance model, which allows youth entry to governance at any point – locally, nationally and internationally.

Core to this focus area for the period 2014-2016 will be the Habitat III process. Women and youth organizations were actively involved in the processes towards Habitat II in Istanbul in 1996, and contributed to the fact that there are strong references to youth, women, gender and gender equality in the Istanbul Declaration and in the Habitat Agenda. The Habitat Agenda that came out of the Habitat II conference in 1996 in Istanbul, Turkey is one of the strongest UN documents on the right of participation of civil society, including youth groups.

Resilience, Reconstruction and Post-Conflict

In cities like Mogadishu and Kabul, generations of youth have lived through conflict. Many of these young people have endured lives of insecure economic prospects, violence and traumatization, with young women often facing dual discrimination due to their gender and age. Increased pressure on urban infrastructure and services, uncertainty and outbreaks of violence, lack of resources and support mechanisms as well as a general mistrust in society serve to further side-line, and in some cases radicalize, youth, making post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation even more challenging.

UN-Habitat supports countries in addressing issues such as these in countries including Somalia, Afghanistan, Palestine, Syria and Sri Lanka. Here, urban areas have faced a massive influx of displaced people and relief actors; breakdown of services; weakened institutions; and destruction of infrastructure and buildings.

Currently being developed, this portfolio seeks to utilize the decade long experience of the One Stop program and the Urban Youth Fund to develop a program which improves the livelihoods of youth and their communities particularly in post-conflict contexts, engaging youth as assets for development and bringing them on-board as development partners. Through this program, both normative and operational work on issues arising in line with the pace and scope of urban change as related to youth in conflict and post-conflict situations are underway.

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Youth and Urban Sports

Pursuant to the Habitat Agenda, sports and recreation are designed to promote youth involvement in local governance and the improvement of human settlements. Pursuant to Governing Council resolutions 19/3 and 20/1, using sports as an activity invites youth to partner in solving urban problems. Although many of the youth centres and youth fund recipients incorporate sports as part of their programme activities, sports and recreation also receives specific focus from UN-Habitat. Sports have been deployed as a way of engaging urban youth because of the passions that they inspire and the entertainment, health and economic benefits that accrue from them.

Programmes seek to empower participants and communities by engaging them in the design and delivery of activities, building local capacity, adhering to generally accepted principles of transparency and accountability, and pursuing sustainability through collaboration, partnerships and coordinated action.