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### Agenda Item 6: New UN Urban Agenda

## Urbanization and Sustainable Development: Towards a New United Nations Urban Agenda

### Executive Summary

This policy paper addresses the challenges facing today's urbanization model and the opportunities that urbanization offers. It presents, for consideration by the HLCP, eight *guiding principles* and nine *key levers of transformative change* towards sustainable urbanization that could constitute 'A New United Nations Urban Agenda'.

Urbanization is today one of the most important global trends of the 21st century. It is a transformative force that can be harnessed to enhance economic growth and productivity, as well as wealth and state-building. However, today's most common urbanization model is not sustainable environmentally, socially, politically and economically.

The many opportunities of urbanization today could be the basis for harnessing its transformative force and activating a pattern of urban growth that could positively impact other spheres of national development. Eight guiding principles could steer the vision of such a new urban agenda and induce transformative change:

- (a) Promoting a new urbanization model that is *universal* and adaptable to different national circumstances and that is based on the key urbanization challenges and opportunities shared by all countries.
- (b) Promoting a new urbanization model that contains mechanisms and procedures that respect, protect and promote *human rights*.
- (c) Promoting *equitable* urban development and inclusive urban growth, which entails bringing equality and non-discrimination considerations, including gender equality, to the centre of urban development.
- (d) Promoting *integration* in the implementation of a new urbanization model in order to address the environmental, social and economic objectives of sustainability, which have many inter-linkages, as well as the concerns of different levels of government.
- (e) Promoting the *empowerment of civil society*, expanding democratic participation and reinforcing collaboration.
- (f) Promoting green cities and *environmental sustainability*, which involves establishing a critical connection between science, environment, economic growth, urban planning and governance.
- (g) Promoting *innovations* that facilitate learning and the sharing of knowledge, which entails the creation of supportive learning, science, technology and innovation policies as well as development of capacities.

(h) Promoting a *global data revolution* for effective, results-based, implementation and monitoring of the new urban agenda at the local, national and global levels.

The proposed 'new urban agenda' represents a paradigm shift towards a new model of urbanization that can better respond to the challenges of our age. At this stage, the HLCP may wish to consider nine key levers of change, adaptable to different circumstances:

1. *Developing and implementing national urban policies*: This lever amalgamates the dispersed energy and potential of urban centres within a national system of cities and towns. It helps to coordinate the work of different sectors and tiers of government, establishes the incentives for more sustainable practices, and allocates resources accordingly.
2. *Strengthening urban legislation and systems of governance*: Laws, institutions and systems of governance in line with states international obligations and bound by the rule of law shape the operational principles, organizational structures and institutional and social relationships that underpin the process of urbanization.
3. *Harnessing the urban economy, creating employment opportunities and improving existing working conditions for all*: Urban areas and regions require economic regeneration, cluster development and industrial zone strategies; productivity plans, employment generation and income-growth programmes; as well as sustainable transport.
4. *Strengthening municipal finance*: This lever is about realigning fiscal authority, responsibility and revenue sharing, i.e. achieving the right balance between different levels of government; improving systems of revenue collection; designing new financial mechanisms; and improving budget management and transparency.
5. *Reinvigorating territorial planning and urban design*: New planning methods and systems can contribute to changing the city's structure, form and functionality towards more compact, integrated and connected and sustainable solutions, such as densification, social diversity and mixed land uses, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and adequate public spaces, including vibrant streets.
6. *Promoting universal access to quality basic services*: This requires an urban development model that promotes universal access to clean water and sanitation, sustainable energy, essential health care, nutritious food, education and training facilities, basic income security, and socio-economic safety nets, especially for people living in poverty.
7. *Promoting adequate housing for all income categories of urban residents*: This requires access to land for different social groups, prioritizing the most in need, effective land-use plans, adequate legal and institutional frameworks, sustainable building technologies, predictable financial mechanisms for affordable housing, and recognition of housing as a place of work. Housing can contribute to growth through backward and forward linkages.
8. *Strengthening gender equality and women's empowerment*: National and local governments should develop their capacity to integrate a gender perspective into all their urban policies and programmes so as to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and to improve the welfare and rights of women and children.
9. *Placing culture at the heart of sustainable urban development*: Integrating culture in urban development policies will contribute to efficient management of urban change. It will strengthen sustainable development and social cohesion through tourism-related creative industries, other job-creation opportunities, education and enhanced cultural diversity.

The new urban agenda could be the basis of a UN system-wide approach to the implementation of the sustainable urbanization dimensions of the post-2015 development agenda and the outcome of Habitat III. It could also constitute a framework for cooperation and showcasing of UN work on urban issues in a way that demonstrates UN policy coherence in the area of sustainable urbanization.

## **I – Introduction**

1. This policy paper addresses the challenges facing today’s urbanization model and the opportunities that urbanization offers. On the basis of these, it presents, for consideration by the HLCP, eight guiding principles and nine key levers of transformative change towards sustainable urbanization that could constitute “A New UN Urban Agenda”.

2. It is important to state, at the outset, that the proposed agenda does not seek to establish a blueprint. Instead, it seeks to propose an approach (guiding principles and levers of transformative change) that should be contextualized and adapted to different settings.

## **II – Urbanization can drive economic growth and development, yet the prevailing model of urbanization is not sustainable**

3. **At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only 2 per cent of the world’s population was urban.** By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the percentage had increased to 10. During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a historic milestone was reached when the population living in cities and towns exceeded 50 per cent of the global population, thus making urban centres the dominant habitat of humankind. And the level of urbanization is increasing, with 60 per cent of the world’s population expected to live in cities by 2030 and nearly 70 per cent by 2050. Most of this growth, at least 90 per cent, will take place in low-income countries, some of which are fragile states plagued with recurrent conflicts.

4. The rapidly increasing dominance of urban areas places the process of urbanization among the most significant global trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But urbanization is not simply a demographic or spatial phenomenon.<sup>i</sup> Rather, it is a force which, if effectively steered and deployed, can help the world to overcome some of the major global challenges, including poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, climate change, fragility and conflict, to name just a few.

5. Evidence shows that no country has ever achieved sustained economic growth, rapid social development and gender equality without urbanizing. The transition from low- to middle-income country status is almost always accompanied by a transition from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban economy, a process often based on accumulation from the primary sector.<sup>ii</sup> Urbanization is a force that has changed ways of thinking and acting, ways of using space, lifestyles, governing and solving disputes, social and economic relations, and consumption and production patterns. It has been a driving force behind profound social, cultural and political change, including state-building, although inequalities remain a substantial barrier to development in many cities, especially within developing countries. In many societies, urbanization has been the locus

The **transformative force of urbanization** has far reaching implications beyond demographic change. While urbanization, as viewed in this paper, includes rural-urban migration, proportional increases in the urban population, and the spatial expansion of cities, it also has other very important social, behavioural, political, economic, and environmental dimensions.

Urbanization is related to consumption and production patterns, as well as levels and rates of urban socio-economic activities, growth and development. Furthermore, it refers to cognitive processes; the changing of mindsets in ways that profoundly influence social development and innovation.

The potential strength of this transformative force is related both to the level and rate of urbanization in this wider context.

of much of their creativity and inventive spirit, and the bulk of their economic activity. It is estimated that urban areas account for about 70 per cent of the world's gross domestic product and a similar percentage of new job creation. Thus, urbanization has generated economic growth and prosperity, as well as the demand for inclusion and protection for many, including in post-conflict and transition contexts.<sup>iii</sup> In short, urbanization is a powerful driver of development. Moreover, when health, education and other social services are managed well in urban settings, the potential to achieve other development outcomes is great. This has been recognised by the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals through its proposal of a stand-alone goal on cities and human settlements: **"Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"**.

6. **However, urbanization has generally followed a pattern that is unsustainable:**

- a. *Environmentally*, with its combination of cheap fossil fuel, heavy dependence on the motor car, endless urban peripheries that often consume inordinate amounts of land, resources, and in many cases protected natural areas – largely steered by private, not public interest<sup>iv</sup> – and with increasing impacts of natural disasters and outbreaks of communicable diseases. Extensive urban sprawl in different cities of the world is causing environmental degradation and the depletion of natural resources, including the availability of arable land, thereby increasing per capita rates of resource use and greenhouse gas emissions;
- b. *Socially*, with exclusive forms of urban development that add to unequally distributed income and wealth generation as well as spatial inequalities, creating divided cities in the form of wealthy gated communities that are in sharp contrast to slums or poor areas with little or no access to basic municipal services. Different forms of poverty and marginalization and the increase of income inequality are exacerbated by speculative land and housing markets. Although hunger and malnutrition are often framed as rural problems, the urban poor are also increasingly at risk. Growing difficulties in integrating migrants and in sharing the human, social, cultural and intellectual assets that urban centres offer create racially and socially fragmented areas. Insensitive planning and lack of accessibility of urban infrastructure, facilities and public services contributes to barriers that prevent women, persons with disabilities and older persons from participation as both agents and beneficiaries of urban development;
- c. *Politically*, with the continuing domination of traditional modes of representation and leadership which tend to concentrate power in the hands of the economic and social elites and to disenfranchise large sections of the urban population that cannot access the formal political system. If cities are also where new forms of social organisation and civic participation mostly thrive, these are often not able to challenge the existing power structure within the formal structures of grievance management – when they do not reinforce it instead – and as a result, cities remain prone to tensions between groups for the control of power, money and identity that more and more often degenerate into outright conflict; and
- d. *Economically*, with the incessant increase in the cost of living which is prohibitive for many, forcing them to move to distant peripheries far removed from places of employment, further increasing their expenditure on transport,

thereby limiting the urban advantage. Widespread under- and unemployment and different forms of unstable and low-paid jobs, informal income-generating activities and improper working conditions create additional economic restrictions, unequal access to basic services and amenities, and poor quality of life for many. Urban households are highly dependent upon food purchase, and therefore upon regular income for food security, making the poorest households especially vulnerable to internal and external economic factors outside their control.

7. Despite the fact that urbanization has the potential to make towns, cities and city regions more prosperous and countries more advanced, many urban centres, both in the developing and the developed world, have found themselves unprepared in the face of current spatial, demographic, social, political and environmental challenges.

### **III – The challenges associated with development are exacerbated by poorly planning and managed urbanization**

8. Urbanization, and particularly the city, historically has been associated with intrinsic attributes that generate positive dynamics for development and change. However, poor planning, the absence of effective governance and legal frameworks, fragile institutions, low capacity of local authorities to finance, operate and deliver essential physical infrastructure and services, weak coordination mechanisms of different levels of government and of rural-urban linkages, among other factors, have intensified the **challenges associated with urbanization**. Today the most pressing challenges include:

- a. *Large scale urban poverty in many countries:* While poverty has fallen dramatically at the global level, urban poverty is a growing challenge, especially in developing countries.<sup>v</sup> The lack of an agreed definition of urban poverty and the inconsistency of official data make it difficult to assess precisely the current extent of urban poverty worldwide; yet, studies at country level show that urban poverty is becoming more prevalent in many countries, partly because the expected improvement in quality of life has failed to materialize for many rural to urban migrants;
- b. *The steady increase in the number of slum dwellers:* In many countries, urban expansion has often been characterized by informality, illegality and unplanned settlements, especially in developing countries. Above all, urban growth has been strongly associated with slum growth, which is primarily due to a lack of appropriate planning and affordable housing as well as low incomes.<sup>vi</sup> In fact, the world's 828 million slum dwellers suffer in varying degrees from poor sanitation, inadequate access to clean water, food insecurity and malnutrition, crime, unemployment, threats of eviction, overcrowding and poor quality housing. Slum growth affects women and members of other disadvantaged social groups disproportionately, often because they experience greater difficulty in accessing resources and services tailored to their needs as well as decision-making opportunities.<sup>vii</sup> Continuing population growth, including migration into urban centres – caused by economic factors, natural disasters and conflicts combined with the lack of appropriate responses and sustained solutions – is likely to increase the number of the urban poor and slum

dwellers, whose shelter needs are not given adequate attention by municipal authorities, in spite of their provision of much needed labour to urban industries and high-income homes;<sup>viii</sup>

- c. *The emergence of new forms of poverty, vulnerability and marginalization:* In addition to the income poverty in developed countries,<sup>ix</sup> new overlapping forms of social exclusion and marginalization are emerging: infrastructure-poor, immigrant poverty, young people at risk, vulnerable women headed households, and vulnerable elderly, among others.<sup>x</sup> Many of these forms of poverty and marginalization stem from unemployment and under-employment, the decline of economic bases in decaying cities, low incomes, absence of traditional safety nets and lack of or weak social security systems, all of which are often physically manifested in segregated urban neighbourhoods, including those in which international migrants are concentrated, a phenomenon that is present in many cities in both the global south and the global north.<sup>xi</sup> Unemployment is one of the greatest challenges facing youth globally. Today there are more young people without work than ever before. Estimates of the proportion of unemployed 15-24-year-olds are close to one-third in many regions and countries, representing one of the most pressing problems in the world's cities and towns;
- d. *Rising inequality in urban areas across the world:* Inequality has become a universal concern. Differentials in access to opportunities and basic services, income, consumption, location, safety and security, information and technology, as well as gender-based and other forms of discrimination and stereotypes, are now the norm, not the exception. For the majority of the world's population, income disparities are today bigger than they were a generation ago.<sup>xii</sup> Urban income inequalities intersect with other forms of inequality in the social, political, legal (in terms of access to justice), spatial<sup>xiii</sup>, cultural and environmental spheres, reinforcing the deprivation faced by many groups and individuals based on gender, age, ethnicity, location, disability and other factors.<sup>xiv</sup> Moreover, inequality is an important risk factor for crime and victimization. Meanwhile, many people's aspirations have risen due to greater access to information, resulting in social dissatisfaction and malaise;
- e. *Decreasing levels of human security and inequitable health gaps in cities:* Poverty, social deprivation, poor access to health, education and other social services, substandard housing and crowded living conditions, increasing food and nutrition insecurity, problems with water safety and availability, inadequate sanitation and solid waste disposal services, air pollution, traffic congestion, road safety, criminal violence, epidemics of both communicable and non-communicable diseases, as well as occupational health problems and accidents at work, are some of the factors associated with human insecurity in general and ill-health in particular that affect the population of many cities in the world today. The close proximity of people living in the environmentally poor conditions typical of many developing country cities – especially informal slum areas – increases the rates of infectious diseases. HIV/AIDS and TB are increasing rapidly in many poor communities in urban areas as a result of extreme poverty, overcrowding, insecurity and separated families. The poor, particularly slum dwellers, have less access to health care, have a higher

incidence of illness, including of water borne diseases such as cholera and typhoid, and die earlier than people in any other segment of the urban population. These inequitable health gaps are growing despite unprecedented levels of global wealth, knowledge and health awareness.<sup>xv</sup> Increased pressure on health care systems and basic services that often do not keep up with increasing demand and do not respond to changing demographic and epidemiological transitions are part of the problem;

- f. *The speculative nature of housing and related markets:* Housing plays a fundamental role in national economic development, having a multiplier effect on employment, income generation, investments and savings. However, a massive rise of subprime mortgage lending in the USA, partly driven by speculative behaviour and inadequate regulation of credit and financial markets, led to a sudden increase in defaults and collapse of several financial institutions, triggering the financial crisis that started in 2008 and spread globally through the contagion effect made possible by interconnected financial markets. Millions of people in a number of countries, mostly developed, faced foreclosure while at the same time millions of houses were left abandoned, underutilized or vacant.<sup>xvi</sup> Speculative behaviour in land, housing and financial markets in many countries has contributed to the endless expansion of cities, rampant land sub-divisions, poor street and infrastructure connectivity and unsustainable consumption of land, resources and energy. Even more, decades of neglect of public housing, state intervention and the failure of the private market to produce an adequate number of affordable homes has resulted in the polarization of cities, weakening of social cohesion and further inequalities. Policy perspectives have often considered housing, land, water and sanitation (alongside health, education or justice) as mere commodities, instead of recognizing their social functions;
- g. *Women face discrimination in the context of urbanization, poverty and violence:* On the one hand, women living below the poverty line, especially those living in slums,<sup>xvii</sup> tend to concentrate in the low-wage, low-skilled and often home-based jobs in the informal sector, and non-core jobs.<sup>xviii</sup> Moreover, women in poor communities do not enjoy the same rights to infrastructure and adequate housing. On the other hand, urban women in poverty experience a higher degree of insecurity and vulnerability to violence as they are more likely to become victims of violence, including sexual violence, both in the public space, including the work place, and within the household, and they are more vulnerable to human trafficking;
- h. *High costs to the natural environment:* Increasing urbanization produces particular environmental challenges associated with intensive land uses, higher resource and energy consumption, and rising difficulties in ensuring efficient and sustainable food systems, and flows of goods and people. When cities are not well planned and managed, environmental health hazards increase, ecosystems are disrupted or damaged, air and water pollution aggravated and natural resources depleted;
- i. *The urban risks of climate change and natural hazards:* As the world becomes predominantly urban, the international debate on climate change is intensifying, and this is not coincidental. It is now widely accepted that

urbanization brings about fundamental changes in production and consumption patterns, which when associated with a dysfunctional urban form and structure of cities, contribute to higher levels of energy consumption<sup>xix</sup> and greenhouse gas emissions.<sup>xx</sup> Also, coastal cities are increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather events resulting from climate change. Human life and economic losses in urban areas caused by climate change induced and other natural disasters are a result of the high concentration of population and economic activities, as well as of the high levels of vulnerability of the poor, whose residential areas are frequently located on hazardous land, such as industrial waste sites, floodplains, riverbanks and steep slopes. This in turn is exacerbated by poor urban planning and disaster prevention measures as well as inadequate infrastructure;

- j. *Cities are becoming the terrain for violent conflict and crises:* More than 1.5 billion people live in countries affected by state fragility and violent conflict.<sup>xxi</sup> Fragile states often have the highest rates of urbanization, partly due to the massive population movements from rural to urban centres caused by conflicts. They often experience extraordinary pressures on urban basic services and infrastructure, including housing, food security and nutrition, water and sanitation, as well as health and educational facilities, while lacking the necessary institutional capacity to respond to the demands. They also experience immense pressure to generate jobs and other forms of livelihood. In addition, they are unable to deal with the grievances and conflicts that arise from the lack of services and livelihoods. Many cities are failing to manage the socio-cultural heterogeneity within their populations, are not able to find durable solutions for permanently displaced populations and refugees, nor are they promoting social cohesion in any appreciable ways. Cities that were previously socially and culturally mixed evolve into highly divided urban spaces after conflict, at all levels, making effective urban governance even more difficult to achieve. The demand for services from informal settlements also causes the privatisation of services that the state is unable to deliver and can cause further tensions. In addition, the visibly increasing inequalities in income, wealth and access to services and opportunities in urban centres, and the absence of alternative means of securing livelihoods, all create the kinds of tension that can easily result in violent conflict, including over access to resources. Moreover, the largely informal character of urban growth in these countries and cities erodes the legitimacy of the state, creating along with other factors an environment prone to crime and other types of violence not related to conflict; and
- k. *Cities are generating unprecedented levels of multi-layered crime and violence<sup>xxii</sup>:* Violence can take a multitude of forms in urban environments, including armed violence, extortions, robberies, drug and human trafficking, sexual or gender-based and domestic violence, and the criminal depredation of urban spaces and infrastructure, among other forms of violence. It is perpetrated by numerous actors, including gangs, organized criminal groups, armed individuals and militias, as well as state security and law enforcement agencies. Urban violence has become a major impediment to economic growth and has catastrophic social consequences. Urban violence is also deeply gendered: across all societies, young males are the most common perpetrators, as well as victims, of



urban violence; yet, the proportion of women suffering from urban violence as direct victims keeps increasing. Crime and violence affect overwhelmingly the most deprived urban communities, where city governments and law enforcement agencies have often abandoned their public security role, while richer sections of society resort to private security provision, often operating outside of legally-defined boundaries.

9. All these urban challenges are exacerbated by the inefficient form and function of many cities, and the failure to create locally appropriate legal and institutional structures to promote integrated and long-term sustainable urban planning and management. Indeed, poorly planned and managed urbanization – that translates into low densities, separation of land-uses, mismatch between infrastructure provision and residential concentration, and inadequate street networks, among other problems – diminishes the potential of using economies of scale and agglomeration. This causes high transaction costs, loss of opportunities in production and delivery, labour shortages, poor generation of jobs, and various other negative externalities that have adverse effects on the growth and prosperity of cities. Balanced urban and rural development is also essential to ensure positive synergies between urban centres and rural areas.

#### **IV – The opportunities offered by urbanization go beyond urban space**

10. The **opportunities that exist can be used to harness the transformative force of urbanization** and to activate a pattern of urban growth that can positively impact other spheres of national development. The outcome document of Rio+20, *The Future We Want*, recognizes that, “...if they are well planned and developed... cities can promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable societies”.<sup>xxiii</sup> More recently, and as mentioned earlier, the OWG has recognised the important role of urbanization in sustainable development through its proposal of a stand-alone goal on cities and human settlements. Sustainable urbanization offers a number of avenues for overall sustainable development as described below:

- a. *Cities are becoming prominent players in the global arena:* Increasingly cities are identified as the locus for change and the venue where policies and actions are mobilized. Cities have been able to forge new linkages among actors and offer innovative solutions that have been included in national agendas with greater possibilities of influencing regional and global development. Many of the new partnerships and networks that advocate for key global issues, such as security, resource management, environmental protection, human rights and sustainability, are created in cities;
- b. *Local governments have emerged as key institutional drivers of city/regional growth:* Increasingly, their work, vision and solutions transcend local political confines and exert regional and global influence. Urban local governments today are generally more decentralized, have greater autonomy, flexibility and creativity, including in service delivery, and have stronger interdependence with national and other territorial levels of government. Representative local governments interact regularly with society in the implementation of the urban development agenda, frequently through more creative means such as the

- increasingly common use of e-governance solutions; a process that has contributed to bringing more balanced territorial development and roles among the public, private and non-governmental sectors and other tiers of government. With adequate infrastructure and legal frameworks in place, locally institutionalized partnerships between government, industries and other actors can lead to considerable growth;
- c. *Increased contribution of cities to national economic growth:* Cities presently account for 70 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP): some 55 per cent of GDP in low-income countries, 73 per cent in middle-income countries, and 85 per cent in high-income countries. In spite of the relatively weak global economic growth since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, many developing countries have witnessed high economic growth rates of over 7 per cent per year since 2010, and most of this growth is concentrated around industrial activities of towns and cities, often enhanced by increasing inputs from rural areas. At the same time, most employment opportunities are in urban and peri-urban areas, generating further potential for growth and prosperity. This can be further enhanced by improving the working conditions of the urban workers. Recent empirical evidence suggests that cities can, in fact, be pathways out of poverty. One of the main reasons why poverty has declined significantly in some countries, such as China, is because of urbanization and, due to the large numbers involved, this has contributed to the overall decline of world poverty;
- d. *Cities are and have always been centres of change and innovation:* The concentration of people, resources and activities favours the development of creative systems, thought and action driven by education and learning, innovative milieus, knowledge-creation mechanisms and new technological developments that contribute to social development and prosperity. The creative capital of cities has been a catalyst of productivity, particularly in generating local solutions, which have a major role to play in urban transformation. Innovative social and institutional arrangements can contribute to the enhancement of equity, social inclusion and gender equality; improvement of decision-making; more accountable means of carrying out service delivery; more influential civic interest groups; as well as change of the ways of doing business and of using resources. Technological innovations can help to change the urban space in terms of connectivity, proximity and distance, as well as to improve connectivity with both proximate and more distant rural hinterlands.<sup>xxiv</sup> However, research, innovation and entrepreneurial dynamism, including in the informal sector, must be supported by enabling science, technology and innovation policies, as well as an enabling business and investment environment, without which the creative potential of cities will not be unlocked. This requires investment in the framework conditions that allow for new thinking, welcome participation and reduce obstacles that deepen the inequality of opportunities among different groups of society. Innovation boosts can also be achieved through smart industrial policies that provide spaces in urban areas such as industrial or science parks, allowing industries to cluster, thus fostering a basis for inter-industrial knowledge exchange and technology learning. Industrial and science parks can stimulate productivity, innovation and growth of local industries, and also increase foreign direct investment and related technology exchange with globally more advanced economies;

- e. *The important role of culture* as a factor of social cohesion and mutual understanding as well as an economic vector, notably through heritage and creative industries<sup>xxv</sup> (with impact on land use, building techniques, planning, high value know-how, tourism), is increasingly recognized as an asset for the sustainable management of change in the context of development policies. Cities hold much of humanity's tangible and intangible cultural heritage and are places of extraordinary expressions of cultural diversity, including in the food industry;
- f. *Urban areas are increasingly connected*: Cities are more and more interconnected, not only through their physical infrastructure such as transportation, power and communication facilities, but also to "distant and multiple locations through financial capital, resource flows and commodity chains".<sup>xxvi</sup> The landscape of urbanization is rapidly changing, affecting the scale, rate, location, form and function<sup>xxvii</sup> of human settlements. Cities that are better connected with each other and with the rest of the world can add to productivity growth and more effective and accessible service delivery through agglomeration effects, particularly when combined with smart industrial policies, thus opening up opportunities to enhance human well-being and prosperity. However, cities and towns must also ensure that their citizens equally benefit from agglomeration factors – that networks of roads and infrastructure reach low income settlements, that urban spaces also provide the poor with productive opportunities and that regulations allow them to be service providers as well. By being physically, socially and economically connected, the expected growth in cities can be better distributed among all stakeholders, including low-income communities;
- g. *Cities are merging into new regional spatial configurations*: In some parts of the world, both large and small cities are merging to create urban settlements on a massive scale. These new configurations can take the form of mega-cities, urban corridors and city-regions. These forms seem to act as nodes where global and regional flows of people, capital, goods, research and science, services and information combine and commingle, resulting in faster economic and demographic growth than that of the countries where they are located. These new configurations are increasingly connected spatially and are functionally bound by their economic, socio-political and environmental linkages. They offer the possibility of reinventing new mechanisms of governance, and play an increasing role in the creation and distribution of prosperity far beyond their own specific geographic areas, including in their rural hinterlands;<sup>xxviii</sup>
- h. *Higher interdependence between rural and urban areas*: The geography of rural, urban and peri-urban space is changing. Complex interactions are taking place, influencing social and environmental transformations at the interface of rural and urban areas, including flows of people, products/goods, services, money, information, natural resources and waste.<sup>xxix</sup> A new equation that integrates urban and rural and focuses on the rural-urban nexus, in contradistinction to a conventional view of urban versus rural, is emerging. In this new interpretation, cities are drivers of change in rural areas and vehicles for job creation and poverty reduction, while at the same time rural areas are the source of ecosystem services that cities require, as well as of the food and other agricultural inputs they need for both nutrition and industrial production. The

- provision of strategic infrastructure, basic services and amenities in rural areas and better urban-rural interconnectivity have the potential of contributing to the creation of economic opportunities, reduction of rural communities' vulnerability, enhancing the prospects for equity and promoting regional and national sustainability;
- i. *Adequate housing brings an opportunity for social, economic and spatial integration:* More than half of city space is composed of residential areas. Appropriate urban planning and policies and programmes geared toward the fulfilment of the right to adequate housing for all contribute to efforts by countries to comply with their international obligations. Along with appropriate urban design, housing can contribute to increasing densities and enhancing economies of agglomeration. The housing sector can improve social integration and enhance quality of life when housing is affordable, built to provide adequate protection from weather elements, equipped with adequate services and amenities, and linked to proximate livelihood opportunities – all of these in the context of the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing. It can also stimulate the construction sector, generate jobs and promote local economic development through backward and forward linkages. Housing is not only a place for living, but often also a place of work, especially in the cities and towns of developing countries. Well-designed housing units favour spatial integration that in turn reduces land and energy consumption and diminish the cost of infrastructure provision, including public transport;
  - j. *Tourism increasingly constitutes a significant component in the economy, social life and the geography of many cities:* Tourism can help reduce poverty and support sustainable development in cities. It creates not only economic opportunities for local residents, but is also an important tool for transforming the urban landscape and improving the worldwide reputation of individual cities. Tourism is also an important means for the rejuvenation of cities through infrastructure improvements, creation of a skilled labour force, stimulation of local business entrepreneurships, attraction of other industries and services, and creation of local amenities and recreational facilities. The regeneration process not only builds a quality visitor experience but also safeguards and enhances the quality of life for the local community. Within this context, urban land-use plans and management policies must give full consideration to the needs of tourism development, including the spatial distribution of tourism attractions, promotion of accessibility of tourist destinations and the conservation of natural and cultural heritage;
  - k. *New comprehensive human rights-based approach to urbanization:* Human rights have advanced in cities, particularly with regards to adequate housing, tenure security and water and sanitation. The respect for all human rights and the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, the right to safe drinking water and sanitation, the responsible governance of tenure, gender equality and women's empowerment, the rule of law, and the overall commitment to just and democratic societies for development was reaffirmed in the outcome document of Rio + 20.<sup>xxx</sup> Likewise, key documents drafted as inputs to the post-2015 development agenda stress that new goals and targets “need to be grounded in respect for universal human rights”<sup>xxxii</sup> and based “on the values

of equity, solidarity and human rights.”<sup>xxxii</sup> A human rights-based approach to urbanization and the progressive realization of human rights in the city is also gaining more traction in many cities and countries;<sup>xxxiii</sup>

- l. *Urbanization offers many advantages for women’s social and economic growth and their equal participation and rights with men:* On the social front, greater cultural diversity found in urban areas can provide an enabling environment to deconstruct social norms, entrenched gender stereotypes and traditions or customs that hold women back and perpetuate gender discrimination against women, girls and youth in general. Furthermore, cities offer better social and infrastructure services, such as water, transport, education and health care, including sexual and reproductive health, and this is where women can more easily access information facilities and communication technologies as well as opportunities for practicing sports, recreation and cultural activities. On the economic front, there are growing opportunities in cities for women to engage in highly paid professional jobs or dynamic sectors such as manufacturing and services. Women’s equal access to productive resources and decent jobs is critical not only for their empowerment and for furthering the gender equality goal, but it also has positive multiplier effects for a range of key development goals, including poverty eradication. Women’s economic empowerment has proven to generate both micro-level efficiency results through increased household productivity and macro-efficiency, as evidenced by the positive correlation between indicators of gender equality and economic growth;<sup>xxxiv</sup>
- m. *Urbanization offers many opportunities to deal with climate change and disaster risk reduction:* Cities are well positioned to assess their risks and vulnerabilities, and to develop mitigation and adaptation strategies through appropriate urban planning and design as well as appropriate building materials and construction technology, including in the retro-fitting of both buildings and infrastructure. Policies that promote compact cities with higher densities and more mixing of residential and commercial uses can certainly contribute to climate goals because of reduced per capita rates of resource use and greenhouse gas emissions. The economies of scale, as well as proximity and concentration of enterprises and innovation in cities, make it cheaper and easier to take actions to minimize both emissions and climate hazards. Green growth through increasing use of renewable energy, growth in environmental industries such as solid waste management and recycling industries, as well as the decoupling of urban growth from resource use can have positive impacts on climate change. Well planned and managed urbanization offer significant opportunities for disaster risk reduction, climate resilience and lessening of the vulnerability of people living in poverty. In this regard, it is important to promote and support green jobs;
- n. *Cities show strong potentials for establishing the basis of positive state-building dynamics:* Cities are easier to fix than the “failed” states in which they are located. The political dynamics of running a city are more favourable than that of a whole fragile country. Cities’ compact size and blurring off cultural and other identities make elections of city governments more a test of competence and pragmatism in urban governance than a contest between different ethnic, religious-based or ideological narratives as found at national level. Officials at city-level can be held more easily accountable than those in central government.

The concentration of elites (political, social, intellectual and economic) means also the capacity to challenge the bargains on which political settlements rest when these are not sustainable. Cities in post-conflict settings can become critical spaces for institutionalized forms of political debate and participation that help build inclusive institutions for managing conflict; and

- o. *Urban violence can be successfully addressed by tackling its root causes and through integrated preventative strategies:* Despite high levels of armed violence, encouraging results can be seen in the reduction of armed violence in certain urban communities. Multi-stakeholder and multi-disciplinary initiatives at the city government level have resulted in the design of city community-based security and social cohesion plans that extend the reach of law enforcement, improve response to criminal incidents and include close cooperation with civil society to prevent armed violence. These initiatives also tackle different dimensions of urban life that are paramount to creating safer environments, including urban design for crime prevention, job-creation, education, health, cultural needs and access to justice. They are also reinforced by programmes to reduce violence in the domestic and educational spheres. Violence prevention becomes closely linked to urban planning and how greater social diversity can be generated through transport, services, housing and economic policies that break ghettoization dynamics.

## **V – There is a need for a system-wide approach to sustainable urban development**

11. To effectively address the above-mentioned challenges and take advantage of the opportunities of urbanization, **the United Nations, in its role as the “guardian” of the international development agenda, requires a coherent approach to urbanization.** This approach should recognize urbanization as a force on its own, which, alongside other drivers of sustainable development such as agriculture and rural development, can be harnessed and steered through policy, planning and design, regulatory instruments as well as other human actions to contribute towards national sustainable development. Moreover, the challenges posed by urbanization have global ramifications that, if not addressed adequately, could jeopardize chances of achieving sustainable development. It is therefore necessary to shift cities and towns onto a sustainable development path.

12. Urbanization affects all human settlements: rural villages and service centres, small and medium-sized towns, cities and megacities. All these settlements contribute in different ways to national growth and sustainable development.

13. The third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) offers an excellent opportunity for the UN system organizations to reflect on the role of urbanization in sustainable development and to come up with a system-wide approach that is guided by the content and spirit of international human rights instruments, including on women’s rights and gender equality. Similarly, the discussions on the post-2015 development agenda are crucial to developing a shared perspective on sustainable cities and human settlements, and for discussing the challenges and opportunities that urbanization offers for the future implementation of the Sustainable

Development Goals. These global discussions, and the work of the High Level Committee on Programmes, are excellent platforms for forging agreement on the main principles and characteristics that a sustainable city should have, including the mechanisms that are needed to induce a drastic change towards sustainable urbanization. However, this UN consensus should also be informed by the views of other stakeholders, especially cities and local authorities, as well as civil society.

14. **The UN system and the international community recognize the importance of and high priority that should be accorded to transformative change.** This is a critical juncture at which the dynamic forces of urbanization must be used to make a giant leap towards sustainability. It is clear that continuing along the current model of urbanization is no longer an option. Cities and towns can play a greater role in the sustainable development agenda, and for that they need to be better understood and integrated into the changing global discourse on sustainable development. The UN can ride the wave of change by promoting a “new urban agenda” in order to match the world’s evolving development goals and meet the current and emerging urban challenges. The “new urban agenda” should promote sustainable cities and other human settlements that are environmentally sustainable and resilient; socially inclusive, safe and violence-free; economically productive; and better connected to and contributing towards sustained rural transformation. Such a vision should be fully in line with all of the evolving post-2015 sustainable development goals, most particularly the proposed goal on sustainable cities and human settlements.

15. For this “new urban agenda” to induce transformative change in cities and countries, both developed and developing, it needs to give explicit attention to both **the principles** that can guide this change and the **levers** to support the development of the new urbanization model. In other words, the “new urban agenda” needs to address the longer-term, structural factors, including beliefs and behaviours that hinder the possibility of transformative change, using clear guiding principles. It also needs to respond to existing challenges and opportunities to promote sustainable urban development through appropriate levers of transformative change.

16. **Eight guiding principles** can steer the vision of such a “new urban agenda” towards transformative sustainable development: universality, human rights, equity, integration, democratic participation, environmental sustainability, learning and sharing of knowledge, and data revolution.

1. *Promoting a new urbanization model that is universal and adaptable to different national circumstances:* Work towards ensuring universality of the new urban agenda, given that the key challenges urbanization are shared by all countries. Some of the shared challenges are increasing urban poverty, high levels of unemployment and underemployment, especially among the youth, climate change and increasing vulnerability to disasters, as well as urban-based social and political upheavals. The new urbanization model should promote sharing of solutions to these challenges and of ways to take advantage of the opportunities that urbanization offers, within the context of north-south and south-south cooperation, and of the normative role of the UN. Global urban networks such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and C40 Climate Leadership Group, facilitated by new information and communication technology, could play an

- important role in promoting universal urbanization principles. It will be important for this universal agenda to be adaptable to different national priorities and urbanization levels;
2. *Promoting a new urbanization model that contains mechanisms and procedures that respect, protect and promote human rights:* Ensure that both the desirable outcome (sustainable cities and other human settlements) and the process to achieve this outcome take account of the content and intent of international human rights instruments. That process should be guided by an equitable model of urban development which addresses a number of basic rights, including access to: decent work, nutritious food, adequate and affordable health care, housing, clean water and adequate sanitation, education, basic social services and socio-economic safety nets, safety and security, transparent institutions and justice systems, as well as participatory public decision making mechanisms. It should also be guided by international instruments such as those on persons with disabilities and on the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women and girls. Pursuit of an equitable model of urban development will contribute to the progressive realization of human rights in urban centres and the expansion of open and inclusive democratic spaces as well as of opportunities and prosperity for all urban residents. The advancement of human rights, including civil and political rights, is essential for development and poverty eradication, and requires responsive, accountable and legitimate public institutions, including at the local level;
  3. *Promoting equitable urban development and inclusive urban growth:* Transformative change can occur when equity considerations, including gender equality, are brought to the centre of urban development and guide informed decision-making that enhances the lives of all city dwellers.<sup>xxxv</sup> This can happen when all levels of government and development partners adopt equity-based approaches, not only for ethical reasons, but also because they realize these approaches are cost-effective.<sup>xxxvi</sup> In particular, the promotion of access to adequate housing and urban basic services is essential to building “cities for all”, as it enables all urban dwellers to live and participate in a meaningful manner within their towns and cities;
  4. *Promoting integration in the implementation of a new urbanization model:* Fully sustainable urban development cannot be achieved without the integration, in urban planning, of the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainability. This will ensure that different sectoral objectives, such as those on land and housing, environment, transport, water and sanitation, health, education, industry and employment, are addressed simultaneously because of their many inter-linkages. This is also necessary for eliminating duplication and waste in investment in the different sectors. Spatially, the new urbanization model should address rural-urban linkages, the regional impacts of towns and cities and the multi-level governance and planning requirements of urban development within the context of metropolitan regions, urban-rural regions and other emerging configurations such as urban corridors. Integration also entails joint, or coordinated, planning and implementation by different agencies at the local, regional, national and global levels. For the UN system organizations,



- this implies joint planning and implementation of development assistance in the area of sustainable urbanization, especially at the national and municipal levels;
5. *Promoting the empowerment of civil society, expanding democratic participation and reinforcing collaboration:* Empowering civil society, expanding democratic participation and reinforcing collaboration enables transformative change, leading to a strong and well-organized civil society; equal and balanced participation between men and women, young and old; as well as deliberate inclusion and participation of marginalized groups, such as people living in poverty, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, migrants, minorities and other historically excluded groups. Inclusion and participation may also be achieved by upholding and promoting cultural diversity. This requires new avenues for political organization, social participation and the expression of cultural diversity, so as to influence decision-making and change policy outcomes for the benefit of the majority. It also requires an effective local platform that allows for genuine and efficient collaboration between different levels of government and interested groups, including civil society and the private sector, and that is capable of steering urban growth towards a more sustainable path. In particular, community media should be used to enhance public debate and participation fostered by international standards that respect freedom of expression and journalistic independence;
  6. *Promoting green cities and environmental sustainability:* Transformative change occurs when a critical connection is established between science, environment, economic growth, urban planning and governance with regards to issues such as land and resource use, energy consumption, rural-urban linkages, material flows, industrial development, land fragmentation, disaster risk reduction and climate change. The need to integrate green growth considerations, “decoupling” of urban growth from increased resource use and its environmental impacts, greening of urban centres and peri-urban areas, green training of urban enterprises and workers, and environmental strategies in long-term urban planning and management of cities<sup>xxxvii</sup> are fundamental aspects of this guiding principle;
  7. *Promoting innovations that facilitate learning and the sharing of knowledge:* Transformative change, whether in urban or rural areas, depends on social and institutional innovations that facilitate participatory learning. It happens when a supportive learning environment and supportive science, technology and innovation policies are established, people’s and institutions’ capacities are developed, including those of the private sector and industries, and appropriate tools are employed; when long-term collective, collaborative and cumulative learning is connected to knowledge in support of the achievement of desirable outcomes and the monitoring of goals and targets. Cities are thus places where people can acquire the tools and skills for sustainable living and helping societies learn their way to sustainability. Educational as well as scientific and cultural institutions are integral to this process, as well as to the future of cities, in particular because of the opportunities they offer young people seeking a better life;

8. *Promoting a global data revolution:* For the effective and results-based implementation of the above-mentioned principles, especially if the goal of sustainable cities and human settlements is recognized in the post-2015 development agenda, there will be a need to put in place a global monitoring mechanism, adaptable to the national and local levels, that provides a general framework for periodic assessments of the different dimensions of urbanization and the state of cities and towns, including all forms of inequity. It is important that data collected for this purpose is disaggregated by age, sex, location, income, ethnicity, etc, and that it be collected in a participatory manner. This will allow cities and towns, countries, and the international community to measure progress and identify possible setbacks and constraints, thus pre-empting unintended developments.

17. The “new urban agenda” can only be successful in achieving its objectives if these eight guiding principles actively underpin and structure urban growth and development, and if they functionally and operationally guide the way urban societies function.

## **VI – A “new urban agenda” for transformative change**

18. **The proposed “new urban agenda” represents a paradigm shift towards a new model of urbanization** that can better respond to the challenges of our age, optimizing resources to harness future potentials. This “new urban agenda” should be universal, rights-based, sectorally and spatially integrative, inclusive, equitable, people-centred, green and measurable. It should also have the possibility of articulating different scales, from the neighbourhood to the global level, and diverse human settlements, from the rural village and rural service centre, through the small and medium-sized town, to the city and megacity.

19. **The contours of a “new urban agenda” revolve around major issues that are linked to urban sustainability.** They constitute effective means, or levers of change, that can be deployed to effect the adoption of a new urbanization model that can have an impact on the sustainability of national development. In this manner, the “new urban agenda” makes a critical connection between urban sustainability and sustainable development at large.

20. At this stage, the HLCP may wish to consider nine key levers of change that are presented here as components of the “new urban agenda”. These levers, which may help to achieve the desired outcomes of sustainable urbanization and sustainable development in general, need to be adapted to different circumstances, as there is no “one-size-fits-all” solution. More specifically, these levers of change have to be designed locally, nationally and regionally, taking into consideration the needs and specific circumstances of cities and towns, and the level of peace, state-building and development of the countries where they are to be deployed.

21. Once deployed, the levers may increase economic productivity and enhance equitable growth, improve the wellbeing of the population, improve inclusion and accountability in urban governance, and create multiplier effects that spread across space

and through different types of human settlements – from remote rural villages and rural service centres, through small and medium-sized towns, to cities and megacities. Their effective implementation will determine the actual form and content of urbanization, in the process steering urban growth, influencing land-use markets, forming the basis for managing public spaces and other common goods, and identifying opportunities for multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral solutions. Fundamentally, the transformative agenda needs to focus on all people and to maximize their engagement.

22. The **nine levers of change** that have been identified are the following:

1. *Developing and implementing integrated national urban policies:* This lever amalgamates the dispersed energy and potential of urban centres within a national system of cities and spatial or territorial planning. It establishes synergetic connections between the dynamics of urbanization and the overall process of national development, recognizing the importance of fostering mutually reinforcing rural-urban linkages and leveraging the rural-urban nexus for development. It builds linkages between sectors, defines the broad parameters within which the transformative force of urbanization is activated and steered, coordinates the work of different tiers of government (local, regional and national), establishes the incentives for nudging economic and social agents towards more sustainable practices, and allocates resources accordingly;
2. *Strengthening urban legislation and systems of governance:* Laws, institutions, regulatory systems, and systems of governance bound by the rule of law integrate a composite set of factors which embody the operational principles, organizational structures and institutional and social relationships that underpin the process of urbanization. Laws, policies and governance systems must not discriminate in substance or in practice and must reflect the inputs of the population and should be equitable, ensuring that efforts are geared towards the most in need so as to avoid reinforcement of inequalities. Balancing regulations with incentives provides potential “win-win” opportunities for urban planning. These elements provide the medium through which the transformative force of urbanization is nurtured and deployed. This lever creates the normative basis for action and realization;
3. *Harnessing the urban economy, creating employment opportunities and improving existing working conditions for all:* This lever refers to the very foundation of urbanization, the locus of change and interaction, and the basis for transformation and accumulation. Urban areas and regions require economic regeneration and renewal programmes, cluster development and industrial zone strategies, as well as access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport. They also require productivity and structural diversification plans, knowledge sharing and technology learning platforms, as well as employment generation and income-growth programmes for vulnerable groups, including newly arrived immigrants. These can have positive multiplier effects in various development areas, especially when redistributive mechanisms are put in place, including extension of public spaces and public procurement for people’s livelihoods. Adequate urban design maximizes agglomeration economies that

- are needed to develop the local urban economy and reduce the inequality of opportunities among different groups of society;
4. *Strengthening municipal finance*: This lever is about realigning fiscal authority and responsibility, i.e. achieving the right balance between different levels of government (municipal, subnational/regional and national) in terms of fiscal authority, responsibility and revenue sharing; improving systems of revenue collection; designing new financial mechanisms; and improving budget management and transparency, including through capacity-building and institutionalization. It is also about the proper use of the urban space, legal mechanisms and taxation instruments that reinforce capacities of local authorities and land-value sharing strategies. It also refers to innovations in financing, including through endogenous local solutions, leveraging the statutory role of planning to mobilize public and private resources and enhancing local government credit-worthiness and accountability;
  5. *Reinvigorating territorial planning and urban design*: New planning methods and systems can contribute to changing the city's structure, form and functionality towards more compact, integrated, connected and sustainable solutions. Cities that optimize economies of agglomeration, increase densities (where these are low), promote enterprise linkages, provide adequate logistics infrastructure, adopt environmentally sound production and consumption methods, encourage social diversity and mixed-land uses, foster inclusiveness, protect commons, and consider the possible impacts of climate change induced and other natural hazards, as well as promote public spaces and vibrant streets can better address current urbanization challenges. So too can re-establishing joint urban planning and public health initiatives, as well as initiatives with other other sectors. As urban centres do not exist independently from their surroundings, with the constant and in some cases reciprocal flow of people, goods, natural resources and services, territorial planning at the urban region level is necessary for sustainable development;
  6. *Promoting universal access to quality basic services*: An urban development model with adequate policies and institutional frameworks, including social protection systems or safety nets, for promoting universal access to urban basic services, such as housing, nutritious food, water and sanitation, health coverage, education and training facilities, and basic income security, especially for urban dwellers living in poverty poor, is another lever of change. It requires integrated and gender-sensitive planning, innovative solutions for sustainable energy services, adequate financing and investments, effective partnerships with the private sector and all relevant stakeholders, technological support that promotes green economic and industrial development, resilience and climate change considerations, and a scheme that retrofits and rehabilitates existing infrastructure. Basic services and infrastructure strategies, including green infrastructure, transport and mobility, need to be people-centred and to be clearly articulated to housing programmes and land-use plans, as well as to prioritize vulnerable and marginalized groups. For the latter to happen, urban policy makers need to understand the poor and their options, to seriously consider their safety and well-being, as well as to appreciate their contribution to cities;

7. *Promoting adequate housing for all income categories of urban residents:* This lever considers re-positioning housing as a pillar of sustainable urban development in such a way that it contributes to building cities that are economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive. It requires equal access to land for different social groups as well as men and women, without discrimination and prioritizing the most in need, effective land-use plans, adequate legal and institutional frameworks, sustainable building technologies, responsible construction industries, and predictable financial mechanisms for affordable, habitable and accessible housing, all of which should also take into account that housing is often a place of work (home-based enterprises). This contributes to the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living;
8. *Strengthening gender equality and women's empowerment:*<sup>xxxviii</sup> National and local governments should develop and strengthen their capacity to integrate a gender perspective into all their urban policies and programmes so as to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and to improve the welfare and rights of women and children. Efforts should be made to effectively collect urban data disaggregated by sex and age, and to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls through prevention measures. Specific attention should be given to women's and girls' safety in private and urban public spaces. In particular, cities should develop approaches and standards for city-wide implementation of gender mainstreaming in all areas, including the design of public spaces, housing, transportation and street lighting. Increasing the voice and participation of women in urban public life is vital for ensuring that women's issues are taken into consideration in urban development agendas; and
9. *Placing culture at the heart of sustainable urban development:*<sup>xxxix</sup> Integrating culture in urban development and/or urban regeneration policies contributes to efficient management of change in cities towards more sustainable social, economic and human development, as well as better job-creation opportunities, social cohesion, education and promotion of cultural diversity. Sustainable and resilient cities are those which preserve their urban heritage as a factor of social identity, safeguard their intangible cultural heritage and the collective memory as factors of identity and dialogue among communities, and promote the creative industries and the creative economy. Placing culture at the heart of sustainable urban development provides a solid baseline for better understanding of each socio-cultural context and is a means for ensuring better linkages between local and global needs.

## **VII – Conclusion**

23. Urbanization is vital for delivering sustainable development, not only because the urban areas of the world are expected to absorb almost all future population growth, but because they have the potential to concentrate economic activities and influence social change. They also have the ability to reduce ecological footprints (by densification), connect rural and natural environments and create system-based solutions.<sup>xi</sup> The “New UN Urban Agenda” responds to the differentiated needs, challenges and opportunities of cities in developed as well as in developing countries. It contributes to “fixing” the urban space in its form, structure and functionality both in the developed and developing countries to positively influence social change in various development domains.<sup>xli</sup>

24. As this document has shown, urbanization has the potential to help the world to overcome some of its major challenges; including poverty, inequality, environmental degradation, conflict, poor health and climate change. However, uncoordinated interventions (by different actors) that are not based on broadly shared guiding principles can inadvertently contribute to forms of urbanization that are not sustainable, such as: the unnecessary spatial expansion of cities, the development of communities at densities that are too low, a mismatch of infrastructure investment and productive activities, allocation of resources and investments that may contribute to the generation of further inequalities, and the entrenchment of conflict-inherited urban governance systems that aggravate societal divides rather than facilitate reconciliation and state-building. Thus, the ‘new urban agenda’ should provide guiding principles for promoting an overall spatial framework for sustainable urban development that addresses a number of essential physical and environmental aspects, such as: designing compact cities, protecting public spaces and the commons and making them safer, enhancing street connectivity, and encouraging well-designed urban layouts, favouring social diversity and inclusiveness as well as mixed land-uses. The “new urban agenda” should also include the guiding principles for promoting sustainable social and economic development within urban centres as outlined above.

25. The “new urban agenda” can bring about sustainable urban development, which is essential for national sustainable development, as its expected outcomes extend well beyond urban areas. From an economic perspective, the “new urban agenda” will support more efficient economic and industrial growth through better allocation of land, labour, capital and other resources, as well as through greater connectivity, economic diversification and strategies for creating employment and improving working conditions. From a social perspective, the new agenda will promote shared prosperity with equitable access to the benefits of urbanization, underpinned by a rights-based approach to urbanization, with concomitant protective laws and institutions. This also includes socio-economic safety nets that guarantee access to basic urban services, as well as practical actions designed to add-value: e.g. employment-generation through public services, combating child labour and support to youth in risky sectors. From an environmental perspective, the agenda will protect natural resources, ecosystems and biodiversity at local and global levels, and promote climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as building of resilience, allowing present and future generations to live in sustainable cities. Cities that are environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive and violence-free, economically productive and resilient can genuinely contribute to national development, prosperity and sustainability.

26. The new urban agenda could be the basis of a UN system-wide approach to assisting countries and municipal authorities in implementing the sustainable urbanization dimension of the post-2015 UN development agenda. It could also be the basis of a framework for cooperation among UN system organizations, especially at the local and national levels, on sustainable urbanization issues. In this way, it could facilitate the systematic inclusion of urbanization in United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks. In addition, it could provide a framework for UN system organizations to showcase their work on urban issues in a way that demonstrates UN policy coherence on sustainable urbanization, which is likely to increase the interest in and support to urban development among international development partners, especially at the country level. For this to work, the New UN Urban Agenda should be in the consciousness of as many UN system organizations as possible and be reflected in their work programmes.

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## Notes and list of references

- <sup>i</sup> “Urbanization”, as used in this document, may be defined as a process of change from rural to urban ways of living. It is the process by which towns and cities are formed and increase in number and size as more and more people begin living and working in central areas defined as ‘urban’, i.e. comparatively large, dense and permanent agglomerations. The process of urbanization is associated with fundamental demographic, economic and social transformations. Demographically, urbanization is a result of three processes: rural-to-urban migration; growth of the internal population of towns and cities; and official reclassification of ‘rural’ settlements to ‘urban’. Economically, urbanization involves the geographical or spatial concentration of non-agricultural productive activities such as industrial production/manufacturing and services, mainly for the purpose of achieving agglomeration economies. Socially, and behaviourally, urbanization entails significant changes in ways of living, including from customary (or traditional) to bureaucratic ways of socio-political organization. The word ‘urban’ is defined differently from country to country, but the criteria used for such definitions are usually population size, population density, and proportion of population in non-agricultural occupations, with clear thresholds being given for each criterion.
- <sup>ii</sup> Commission on Growth and Development, 2008.
- <sup>iii</sup> UN-Habitat, Concept Paper, World Urban Forum 7, 2014.
- <sup>iv</sup> UN-Habitat, *State of the World’s Cities Report 2012-2013: The Prosperity of Cities*, Earthscan-Routledge, London, 2012.
- <sup>v</sup> According to the World Bank, the number of the world’s poor living on less than \$1.25 a day decreased from 1.9 billion in 1990 to 1.3 billion in 2008. However, updated economic projections by the IMF and the World Bank indicate that an estimated 970 million people will continue to live on under \$1.25 a day in 2015, equivalent to 15.5 per cent of the population in the developing world. Shaohua Chen and Martin Ravallion, 2012.
- <sup>vi</sup> UN-Habitat shows that the absolute number of the world’s slum population is not decline; on the contrary, the figure has been rising from 650 million in 1990, to 767 million in 2000 and to 863 million in 2012. UN-Habitat, database, 2014
- <sup>vii</sup> See UN-Habitat, *State of the World’s Cities 2012-2013: Prosperity of Cities*, op.cit.
- <sup>viii</sup> It is estimated that in the next 15 years the world’s slum population will grow by around 7 million every year. Ibid.
- <sup>ix</sup> In Europe, 17 families out of 100 were considered at risk of poverty in 2007. López M. Eduardo, “*Addressing New Forms of Poverty and Exclusion in Europe*”, European Commission, World and European Sustainable Cities, Insights from EU Research. 2010.
- <sup>x</sup> López M. Eduardo, 2010. Ibid.
- <sup>xi</sup> Sharkey Patrick, “*Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress Toward Racial Equality*” Chicago, University of Chicago, 2013.
- <sup>xii</sup> The Economist, 2012. UN-Habitat estimates that more than two thirds of the world’s population lives in cities where income inequality increased since 1980’s. UN-Habitat, 2014.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Poor urban planning increases inequality in cities by limiting job opportunities, aggravating gender disparities, intensifying crime, limiting the access to public goods and reducing forms of social capital. UN-Habitat, CAF, “*Construcción de ciudades más equitativas: políticas públicas para la inclusión en América Latina*”, 2014.
- <sup>xiv</sup> UN Open Working Group, 2013, Post-2015 Development Agenda, New York
- <sup>xv</sup> WHO, UN-Habitat, “*Hidden Cities: Unmasking and Overcoming Health Inequalities in Urban Settlements*”, Switzerland, 2010
- <sup>xvi</sup> López M. Eduardo and Zeltia Blanco, “Ghost Cities and Empty Houses: Wasted Prosperity”, *American International Journal of Social Science*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2014.
- <sup>xvii</sup> Almost one billion people live in slums without basic services and social protection according to UN Habitat, *State of the World’s Cities 2012-2013: Prosperity of Cities*, op.cit.
- <sup>xviii</sup> Urbanization, gender and poverty. Technical briefing. UNFPA in association with IIED, March, 2012.
- <sup>xix</sup> Globally, with a population share of just above 50 per cent, cities concentrate between 60 to 80 per cent of energy consumption, and generate as much as 70 per cent of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.
- <sup>xx</sup> Between 1950 and 2005, the urban population grew from 29 per cent to 49 per cent of the global population, while global carbon emissions from fossil-fuel burning increased by almost 500 per cent. UNEP, “*Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*”, 2011.
- <sup>xxi</sup> OECD estimates that by 2050, 50 per cent of the world’s poor will live in such contexts.
- <sup>xxii</sup> Only in 2010, 18,167 homicides were recorded in Central America, mostly in urban areas, according to UNDP. This equates to, on average, a rate of some 42 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants, a value that is similar to, or greater than, that of most contemporary armed conflicts.
- <sup>xxiii</sup> United Nations, “The Future We Want”, 2012.
- <sup>xxiv</sup> UN-Habitat, 2012. Op cit.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Special Edition of the 2013 Creative Economy Report: *Widening Local Development Pathways*, 2013.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Urbanization and Global Environmental Change, “*Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements in the SDGs*”, 2013.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxviii</sup> UN-Habitat, *State of the World’s Cities Report: Bridging the Urban Divide*, Earthscan, London, 2010.
- <sup>xxix</sup> UN-Habitat, 2010. Ibid.
- <sup>xxx</sup> United Nations, 2012. Op. cit.
- <sup>xxxi</sup> United Nations, Realizing the Future We Want for All, Contours for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, UN Task Team Report, 2013a.
- <sup>xxxii</sup> United Nations, the Secretary-General Report *A Life of Dignity for All*, 2013.
- <sup>xxxiii</sup> Urban Jonsson, “Promoting Human Rights-Based Approach and Sustainable Development”, UN-Habitat, 2014.
- <sup>xxxiv</sup> UN DESA (2009). World Survey on the Role of Women in Development. New York, United Nations.
- <sup>xxxv</sup> UN-Habitat, Concept Paper, World Urban Forum 7, 2014.
- <sup>xxxvi</sup> United Nations, Realizing the Future we Want for All, op cit.
- <sup>xxxvii</sup> UNEP, Integrating the Environment in Urban Planning and Management, Cities Alliance, 2013.
- <sup>xxxviii</sup> Based on UN-Habitat Governing Council resolution 24/4, “Gender equality and women’s empowerment to contribute to sustainable urban development”, 19 April 2013.
- <sup>xxxix</sup> [UN Resolutions 65/166 \(2010\) and 66/208 \(2011\) adopted by the General Assembly on culture and development](#).
- <sup>xl</sup> ESDN, “*Mapping Urban Sustainability in Europe and Beyond*”, case Study 15, 2014.
- <sup>xli</sup> UN-Habitat, “The Spatial Fix”, Think Piece for Habitat III, 2013.