A SIDE EVENT FOR THE HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM 2018

THE SDGS IN ACTION
WORKING TOGETHER FOR INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS

Objective

The event, **The SDGs In Action: Working together for inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements**, will focus on how the cities of the world are accelerating progress towards the SDGs. It will showcase how SDG implementation in cities and human settlements contributes to a transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies[1] and how cities and human settlements are tackling issues related to the SDGs under review at the HLPF in 2018, including water and sanitation (SDG 6), affordable and sustainable energy (SDG 7), sustainable consumption and production patterns (SDG 12), and terrestrial ecosystems (SDG 15). Further central topics of the discussion relate to urban poverty, climate change, exclusion, conflict prevention, and inequality. The event will illustrate how the UN Development System can work together to support Member States, local governments and other non-state actors to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the local level, with a particular focus on the imperative to leave no one behind.

Participants are encouraged to reflect upon their experience with SDG implementation and actions to address the interlinkages between Goal 11 (sustainable cities) and the other SDGs, highlighting innovations, challenges and lessons learned in development and humanitarian contexts.

Background

The majority of the human population now live in cities (56% in 2014), and nearly 70% will be living in urban areas by 2050[2]. Most of the challenges and issues that the SDGs address are found in cities. Making cities inclusive, sustainable, resilient and safe is critical to achieving the 2030 Agenda. As an accelerator of the achievements of global development agendas, the New Urban Agenda provides opportunities to better understand and implement the urban and territorial dimensions of the SDGs[3].

A specific focus on inclusive, sustainable urbanization is required in low and middle-income countries where urbanization is happening at its most rapid pace with a high risk of leaving many behind, and in countries already facing significant challenges (economic, political, environmental and social)[4]. Sustainable urbanization also remains an issue for higher-income countries where the transition to post-industrial economies requires redesigning cities to be more livable, equitable and energy efficient.

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[1] "Transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies" is the theme of the HLPF in 2018.
[2] World Urbanization Prospects (WUP), 2014 Highlights (http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/Highlights/WUP2014-Highlights.pdf)
[3] A/73/83-E/2018/62, Progress on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, Report of the Secretary-General
[4] According to WUP 2014 Highlights, urbanization will be rapid in developing countries of Asia and Africa.

While cities are engines of socio-economic development (in 2014, cities accounted for 82 percent of global GDP and will account for an estimated 88 percent by 2025[5]), they are also home to significant concentrations of the poor and marginalized. Urban poverty is growing[6] and the World Bank estimates that, by 2035, most of the world's extreme poor will be found in urban areas.[7] Over one billion people live in urban slums in developing countries, and their numbers are projected to grow by nearly 500 million between now and 2050. Inhabitants of urban slums are more likely to lack access to basic services such as improved drinking water and sanitation. High and extreme inequality in cities has been found to be a driver of violence and unrest[8]. Amidst waves of migration accelerated by conflicts and natural disasters, the displaced are increasingly seeking refuge in urban areas, with over half of the world's 38 million IDPs and 13 million refugees living in towns and cities. The ability to deliver on the "leaving no one behind" commitment of the 2030 Agenda hinges on our ability to foster an inclusive, participatory and equitable urban development.

The high concentration of people, economic activities, development assets, critical infrastructure in cities also concentrates risks. Left unattended or inadequately addressed, these risks have the potential to erode national progress towards poverty eradication, sustainable development and the resilience of urban social networks.

Urban centers are important contributors to climate change due to high emissions from consumption and production (cities account for 70% of the global energy use and 37-49% of the total GHG emissions[9]). Urban centers are moreover affected by adverse climate change impacts. Global analyses of disaster impacts show that a high proportion of the people and economic activity affected by extreme weather events is concentrated in urban centres.[10] People living and working in slums and informal settlements are the most vulnerable.

Sustainable urban development requires a systems approach by local governments to eradicate poverty, improve transparency and accountability, and strengthen the resilience of communities and their organizations. Many cities are stepping up to the challenges, showing inspiring ways to accelerate progress towards the SDGs. Through this event, the UNSDG will create a platform for Member States, cities and non-state actors to showcase innovative programming, and illustrate how the UN system can work in a coherent manner to support these efforts.

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[5] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/04/how-much-economic-growth-comes-from-our-cities/

[6] Mitlin and Satterthwaite (2012), Urban Poverty in the Global South: Scale and Nature

[7] http://blogs.worldbank.org/governance/governance/more-voices-mean-smarter-cities

[8] Stewart (2008), UN Habitat (2012b)

[9] IPCC 2014

[10] This is due to the fact that many cities are located in highly exposed coastal areas and riverbanks, which are prone to sea level rise, typhoons, storms, flash floods and landslides. Cities' vulnerability goes beyond exposure to extreme events. (UNISDR Global Assessment Report 2013, 2011 and IFRC 2010, World Disaster Report 2010)

Organizers: UN Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG)

Date, Time and Venue: *Tuesday, 17 July: 1.40-3.00pm, UN Conference Room 1*

List of speakers

- Keynote Speaker: UN Deputy Secretary General & UNSDG Chair, Ms Amina Mohammed
- Moderator: UNDP Administrator & UNSDG Vice-Chair Mr Achim Steiner
- Ms. Maimunah Sharif, USG and Executive Director, UN-Habitat
- Government representative (tbc)
- City representative/Mayor (tbc)
- Stakeholder representative (tbc)

Programme outline (80 mins) *(TBC)*

Scenario
(5 min) UNSDG Vice-Chair/Moderator (open event, welcome participants, introduce speakers, facilitate discussion)
(10 min) UNSDG Chair (keynote address on role of cities in localizing SDGs)
Facilitated discussion – Round 1: Specific (thematic) question per speaker (max 5 min each)
Government perspectives
City/Mayor perspectives
Stakeholder perspectives
UN-Habitat (transformative potential of global platforms, national urban policies, and local implementation of the New Urban Agenda)
Facilitated discussion – Round 2: Common question on 'leave no one behind' to all speakers (10 min)
(15 min) Q&A with audience
(5 min) UNSDG Vice-Chair/Moderator (concluding remarks)