

Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Special Meeting
Sustainable Urbanization and the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda
21 April 2022, 10:00 – 13:00 (NY Time)
ECOSOC Chamber

10:25-10:35 (10’): Setting the Stage

Talking Points of USG Sharif, Executive Director of UN-Habitat

- Excellency Abdulla Shahid, President of the General Assembly
- Excellency Collen Kelapile, President of the Economic and Social Council
- Honourable Martha Delgado, President of the United Nations Habitat Assembly
- Deputy Secretary-General, Madam Amina Mohammed
- Distinguished Permanent Representatives and Delegates
- Colleagues from the United Nations
- Representatives of partner constituencies of the New Urban Agenda

It is a pleasure to address you today at this Special Meeting of ECOSOC on Sustainable Urbanization and the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

Excellency Collen Kelapile, thank you for convening this important and timely meeting, to review the Quadrennial Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda through the two prioritised themes on inequality and UN reforms.

It gives me great please to present a summary of the Quadrennial Report of the Secretary-General.

1. Uptake of the New Urban Agenda among Member States

During the reporting cycle dating from 2018 to 2021, 30 countries submitted progress reports on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. We are very grateful for the countries that concluded the reporting on time. Let me also acknowledge Member States who have uploaded their report on the New Urban Agenda Platform, and those who have organised national urban forums.

With only 30 Member States having submitted full reports, it is clear that the Secretariat needs to work harder, to assist Member States build the necessary capacity to bring about the policy, multi-level governance, planning, and technology, to realise the full potential of sustainable urbanisation. We have to help Member States embed sustainable urbanisation as part of their development policy, by demonstrating how urbanisation can lead to the achievement of the social, environmental and economic dimensions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Quadrennial Report urges us to position the transformative commitments and key drivers of the New Urban Agenda, as concrete tools to enable countries to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as to protect our planetary ecosystems.

2. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on cities

Cities have been at the forefront absorbing the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In many instances, this has resulted in closer cooperation between national and local governments resulting in increased reclamation, greening and inclusive use of public space.

Here is an opportunity to build on this symbiotic partnership to accelerate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, capitalising on innovations as we adapt to the pandemic. We can provide basic services on a more equitable manner, reduce commuting through tele-work, and reduce carbon emissions by prudent use of energy. Through effective urban planning and management, cities and communities have been able to create healthier urban environments.

Whilst the pandemic has deepened existing inequalities and created new vulnerabilities, city managers now realise the importance of public goods. They understand the need to invest in public institutions. This has led to greater awareness about the need for fiscal autonomy, and greater transparency in the management of local finances. You cannot have one without the other.

Key areas of implementation of the New Urban Agenda: an assessment of progress

3. Housing and urban poverty

Upgrading slums and addressing the housing affordability crisis, remain the highest priority of Member States. In developing countries, progress on lifting urban populations out of slum conditions has slowed down in recent years. More than 1 billion people still live in slums worldwide. In developed countries, housing has become unaffordable for many. It is estimated that the global housing deficit will be 440 million homes by 2025. Violations of land and housing rights persist globally. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, despite calls by the international community to halt evictions, homelessness is on the rise.

While many national governments in developing countries have established financial tools to support greater access to housing, it is reaching too few to have a positive impact. We risk leaving many behind.

Member States are increasingly adopting urban and territorial planning as tools for national and local development. However, capacities remain limited, and planning is not yet sufficiently institutionalised. We need greater political will, to translate policy into practice, with clear budgets and capacity to monitor implementation.

4. Role cities in developing better climate change solutions

Cities are unfortunately still often perceived as detrimental to the environment with a negative impact on climate change. However, when well planned, built in a compact urban form, and supported with high quality public transport, cities offer the most sustainable form of human settlement.

Cities are greatly affected by greenhouse emissions and pollution – climate change is exacerbated, more risk of natural disasters is generated, and air pollution poses a serious health issue. During the reporting period, the capacity of mass rapid transport systems has grown dramatically, which provides the co-benefits of enhancing health outcomes and lowering emission

5. At-risk populations require particular attention in implementation of the New Urban Agenda

Urban displacement is an increasingly common feature of disaster and conflict, with growing numbers of refugees, migrants and internally displaced people living in cities. During 2020, more than 82 million people were displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, and climate change.

Accommodating displaced population is done most effectively in urban areas, where job opportunities and social networks enhance social cohesion and improve integration.

Member States are urged to amplify implementation of the New Urban Agenda in countries in post-conflict and post-disaster situations, such as through the *global compact on refugees*.

6. Unlocking financial investment in urban planning and development

The implementation of the New Urban Agenda around the world continues to be impeded by inadequate financing. Expenditures at the local level have risen dramatically due to emergency social security measures. This is in direct contrast to lower revenue collection rates due to locked down economies. In some instances, foreign exchange crisis is leading to hyper-inflation and, in the most extreme cases, will lead to famine. Raising revenue is limited in small and intermediary cities, owing to a lack of capacity.

Moreover, national legal frameworks restrict the capacity of subnational governments to borrow money, issue municipal bonds, and raise endogenous revenue. Yet, cities have demonstrated initiative, by re-evaluating the benefits the privatization of municipal services. The pandemic has demonstrated that real value comes from the provision of affordable service, instead of extracting profit. Effective urban financing depends on more nuanced approaches to fiscal decentralisation - greater transparency is required to win over citizens and ratepayers.

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Distinguished delegates,

The implementation of the New Urban Agenda has generated extensive action at local and national level. However, the mixed and limited results on the ground attest both to the negative impact of the pandemic, and to the limited commitments by national governments, to make the New Urban Agenda a tool for national and local development.

By linking the Quadrennial Report to the wider themes of inequality, and linking its implementation to UN reform, Member States are provided with a better understanding of the potential of the New Urban Agenda. It remains the best tool we have, to help Member States incorporate the benefits of urbanisation as a catalyst for equitable development.

We have the opportunity to leverage the New Urban Agenda, to fulfil the ambitions of sustainability for people, planet, and peace. I put it to Member State, that understanding such opportunities, is the first step towards full implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

Thank you very much.