

Editorial

Cities for All – Implementing the New Urban Agenda

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On October 21, 2016 delegations from 167 different countries assembled at the 3rd United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development in the Ecuadorian capital of Quito, after analyzing and discussing for a week the challenges facing our rapidly urbanizing world, adopted what is known as the New Urban Agenda (NUA). According to Jon Clos the Secretary General of the Conference and Executive Director of the UN Human settlements program (UN Habitat) this document could be seen as an extension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by 193 UN member states in September 2015.

The Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG) with its 17 goals recognizes the major role that the rapidly growing urban populations will have to play in meeting its aims. In fact the NUA expects the world's cities to be the very engines for future sustainable development. Bringing together mayors, local and regional decision makers, urban planners and the corporate sector, 36 000 participants in all, urban challenges as well as opportunities were brought up for discussion in plenaries, panels, workshops and expositions, aiming to find common ground and common aims. During this process, however, some of the more sensitive and potentially divisive issues of urbanization were left to discussions in side and parallel events, such as the urban-rural divisions in SDG planning, the right to the city for women, youth, disadvantaged and disenfranchised groups, the protection of public spaces against unsustainable development projects, the lack of an art and humanities perspective and the overarching issue of financing. It could easily be argued that leaving out such issues points to the final report as an unfinished agenda or a work in progress.

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The lack of such perspectives were brought out by sideliners groups like the *Peoples Social Forum Resistance to Habitat III* that presented an alternative manifesto – the *New Inhabitants Agenda*, provoked by the removal of the planned Multi-Stakeholders Panel on Sustainable Development and the inability to come to terms with the global anti-poverty framework responding to the first challenge on the agenda of Social Development Goals. Finally the inability to find common ground with the academic research community closed the door to much needed creativity and innovation.

This inability to find common ground on some important issues formed the basis for the UNACLA (Unite Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities) linking the implementation of the New Urban Agenda 2030 Agenda with the SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) with the Paris accord.

“We believe in the power of local democracy and decentralization as the means to ensure that the transformative potential of urbanization produce benefits for all.” “We further welcome paragraph 171-172 of the New Urban Agenda which launches a 2-year process until September 2018 by mandating the UN Secretary General and the UN General Assembly to conduct broad consultations, dialogues and analysis that will result in a new institutional framework on the follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda, hoping that the process will conclude with innovative mechanisms for the engagement of local and sub-local governments within the UN system” (www.ucgl.org/en)

No doubt the recommendations of the UNACLA must have carried considerable weight in planning for the upcoming 9th World Urban Forum, together with the increasing challenges posed to local urban governments by new authoritarian administrations coming into power during the intervening two years. Leading out in analyzing these new threats to democratically elected city governments we find the researchers holding on to a humanities perspective to urban studies. We also find some calling into question the New Urban Agenda embracing today’s increasing trend of unconditionally and exclusively accepting the high tech tools in urban planning and management driven by corporate agendas of creating the measurable smart city and the measurable smart citizen.

The 9th World Urban Forum assembling 22,000 participants from national and city governments, academia, civil society and grass root movements from February 7-13 in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur was announced as a forum for implementation of the New Urban Agenda adopted in Quito, but with a conference program bearing a clear imprint of the consultations, dialogues and analysis conducted under the auspices of the UN Secretary General during the intervening two years. A special feature of this preparatory process was the opening of a Women’s Online Partnership Program for sharing ideas, tools, challenges, knowledge and experiences among women worldwide during the weeks leading up to the WUF. Adopting the general theme of Cities for All the UN-Habitat aimed to promote urban inclusivity, ensuring that all inhabitants without discrimination of any kind are able to inhabit environmentally sustainable and resilient, socially inclusive, safe, violence free and economically productive cities.

The time frame for fully implementing the targets of New Urban Agenda was chosen to align with the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development adopted by the United Nations Member States in 2015 emphasizing the spatial dimension of development. Accordingly the SDG goals were to become the central focal point in plenary sessions, panels and workshops with themes like

Housing

- Innovative Models for Affordable Housing
- Laying the Foundation for Robust Housing Micro-finance Ecosystems

Land

- Gender: Urban Land Tenure and Access to Public Spaces
- From Theory to Reality. Using Data to Move the Bar on Property Rights for Women and the most Vulnerable

Public Space

- We the Public Space
- Strategies to Deal with Inequalities in Order to Achieve Inclusive and Sustainable Urban Environments

Slum upgrading

- Cities for All: Addressing Forced Evictions
- Forming inclusive Partnerships and Sharing Innovative Tools toward Citywide Slum Improvement and Secure Tenure Rights for All

If there was one key recommendation coming out from the 9th World Urban Forum it could be summed up in one word: Localize! Our former Norwegian Premier Minister who introduced the concept of Sustainable Development in her commission report *Our Common Future* 30 years ago is also known to be the author of the slogan *Think Globally – Act Locally*. We find it introduced as the theme of the most conclusive discussions at the WUF 9:

Urban Legislation

- Localizing the Sustainable Development Goals by Implementing the New Urban Agenda. A Call for Decentralized Governmental and Administrative Structures
- The Judiciary Facing the New Urban Agenda. Urban Law, Access to Justice and Human Rights Defense.

After attending plenaries, panels, and presentations on regional and local urban challenges and models for urban planning by participants from all continents and regions one conclusion bearing a message in these times of increasing authoritarian regimes rests in my mind:

Even if your government no longer honors global agreements like the NUA or the Paris Accord you can do it together with your family, your friends, your neighborhoods or your local assemblies, creating a training field for democratic citizens interaction.

Kjell Skyllstad



Figure 1. Cover Declaration on Cities 2030, left. New Urban Agenda, right.

Kuala Lumpur Declaration On Cities 2030

We, the participants of the Ninth session of the World Urban Forum – representing national, subnational and local governments, parliamentarians, civil society, older persons, women, youth, children, persons with disabilities, grassroots groups, indigenous peoples and local communities, private sector, foundations and philanthropies, international and regional organizations, academia, professionals and other relevant stakeholders — gathered in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, to localize and scale up the implementation of the New Urban Agenda as an accelerator to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Led by a strong spirit of collaboration, creativity and innovation, we share our aspirations for the future of Cities 2030 as the Cities for all where no-one and no place is left behind.

To this end, we call for the deployment of all efforts, means and resources available towards the operationalization of the concept of cities for all, ensuring that all inhabitants, of present and future generations, without discrimination of any kind, are able to inhabit and produce just, safe, healthy, accessible, affordable, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements to foster prosperity and quality of life for all.

We believe that global, regional, national and local implementation frameworks of the New Urban Agenda being formulated since its adoption should be supported by key enablers capable of unlocking positive transformation, such as:

- Strengthening the role of subnational and local governments, urban governance systems that ensure continuous dialogue among different levels of government and participation of all actors, and increasing multilevel and cross-sectoral coordination, transparency and accountability.

- Encouraging sharing of creative solutions and innovative practices which enable a shift in mindset necessary to drive change.
- Building inclusive partnerships and strengthening age and gender responsive environments to ensure meaningful participation and engagement at all levels.
- Adopting integrated territorial development, including through appropriate urban planning and design instruments, to ensure sustainable management and use of natural resources and land, appropriate compactness and density, diversity of uses, and revitalization of cultural heritage.
- Deploying monitoring and reporting mechanisms, including assessment of impacts, that encourage best practices for effective policy making.

We draw attention to the persistent challenges faced by our cities and human settlements, such as:

- Limited opportunities and mechanisms for youth, women and grassroots organizations, as well as other civil society organizations, local, subnational and national governments, international and regional bodies to work together in planning, implementation and monitoring;
- Inequitable access to the city, including to decent jobs, public space, affordable and adequate housing and security of land tenure, safe, efficient and accessible public transport and mobility systems, infrastructure and other basic services and goods that cities offer;
- Insufficient protection from human rights violations, including forced evictions, and inadequate inclusion of people living in poverty, persons with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups in urban planning, design, and legislation processes;
- Gender inequalities in urban economic and leadership spheres.

We recognize that today we face emerging challenges that require urgent actions, including:

- Recognizing that crises are increasingly urban, which calls for inclusive urbanization tools adapted to local contexts and to the nature of natural and human made disasters and conflicts, as well as to guide humanitarian assistance, fast track recovery, and contribute to building and sustaining peace.
- Managing the complexities of increased migration into cities, at all levels, leveraging positive contributions of all and using more inclusive planning approaches that facilitate social cohesion and create economic opportunities;
- Understanding the impact of new technologies and potential of open and accessible data, which require governance and design models that help to ensure no one is left behind;
- Addressing growing social and cultural inequalities, lack of access to economic opportunities, that are increasingly manifested in cities.
- Responding to environmental degradation and climate change concerns.



Figure 2. WUF9 Opening Speech being given by Maimunah Mohd Sharif, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director, UN-Habitat's Opening Ceremony.

Actionable Recommendations

We, the participants of the WUF9, leveraging the advantage of the Forum, which convenes thousands of decision makers, key actors, stakeholders and communities, generated a wealth of ideas. We encourage the acceleration of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda through:

Frameworks

1. Encourage the formulation of implementation frameworks for the New Urban Agenda at all levels, including monitoring mechanisms, providing a coordinated space for an effective contribution from all stakeholders, aligning to the efforts and actions of the 2030 Agenda and other international, regional, national, subnational and local development frameworks.
2. Support the creation and consolidation of inclusive platforms and agendas for dialogue among all levels of government, decision makers and stakeholders such as regional, national and local Urban Forums and committees that can strengthen policy review and assessment of impacts. These can also foster exchange of experiences and cooperation, as well as scaling up voluntary commitments and actions from all partners.
3. Further develop and advocate for integrated territorial development, which includes integration of sectoral policies, institutions and investment; integration among the different spheres of government; spatial integration across the urban-rural continuum; improved coordination across actors; and enhanced alignment of national, subnational and local policies with international agendas.
4. Adapt innovative and robust mechanisms for the diversification and expansion of the means of implementation, to cater for complex and integrated approaches promoted by the New Urban Agenda. Technological innovations and improvements, research, capacity building, technical assistance and partnership development, among others, may require enhanced resourcing.

Governance and Partnerships

5. Adopt multiple collaborative governance mechanisms that actively engage national, subnational and local governments, all groups of society, including youth, women and grassroots organizations and particularly the excluded, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This work in solidarity is critical to promote more buy-in and co-responsibility in the activities towards sustainable urban development, and to ensure the sustainability of the results.
6. Promote multi-stakeholder constituency-based coalitions to use the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to better prevent, prepare, and respond to urban crises.

Innovative Solutions

7. Foster a culture of creativity and innovation to be embedded in the way cities and human settlements operate.
8. Develop monitoring and data collection mechanisms, including community generated data, to enhance availability of information and disaggregated and comparable data at city, functional urban areas and community levels. This would promote informed and evidence-based decision making and policy formulation, assessing progress and impact at all levels.
9. Create an enabling environment and develop capacities for scaling up of good practices including municipal finance, sustainable private and public investments in urban development and job creation, and generating value while advancing the public good.
10. Adopt accessibility and universal design as core principles into national, subnational and local action plans for implementing the New Urban Agenda through inclusive, accessible and participatory processes and consultations.

We, the participants of the Ninth Session of the World Urban Forum, recognize the value of the Forum convened by UN-Habitat as an inclusive platform to collect inputs from a broad range of stakeholders and to feed these into annual and quadrennial reporting on progress in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

We call to further develop the role of UN-Habitat as a focal point in the United Nations system to support all countries and mobilization of stakeholders in the implementation, follow up and review of the New Urban Agenda, including through scaled up normative support.

We thank the Government of Malaysia, the City of Kuala Lumpur, and UN-Habitat for organizing the Forum, and commit to provide continuous cooperation to the next hosts, the Government of the United Arab Emirates and the city of Abu Dhabi.

Kuala Lumpur, February 13, 2018