Briefing

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Policy pointers

Habitat III is a vital opportunity for its stakeholders (national and local governments, civil society and development agencies) to develop and implement a New Urban Agenda that unites and responds to key development commitments, including the SDGs.

The revised Agenda is comprehensive, but its commitments and implementation are inconsistent. Stakeholders and conveners must take steps to develop a concise, clearly targeted agenda that enables local governments and civil society to pursue just and sustainable urbanisation.

To 'leave no-one behind', the Agenda must explicitly recognise and support the role and capacities of the urban poor and their organisations, and local governments in documenting, monitoring and responding to urban poverty.

The Agenda's three guiding transformative commitments are welcome, but a fourth commitment, to democratic governance, is missing. Efforts must be made by Habitat III's conveners and stakeholders to understand the commitments intersect and to ensure that they do not develop as parallel processes.

Transforming a 'New Urban Agenda' into a just urban agenda

Habitat III — the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development — will take place in October in a new global context. Post-2015, international agreements and processes offer the opportunity for Habitat III to make more real transformative commitments in pursuit of a sustainable and just urban future than its predecessors. But if it is to do so, flaws in the revised Zero Draft of the New Urban Agenda must be urgently addressed. While IIED, IDS and DPU collectively welcome the current transformative commitments, the revised Zero Draft lacks both an overarching vision that recognises the vital links between the three commitments and a consistent approach to implementation. The current contradictions threaten to make the commitments ineffective individual workstreams. To reach its transformative ambition, we argue that the final New Urban Agenda must make these connections, and suggest four specific ways in which it could achieve greater coherence and inclusivity.

The New Urban Agenda, which will be finalised at Habitat III in Quito this October, provides an opportunity for national governments, local governments, civil society and external support agencies to agree on an agenda that can promote sustainable and just urbanisation. A meeting of practitioners and researchers from the global North and South (organised by IIED, DPU and IDS in early July 2016[1]) discussed the drafts that had been put forward.[2] The group collectively welcomed the ambitious 'transformative commitments' of the draft, which fall under three headings:

- Sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all

- Sustainable urban development for social inclusion and poverty eradication, and

- Environmentally sound and resilient urban development.

However, the all-encompassing approach of the revised *Zero Draft of the New Urban Agenda*[3] (the 'revised Zero Draft') often leads to contradictory recommendations that lack consistency — especially between the sections on 'principles and commitments' and 'effective implementation'. This presents a crucial challenge for Habitat III stakeholders to address in advance of Quito: to consider how these three commitments connect and intersect, in order to avoid the development of three parallel agendas that do not interact.

In one example of inconsistency, the language of 'rights' is used irregularly, infrequently and changeably throughout the draft. This results in an ambiguous approach to the protection of

rights and to the loss of entitlements that can perpetuate or deepen urban inequalities. The independent human rights experts appointed by the UN Human Rights Council (OHCHR) have made a similar argument, calling for the New Urban Agenda to have a more substantial, consistent and explicit commitment to human rights, making it central to the agenda and in line with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.[4] OHCHR's Special Rapporteur on the right to adequate housing has specifically called for a more comprehensive and ambitious focus: "the New Urban Agenda is the right space at the right time to embrace and articulate a new human rights framework for cities: an urban rights agenda."[5] Moreover, the language of the draft is often inaccessible and ambiguous, using specialist jargon from different

The Habitat III Urban Agenda presents a unique opportunity to reject ambiguity and support a truly transformative roadmap.

Box 1. UNDP definition of democratic governance

"Democratic Governance [DG] and its focus on participation and accountability is a development goal that is intrinsically valuable in its own right. Enjoying both political freedom and the ability to participate in the decisions that shape one's life are fundamental human rights: they are capabilities that are as significant for human development — for expanding people's choices — as being able to read and being in good health. Democracy is the political process that secures political and civil freedoms and assures the right to participate, making DG an intrinsically desirable goal in itself." (p.16)[10]

"Therefore, efforts to promote DG for development must focus both on fostering inclusive participation and on strengthening responsive state capacity (…)" (p.17)[10]

"Mechanisms and opportunities to deepen inclusive participation include focusing on: electoral laws, institutions, and processes; mobilization channels such as political parties and CSOs; and communication channels in relation to access to information, e-governance and independent media" (p.17).[10] The establishment of participatory city and policy councils by the Brazilian national government since the 1990s provides an example of this. When reviewing participation in health councils, Cornwall argues that councils have created opportunities to address unequal power relations despite facing a series of challenges and threats.[11]

Strengthening sccountable and responsive governing capacity for UNDP means "strengthening public administration reform, local governance institutions, parliamentary development, and access to justice and the rule of law" (p.18).[10] In South Africa, civil society using legal avenues to protect the urban poor from forced evictions demonstrates the need to enhance access to justice and the rule of law for vulnerable groups in urban areas. The work of organisations such as Socio-economic Rights Institute of South Africa and Inner City Resource Centre in Johannesburg has been drawing on constitutional legislations to prevent illegal evictions and to call for meaningful engagement between government and communities under threat of evictions.[12]

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disciplines that makes it difficult for key stakeholders to achieve a shared understanding and to adopt its contents.

The need for a unifying urban vision

To address these shortfalls, we suggest that the final Agenda should make and recognise links between the transformative commitments, through an explicit overarching vision that promotes *sustainable and just urbanisation*. This would go beyond the shared vison in the current draft. Instead of focusing on the 'urban' and addressing the manifestations of social, economic and environmental challenges in cities in a separate fashion, we call for a stronger focus on the trends and processes that undermine or support just and sustainable urbanisation and reciprocal linkages between urban and rural areas. Urban sustainability can only be achieved by examining the relationships between urban, rural and peri-urban areas, and by unpacking the inequality that tends to characterise urbanisation processes. This vision has to recognise, the "uneven geographies of development" and the significant transformation of the "linkages between the global and the local, the urban and the rural, the rich and the poor, and above all, the systemic conditions that threaten the very possibility of a sustainable future."[6]

Without such an overarching vision and ambition, there is a risk that the transformative commitments of the New Urban Agenda might develop into separate agendas, opening up further possibilities for contradictions and trade-offs in urban policy and planning. Here we suggest four ways in which Habitat III's final New Urban Agenda could be more inclusive and cohesive than the drafts to date.

1. Make a clear commitment to quality of governance

The New Urban Agenda currently frames governance in urban areas as an implementation issue, missing the political economy and unequal power relations that underpin decisions such as those on planning, regulation and finance. *Enhancing the quality of urban governance* and governance institutions could be included in the Agenda as a fourth transformative commitment, setting an expectation for:

• Meaningful participation by and the recognition of all actors — specifically the role of local governments in urban development, and civil society, as well as the urban poor and their collectives

- Power imbalances to be addressed and every effort made to reach equitable outcomes that leave no-one behind.

For more information on how democratic governance can be identified as an intrinsic commitment, see Box 1, which outlines the UN Development Programme (UNDP) definition.

2. Speak more directly to global processes

Several international processes converge to create a unique moment of global opportunity for the New Urban Agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, the Paris Agreement adopted at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC and the outcomes of the third International Conference on Financing for Development. As articulated by Cities Alliance, "Against this background, Habitat III is often referred to as the first implementation conference of the 2030 development agenda and the new climate agreements."[7] However, in the revised Zero Draft there is little indication of alignment with those processes and a lack of clarity around coordination and synchronisation with them, limiting the Agenda's transformative power and ability to work to greatest effect.

In particular, the New Urban Agenda needs to talk more directly to the implementation of the SDGs — the revised Zero Draft relates only briefly to the SDGs. The Agenda should adopt the agenda of the SDGs, and take up opportunities to indicate the mechanisms to implement the urban goal (11) or to adopt an urban lens to the SDGs and prioritise the urban-based enabling conditions of the achievement of the 2030 agenda.

3. Build in inclusive implementation and monitoring

UN Habitat have led the drafting of the New Urban Agenda and it will be agreed by national governments. However, the two key stakeholders for implementing the Agenda are urban governments and those within their jurisdictions whose needs are not met — including representative organisations of the urban poor. No New Urban Agenda will be effective without their buy-in and meaningful participation. This means endorsement and implementation of the Agenda will require inclusive leadership and meaningful accountability mechanisms at both global and local level if it is to (a) influence national governments and external support agencies and (b) help local communities — in particular those women and men typically excluded and marginalised — to engage with

Box 2. A local data revolution that 'leaves no-one behind'

Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) is a transnational network of community-based federations of the urban poor and local NGOs affiliated to them, active in 33 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. Women-led groups form the heart of community organising, supported by community-to-community learning exchanges and by enumerations (through, for example, censuses, surveys, profiles and mapping) of informal settlements undertaken by their residents with support from their federations and SDI.

In this way, SDI federations have amassed the largest and most detailed set of data on 'slums' or 'informal settlements', which has been built from enumerations undertaken by the residents of these settlements and their federations. These include settlement profiles, house-by-house surveys and mapping. The disaggregated data has developed indicators that reflect the realities of informal settlements and reveal inequalities within cities. These enumerations serve as the most strategic instruments for advocacy and dialogue with city authorities and development partners around slum upgrading and planning.[13] SDI is now developing a single, globally accessible platform for 'slum' data, in an attempt to ensure that disaggregated data produced by the urban poor can be used to inform urban policy and planning that really 'leaves no-one behind'.

national, regional and local governments and hold them to account.

It has been well documented that the residents of informal settlements have the capacity to lead data collection and monitoring processes in ways that improve the visibility of the living conditions and actual needs of the urban poor (see Box 2), while at the same time empowering groups in negotiating for their rights to secure and adequate housing.[8] By building on these citizen-led processes — and to ensure that the New Urban Agenda 'leaves no-one behind' — more nuanced and detailed data will be required that:

- Moves past the undercounting of urban poverty

- Captures the complexities of urban processes, and

- Reflects the different experiences of women, men, girls and boys in the context of urban change.

4. Reflect learning from Habitat I and II

While the New Urban Agenda is the first to engage with climate change, many of the commitments outlined in the revised Zero Draft have already been the focus of Habitat I, in 1976, and Habitat II, in 1996. These include, for instance, the commitment towards the universal right to water, present in 1976. The explicit articulation of the so-called 'green' and 'brown'

perspectives on urbanisation, environment and development[9] was made in 1996, so it is now 20 years since the Habitat perspective moved away from the conventional 'environment versus development' approach to one that recognised that environmental challenges are inextricably linked to social and economic development processes. In addition, the 1996 Agenda recognised that, in an increasingly urbanised world, urban regions are the locus of critical social, economic and environmental problems, as well as the source of multiple opportunities for a more sustainable and just future.

With all this established, the New Urban Agenda of Habitat III is an opportunity for stakeholders to assess why previous commitments have only been partially achieved and to use this knowledge to take assertive measures towards their fulfilment. Agendas might not deliver for a host of reasons — they might be too general, or have too many competing or contradictory objectives, or fail to align commitments with effective implementation pathways for delivering them. The current iteration of the New Urban Agenda is comprehensive, following on a thorough consultation process, but any agenda that tries to be too broad runs the risk of becoming a list that does not amount to a powerful roadmap to guide and inform transformative change, while enabling citizens to hold states accountable. Habitat III should be a chance to learn from the past for a deliverable urban future that is both sustainable and just.

For a truly transformative New Urban Agenda

In this briefing, we are arguing for a stronger and sharper commitment and approach to urbanisation that is socially and environmentally just. This involves recognising and linking the social, economic, environmental and political-institutional dimensions of development. It also calls for the need to go beyond the pursuit of 'smart' and 'sustainable' cities to fairer ones, understanding that urbanisation impacts positively and negatively upon the future of wider regions and the quality of urban–rural interactions.

To be as transformative as it hopes, the New Urban Agenda must be explicit about the relationships and social contract required between all spheres of government and ordinary citizens, and offer realistic steers on inclusive monitoring and implementation. It also needs to acknowledge the structural causes of poverty, injustice and exclusion, and to adopt affirmative actions to counteract them. These ambitions are not new, but the Habitat III Urban Agenda presents a unique opportunity to reject ambiguity and support a truly transformative roadmap, which speaks to the post-2015 world.

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Notes

[1] The meeting was held at IDS in London as part of a meeting convened by the Development Studies Association, Urbanisation and Development Study Group and attended by David Dodman (IIED), David Satterthwaite (IIED), Anna Walnycki (IIED), Diane Archer (IIED), Adriana Allen (DPU), Alex Frediani (DPU), Rafaella Sinas (DPU), Barbara Liepetz (DPU), Paula Lucci (ODI), Jaideep Gupte (IDS), Sheela Patel (SDI), Alvaro Puertas Robina (HIC), Zahrah Nesbitt-Ahmed (IDS), Eric Kasper (IDS), Roger Williamson (IDS), Lyla Mehta (IDS), Pritpal Singh (JNU), Ritu Priya (JNU), Sue Parnell (UCT), Barbara Lipietz (DPU) and Cassidy Johnson (DPU). The content of this briefing is based on the key points raised and agreed throughout the debate. / [2] This briefing paper discusses the *Revised Zero Draft of the New Urban Agenda* published on 18 June 2016; a subsequent draft was published on 18 July 2016. / [3] UN-Habitat (2016) *Habitat III: Revised Zero Draft of the New Urban Agenda, 18 June 2016*. www.habitat3.org/bitcache/462d74cfb2e04878ff43c8fcca48037daf73d84f?vid=582559&disposition=inline&op=view / [4] Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (2016) *UN Experts Statement on Habitat III: New Urban Agenda Must be Based in Human Rights*. Geneva, 29 June 2016. www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20200&LangID=E / [5] Farha, L (2015) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context.* UN General Assembly, Seventieth session. Accessed in: https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/242/95/PDF/N1524295.pdf?OpenElement / [6] Allen, AE (2009) Sustainable cities or sustainable urbanisation? Palette, UCL's journal of sustainable cities. www.ucl.ac.uk/sustainable-cities/results/gcsc-reports/allen.pdf / [7] Cities Alliance (2015) *Sustainable Development Goals and Habitat III: Opportunities for a successful New Urban Agenda*. Cities Alliance Discussion Paper, N. 3. Brussels: Cities Alliance. www.citiesalliance.org/sites/citiesalliance.org/files/Opportunities%20for%20the%20New%20Urban%20Agenda.pdf / [8] Patel, S (10 May 2012) Why enumeration counts: documenting by the undocumented. www.iied.org/why-enumeration-counts-documenting-undocumented / [9] Allen, A and You, N (2002) *Sustainable Urbanisation: Bridging the Green and Brow Agendas*. London: DfID, UN-Habitat and The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), University College London. / [10] UNDP (2010) *A Guide to UNDP Democratic Governance Practice*. New York and Oslo. www.undp.org/content/dam/aplaws/publication/en/publications/democratic-governance/dg-publications-for-website/a-guide-to-undp-democratic-governance-practice-/DG_FinalMaster2-small.pdf / [11] Cornwall, A (2008) Deliberating Democracy: Scenes from a Brazilian Municipal Health Council. *Politics and Society* 36(4), Sage, 508–531. / [12] Chenwi, L and Tissington, K (2010) *Engaging meaningfully with government on socio-economic rights. A focus on the right to housing*. Community Law Centre, University of the Western Cape. http://repository.uwc.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10566/228/ChenwiCommunityParticipation.pdf?sequence=1 / [13] Beukes, A (2015) Making the invisible visible: generating data on 'slums' at local, city and global scales. Working Paper, IIED, London. http://pubs.iied.org/10757IIED.html