



The General Assembly of Partners (GAP)

Media Coverage 2015-2017

The General Assembly of Partners (GAP)

NAIROBI APRIL 2015 TO QUITO OCTOBER 2016 AND BEYOND

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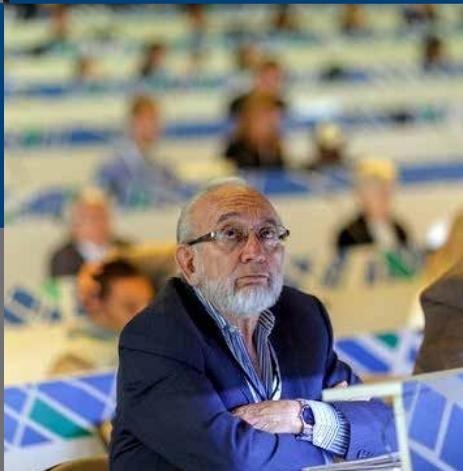
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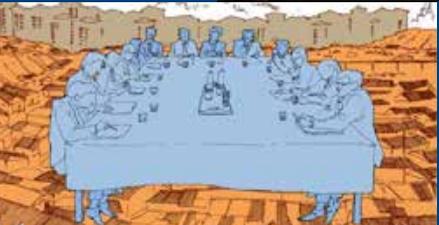
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The General Assembly of Partners (GAP)

NAIROBI APRIL 2015 to QUITO October 2016 and BEYOND



(L-R) Joan Clos, Executive Director, UN-Habitat; Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General; Genie Birch, GAP President. The UN-Secretary General held a private meeting with the co-chairs of the GAP constituent groups during the Habitat III meeting in Quito.

The sun shone brightly on April 15, 2015 as a group of people – civil society leaders from around the world – passed through the gates of the UN compound in Nairobi and strolled along the footpath lined with a double file of flagpoles, marking their own national flags waving in the gentle breeze. They had come to Kenya to finalise plans for an innovative platform they were creating to support the upcoming UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development (Habitat III), the all-UN meeting convened every 20 years scheduled for October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador. As they entered the low-lying UN Habitat offices, they paused by the colourful exhibits for the second Habitat III Preparatory Conference (Prepcom) set to begin the next day. They moved into the plenary hall, the formal Member States’ meeting room, lent to them for the occasion. Within the hour, they had formed the General Assembly of Partners (GAP) as an independent, self-organised and self-governing engagement platform. Since that day, GAP membership has grown to more than 1,200 unique organisations and 58,000 networks drawn from every continent.

This Media Collection, edited by Richard Forster, *Cities Today* Editor-in-Chief, documents GAP’s progress as covered by *Cities Today*, *Citiscopes* and the *UN Chronicle* since April 2015. Before enjoying them, read this brief history of GAP.

GAP resulted from the UNGA resolution 67/216 (2013) that called on Joan Clos, Habitat III Secretary General, to develop “improved participation of local authorities and other stakeholders in the preparatory process and the conference itself.” It is composed of:

- Sixteen Partner Constituent Groups (PCGs), representing the Agenda 21 nine major groups, the Habitat Agenda Partners and other relevant stakeholders. Full membership has met four times– in New York, Surabaya and Quito.

- And an Executive Committee (ExCo) composed of the PCG co-chairs and a president and vice-president.

In the 18 months leading up to Habitat III, GAP gave voice to previously unrecognised groups like the elderly, disabled, and grassroots along with the more familiar ones. Further, it introduced many people to the UN – fully a third of its membership participated for the first time in UN activities. Its members:

- served on the drafting committees of the 11 Regional and Thematic conferences that fed directly into the *New Urban Agenda*, Habitat III’s outcome document;
- organised the June stakeholder hearings on the draft *New Urban Agenda*, with more than 40 speakers at the UN Headquarters;
- developed and circulated *Partnerships for the New Urban Agenda* that pledges its contributions as partners;
- met with the Bureau and co-facilitators several times to discuss the *New Urban Agenda*; and

In the 18 months leading up to Habitat III, GAP gave voice to previously unrecognised groups like the elderly, disabled, and grassroots along with the more familiar ones

- placed statements in the official record at the third Prepcom and during the informal meetings.

At Quito, GAP was very busy and quite visible.

- Its PCG co-chairs organised 16 roundtables and 4 assemblies.

- Its PCGs co-chairs were assigned 16 seats in the official meetings (in contrast to the usual 9 seats for major groups and 3 for other stakeholders).

- GAP PCG co-chairs offered statements at the final plenary session.

- The ExCo had a private meeting with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon at his invitation.

- And the GAP president and vice president addressed the opening and closing plenaries

GAP introduced many people to the UN – fully a third of its membership participated for the first time in UN activities

After these successes, the GAP membership voted to extend its work to implementation of the *New Urban Agenda*, an action encouraged by the Habitat III Secretary General. Subsequently, each PCG tailored strategies for organising its contributions at multiple levels (local, national and global) -- and each is developing partnerships among other PCGs to enhance these activities.

These strategies include complementing the work of other advocacy efforts like the UN-Habitat programme, the World Urban Campaign; organising substantive roundtables and assemblies at the World Urban Forum; and developing communication channels for the Member States’ stakeholder consultations as part of the mandated reporting on the *New Urban Agenda*. ■

Genie Birch, President, GAP

How youth and children are playing a role in Habitat III

Cities Today US reporter, **Mythili Sampathkumar**, spoke to **Joyati Das**, Senior Director for Urban Programs, World Vision International, co-Chair Children and Youth Constituent Group

What organisation are you representing and what is your role in the New Urban Agenda?

World Vision is committed to the needs of children for safer more prosperous, sustainable cities. The most important thing for us that is we understand and recognise while these amazing aspirations are signed off on the multilateral level... in the communities where we work, the ideas are not understood.

There is a lack of common understanding about what we are trying to achieve in the grassroots, smaller NGOs don't have an understanding of the depth of thought and insight that goes into the process of developing a set of sustainable urban development policies. We want to make that gap smaller.

Why did you join the General Assembly of Partners (GAP)? How do you think it will help children and youth around the world?

We got elected to co-chair the group. It was practically mandatory to join GAP because it's a shared platform for groups who are interested in specific thematic areas.

Most important for us as the Children and Youth group is driving the principle of complementarity. One group cannot do it all! No one city will have the solutions! It has to be the principle of mutuality, of common good to bring multidisciplinary skills, ideas, and competencies to drive the new urban agenda.

What are some of the pressing issues for your group in the New Urban Agenda?

First and foremost, we want [children and youth] to be equal partners in driving the new urban agenda. They are tomorrow's future leaders. They are citizens of today

yet the word 'inclusion' makes them look like they are in the periphery but they need to be included. [The] planet and cities we leave behind today will be their work and their inheritance.

What does that look like in cities?

We are holding and hosting roundtables for people to understand the aspirations of the New Urban Agenda. We are working with departments of education so we are reaching children through that established mechanism and where children are not in school we have community conversations going on to include those that are most marginalised and vulnerable.

For instance, in La Paz, Bolivia we formed youth groups within communities and train them about the constitution and their rights. As a result of that, thousands of youth came up with a Community Youth Group action plan which they shared with the La Paz city government. The mayor was so impressed that during the elections, he created two youth councillor positions at the municipal level.

In New Delhi, India we see it come into action through a safer cities initiative. We brought police and teenage girls together to make areas of the city safer. They feel confident and empowered, like they are taking charge of promoting safety in their own city through formal martial arts training, mapping street light outages, and teaching police why and how women and girls feel unsafe in the city.

What kinds of advantages do you see being part of the GAP group?

It's creating a shared sense of common good because the governments can only do so much; resources are limited. The more we come together, the more we have joint action.



Joyati Das, Senior Director for Urban Programs at World Vision International

Now that the Zero Draft is out, what are your thoughts on it?

We really celebrate the Zero Draft because it is an aspirational document. It has about four or five places that mention children and youth. We have [flagged] some items for inclusion [and strengthening] like heightened vulnerability of children and youth when they first move to cities. According to World Vision, nearly 70 percent of people in African countries moving to cities end up in informal settlements on the peripheries of cities. That means member states are losing those people as assets, their skills, and a whole section of population is not counted—and they're coming whether one likes it or not.

In these informal settlements, violence and crime are established fact and people ignore it. Children living in these fragile pockets of the city are ten times more affected by it. I would also like to see quality education, child labour, child trafficking, and safe spaces issuesstrengthened in the Zero Draft. ■

The role of grassroots organisations in Habitat III

Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and WIEGO are the co-chairs of the Grassroots Partner Constituent Group of the General Assembly of Partners, which brings together 15 such interest groups to speak with one voice on behalf of civil society in the Habitat III process. Cities Today US Reporter, **Mythili Sampathkumar**, spoke to **Rose Molokoane**, the National Coordinator for the South African Federation of the Urban Poor (FEDUP), affiliate of SDI and co-Chair of the Grassroots Constituent Group



Rose Molokoane speaks at the Third World Urban Forum in Vancouver, Canada

What is your role in the New Urban Agenda?

I am representing the large number of [poor] communities and 7,000 informal settlements—representing more than 10 million members and outreach to 1 billion people.

Our aim [in the New Urban Agenda] is to address the issue of homelessness, landlessness, and poverty. We are using data collection through mapping, GIS. We are doing household surveys, enumeration, layouts of our communities and then with this data... we are going to local authorities and negotiating with them, influencing them throughout 33 countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

Our aim [in the New Urban Agenda] is to address the issue of homelessness, landlessness, and poverty

Why is the Grassroots constituency important in the New Urban agenda?

After Habitat II, the issue of the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] came up. Then we asked a question: Member States are talking about MDGs but who is going to become the goalkeeper?

And now we're coming with a new term, SDGs. Again, the same question: who is going to become the goalkeeper of these Sustainable Development Goals?

We are the goalkeepers because everything is implemented through our goal posts. The agenda and policies will be have to be implemented at the community level.

What does sustainable urban development mean for the urban poor?

For us to have sustainable development, is to bring development to the people, with the people, that is managed and controlled by the people with the technical and financial support of the local, regional, and national governments.

Sometimes the definition of communities and stakeholders is diluting. When you talk about 'the community' you talk about the rich and the poor. But, here in the grassroots we are talking specifically about the poor and—I don't want to say marginalised—but those that are doing the actual work on the ground, they are not recognised for that work and we would like to see that [in the New Urban Agenda].

Why did you join the General Assembly of Partners (GAP)? How will it help the Grassroots constituency?

I think being part of GAP was very, very important for us as the Grassroots because now we are not just jumping into this like a headless chicken and

talking without being listened to! We are now part of the structure that is forcing the Member States to listen. Working with other stakeholders we are building the bigger voice and then Grassroots' voice.

How has that been reflected in the Zero Draft? What are your hopes for subsequent drafts?

We really want to see the concrete mention of the grassroots. We don't want to just have a voice to tick a box, we want to have a voice that can decide and can prioritise, manage, monitor, and to evaluate the partnership. We want the structure of the partnership institutionalised whereby everyone should understand their roles and responsibilities.

Not only recognition but involvement in decision making. We don't want to be acknowledged, we want to be involved. We don't want to become recipients of the policies, we want to be the partners in the creation of policies.

What are some of the challenges faced by Grassroots that will be discussed in Quito and beyond?

Well, we are talking about bureaucracy! We will talk very strongly but for us to achieve what we want to achieve from the grassroots level from government—it takes time. We can sign a contract today, but it can take two years for the contract to be approved by the different governments.

[What we are] saying is that this should be the process towards Quito but should not end in Quito. It should be the beginning to the partnership we are trying to forge here. We are not creating this partnership to discuss what the [policy] should look like—we are paving the way towards the implementation because that's where the important part is. That's where a lot of challenges will come.

Local government is the one that is nearer to the communities. Member states are the ones that will help local governments to implement the policies. We want the top and the bottom to come together to make a nice sandwich that is eatable by everyone.

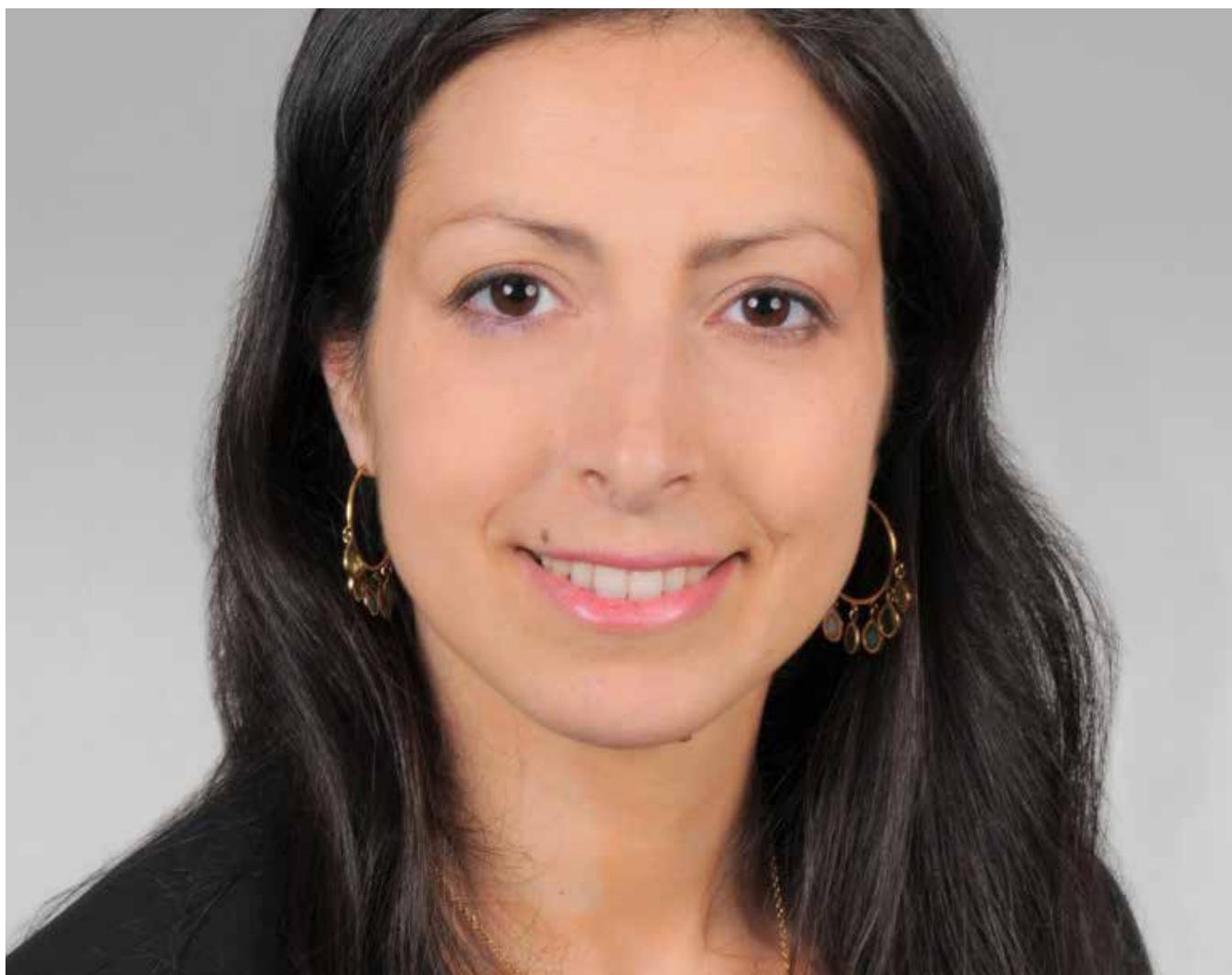
Local government is the one that is nearer to the communities

What are your hopes for the post-Quito phase?

Let's understand the resources that the communities are creating. Let's come up with a process of aiding the support towards the resources grassroots are creating. We have got financial, information, they only really need technical support and more financial aid. We can manage the savings within our communities. We are not unable to manage the millions that are coming from the local authorities or the central governments. ■

“If we don’t talk employment quality, we will just increase urban poverty” – Daria Cibrario, Public Services International, Habitat III

Public Services International is the Co-Chair of the Trade Unions Partner Constituent Group of the General Assembly of Partners, which brings together 15 such interest groups to speak with one voice on behalf of civil society in the Habitat III process. Cities Today US Reporter, **Mythili Sampathkumar**, spoke to **Daria Cibrario**, the Policy Officer, Local and Regional Government, MNEs for Public Services International.



Daria Cibrario, Public Services International

Who do you represent and what is your role in the New Urban Agenda?

We are here to represent all the global trade union federations and in a way we are here to represent city workers that include local, regional, and central administration workers, those that operate the utilities of cities such as sewage, water, electricity, healthcare, social services, building, construction, manufacturing, and more. Overall that is about 125 million workers around the world.

Tax justice for countries and cities [is another issue]

Why did you join the General Assembly of Partners (GAP)? How will it help the trade unions constituency?

GAP helps because it unites all the major groups so that we can exchange

The jobs need to be decent–secure in terms of health and safety, but also economic security, permanent wherever possible, and [include] freedom of association

views, learn about each other, and find points of convergence in our advocacy. We wouldn't be able to do that as well without this structure and we are grateful for the opportunity. For instance, some of the issues we advocate for have been picked up by other GAP members and vice versa. In a way, we get stronger together.

Has the draft text addressed all the points trade unions would like included?

Let me say what's positive about the Zero Draft...our demand for having clear language on the inclusion of labour standard clauses in public procurement contracts has been taken

on board. It is very important and we really encourage member states to keep that. There's also a good mention of empowerment of local government and decentralisation in terms of resources of power—that again, is something we are very much in favour of.

What are the issues that are missing that your constituency would like to see addressed?

For trade unions, there are quite a few issues because of the wide variety of members we have. [Overall], we don't see a clear connection between the business aspect and analysis of the Zero Draft and the social inclusion, socio-economic equity issues.

The International Labor Organisation (ILO)...[definition of] 'decent work'...needs to be at the heart of the agenda. If we just talk about generating employment, but we don't talk about the quality and the rights that come with it, we will just increase urban poverty.

The jobs need to be decent–secure in terms of health and safety, but

also economic security, permanent wherever possible, and [include] freedom of association.

It seems to have been forgotten that when we talk about mechanisms to generate social inclusion the key instruments are collective bargaining and social dialogue.

Tax justice for countries and cities [is another issue]. There are a lot of reports out there that actually show billions of unpaid taxes are somewhere in tax havens while central and local governments are struggling to finance essential services. Sometimes they need to tax even more the working class and the poor. That is not viable for us.

Why are collective bargaining and freedom of association such crucial issues for the New Urban Agenda?

One of the key things we advocate for is ILO Convention 151 is that it stipulates the fundamental labour rights of public sector workers to associate in trade unions and negotiate their working conditions. Public sector workers are often seen as an exception as they are part of the state.

By creating this dialogue and collective bargaining, workers can also have a say in how to propose innovative ways to deliver quality public services at the local level and express what are their capacity building needs, they can better share their ideas and value for those. It just does not happen otherwise. This kind of framework would also facilitate the professionalisation of local government workers, avoiding the consequence of the political cycles...and ensuring continuity in offering public services.

We hear a lot about public-private partnerships in these discussions. Given your constituency's diversity, what is your stance?

Of great concern to us is the mobilisation of private investment as the preferred option to fill the investment gap. We think the public options must be...promoted at the same level...if not more, especially for the essential services that involve human rights—access to water, access to electricity, healthcare, and education. These kinds of services must not answer to commercial logic.

Of course, we need to establish a framework that prevents corruption and is conducive to transparency... but let's remember that lack of transparency and accountability are not just in the public sector. There is no evidence that the private sector is better than the public sector at delivering essential services...we actually have evidence to the contrary: the re-municipalisation of water in Paris which has made significant savings in one year, public healthcare in Costa Rica, and public electricity management in Uruguay. ■

Why the urban-rural linkage is crucial for Habitat III

Caribbean Network of Rural Women Producers (Jamaica) is the Interim Chair of the Farmers Partner Constituent Group of the General Assembly of Partners, which brings together 15 such interest groups to speak with one voice on behalf of civil society in the Habitat III process. Cities Today US Reporter, **Mythili Sampathkumar**, spoke to **Mildred Crawford**, the President and Community Development Officer of Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers.



Mildred Crawford participated in the UN climate change negotiations in Lima, Peru. December 2014

What is your constituency and what is your role in the New Urban Agenda?

I work with mostly women farmers, but I represent small farmers, which make up 70 percent of famers in the world.

We don't normally think of farming as an urban issue. What is the link and why is it important?

The issue of farming is really rural, or at least once you say farming—you're thinking of rural. But, you have to look at the shift taking place in urban farming, new kind of connections that are about take off in the cities, and the urbanisation [of] rural areas in the countries [which] have become over-crowded in the cities.

[Also] food/food security is named SDG 1 and 2 and has to be a part of dialogue and preparation of the New Urban Agenda.

Farming and food production is important for consumption [and urban growth]. It is essential and the urban-rural linkage is not an accident, it is critical

How does urban growth in rural areas impact farmers?

In order to secure that vision of what a developed area looks like most of these houses and arable agriculture lands are usually mowed down. I rarely see much planning put in place to secure these women and men who own these lands and how they will be compensated especially when there is no formal document to show ownership.

Second, as the city expands into the rural area, are these people prepared for it? No. Because they were not informed what it would require...most of them the lack of the skill sets required of the new factories and all the other industrialised activities that come there.

What impact does their inability to farm anymore have on urban populations?

Well, we all have to eat from the day we were born to the day we die! And

even if you're talking about urban planning, you have to produce. So, farming and food production is important for consumption [and urban growth]. It is essential and the urban-rural linkage is not an accident, it is critical.

Big investors, big factories are usually in cities—but the raw materials are produced by farmers who are primary producers. So, you realise there has to be a strong link between where the raw material that is needed in the city comes from and make sure that it is consistent as well. Based on those, it is imperative that farmers be at the table [for forming the New Urban Agenda].

Why did you join the General Assembly of Partners (GAP)? How will it help the Farmers constituency?

It is a platform that allows for full participation and...much more visibility on the issues that affect my constituency.

GAP opens up an opportunity for me to speak to member states through these mediums. We are also able to post our information virtually. The fact that we are seen as a reservoir of information is already an opening that if, not just african member states, anyone wants information on the city we need they can safely rely this major group to feed them with the necessary information.

What are your hopes for the upcoming draft texts and the final New Urban Agenda text?

I commend Habitat III for thinking urban-rural, but I am not seeing the urban-rural linkage strengthening within the document as it should be.

We are not mentioned there in the Zero Draft although food security is there, the centrality of who the food producers are is not there. Neither the term 'primary producers' or farmers – nothing is there. [The push] is to get them or the term 'primary food producers' mentioned in the draft.

We are asking consideration for a quality of life that is a right of all

We are producers and business people. We are asking consideration for a quality of life that is a right of all. We welcome the idea of [local authorities holding consultative sessions]. I'm not worried about the acceptance. I am more concerned about how member states will integrate it into the final document.

Do you think you face any pushback from Member States on including farmers in an urban agenda? Are there any challenges to educating them on the connection?

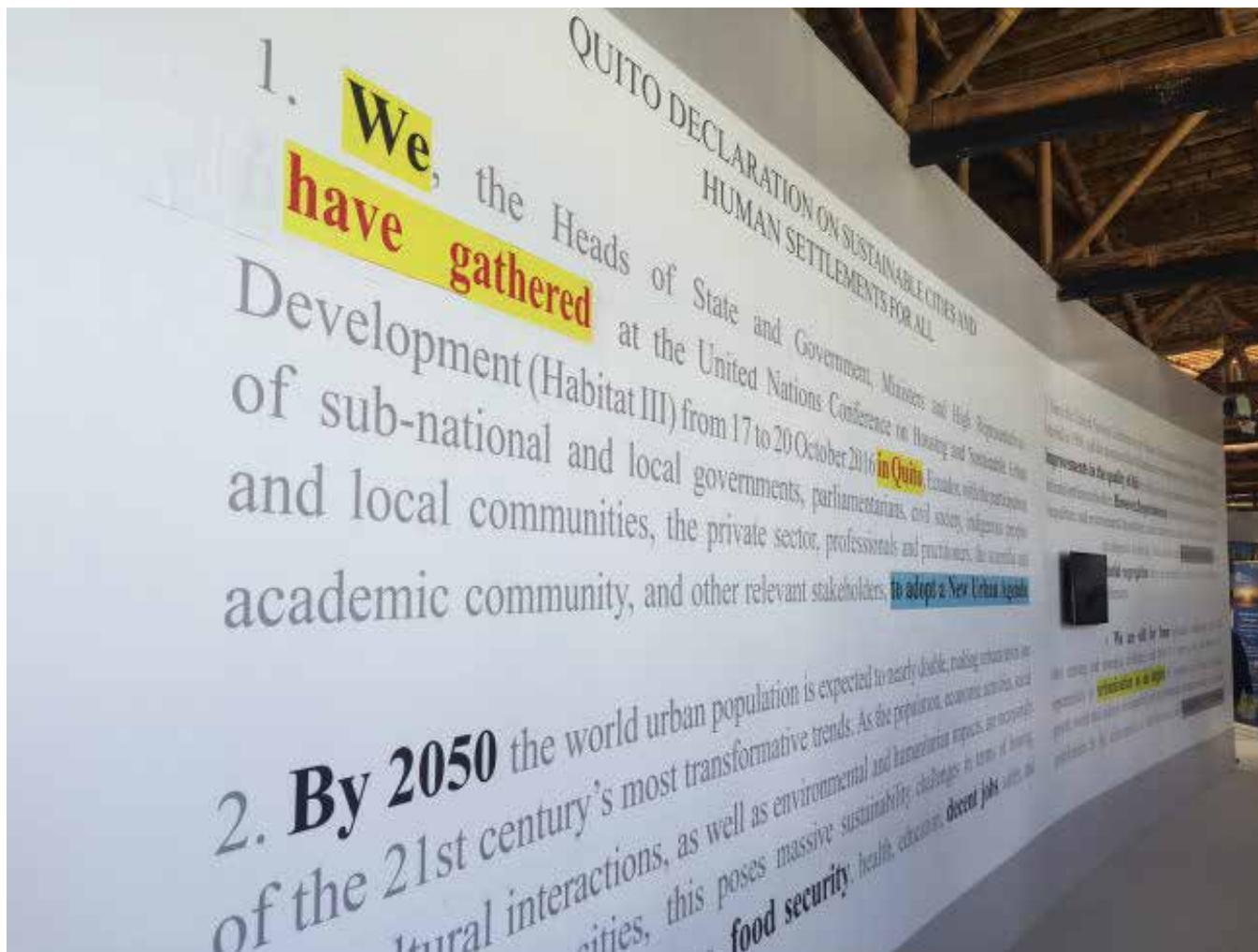
No, pushback. I don't know how relevant they think the issue is because I'm not getting that feedback right now. We'll have to see how it plays out in the next round of document revisions.

There might be other challenges from other perspectives. If you look at the Paris Agreement on climate change, farmers were not included either in that document because farmers are seen as one of the actors that could have contributed to this build up carbon. It might not be said directly, but indirectly it is. We're talking about greenhouse gas emissions, etc however research has proven otherwise.

With building cities, you're thinking about clean cities, green cities, accommodative, and so on. That is why I would rather use the term 'primary food producers' rather than farmers. ■

Civil society gains new ground at Habitat III

By **Richard Forster**



The New Urban Agenda is expected to be signed on Thursday

There were 30,000 attendees expected at the Habitat III meeting in Quito but on yesterday's opening day, as a huge queue snaked back through the El Ejido park, you would be forgiven for thinking that Pope Francis was back in the city.

Estimates put the final number of registrants at just under 50,000 (though UN sources could not confirm the number), many of whom spent several hours sheltering under umbrellas from the blazing sun, in the hope of getting

into the Casa de la Cultura Ecuatoriana, the venue for the main conference sessions and the plenary assembly of national governments. Rooms are packed to capacity and local people are even sending email requests to gain last-minute entry. Clearly, it is not only taxi drivers and people selling umbrellas who are celebrating Habitat III coming to Quito.

While one urban specialist at the Asian Development Bank quipped that the event perfectly captured the chaos

of cities, what the huge attendance shows is a groundswell of interest and support from citizens for urban issues. Pope Francis has said degrading the environment is a sin and 15 months on from his visit, the residents of Quito are showing their understanding of the close relationship between cities and climate change.

In its own way, this meeting reflects the formal recognition during discussions leading up to Habitat III, that the implementation of the New

Urban Agenda will require the support of not only national governments but all segments of society.

The UN Secretary-General said as much in his speech addressing the plenary session. “Cities and towns have an immense role to play in ending poverty and building inclusive societies that promote participation by all,” declared Ban Ki-moon citing the importance of investment in infrastructure and affordable housing, and the need to engage with all citizens, especially with women and girls, to make cities safer and more productive.

Ban backed his words by agreeing to an unscheduled meeting with 16 representatives of civil society, who had come together as a new group, the General Assembly of Partners (GAP). The Secretary-General’s audience with them marks a remarkable period of development for the GAP, which represents 16 very diverse interest groups from grassroots to academics, farmers to parliamentarians, and which unites business people with trade unions on the same platform.

“It is you who really makes governments open their ears and eyes,” said Ban addressing the GAP chairs. “I assure you of the full support of the UN system and I count on your continuing engagement.”

Still, not everyone feels included. Waiting in the queue for Habitat III were representatives of Blue Ocean, a US faith-based eco-feminist group, which has set up community meetings in cities and championed the rights of girls in education including in Ecuador. They described how they had applied for a side event but had been turned away and told to “go to the Hilton”.

In conversations with Cities Today, leaders of major city associations bemoaned the fact they had not been consulted on the New Urban Agenda though they represent the very cities and mayors who will be tasked with the implementation of the principles set out in the document.

But the General Assembly of Partners, formed just 17 months ago, seeks to help both: a constituency group for grassroots co-chaired by the



Ana Moreno, Secretariat Coordinator for Habitat III (centre), addresses the plenary meeting of the General Assembly of Partners

NGOs, Wiego and SDI, is open to all stakeholders like Blue Ocean with an interest in sustainable urbanisation. And the global city networks, UCLG and ICLEI, are leading the local authorities’ group to which city associations can make their feelings known.

GAP is a new and developing partnership and if the implementation of the New Urban Agenda is to be inclusive, it offers a vehicle through which thousands of organisations that may have previously felt excluded, can now make representations to the UN and its member governments.

“Fully a third of those who participated this time had never been a UN stakeholder before,” Genie Birch, president of GAP and co-director of the Penn Institute for Urban Research, told Secretary-General Ban.

Chairs of the constituent groups of the General Assembly of Partners have already had the opportunity to make representations on behalf of members at the preparatory meetings organised by the UN in 2015 in Prague, New York and Surabaya. It was through such preparatory meetings that Member States agreed the content of the New Urban Agenda, which sets out a series of voluntary commitments to be adopted this week by 193 governments.

Last Sunday, the GAP members voted at their plenary session to continue their activities post-Habitat III to assist in implementation of the New Urban Agenda for the next four years. At the same meeting, Ana Moreno, Secretariat Coordinator for Habitat III, revealed that 16 seats had been granted to the group for the plenary sessions this week, something that is unprecedented in previous UN meetings.

Moreno has worked closely alongside Joan Clos, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat, to secure a role for GAP before and during this United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development, as Habitat III is formally known. She said the recognition for the work of GAP in the text of the New Urban Agenda itself was a landmark.

“What GAP has brought has been no silos, no independent interests, and an integrated approach with groups still having their own identity and that is a very good legacy,” said Moreno. ■

**The author is co-chair of the Media Constituency Group of the GAP*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_KAPrQ0gwi&feature=youtu.be

How civil society can drive implementation of the New Urban Agenda

The role of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), a new representative body for civil society, in the process leading up to the Habitat III meeting marked a watershed in how national governments can work with stakeholder groups. **Richard Forster** reveals how the next-generation GAP will not only provide a vital link between government and cities in terms of implementation of urban policy but could also serve as a template for multi-stakeholder cooperation across the entire UN system

While the Habitat III meeting in Quito last October may have put the seal on the New Urban Agenda, the key question now is how to ensure that the broad, some would say rather aspirational, statements in the Agenda are implemented in our cities over the next 20 years.

The Agenda itself has come in for some criticism for not being more focused on targets and how we might get to them.

“It doesn’t tell me as a local government official how I should do anything differently,” Debra Roberts, chief resilience officer for the city of Durban told Reuters ahead of

Habitat III, emphasising that national governments and urban policymakers need to engage much more with a wider range of actors such as civil society, business and academia.

This is particularly telling as chief resilience officers are the very people who are on the front line of implementing the New Urban Agenda.

Inspired by and created with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation in 2013, the role of a city’s chief resilience officer is to pull together a wide range of community stakeholders as well as the different silos of local government to change the way cities build resilience against economic shocks, social distress and inequality, and the environmental threats of climate change.

Cities as different as Accra and Rotterdam, or Amman and Washington DC, which are all part of Rockefeller’s 100 Resilient Cities initiative, are looking to the same model of local cooperation and while the New Urban Agenda can be criticised for its lack of targets or indicators, what it did achieve was a recognition that we need a similar and more inclusive model of local consultation by national governments.

Much of the credit for that lies with a new organisation—the General Assembly of Partners—which has emerged as a powerful vehicle to meet Roberts’ call for governments to consult more widely with stakeholders. ▶



The GAP Executive Committee met at the United Nations Headquarters at the end of January to delineate its programmes for the next five years. Attendees pictured (L-R): Greg Budworth (Compass Housing, Australia), co-chair Civil Society; Mary Rocco, GAP co-ordinator at Penn IUR; Bert Smolders, (Arcadis, The Netherlands) co-chair, Business and Industry; Peter Goetz (former member German Parliament) co-chair, Parliamentarians; Nicholas You (Citiscope, Kenya), co-chair, Media; Ishtiaque Zahir (IUIA, Bangladesh) co-chair, Professionals; Ali Kahn (European Foundation Center, Belgium) co-chair, Foundations; Jane Katz (Habitat for Humanity, USA) co-chair Civil Society; Magdalena Garcia Hernandez (Bufetede Estudios, Mexico) co-chair, Women; Eugenie Birch (University of Pennsylvania, USA) president, GAP; Shipra Narang Suri (ISOCARP, India) vice president, GAP; Hirotaka Koike (C&Y Habitat III) co-chair, Children and Youth; Mildred Crawford (Jamaica Network of Rural Women Producers, Jamaica), co-chair, Farmers; Sion Jones, HelpAge, UK co-chair, Older Persons; Violet Shitvutse, Shibuye Community Health Workers, Kenya) co-chair, Farmers; Ana Lucy Bengachoa (Plataforma Comunitaria Comité y redes de Honduras Waguch, Honduras) co-chair, Indigenous Peoples; Mohammed Ali Loufy (partially hidden) (American University, USA), co-chair, Persons with Disabilities; Enrique Silva (Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, USA), co-chair, Research and Academia; Joyati Das (World Vision International, Australia), co-chair, Children and Youth

The General Assembly of Partners, or GAP, only came together formally for the first time at the Governing Council Meeting of UN-Habitat in Nairobi, Kenya in April 2015 with the idea of providing a combined voice for different stakeholder groups in the discussions leading up to the New Urban Agenda. From an initial group of 100 members, the GAP has grown in just 20 months to over 1,400 entities representing 1.1 billion people through 58,000 networks.

“Fully a third of those who participated [in Quito] had never been a UN stakeholder before,” says Genie Birch, president of GAP and co-director of the Penn Institute for Urban Research.

The success of GAP in representing different stakeholder groups (see box on page 50: *Achievements and Milestones*) was in marked contrast to Habitat II twenty years earlier where civil society had considered there were too many diverse interests to speak as one.

An inclusive approach

An initial innovation to make the group more inclusive and avoid fragmentation was to extend membership beyond the nine major groups of stakeholders recognised under the UN system and defined at the UN Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. The partners that Debra Roberts referred to like business and academia are members together with a diverse number of other groups many of whom had not seen eye to eye at previous meetings. (See box for the full list of Partner Constituent Groups).

“We came up with 14 groups with particular relevance to cities and human settlements which naturally included the nine major groups but also others such as media which is treated as a constituent group and not as a mouthpiece, and foundations which were also brought into their own group not just as a facilitator of grassroots for example,” says Shipra Narang Suri, vice-president of the GAP.

So a city like Durban can have input to the GAP through its

membership of ICLEI, the global city association, whose representative Yunus Arikan co-chairs the local authorities group with Emilia Saiz, deputy secretary-general of UCLG. Both co-chairs are obliged to canvass the opinions of their city and local government members as well as other members of their Constituent Group. At the same time, the Rockefeller Foundation has a voice through the Foundations and Philanthropies Partner Constituent Group, which is co-chaired by Avina and the Ford Foundation.

Unlike the World Urban Campaign (WUC), a UN-Habitat led programme launched in 2009 from which the GAP’s original 100 members sprang, members could join the GAP constituent groups freely without the obstacle of needing clearance to sign agreements with a UN agency. As a result it was far more successful in galvanising a large and wide-ranging membership in a short space of time.

“GAP was set up in a sense to bypass that very bureaucratic mentality of the WUC and it snowballed a lot quicker than the WUC and than we imagined,” says Narang. “[For the World Urban Campaign] you have to enter into an MoU with UN-Habitat and that means there is an element of discretion and gatekeeping and decisions on who can get in so the idea of GAP was to be more inclusive.”

Having been granted a last-minute audience with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon during the Quito meeting, the GAP not only created history for such a multi-stakeholder group but realised that it had to continue to be part of the implementation and not just the formation of the New Urban Agenda.

As a result, its members voted at their plenary meeting in Quito to remove the expiration date from the constitution and to push on with a new agenda to carry forward the momentum and achievements of the group.

Nicholas You, co-chair of the Media Partner Constituent Group and a former senior policy advisor of

Who are the General Assembly of Partners?

The 16 Partner Constituent Groups represent:

Local and Subnational Authorities
 Research and Academia
 Civil Society Organisations
 Grassroots Organisations
 Women
 Parliamentarians
 Children and Youth
 Business and Industries
 Foundations and Philanthropies
 Professionals
 Trade Unions and Workers
 Farmers
 Indigenous People
 Media
 Older Persons
 Persons with Disabilities



Genie Birch, president, GAP

“Fully a third of those who participated [in Quito] had never been a UN stakeholder before”

Genie Birch, president of GAP and co-director of the Penn Institute for Urban Research

GAP Achievements and Milestones

April 2015: A constitution is approved at the formal launch meeting in Nairobi for a new organisation with 14 stakeholder groups to be called the General Assembly of Partners.

October 2015: Second GAP meeting in New York. Partnership Constituent Group Chairs' Handbook approved.

March 2016: GAP hosts its third plenary in Prague and membership rises to 900. A new Partnership Constituent Group (the fifteenth) is added for Older Persons.

May-June 2016: Partner groups of GAP have input to the intergovernmental informal sessions in New York.

July 2016: Third Gap plenary meeting in Subaraya during Habitat PrepCom3 meeting. Sixteenth Partnership Constituent Group added for Persons With Disabilities.

September 2016: The draft of the New Urban Agenda is agreed by national governments and includes, as well as input on specific clauses from GAP, a reference to the role of the General Assembly of Partners in paragraph 128.

October 2016: GAP advocacy results in unprecedented profile for stakeholder groups during Habitat III meeting:

- The GAP president and vice president are invited to offer comments at the Opening and Closing Plenaries in front of member states.
- The conference organisers allocate 16 seats in the plenary to the GAP constituent groups (as opposed to 9 for major groups and 3 for other stakeholders)
- Members of the GAP Executive Committee are invited to a private meeting with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

“What I have tried to look to with the draft of the new constitution is that we should behave like a coalition of partners”

Nicholas You, co-chair, Media Partner Constituent Group, GAP

UN-Habitat, and Katherine Kline, co-chair of the Older Persons Constituent Group, are leading a sub-committee that is drafting a new constitution for what has been termed GAP 2.0. You sees the GAP as fulfilling several important functions post-Habitat III.

“I think there is a very legitimate concern by civil society that somebody has to hold government to account for example, to ensure social inclusion and leave no one behind, and that is one part,” says You. “Another part is how do we accelerate the pace of implementation through the exchange of knowledge? We need to document innovation and the success stories and make that benefit the maximum number of people and institutions. Several partners are also keen to look at how we can put together a more robust monitoring system.”

The challenges of implementation

But while the GAP has broken new ground in terms of the role of stakeholder representation in an intergovernmental process, challenges remain on how effective it can be in terms of the implementation and monitoring of the New Urban Agenda.

In the first place, member states need to accept there is such a role. In the lead up to Quito, the GAP leadership worked hard to get the ear of national governments leading to recognition by name of the new organisation in the final document signed by member states.

“One thing which we have in the New Urban Agenda document itself is for national governments to commit to consulting and working with stakeholders when they report on the New Urban Agenda,” says Narang. “We did talk hard on issues such as a Right to the City but we gained their [member states’] respect not just their ear in the process because of our mobilisation, our persistence, and our willingness to play the game and not just hold placards.”

Genie Birch says the strong support from Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-Habitat and in particular Ana Moreno, Coordinator of the Habitat III

Secretariat, not only meant the GAP played an important advocacy role for the New Urban Agenda but it set the organisation on a course to assist with implementation.

“I believe that Ana Moreno had a vision of how to develop a platform that would be able to attract the kind of stakeholders that would be needed for Habitat III, for the conference itself, but also later that would be needed for the implementation stages,” comments Birch.

Birch says that Partner Constituent Groups are now entering a pilot phase to establish how they can assist on implementation by engaging with new partners on a local basis. Each group or PCG is going through a self-examination to identify how it can organise itself through its members and through partnerships with other constituent groups to go out to localities, create synergies around existing activities and relate these to the New Urban Agenda, and then bring that back to the national governments through communication and information exchanges to assist those governments in reporting on the implementation of the Agenda to the UN system.

Birch cites the example of the Older Persons Constituent Group group co-chaired by Katherine Kline, which is reaching out to the City of New York and other stakeholders who were not involved directly in the Habitat III process, to engage in discussions around existing activities on Age-Friendly Cities.

“She {Kline} is working with these groups to explain the New Urban Agenda to them so there is an alignment of what is happening locally with what is in the New Urban Agenda in terms of Age-Friendly Cities,” says Birch, who says there are similar initiatives by GAP members in New York on food systems and housing. “This serves as an example of how one takes a global set of recommendations and drives them right down to local activities.”

In terms of the GAP’s role in monitoring governments, matters

are much less clear both in terms of national governments' recognition of this role and how the GAP itself may organise the groups to make governments accountable.

"We were saying [during the preparatory sessions] that investments made in pursuit of the New Urban Agenda goals should be monitored by multi-stakeholder advisory committees and member states stood up and said: 'What are you talking about?'" says Narang. "But the seed has been planted and if a couple of progressive national governments take it up then we could show how it could actually work."

A second more prosaic challenge is that someone needs to pay for the work of GAP.

Nicholas You says the biggest obstacle to raising finance for the GAP is that the organisation has no legal personality so it cannot even have a bank account. For its activities and input leading up to the Habitat III meeting, the Habitat III Secretariat, which had its own budget for stakeholder collaboration in the Habitat III process, provided funding and travel support for the meetings of the GAP Executive Committee members (the two co-chairs of each Constituent Group).

Since Quito, the Executive Director of UN-Habitat Joan Clos has offered to support future meetings in a similar way. That offer has yet to be accepted but You says there will be changes in the way members work together post-Quito and that may well help get round the lack of legal personality which prevents GAP raising funds.

"What I have tried to look to with the draft of the new constitution is that we should behave like a coalition of partners and to allow two or more partners to coalesce and to mobilise resources for activities that support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and that those activities be considered legitimate activities of GAP," explains You.

Birch stresses that the GAP members must show their worth before finance and support falls into place

and recognises that the pilot phase for activities by the different Partner Constituent Groups will be crucial in demonstrating an active role for GAP in implementing the New Urban Agenda with national governments.



Shipra Narang Suri, vice-president, GAP

Shipra Narang says her long-term vision is for the General Assembly of Partners to become part of the UN system

"We are in a pilot stage on how we can best use the capabilities of the GAP for the New Urban Agenda and how we can bring something to the table in terms of implementation and we have to show we have something to 'sell,'" says Birch.

The third and perhaps greatest challenge for the GAP relates to human nature and what Shipra Narang calls the process of "herding cats". A group that brings together business with trade unions, or local authorities with grassroots, will inevitably lead to

exchanges of very different viewpoints and inevitable tensions. In the run up to Quito, the GAP held together well and one reason for its success was that the different parties did not have to reach consensus on all matters and were free to advocate on their own particular issues.

"The big reassurance that people had in this process was that GAP was not going to be a gatekeeper so even if people agreed to certain positions with us they would not be blocked from advocating on other issues independently," explains Narang.

Post-Quito—and perhaps as a victim of its own success—relations have not been so cordial. Following a disclosure that the GAP President Genie Birch was applying to trademark the words *General Assembly of Partners*, a lawyer's letter was sent to the UN Office of Internal Oversight Services and the President of the UN Economic and Social Council to instigate action against Genie Birch on the basis that she had done this for personal gain and without due authorisation. The same letter was also sent to the German and Kenyan Permanent Representatives at the United Nations.

Birch had undertaken the application personally because the GAP itself has no legal status nor a permanent address, as was required under US law to register the trademark. However, the letter of action against Birch suggested she was seeking to profit from exploitation of the name, which appears absurd both in the lack of commercial opportunities that such a group affords (GAP T-shirts anyone?) and her cognisance as president that any such exploitation could only be done under the authority of the GAP itself, if and when any mark was granted.

As one source noted, some PCG members had clearly felt GAP was getting too big for its boots and chose to undermine and discredit the GAP by attempting to bring it into disrepute with the United Nations itself through the claim brought against Birch.

At their most recent meeting in New York on January 22-23, GAP

Executive Committee members voted 14 to 1 to continue the trademark application (one co-chair of the Children and Youth Group dissented; Foundations and Philanthropies never exercises a vote in GAP meetings regardless of the topic).

While GAP members have roundly dismissed the action by joint letter and fully supported Birch, who has been investigated and cleared completely of any wrongdoing, the disruptive action has had consequences on the GAP's freewheeling membership and voting procedures.

"Unfortunately the people who were behind the leak to the Permanent Representatives [of the UN] were members of GAP and that is part of the reason why in the new version of the constitution we will have to put into place some sort of vetting process and a clause which will enable the suspension of people who misbehave," says You. "But overall, we want to GAP to be open as possible, to provide as many people and stakeholder groups with a voice going forward."

Another more compelling reason for amending the constitution is that the role of GAP has changed with the need to implement rather than design the New Urban Agenda.

"We are in a new phase where the multitude of people that are required for implementation of the New Urban Agenda is far greater than those that may have taken part in the intergovernmental process," says You. "Similarly the centre of gravity will not just be New York – it will shift to regions and nations and subnational spaces and we need more flexible decision-making processes – for example decisions to be made by two-thirds or a simple majority. We will continue to seek consensus but we also have to realistic."

As Birch emphasises it is important that the GAP empowers and insists that the co-chairs of its Executive Committee (the Ex Co is 32 people representing the 16 groups) communicate with their partnership groups so that it becomes a representative democracy having

consulted with all members on the issues at hand.

"What we are proposing now is that the plenary or full General Assembly



Nicholas You, co-chair, Media Partner Constituent Group, GAP

"I think there is a very legitimate concern by civil society that somebody has to hold government to account for example, to ensure social inclusion and leave no one behind"

Nicholas You, co-chair, Media Partner Constituent Group, GAP

of Partners will set the agenda and propose the issues which need to be discussed and the Ex Co will make the decisions and vote as necessary," says You. "Otherwise you can have a single member with the same voting power

as say a large association representing thousands of members or hundreds of local authorities and millions of inhabitants?"

With the legal challenge petering out, and the GAP and its leadership having seen off bigger challenges, including member states who were supporting GAP and who then reversed their positions just before Habitat III, it is clear that in adversity, the GAP has grown. So how far can it go?

Shipra Narang says her long-term vision is for the General Assembly of Partners to become part of the UN system.

"With ESCAP [the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific] we have put this on the table for them to seriously consider for their regional committee meetings to use the 16 member group template," says Narang. "Once it gets traction at that level and with the new leadership of UN as well as I am hopeful that this will get picked up and people will ask why we are sticking to the nine regional groups. This may well become the inspiration for a system-wide reform on stakeholder involvement."

Clearly, the GAP can play an important role in the stakeholder consultation that Durban's Debra Roberts highlighted. After becoming chief resilience officer of Durban, Roberts was invited to join the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change where she has been an active voice on how important cities and local governments are to mitigation and adaptation strategies. It would be fitting to see the GAP also solidify its place in the intergovernmental system and change the dynamic for cities in terms of a wider representation of all residents. ■

This is a corrected version of an earlier article. Hirotaka Koike, from the UN Major Group for Children and Youth, has confirmed that members of the Youth and Constituency Group did not disclose any matters regarding the trademark application to the lawyer who acted against Genie Birch nor did they have any dealings at all with the lawyer in question.

New General Assembly of Partners aims to broaden global focus on Habitat III



Eugénie Birch, president of the new General Assembly of Partners, displays a copy of “The City We Need” declaration at a briefing during the PrepCom 2 talks in Nairobi.

A new global initiative will seek to raise attention and recruit expanded constituencies to define and press for a New Urban Agenda through the U. N.’s Habitat III process, ahead of the major cities conference set to take place next year in Quito.

Formally called the General Assembly of Partners for Habitat III, the undertaking was announced in mid-April in Nairobi at major preparatory talks for next year’s conference. (See the assembly’s Nairobi Declaration here.) The network has its roots in the World Urban Campaign, the network of academic, business and advocacy groups that formed in 2009 to work collaboratively with (and staffed within) UN-Habitat in defining new urban policy ideas and directions.

But the General Assembly of Partners (GAP) is intended to reach far more broadly, to welcome virtually any organization or stakeholder group across the world interested in sustainable urbanization. The constituencies approached for membership will range from city policymakers to organized groups of women, professionals and academics, as well as business and trade unions. It will also include indigenous peoples, foundations, parliamentarians, farmers, children and the media — and any others that may arise.

Further, the GAP is not meant to be a permanent organization. Rather, it’s designed as a mobilization effort to work to make Habitat III a historic success through the global embrace of a strong New Urban Agenda, the intended outcome document from the Habitat III conference. But beyond that, the GAP is not expected to be an ongoing entity.

The World Urban Campaign (WUC), by contrast, will continue in its role as a group of urbanists associated with UN-Habitat, up to and past Habitat III. Eugénie Birch, of the University of Pennsylvania, the campaign’s current chair, is also the first president of the GAP.

Asked whether the GAP model was a typical one in U. N. processes, former U. N. official Nicholas You, also a former WUC chair, said no. For most U. N. conferences on specific topics, member states are briefed on salient issues. But, You said, the GAP is different. “It’s an evolutionary movement so that the partners” — in civil society, worldwide — “can talk among themselves, find the common interest, and go forward with a powerful message.”

Queried at the Nairobi “PrepCom 2” sessions about “any gaps in the GAP,” Birch responded, “We definitely have holes. This is just the start of a new operation.”

The World Urban Campaign, she noted, has never included members from, for instance, farming or indigenous groups. But the GAP is reaching out to these and others. In May, the GAP will also undertake a major campaign to enlist business and industry interest, representation of which was almost completely lacking at the PrepCom 2 talks.

“We want to fill the GAP,” Birch said. “The members so far are just 100 or so. We want to have thousands of members.”

Still, the new effort is not starting from a blank slate. The World Urban Campaign, for example, created an aspirational “City We Need” declaration, launched in 2014, a revised version of which will likely constitute part of the GAP’s formal input into the Habitat process.

Likewise, an “Urban Thinkers Campus” was modelled at Caserta, Italy, in October, and nearly 20 such conferences are now planned for coming months (full details will be made available here). Further, outreach to media, with a focus on the dynamics and importance of urbanization, occurred within special sessions at the Caserta conference and was strengthened at PrepCom 2.

Meanwhile, the broadened policy links between cities worldwide has been modelled by organizations such as the Huairou Commission, which presses the idea that women’s rights and roles are deeply intertwined with urban spaces.

In Nairobi, the importance of connective partnerships was expanded upon by Ana Marie Argilagos, of the Ford Foundation. While “20 years ago philanthropy tended to be more project oriented,” she said, “philanthropy is now more strategic and working to achieve social change by working on systems change — and philanthropy is partnering with others, including government.” (Citiscope receives funding from the Ford Foundation.)

What the GAP founders clearly hope to spark is a global conversation on the status and role of cities and their potential, tying urban futures to 21st-century potential for peoples and interests across the globe. It’s a broad ambition: The sponsors aim not just to create alliances that impress the nation states at Quito, but to contribute to making Habitat III the critical turning point toward a unifying global urban agenda for this century. ■

Civil society must ensure equitable inclusion in Habitat III

The road is looking a bit rockier than once thought to get to the New Urban Agenda, the outcome document for next year's Habitat III conference on cities and the intended blueprint for a new global strategy around urbanization. Nonetheless, there was considerable optimism and civil society engagement at recent preparatory meetings in Nairobi for the conference.

The Nairobi negotiations, held in mid-April, were important ones. They were the second of just three formal meetings of the Habitat III preparatory committee (PrepCom) before the summit itself, being held in October 2016 in Quito. As has been previously reported, however, the events in Nairobi fell short of expectations, with the formal mechanism to include local governments, civil society and other stakeholders left undecided.

While it is widely recognized that substantive input from these major groups is essential if Habitat III is to have any real impact, the “how” of their participation remains under debate. Decisions on this accreditation process have now been pushed off to the U. N. General Assembly in September at the earliest.

Despite these procedural impediments, PrepCom II underscored the outpouring of valuable contributions for the New Urban Agenda from civil society organizations, local government, gender and grass-roots groups, academia and numerous Habitat Agenda partners.

Habitat for Humanity was one of these contributors at PrepCom II, with representatives from the United States, Europe and Africa participating. At the first such preparatory meeting, held in New York last September, we were invited to deliver a statement because of our consultative status with the U. N. Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Other organizations with similar ECOSOC status are now allowed to participate in the Habitat III process.

Likewise, the United Nations took the positive decision to allow civil society organizations that attended the last Habitat conference — Habitat II, held in 1996 in Istanbul — to participate in the recent PrepCom II. As such, additional constituencies were able to make statements during the plenary sessions in Nairobi.

Yet organizations looking for new accreditation to participate in this process are currently left stranded. While Habitat for Humanity was honoured to have the opportunity to present our views, we want to ensure that civil society organizations from all relevant sectors have a similar opportunity to shape the New Urban Agenda.

Certainly there is clear interest in strong engagement in the Habitat III process. Outside of the formal events in Nairobi last month, both accredited and unaccredited civil society groups sponsored side events on a variety of urban issues —

rural-to-urban linkages, financing for development, disaster resilience, climate change, affordable housing, partnerships, youths, data collection and others. Broader caucuses, such as the Huairou Commission and grass-roots women's networks, also met daily to develop strategies and promote positions with member states and stakeholders.

The Nairobi sessions also brought together stakeholders to create an innovative new platform known as the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), a special initiative of the World Urban Campaign organized in 14 broad constituent groups. Prior to the PrepCom II meetings, a full day was devoted to developing the new GAP platform, adopting a constitution and bringing together over 100 partner organizations to discuss how to provide input into the Habitat III process.

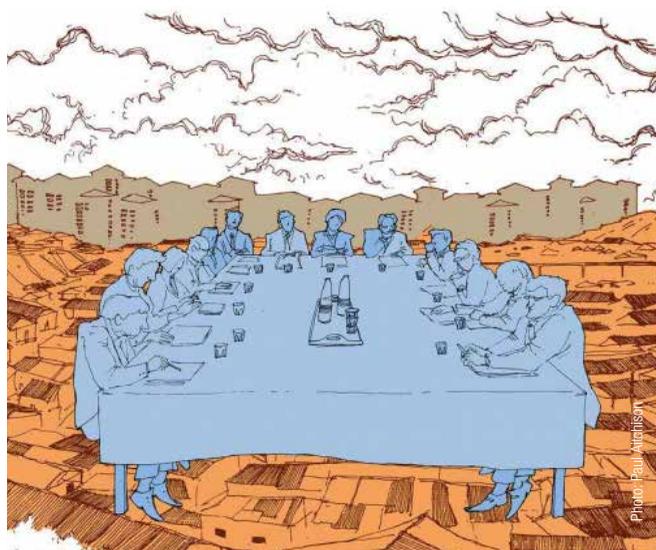
At an inaugural meeting on 13 April, Habitat for Humanity was elected to chair the GAP's constituent group for civil society organizations. The broader aim here is to support stakeholders' engagement with and contributions to the Habitat III conference and, in particular, to the New Urban Agenda. As part of our responsibilities as chair, we are now reaching out to other stakeholders, inviting all organizations interested in ensuring the fullest possible involvement in the preparatory process toward Habitat III to join us.

In particular, civil society organizations around the world wanting to engage with and shape the New Urban Agenda are invited to join the open dialogue venues known as Urban Thinkers Campuses. These events will bring partners and others together on a variety of themes from different regional areas. Nearly 20 such campuses are already planned over the next year, and the World Urban Campaign is still accepting additional proposals.

Eventually, results and recommendations from the Urban Thinkers Campuses will be fed into the New Urban Agenda.

Pivotal moment

Habitat for Humanity's vision is a world where everyone has a decent place to live. During the recent Nairobi talks, we built upon momentum from the strong housing theme at Habitat



II to reiterate that next year's conference must continue to prioritize housing and basic services. In addition, we are urging that Habitat III prioritize security of tenure and that the entire process be informed by local communities. Finally, the conference's outcome must offer clear, measurable and actionable recommendations.

The need for adequate housing has never been greater, and only through smart, coordinated and sustainable policies will the world address that need. By 2030, 6 in 10 people will live in cities, and the number of slum dwellers — and the requirement for adequate housing — is expected to rise to nearly two billion in the next two decades.

To meet that need, the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must include the new cities goal. Currently, this is draft Goal 11: "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable."

Habitat III stakeholder umbrella group to receive official financial support

Assistance will ensure that General Assembly of Partners chairs are able to attend major meetings while preparing inputs for the New Urban Agenda.

In the run-up to next year's U. N. conference on cities, Habitat III, the voice of civil society is particularly disparate. It encompasses the needs of everyone from children to the elderly, grass-roots activists to planning professionals, rural farmers to urban slum dwellers.

To that end, the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), a special initiative of the World Urban Campaign, aims to solidify these diverse voices into something resembling a unified statement. That statement, known as The City We Need, will eventually be offered as formal input into the drafting of the Habitat III outcome document, the New Urban Agenda.

The GAP's efforts to harness civil society's energy received another boost during the first week of July in Stockholm. This was the group's first formal meeting since the assembly was chartered in April on the sidelines of the Habitat III preparatory negotiations in Nairobi.

The Stockholm meeting was also important because it was to be the first time that the newly elected chairs of each of the group's 14 constituent groups were set to come together. And while a quorum of these chairs did indeed take place, not everyone could make it to Stockholm. (The meeting also coincided with the first Urban Thinkers Campus, at the Future of Places conference.)

With the planned finalization of the SDGs in September and as the Habitat III preparations continue to gain momentum, this is a pivotal moment for urban development and local communities — which are growing and urbanizing — to have a say in defining their future.^a

It is incumbent upon civil society organizations and other Habitat Agenda partners to continue to push for the inclusion and engagement of local communities with both national governments and the United Nations. Those living in cities must be a part of the solution to growth.

As civil society, as advocates and as cohabitants of this planet, we cannot forget that only by working together — with each other and with partners, including nation states, local governments and communities — can we meet the extreme need in our communities and plan for inclusive, sustainable and resilient cities in the future. ■



GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PARTNERS

The group representing children and youths, for instance, sent its interim chair. But it could not muster a larger presence, despite its notable energy around Habitat III.

"Youth-led organizations are run by volunteers, like students with an interest in a policy, and do this work almost without any financial support," said Chris Dekki, who represents the Major Group for Children and Youth at the United Nations, which is a member of the GAP group. "Young people are doing huge outreach and consultation efforts for Habitat III, but our ability to attend official meetings hinges on funding."

In order to increase participation in the remaining GAP meetings, the Habitat III Secretariat has agreed to pay for the travel and accommodations for one chair and one partner constituent member from each of the 14 groups.

"This is good news," said Dekki. "Without the money that we can now see from the Habitat III Secretariat, the children and youth constituency would be very underrepresented at these meetings."

The same can likely be said of many of the other groups, as well.

The decision is important because it signifies the Secretariat's faith in the GAP process as the voice of civil society and as a valid contribution to the New Urban Agenda. It also reflects the positive overtures toward the work of the GAP coming from the Habitat III Bureau, the eight-member committee of U. N. member states that is overseeing the conference on behalf of the General Assembly.

“The GAP is very excited and pleased to receive the support of the Habitat III Secretariat,” says GAP President Eugénie Birch, “because this will enable us to create an effective platform to develop consensus and to push forward the agreed upon ideas to enter the New Urban Agenda.”

The remaining GAP meetings are:

New York, 2-3 October 2015
Prague, 16-18 March 2016 (TBC)
Jakarta, July 2016 (TBC)
Quito, October 2016 (TBC) ■

Bridging the GAP: Urban advocacy for children and youths

The first in an occasional series on the stakeholder groups that make up the General Assembly of Partners.



A girl in Timbuktu, Mali. In the next 15 years, 60 percent of city dwellers will be under 18.

The General Assembly of Partners (GAP) is the main vehicle for civil society and other stakeholders to organize and advocate ahead of Habitat III, next year's major summit on urbanization. By necessity the GAP represents a wide range of interests, which have coalesced into 12 constituent groups. In the coming months, Citiscope will profile how these groups are preparing for the summit, with a focus on why sustainable urban development matters to the constituents of each.

According to the most recent U. N. statistics, the global youth population today is at a record high — some 1.8 billion. Cities have absorbed most of this boom in young people: UN-Habitat estimates that in the next 15 years, 60 percent of city dwellers will be under 18.

Rapidly urbanizing Africa, for instance, is an incredibly youthful continent, with over 70 percent of its population under 30 years old. Its population as a whole is expected to be majority urban by 2030.

Yet urban labor markets have failed to keep up with this demand. Nearly half of the 200 million unemployed worldwide are youths. Around 150 million young people live on less than USD 1.25 a day, and UN-Habitat classifies some 300 million working poor.

“We know that millions of children and youth live without adequate shelter, deprived of basic conditions in urban areas,” said Joyati Das of World Vision International, an NGO focused on children and the interim chair of the GAP constituent group for children and youths. “Children are the first casualties of urban poverty — often living on the streets, engaged in hazardous child labour and trafficked to the city.”

Many of the priority human rights issues for youths play out in urban areas. Child labour in sweatshop conditions, the focus of campaigns from Bangladesh to Southeast Asia, has been widely documented in the textile plants of cities' industrial zones, where they often provide important tax bases.

Across Central America, pressure from urban gangs has pushed tens of thousands of underage migrants to the U. S.-Mexico border. Cities like Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, in Honduras, now rank among the most violent in the world, with children both perpetrators and victims.

But in most countries with democratic systems of government, children are not voters. The world's youngest voting age is 16 — in Austria, Brazil, Cuba and Nicaragua — although a minimum of 18 is far more common.

That doesn't mean the voices of children and youths can't be heard. “Governments need to frame institutional and legal frameworks that enable participation and consultation of youth and children and their representative community organizations in decision-making of human settlement strategies, policies and programmes,” Das says.

To that end, the U. N. Major Group for Children and Youth, the interim vice-chair of the GAP constituent group, has been organizing consultations with groups of young people about the issues around Habitat III, next year's major cities summit. The group has already hosted eight consultations, relying on its passionate network of youth advocates with strong ties to their home countries.

“At an orphanage in New Delhi, the main issue was mobility and access to the city because of overcrowded buses and trains that are not child-friendly,” recounted Hiroataka Koike, the group's point person for Habitat III. In Cairo, he said, local youths focused on health; in Stockholm, on migration.

Everywhere, meanwhile, public space has been a constant refrain. For poor youths in dense cities, there is a lack of space for young people to talk, play, or even date and have sex. In ►

New Delhi, Koike said, the orphanage residents talked about a gymnasium where couples go in lieu of any more private location; the public realm, if well designed and managed, can indeed provide a safe space for less graphic moments, such as flirting and displays of affection.

The Major Group hopes to hold over 20 such consultations before Habitat III in order to come up with a concrete set of issues to push for on behalf of children and youths in the New Urban Agenda — the 20-year urbanization strategy that will

come out of the conference. Already, issues that have wound their way into the Post-2015 Development Agenda, such as youth unemployment and decent work, are early candidates for topic areas that this constituent group will lobby for in the world's urban agenda, as well. ■

Note: This story has been edited to reflect the findings and stance of the U. N. Major Group for Children and Youth.

The one-year countdown to Habitat III has begun!

The next 12 months will need to foster international commitment to a new agenda on housing and sustainable urban development that will transform the urban paradigm into a source of global development. Today, everything seems aligned for this to happen.

This morning I woke up in New York with a message on our Habitat III Secretariat group chat from a member of our team based in Jakarta that read, “In only one year the New Urban Agenda will be real!”

This was followed by a series of happy emoticons from the rest of the team members as they read the news and added their reaction. As each woke up around the world, one could track the different time zones: cities in Asia, Nairobi, cities in Europe, New York, and finally an emoticon from Quito — ☺.

And this is what it is. In less than a year, the Habitat III conference will be underway in the Ecuadorian capital, scheduled for 17-20 October. At that point, hopefully, we will have in our hands a global commitment to implement a challenging and visionary strategy on housing and sustainable urban development that will transform the urban paradigm into a source of global development — the New Urban Agenda.

Following the milestones achieved over the past year by the international community, today everything seems aligned to allow for this to happen. In September, the United Nations adopted “Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, a document that presents a new opportunity to end poverty and ensure prosperity for all.

In particular, the power of urbanization to accelerate prosperity and well-being was successfully recognized by Sustainable Development Goal 11, which aims to “to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”. This is an unprecedented context for improving the lives of the majority of the global population.

I am also convinced that cities will have a major role in the discussions at the COP 21 climate summit that begins in November in Paris. Cities consume over 70 percent of the world's energy and produce more than 60 percent of all carbon dioxide. As such, the summit will be a key opportunity to rethink urbanization and to promote critical partnerships that can unleash the role of sustainable urbanization.

The timing of the start of this one-year countdown could not be better, as between World Habitat Day and World Cities Day we are celebrating a month called Urban October. This period is dedicated to raising awareness, promoting participation, generating knowledge and engaging the global community toward the New Urban Agenda.

For this year's Urban October, we are reflecting particularly on the importance of public spaces and good urban design, under the World Cities Day motto, “Designed to live together”. The significant number of events and organizations working together this month to create synergies and join efforts, led by UN-Habitat, offers a strong benchmark for the months ahead.

Broadening participation

Meanwhile, the Habitat III process is picking up significant momentum. This past week saw the third in an important series of regional and thematic meetings.

This series began in September with a thematic meeting on civic engagement, held in Tel Aviv, followed by a meeting on metropolitan areas in Montreal earlier this month. The most recent of these was the Asia-Pacific regional meeting, held in Jakarta. Now, we are all excited as we approach the sessions on intermediate cities, to be in Cuenca, Ecuador, during the second week of November.

Part of the responsibilities of the Habitat III Secretariat is to create spaces for the broad participation of all actors to contribute to elaborating on the details of the New Urban Agenda. These regional and thematic meetings constitute an inclusive platform that makes it possible to bring together representatives from U. N. member states, regional and local governments, civil society organizations, multilateral institutions and the private sector.

This process is extremely valuable in order to develop independent policy recommendations for the New Urban Agenda and, beyond that, to provide the expertise needed to reach consensus on the eventual outcomes of Habitat III.



The Old Town of Quito as seen through the towers of the Basilica del Voto Nacional

In order to achieve this, over 200 experts have now been organized under the guidance of leading organizations within 10 “policy units”. The results of their meetings and discussions will be published in 10 policy papers this winter.

In addition, the entire United Nations system has shown a strong commitment to the New Urban Agenda. The U. N. Task Team on Habitat III, which integrates over 30 U. N. bodies, was responsible for expanding on the series of 22 “issue papers” published early this summer. The members of the Task Team make up the main voice of the U. N. system, encompassing the broad perspectives of development and humanitarian affairs.

The coming months will now see this broad spectrum of inputs come together into a single “zero draft” of the New Urban Agenda, expected for release by the end of April. The journey from now until then will be a key period for engagement and gathering contributions from all sides.

I personally encourage all organizations and individuals to join this thrilling effort. Mechanisms such as the General Assembly of Partners are innovative platforms that are already allowing for bottoms-up discussion, taking input from those who have previously participated in the Habitat I and II conferences as well as from new participants that will build and manage our cities into the future.

Other platforms to bring urban challenges to the global agenda include the national urban forums and

related campaigns, the online Urban Dialogues, the Urban Journalism Academies aimed at the media, the Urban Thursday gatherings in New York and more.

Toward Quito

Starting with the public release of the New Urban Agenda zero draft and leading up to next year’s conference, member states will take the lead in facilitating the third session of the Habitat III Preparatory Committee. These important final preparations are slated to take place in Surabaya, Indonesia, on 25-27 July.

In Quito, work toward Habitat III is already underway, with the host government engaged in conference preparations literally at the street level. In one year, participants will walk through the capital’s unique Old Town and will be given the opportunity to experience a live showroom of urban solutions throughout the city. Indeed, Habitat III will offer such an exhibition in its natural environment — the city.

I expect to see you all in one year with big smiles on your faces, having achieved a successful Habitat III. However, I will also welcome you the following day with an even bigger smile, as we take our places to start implementing the New Urban Agenda and, together, building the legacy of better cities for many generations to come. ■

The New Urban Agenda must prompt planners to recognise informal labour

Urban informal workers saw major gains in 2015, but these need to be consolidated at Habitat III.



A Uighur man checks a mirror after getting his beard shaved by a barber, right, on a street in Aksu, Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, 2013. Informal workers comprise around half of the urban workforce in most developing countries.

Urban informal workers represent the broad base of the urban economy in most developing countries. On average, these account for well over half of the urban workforce and, where estimates are available, over a quarter of gross domestic product in these countries. And yet the activities — the livelihoods — of these workers remain almost entirely unrecognized, valued or taken into account in urban planning or local economic development.

If urban poverty, inequality and unemployment are to be reduced, urban informal workers, especially the working poor, needs to be recognized, valued and supported as economic agents who contribute to the economy and to society. No amount of social or financial inclusion can make up for their exclusion from city plans and economic policies.

Consider three groups of urban working poor who, together with domestic, construction and transport workers, constitute the majority of the urban informal workforce. First, home-based workers produce a wide variety of goods and services, including garments and textiles, craft items and prepared food, as well as electronic goods and automobile parts. Yet most do not have secure tenure or basic infrastructure services to make their homes into productive workplaces. Further, many face the threat of eviction and relocation.

Second, street vendors provide easy access to a wide range of goods and services. These include anything from fresh fruits and vegetables to building materials, garments and crafts to consumer electronics, prepared food to auto parts and repairs. They buy goods from both formal and informal

suppliers and pay for services provided by porters, security guards, transport operators and others.

Many street vendors also pay fees for licenses, permits for the use of public space, creating revenue for local governments. Yet most lack a fixed and secure vending site. Most also face harassment from local authorities on a regular, even daily, basis — including demands for bribes, arbitrary confiscations of merchandise and physical abuse. And again, many face the risk of eviction.

Third, waste pickers collect, sort and recycle waste. In so doing, they help to clean city streets and reduce carbon emissions. Yet they typically go unrecognized for their services, are often denied access to waste — the basis of their livelihood — and are not allowed to bid for solid-waste-management contracts.

Empowering tools

Despite this history of neglect and oversight, there are important changes afoot for the urban informal workforce. Over the past year, the global community took significant steps to advance the cause of social and economic justice for the urban working poor.

In September, the global community renewed its commitment to “a more peaceful, prosperous and just world” by committing to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Building upon but also expanding the Millennium Development Goals that preceded it, the Sustainable Development Agenda includes two new stand-alone goals that are of critical importance to the working poor. Goal 8 deals with inclusive sustainable economic growth and decent and productive employment, while Goal 11 focuses on inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities.

And in June, at an annual meeting of the International Labour Organization, the international community adopted a new global labour standard. Formally known as Recommendation 204, on transitioning from the informal to the formal economy, the measure contains several key provisions for the working poor, both urban and rural.

First, Recommendation 204 recognizes that most informal workers are from poor households trying to earn a living against great odds and, therefore, need protection and promotion in return for regulation and taxation. Further, it recognizes that most informal economic units are single-person or family operations that do not hire other workers.

The recommendation also acknowledges that the regulated use of public space is essential to the livelihoods of informal workers, especially in cities. Likewise, regulated access to natural resources is essential to the livelihoods of informal workers.

Perhaps most fundamentally, Recommendation 204 notes that informal livelihoods should not be destroyed in the process of formalization. For instance, street vendors should not be evicted and waste pickers should not be denied access to waste as cities modernize.

With the new SDGs and Recommendation 204, the urban working poor are more empowered than ever before

to fight the injustices and indignities they face on a daily basis. Now, these strategic gains need to be reflected in the New Urban Agenda, the 20-year urbanization strategy that will be adopted at the Habitat III summit in Quito, Ecuador, in October 2016.

As they did for the SDGs and the ILO recommendation, local, national, regional and international organizations of home-based workers, street vendors and waste pickers are preparing for Habitat III with support from the global network WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing).

Leaders of these organizations participated in the second meeting of the Habitat III Preparatory Committee (PrepCom 2) in Nairobi in April, speaking in plenary sessions and meeting with the executive director of UN-Habitat, Joan Clos, who recognizes the importance of the urban informal economy. They also participated in events linked to the SDGs summit in New York in late September and early October.

In addition, the WIEGO network and Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) are co-chairs of the grass-roots constituency group of the Global Assembly of Partners of UN-Habitat's World Urban Campaign. Together, WIEGO and SDI are working to increase the voice and visibility of organized groups of the urban poor, both those who live in informal settlements and those who earn their living in the informal economy — groups that are usually one and the same.

World-class cities for all

So, what do urban informal workers want to see included in the New Urban Agenda? First, following on the ILO recommendation, they want to see formal recognition that most urban informal workers are from poor households trying to earn a living against great odds and, therefore,

need protection and promotion in return for regulation and taxation.

They also want to see the integration of the working poor in the urban informal economy into urban planning and local economic development. The New Urban Agenda will need to recognize that organizations of urban informal workers should be represented in both urban planning and policy-making processes.

In turn, this will require recognition that most of the working poor in the informal economy work in private homes (as domestic workers in the homes of others or as home-based producers in their own houses) or in public spaces (as construction workers, street vendors, transport workers or waste pickers) — not in factories, shops or offices.

As such, home-based workers who produce goods for the market in their own homes require secure housing tenure and basic infrastructure services to make their homes-cum-workplaces more productive. Likewise, street vendors who operate in public spaces need regulated use of public space in central areas, close to pedestrian flows, in order to generate a decent living. And waste pickers need regulated access to waste and the right to bid for solid-waste-management contracts. Each of these groups will be looking to the New Urban Agenda for these provisions.

Finally and most fundamentally, as mandated in Recommendation 204, city officials, urban planners and designers, and local economic planners need to ensure that informal livelihoods are not destroyed in the process of urban renewal, urban planning or local economic development — all in the name of becoming “world-class cities”. Rather, the organizations of informal workers want inclusive urban processes, policies and practices — they want “world-class cities for all”. ■

Got an urban solution? Submit it to the Habitat III process

Ideas are due by 15 February for a document — The City We Need 2.0 — that will comprise key stakeholder input to the drafting of the New Urban Agenda.

With the calendar turned to 2016, momentum is now picking up toward Habitat III, this year's United Nations conference that will result in a 20-year urbanization strategy called the New Urban Agenda. Ahead of that once-a-generation conference, a major stakeholder initiative is soliciting ideas for inclusion in a key set of recommendations for that strategy.

Specifically, the World Urban Campaign is looking for “urban solutions”, or initiatives, practices, policies, legislation and models that address urban challenges to achieving what the campaign calls The City We Need. Individuals and organizations are now being asked to submit proposed urban solutions to wuc@unhabitat.org by 15 February using the following template.

The City We Need is an evolving document that the World Urban Campaign, an initiative of UN-Habitat, has been preparing for several years ahead of Habitat III. (Note: Citiscope is a media partner of the World Urban Campaign.) Its title piggybacks off of the Future We Want, the outcome document from the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, held in 2012.

With the Millennium Development Goals set to expire at the end of 2015, the Rio+20 conference decided that U. N. member states should adopt a new framework — a series of Sustainable Development Goals — to tackle ambitious targets on issues such as poverty, hunger and education. That conference also set in motion a global consultation to solicit

ideas on what those goals should be. The landmark result, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was adopted in September.

If the U. N.'s sustainable development agenda could be described as “the future we want”, then the lead-up to Habitat III should in turn define “the city we need,” organizers felt.

The City We Need 1.0 emerged ahead of the seventh World Urban Forum in Medellín. In the run-up to that April 2014 global gathering of urbanists, the campaign released a manifesto with nine principles. According to that March 2014 document, the city we need is:

- Socially inclusive
- Well-planned, walkable and transit-friendly
- Regenerative and resilient
- Economically vibrant and inclusive
- Of a singular identity and sense of place
- Safe
- Healthy
- Affordable and equitable, and
- Managed at the metropolitan level.

The City We Need took on additional life in the aftermath of World Urban Forum 7 at the first Urban Thinkers Campus, held later in 2014. At that first-of-its-kind event in Caserta, Italy, the members of the World Urban Campaign realized that The City We Need could evolve with input from around the world ahead of Habitat III.

The campaign thus established a temporary initiative, the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), to gather that input. Today, that process is ongoing through the deliberations of 14 partner constituent groups, representing the breadth of civil society with a stake in Habitat III, as well as a series of more



THE CITY WE NEED

Towards a New Urban Paradigm

World Urban Campaign

than two dozen Urban Thinkers Campuses, which began in June 2015 and will wrap up early this year.

Both the outcome of the Urban Thinkers Campuses and the new call for Urban Solutions will contribute to the drafting of the next iteration of The City We Need — version 2.0. The document is slated to be presented on 15 March at the next meeting of the World Urban Campaign Steering Committee, in Prague, on the sidelines of the Habitat III Regional Meeting for Europe.

Upon adoption by the campaign, the document will be handed over to the General Assembly of Partners, where it will likely form the basis of that group's outcome document. Last month, the U. N. General Assembly recognized the GAP as a formal player in the Habitat III process. As such, once the GAP's outcome document is submitted to the Habitat III secretary-general, it is expected to influence the first draft of the New Urban Agenda, due in April. ■

Nearing a text: March to see release of key documents informing the New Urban Agenda

A series of high-level reports will be made public this month by global stakeholders and experts, constituting major inputs to the first draft of the Habitat III strategy.

By the beginning of May, the first draft of the United Nations' 20-year urbanization strategy, the New Urban Agenda, will be released. That's less than two months away.

That time frame makes the next few weeks critical for those hoping to influence the document, the eventual outcome of the U. N. Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development slated for October in Quito, Ecuador. The event is better known as Habitat III.



One such group is the World Urban Campaign, a coalition of public, private, NGO, philanthropic, grass-roots and academic groups administered by UN-Habitat. The campaign is just about to release its vision for an urban future, “The City We Need 2.0.” (Update: The document is available here.) The first version was released in 2014 ahead of the World Urban Forum; in turn, it built on a previous effort known as the “Manifesto for Cities — The Urban Future We Want”, from 2012.

Different from these earlier pronouncements, “The City We Need 2.0” is designed as a formal input to the Habitat process, the global stocktaking about the state of cities that will inform the New Urban Agenda. Much of that discussion has happened over the past nine months at more than two-dozen Urban Thinkers Campuses — local gatherings of experts, activists, scholars and the like who debate, discuss and draft recommendations for the New Urban Agenda.

As a result of those gatherings, the new document declares 10 principles, some re-used from version 1.0. According to the new draft, which Citiscope was able to see and which will be formally released next week, the city we need:

- Is socially inclusive and engaging
- Is affordable, accessible and equitable
- Is economically vibrant and inclusive
- Is collectively managed and democratically governed
- Fosters cohesive territorial development
- Is regenerative and resilient
- Has shared identities and sense of place
- Is well planned, walkable and transit-friendly
- Is safe, healthy and promotes well-being
- Learns and innovates

“The City We Need 2.0” also outlines 10 “drivers of change” in cities, with specifics on policies and programmes to help achieve the best outcomes within those topics. The proposed ideas include those aimed at government, the grass roots and more.

For example, finance is a driver of change that can be improved through intricate municipal financing strategies such as “land-value capture”, as well as by providing tax incentives to women heads of households. The other drivers of change are governance and partnerships; planning and design; land, housing and services; environment; health and safety; economy and livelihoods; monitoring and evaluation; and education and technology.

In early January, the World Urban Campaign released a call for “urban solutions” that would infuse “The City We Need 2.0” with concrete proposals. Those are currently under peer review and will be made public at the campaign’s upcoming meeting on 15-16 March in Prague.

The Czech capital will also see the unveiling of a promised partnership document from the General Assembly of Partners (GAP). Founded last year as a temporary initiative of the World Urban Campaign, the GAP seeks to harness civil-society energy ahead of Habitat III and to channel it into global implementation of the best ideas about the future of cities. Given that national governments ultimately have the final say on U. N. agendas, the GAP hopes that speaking with a unified voice will generate adequate momentum for their provisions to land in the final text.

Working with more than a dozen constituent groups covering many of the same areas as the World Urban Campaign, the GAP is leaning on its membership to come up with implementable ideas for the “day after” Habitat III. The hope is that the post-Quito landscape will usher in newfound attention to urbanization, ultimately resulting in sophisticated solutions to future urban challenges.

Finally, this month will see the long-awaited results of feverish work by the “policy units”, the 10 thematic expert groups drawn from the worldwide ranks of planners, architects, scholars and activists with intimate knowledge of the key issues at play in the New Urban Agenda. The outlines of their work were released at the beginning of the year; following a period of open comment, these should be made available soon.

It is widely expected that the work of the policy units will form the basis of the New Urban Agenda. Together with the documents prepared and submitted by the World Urban Campaign and General Assembly of Partners, as well as regional reports being put together by member states, these will inform much of the scope and contours of the New Urban Agenda “zero draft”. ■

Bridging the GAP: What do farmers want from the New Urban Agenda?

This is the second story in an occasional series. The General Assembly of Partners (GAP) is the main vehicle for civil society to organize and advocate ahead of Habitat III, the U. N. urbanization summit in October in Quito. The GAP represents a wide range of interests, which have coalesced into 14 constituent groups. Citiscope will profile these groups about their preparations on the road to Quito with a focus on why sustainable urban development matters to their constituents.

In classical economics, markets define cities. Producers from the hinterlands come together to buy, sell and trade in a central location, which over time evolves into the city.

Even in an era of high-speed trains and sprawling megacities, that fundamental fact has not changed. That is especially so in the developing world, where urban markets remain essential to the livelihood of rural farmers. Consequently, farmers have a key stake in the future of cities, even if they don’t live full time in urban areas — perhaps spending part of their week a city for market day.

Take Jamaica, the home country of Mildred Crawford, who artificially inseminates pigs. She is also the president of the Jamaican Network of Rural Women Producers and the co-chair of the farmers constituency for the Habitat III General Assembly of Partners (GAP). ▶

“For a rural woman who is head of household to strengthen her economic life, she has to think of workable ways of survival,” Crawford said recently. She offered a typical example of the breadbasket parish St. Elizabeth, from where women will typically travel three to four hours to the capital, Kingston, in the back of a truck along with farm animals, produce and any children who are under school age.

“She gets there when it’s dark, but accommodation is not affordable to her because of her meagre income,” Crawford said. “So she is going to sleep in the market. She is exposed to all the environmental influences, positive and negative, and she is also exposed to gender-based violence and communicable diseases.”

The Jamaican Network of Rural Women Producers lobbies for better conditions in cities, and Crawford notes that no new market has been built in Jamaica since the country’s independence in 1962. She also serves as the English-speaking representative of the Caribbean Network of Rural Women Producers, an umbrella NGO recognized by the United Nations.

Indeed, Crawford already has international advocacy experience, having spoken out for rural women at annual reviews of the U. N. Committee for the Status of Women. In her regional capacity, she also speaks on behalf of thousands of farmers in her position with the GAP.

Farmers like to see results — and tangible results.

Mildred Crawford Co-chair, GAP farmers constituency

Thus far, she has successfully reached out to the Uganda National Farmers Federation. Her co-chair, Martha Andzie Yeful, represents an agricultural group from Ghana. Crawford hopes that others will join the fold soon, but she recognizes that the onus is on her to convince them.

“Farmers like to see results — and tangible results,” Crawford says. “It is for me to carry that kind of change that trickles down to the grass roots in order to get them buy into the idea.”

Mistrusting the urban focus

The Habitat III process will culminate in Quito, Ecuador, in October, where national governments are set to agree on a new 20-year strategy on urbanization — what’s being called the New Urban Agenda. The first draft of the document is supposed to be made available to the public in early May.

Crawford says she is hopeful that with that draft in hand, she will be able to make inroads with the World Farmers Organization, a powerful lobbying group based in Rome, where the U. N.’s Food and Agriculture Organization meets.

But that will only be possible if the New Urban Agenda has something to offer farmers. For Crawford, that would

mean that “consideration is given to equity, a balance in the use of lands — they would have access to arable lands — and that Habitat III respects decent work as a critical element in development.”



Farmers in the mountains of Sapa, Vietnam, 2011. What will the Habitat III process be able to offer them?

She also has some more prosaic hopes for the New Urban Agenda — that it will translate into, for instance, better garbage disposal and sanitation at public markets in cities to ease the burden on market vendors.

Such issues sum up what is meant by the clunky phrase “rural-urban linkages”. This is a term and idea that have received significant attention ahead of Habitat III as a way of assuaging the fears of predominantly rural countries ahead of what on its face would appear to be a very urban-focused conference and strategy.

Indeed, the New Urban Agenda’s predecessor, what was known as the Habitat Agenda, focused far more widely on what are broadly referred to as human settlements, ranging from mega-cities to small villages. This wide mandate is part of what led UN-Habitat, the agency responsible for implementing the Habitat Agenda, to dedicate technical assistance to projects such as helping countries plan a village or provide housing in a rural province.

Consequently, these countries — predominantly in Africa and Asia — fear that the New Urban Agenda will take the U. N.’s attention and resources away from such areas and focus them instead on big-city problems. Even though the world’s rural countries are predicted to become more not less urban, they don’t necessarily see this trend as inevitable — and neither do they want to ignore the challenges of the status quo.

By arguing that there is a rural-urban nexus, which makes for a symbiotic relationship between the big city and the hinterlands, advocates hope to craft a New Urban Agenda that works for all parties. And for that, farmers in their fields need to have their say. ■

Bridging the GAP: Women have been one of Habitat III's most active constituencies

Above all, women want to play a bigger role in how cities are planned and managed.

This is the third story in an occasional series. The General Assembly of Partners (GAP) is the main vehicle for civil society to organize and advocate ahead of Habitat III, the U. N. urbanization summit in October in Quito. The GAP represents a wide range of interests, which have coalesced into 15 constituent groups. Citiscope is profiling these groups about their preparations on the road to Quito with a focus on why sustainable urban development matters to their constituents.

If majority rules, then by rights women should be running the world. With over half of the planet's population, it would stand to reason that they would occupy a lion's share of parliamentary seats, ministerial appointments and other positions of power.

But persistent discrimination and cultural attitudes that at times do not see a role for women in public life have kept such demographic inevitabilities in check. According to UN Women, only 22 percent of national parliamentarians were female as of August 2015 — an increase over past figures.

These structural obstacles notwithstanding, at the local level women have proven that they can make a difference, in both the developed and developing worlds. Recent social-science research found that women-led panchayats (local councils) in India resulted in 62 percent more completed drinking-water projects than the achievements of male-led councils, an outcome that researchers attributed specifically to the female presence. In Norway, political scientists say they



Advocacy groups want women to play a bigger role in how cities are planned and managed

have proven a causal relationship between women serving on municipal councils and the prevalence of state-sponsored child-care coverage.

These kinds of success stories are what have propelled women to become arguably the most active and vocal constituency in the run-up to Habitat III, the U. N. conference on housing and urban development that will take place this October in Quito, Ecuador. There, national governments plan to adopt the New Urban Agenda, a 20-year set of urbanization guidelines, the details of which are currently under negotiation.

Most of humanity now lives in cities, which means that urban neighborhoods are also where the daily battles for women's rights are playing out. While women, like all urbanites, have a broad interest in sustainable cities, some aspects of city life are uniquely their concern. In today's urbanizing world, women are fighting for safe public spaces, free from gender-based violence and street harassment. They're also demanding recognition that domestic tasks such as childrearing deserve to be compensated or offered as a social service.

Above all, women's advocacy groups want their gender to play a bigger role in how cities are planned and managed.

"We expect that Habitat III will recognize, resource and institutionalize the role of women, in particular grass-roots women, in sustainable development," said Katia Araújo, chair of the women's partner constituent group of the General Assembly of Partners. The conference, she said, should "not just recognize the contributions of women to the development of their own communities, but institutionalize their meaningful, sustained participation in the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of urban policies and programmes."

Such goals have drawn a host of NGOs, architects, planners, researchers and policy advocates that focus on women's rights. One place to start is elected office. At a Habitat III event in January hosted by a Canadian feminist organization, a Vancouver municipal councilor called for gender-based quotas in local government to reflect a national trend now present in dozens of countries.

Outside of office, an enhanced role for women in participatory budgeting, a fiscal policy increasingly in vogue worldwide, has been the main mission of the MIRA Network, a Mexican NGO focused on gender equality in budgeting. The Huairou Commission, a network of grass-roots women that has taken the lead on women's organizing for Habitat III, wants women to be consulted at every step on government programmes such as informal-settlement upgrading.

In the run-up to Habitat III, women have organized at just about every level. Although no national or local government sponsored an official Habitat III meeting on the topic of gender, the partner organizations in the women's constituency organized a dizzying calendar of events.

They successfully lobbied the Habitat III Secretariat to fund an expert meeting of grass-roots women in September; UN Women hosted another such gathering on 3 June. Over

the past year, four of the Urban Thinkers Campuses — global stakeholder events on issues of urban development — had an explicit gender focus.

Thanks to the efforts of their Latin American members, Habitat III was a key topic on the agenda in January at the third Ibero American Summit of Local Gender Agendas in Santiago, Chile. During major events such as the Habitat III negotiations and some of the regional meetings that preceded them, women have held daily caucuses to share information and stay on message.

All of this effort has sought to secure these priorities in Habitat III. As such, the women's constituency has been keeping a close eye on all of the documents coming out of the New Urban Agenda — down to the number of mentions of

terms such as “women and girls”. The broader effort, they say, is to “engender” the new strategy.

The New Urban Agenda's first draft, released in early May, offered a good start, they say. For instance, the draft prominently recognizes human rights, which include the rights of women. Still, they also found that it will “need to strengthen the commitment to gender equality,” according to a statement on the document.

The ball is now in the hands of diplomats as they negotiate the New Urban Agenda for the next several months until the conference begins in Quito. There, the constituency claims to have already activated local networks of grass-roots women. If they don't see substantive progress by the time Habitat III rolls around, their strength in numbers will surely be on display. ■

Habitat III stakeholders offer vision of broad partnership for sustainable urbanization

This week, national governments heard directly from civil society and others on what they're hoping to see in the New Urban Agenda and beyond.



General Assembly of Partners Vice-President Shipra Narang Suri addresses member states and other Habitat III stakeholders at the U.N. on 6 June. (IISD/ENB/<http://www.iisd.ca/habitat/3/stakeholders/6jun.html>)

UNITED NATIONS — The opening line of the U. N. Charter reads “We the peoples”, but historically, multilateral decision-making in the rarefied halls of New York, Geneva and Vienna has been the purview of just a select few: diplomats, heads of state and U. N. officials.

Over the past 25 years, however, outsiders — everyone from well-heeled NGOs to women's rights activists — have slowly made inroads into this global institution. Increasingly in U. N. negotiations, those with a stake in the matter at hand have been consulted and invited to participate.

That opportunity arrived this week for the collection of stakeholders interested in the future of the world's cities

ahead of this year's Habitat III conference. The summit, which takes place in October in Quito, Ecuador, seeks to result in the New Urban Agenda, a 20-year guide to urbanization at the global level. The first draft of that agenda was released in early May, leading to the start of ongoing political negotiations on its details.

Over the past 14 months, a diverse coalition including academics, farmers, parliamentarians and indigenous people have come together under the umbrella of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP). They have organized constituencies across the world, sat in on the drafting committees of declarations emerging from the preparatory meetings of the Habitat III process, served on a services of “policy units” of experts contributing ideas to the New Urban Agenda and lobbied national governments for their cause.

With last month's delivery of the New Urban Agenda's “zero draft”, the GAP and its 15 constituencies were offered the chance to take the floor at the U. N. for two days of hearings with member states before diplomats turned to the matter of revising and negotiating the document. A similar set of hearings was held three weeks ago with local authorities.

Like at the previous set of hearings, civil society members this week were treated as equals with governments, given front-row seating in half of the room rather than being confined to the back rows as is customary. For two days, they covered the bread-and-butter issues of the New Urban Agenda — housing, land, planning, the informal economy — from a variety of perspectives. Scholars presented the latest research on urbanization while grass-roots women offered their lived experience of life in some of the world's most difficult urban conditions.

Partnerships wish list

Also as with the last set of hearings, attendance by member states was thin. Only about 20 out of 193 U. N. members showed up, and many of those sent junior staff in a notetaking capacity rather than engaging in dialogue with civil society.

However, that did not deter GAP President Eugénie Birch from seeing the benefits of the event. “We had a well-thought-out, balanced set of presentations representing all the partners who made substantive comments orally and in written form, which are now part of the record of contributions to the second draft of the New Urban Agenda,” she said.

Indeed, the new co-facilitator of the Habitat III process, Lourdes Yparraguirre of the Philippines, noted Wednesday that these contributions will be taken into consideration in the next revision of the draft text.

“You represent the diversity of the city,” said Maryse Gautier, the French co-chair of the Habitat III preparatory process. “Your requests, your demands are as diverse as you are.”

That diversity, however, narrowed into a specific message. The aim was to convince member states that a vocal constituency cares passionately about the future of urbanization and believes that the New Urban Agenda will be an effective tool to change the future of cities.

Moreover, groups argued during the hearings, the coalition that they have assembled under the GAP umbrella can serve as a partner going forward. For instance, they can help inform the New Urban Agenda’s provisions and implement them on the ground after Habitat III.

They got the chance to make that case when German diplomat Inga Beie asked, “What is your vision for partnerships at the global level in a post-Quito architecture?”

Shipra Narang Suri, the GAP’s vice-president, was ready to offer her wish list. “Whatever governance architecture is devised after Habitat III for the U. N., we would like that to incorporate or be mirrored by a multi-stakeholder panel or platform that allows stakeholders a seat at the table which is institutionalized — it is not a gift,” she said.

This call for a “seat at the table” echoed the demands of local authorities three weeks ago. In their case, they hoped for some kind of “special status” in the U. N. system.

In civil society’s case, the GAP has laid out a specific proposal. “Partnerships for the New Urban Agenda,” a report released earlier this year, calls for a U. N. international decade of sustainable urbanization, a knowledge platform, an advocacy arm, an innovation laboratory, a monitoring mechanism and an investment advisory committee.

Whatever governance architecture is devised after Habitat III for the U. N., we would like that to incorporate or be mirrored by a multi-stakeholder panel or platform that allows stakeholders a seat at the table which is institutionalized — it is not a gift

Shipra Narang Suri, Vice-President, General Assembly of Partners

“The word partnership is all over the zero draft,” Narang Suri noted. However, the devil is in the details. That key word, she said, is nowhere to be found in the section on data collection and analysis. “This is a shocking anomaly,” she said. “Data collection has to be participatory, bottom-up, shared data, everybody’s data, open data — because data defines what kinds of policies are set.”

As of now, however, the future of these proposals is in the hands of the few, rather than the many. Diplomats are currently negotiating the New Urban Agenda in a format known as informal intergovernmental negotiations, and initial comments from member states suggested lack of interest with regard to several key GAP proposals for post-Quito implementation mechanisms.

Further, those negotiations allow for only limited comments from outsiders — in this case, 30 minutes at the end of the second day of talks. Narang Suri again took the stage to make the GAP’s case.

“We urge you to seize on this historic moment to move the discourse forward; we urge you to not shy away from establishing precedents; we urge you to rely on GAP,” she said. “The world is not the same place as it was 20 years ago. New challenges have emerged, but so have new ideas, proposals and solutions.” ■

Bridging the GAP: What are older persons looking for in the New Urban Agenda?

Nearly 60 percent of the world’s older population lives in cities, and the new norm is ‘aging in place.

This story is part of an occasional series on the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), the main vehicle for civil society to organize and advocate ahead of Habitat III, the U. N. urbanization summit in October in Quito. The GAP represents a wide range of interests, which have coalesced into 15 constituent groups. Citiscope is profiling these groups about their preparations on the road to Quito with a focus on why sustainable urban development matters to their constituents.

Whether it involves ads targeting those who are soon to retire from well-paying jobs in developed countries, or the tug of a childhood home for migrants to the big city at the end of



A man waits for the bus in Castellón, Spain.

their working lives, the imagery is often the same: a quiet house surrounded by nature.

But the stereotype that older people belong in the countryside belies current demographic trends. There are 900 million older people worldwide, and 500 million of them — some 58 percent — live in urban areas. The new normal is “aging in place” — the tendency to stay put in the community where one raised a family, even after children have struck out on their own.

That means a lot is at stake for older persons in the New Urban Agenda, the global urbanization strategy currently under negotiation at the U. N. that will be finalized at the Habitat III summit in October. A GAP constituent group formed only recently to add their voice to the civil society chorus ahead of Habitat III.

But first, a note on terminology. The GAP group’s co-chairs Katherine Kline of the U. S.-based AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) and Sion Jones of HelpAge International avoid a fixed-age definition of “older”. They say that discrimination based on age comes at different points in life. AARP, for example, starts targeting U. S. members at age 50, while in a country with a much lower life expectancy, one could be considered an older person at 40.

Either way, the goal is for “cities that enable us to take the choice and make our own decisions about where we want to live and how we want to live in older age,” said Jones.

Accomplishing that objective means, above all, accessibility. At home, that could entail retrofitting housing stock to address health challenges such as arthritis, which can make gripping a doorknob painful. In the public realm, it includes offering adequate public transportation for older people who cannot walk long distances, cycle or drive cars. Accommodating walkers and wheelchairs means that evenly paved sidewalks and regular curb cuts are a must.

If such modifications to the urban environment come at a cost, Kline thinks they are a sound investment.

“Older persons have traditionally been looked at as on one side of the financial ledger. ‘How are we going to prepare for these older people that are going to cost our cities or countries a lot of money?’” she explained. “These are vibrant people. If we can stay healthier longer and educated — don’t assume we can’t learn a new skill because we’re 55 or 60 — then you have the

contributions of older people weighed against what too many people see as only the negative side.”

‘Literally invisible’

In the international arena, there are some standards on this issue. But there also are gaps, say these advocates.

They praised the World Health Organization’s guide and checklist for Age-Friendly Cities. But they also expressed disappointment that the U. N.’s Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not acknowledge the needs of older people. The MDGs guided global development efforts over the past 15 years but were replaced this year by a new 15-year framework, the more-expansive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Recognizing this gap, a coalition of groups including the International Federation on Aging, the International Longevity Centre Global Alliance and the Grey Panthers led a concerted campaign to insert older persons into the SDGs, which were finalized in September. Their effort paid off, with older people now linked to 15 of the 17 SDGs.

This recognition is important because without a direct reference, the U. N. development apparatus will not even count older persons in its demographic surveys. Reporting for most of the MDG targets, for example, stopped at age 49. “We were literally invisible because we were not included in data disaggregation,” said Kline.

Such an omission can have grave consequences. Air-quality standards that don’t bother healthy adults may be hazardous for older individuals. During disaster situations, a failure to take such groups into account may mean that there is nowhere to accommodate wheelchairs in a temporary shelter — as happened in the New York City area during Superstorm Sandy in 2012.

The advocacy coalition’s next goal is a convention or other legal instrument on older persons, something that already exists for children and women, for example. Now they’re hoping that if the New Urban Agenda recognizes older persons, that may generate new momentum within the U. N. system for such a step. Already some U. N. member states have formed the Group of Friends of Older Persons, chaired by El Salvador, to bring these issues to the forefront.

In advance of Habitat III, HelpAge International is preparing a global report on aging and urbanization in lower- and middle-income countries, in part to dispel the notion that aging populations are exclusively a phenomenon of rich countries. The WHO, meanwhile, will launch a global campaign against “ageism” in October, the same month as Habitat III.

All of these efforts, however, are not designed to treat the needs of older persons as separate from those of other city residents. In an ideal world, Jones said, a city that works for older people also would work for everyone — what has been described by urbanist Gil Peñalosa as “8-80” cities.

For instance, Japan, often the poster child of an aging society, has begun locating day-care centres near clusters of housing for older persons, Kline notes. The aim there is to facilitate grandparents’ caregiving needs. Slowly but surely, cities are becoming places for young and old alike. ■

Bridging the GAP: What are researchers, academics bringing to the New Urban Agenda?

With scholars putting cities under the microscope, Habitat III is an opportunity to cement a formal role in the urbanization discussion.

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Two of the most memorable figures at the world's first major "human settlements" summit — the Habitat Forum, held in 1976 — were architect R. Buckminster Fuller and anthropologist Margaret Mead.

While coming from different fields, the two speakers, who reportedly enchanted audiences at the Vancouver event, had something in common: They were both professors. Fuller taught at Southern Illinois University and Mead was tenured at the University of Rhode Island, later serving as president of the American Anthropological Association.

Forty years later, the academic community has come together in the hopes of a more formal role ahead of Habitat III, this year's successor to that landmark urbanization summit. More than 1,000 scholars have joined the General

Assembly of Partner's academic group. Further, they encompass a wide range of disciplines — not just expected ones like urban planning and architecture but also law, public health and the natural sciences.

This push comes, in part, because of a perceived dip in academic engagement at Habitat II, held in Istanbul 20 years ago.

"We want to be recognized as a stakeholder, because in 1996 universities and research centres had no formal presence at all," said Sahar Attia of the Architecture and Urban Planning Department at the University of Cairo, who is co-chair of the GAP's research and academia group.

In Istanbul, she recalls, the civil society arena was dominated by NGOs. And while several scholars attended in an independent capacity, they were not consulted by national committees or otherwise able to offer official input on the Habitat Agenda, the conference's outcome document. A successor to that agenda is currently under negotiation by national governments, called the New Urban Agenda.

Sahar believes this oversight missed out on a critical contribution that the academic community can make to the conversation about urbanization. "We spend time, money and effort on teaching, researching, inventing or writing books," she said. "Governments could benefit from these efforts. We want to share our [knowledge] production for the welfare of cities."

Defining metrics

For many, the views of academics can offer a counterpoint to what governments and NGOs report, which can be skewed by political or other interests. Also as with the last set of hearings, attendance by member states was thin. Only about 20 out of 193 U. N. members showed up, and many of those sent junior staff in a notetaking capacity rather than engaging in dialogue with civil society. ▶

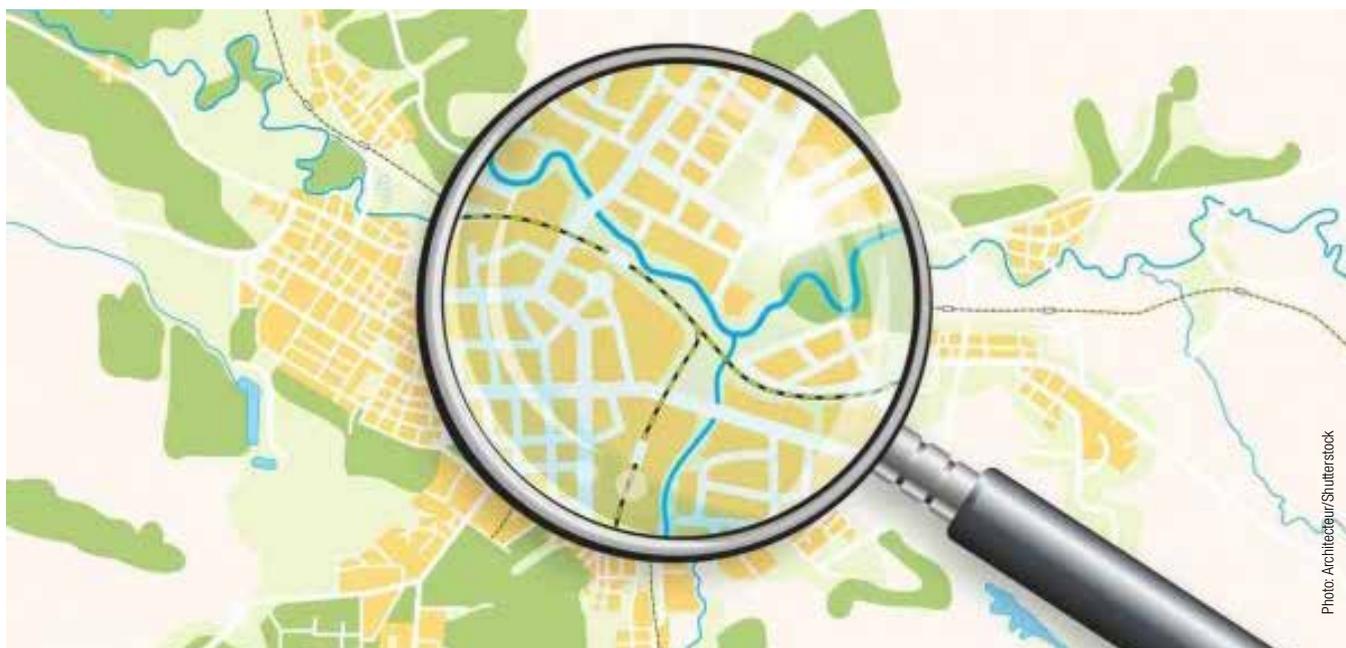


Photo: Architecture/Shutterstock

Enrique Silva, senior research associate with the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, is the GAP group's other co-chair. The academic conversation ahead of Habitat III comes with "a healthy skepticism and critical disillusionment within the academic community over the way that the Millennium Development Goals were designed and the indicators that were used there," he said.

The MDGs were a key framework that guided global anti-poverty efforts over the past decade and a half. This year, they were replaced by a new framework that will be in place through 2030.

Urban historian Mike Davis lambasted the MDGs' methodology for informal settlements in his 2006 book, *Planet of Slums*. More recently, University of California at Los Angeles professor Ananya Roy has taken a critical eye toward the MDGs on everything from development financing to media representation to impact on urban form.

As a result of this critical discourse, Silva said: "The one area that we honed in on quickly was the need to contribute on the definition of indicators and metrics. Within that is better data-collection mechanisms, much more sophisticated ways of designing indicators that are more effective and more consequential to the issues that Habitat is trying to promote."

Such a focus is timely, as the U. N. continues to debate how best to measure the 17 Sustainable Development Goals

We spend time, money and effort on teaching, researching, inventing or writing books. Governments could benefit from these efforts. We want to share our [knowledge] production for the welfare of cities.

Sahar Attia, Architecture and Urban Planning Department, University of Cairo

(SDGs) that the world body adopted last year to replace the MDGs. It is expected that the New Urban Agenda, in turn, will provide a road map to the implementation of Goal 11, the "urban SDG".

Already the community is making inroads. Academics were a staple among the 200 "policy unit" experts convened to generate the raw material of the New Urban Agenda. Sahar served on her country's Habitat national committee, as did Silva's institution in the United States.

And was Sahar's voice heard by the Egyptian government? In response, Sahar offers an enthusiastic "yes", pointing to a direct pipeline that her committee had to the Minister of Housing. "Sometimes governments need to be oriented," she said.

Science of cities

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Sahar noted that Saudi Arabia has been exceptionally open to the academic community. At the first Saudi Urban Forum, in March, the national government opened a tender specifically for universities to help the country overhaul its planning system.

Both Sahar and Silva are hopeful that the final New Urban Agenda will make a strong call to build capacity in the planning arena, which would create more such opportunities.

"If we want to give a mandate to governments to contribute in the New Urban Agenda implementation, there should be capacity-building, especially in developing countries," Sahar said. She suggests that educational institutions are best equipped to train the bureaucratic workforce in planning, design, finance and legislation that will shape the cities of the future.

Academics also are advocating strongly for the New Urban Agenda to take an "evidence-based approach", as befitting a trend toward thinking of urban systems more scientifically — that is to say, the "science of cities."

"As a community, we study everything under the sun," Silva notes. "But we aren't everything under the sun. What sets us apart is the scientific systems, methods and approaches to generating knowledge and data, and applying that data to solve problems." ■

Quito Questions: What's this about a Stakeholders Forum at Habitat III?

It's less an event than an organizing principle.

This is Citiscope's platform for answers to reader questions about Habitat III, the New Urban Agenda and beyond, a series we're calling Quito Questions. Want to take part? Contact information is below.



Citiscope checked in with the Habitat III Secretariat, but they were unable to say much about the Stakeholder Forum.

From what we do understand, the forum is less a specific event than a way of organizing under one umbrella all of the

We were wondering if there are any further details available about the Stakeholders Forum. Any information you have would be greatly appreciated.

Mark Watkins, Urbanization and Global Environmental Change Project, Arizona State University

official roundtables and assemblies that are not composed of government representatives.

According to the current programme, that includes assemblies for children and youth, gender and business on 15-16 October. It also includes roundtables with a variety of groups — research and academia, civil society organizations, trade unions, professionals, grassroots groups, foundations and philanthropies, media, older persons, indigenous people, children and youth, farmers and women — spread over the course of the official conference dates, 17-20 October.

Bridging the GAP: The Habitat III strategy ‘is an agenda affecting grass-roots people’

Community groups want to show next month's conference that answers begin at the bottom, not at the top.

This story is part of an occasional series on the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), the main vehicle for civil society to organize and advocate ahead of Habitat III, the U. N. urbanization summit in October in Quito. The GAP represents a wide range of interests, which have coalesced into 16 constituent groups. Citiscope is profiling these groups about their preparations on the road to Quito with a focus on why sustainable urban development matters to their constituents.

For Rose Molokoane, a grass-roots leader from South Africa, the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development was a wake-up call.

The United Nations conference, which met in Johannesburg, covered a host of pressing global issues, including the state of urbanization, and emerged with a slogan: “Cities without slums”. While that phrase seemed like an admirable goal to public officials and development professionals, for Molokoane, who lives in Oukasie, a township 35 km from Pretoria, it read like a threat.

If those categories look familiar, it's because they are the same as the partner constituent groups of the General Assembly of Partners, a stakeholder umbrella group. According to GAP President Eugénie Birch, the Habitat III Secretariat invited the GAP to organize the roundtables according to their respective interests, with each receiving a two-hour slot. The goal of those roundtables will be to summarize their advocacy in the Habitat III process and to discuss next steps, such as how they will implement the New Urban Agenda in their respective constituencies.

So if you want to get involved, your best bet is to join the GAP.

Have a question about Habitat III, the New Urban Agenda or the global discussion on sustainable urbanization? Email our team at H3Questions@citiscope.org, tweet @Citiscope or leave a question on our Facebook page. Please let us know if you don't want your name included in any published response. All responses will be published in the Citiscope news feed and will also appear here.

Stay up to date on all Habitat III news! Sign up for Citiscope's newsletter here. Citiscope is a member of the Habitat III Journalism Project; read more here. ■



Women sew at a community workshop in South Africa.

“If they are saying ‘Cities without slums’ — meaning they are going to evict us?” she asked herself and her colleagues at the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDUP). While the Johannesburg summit wasn't her first major international conference — she attended the Habitat II “City Summit” in 1996 but confesses that she didn't fully grasp the finer points of the negotiations — it was this moment on her home soil that galvanized Molokoane to take her local activism into the global policy arena.

That revelation has led Molokoane, who is also a coordinator for Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI), to take on a leadership role as co-chair of the GAP's grass-roots constituency in the run-up to next month's Habitat III conference on urbanization in Quito, Ecuador. In this position, she is able to articulate the needs and demands of the urban poor at the highest levels of power at the United Nations.

She took on this role, she said, because the Habitat III strategy — a 20-year document known as the New Urban

Agenda — is “an agenda affecting the grass-roots people.” She elaborated, “They are talking about inclusiveness and people at the centre — they should start in Quito, when the people are there. Acknowledge their presence.”

Molokoane’s call is echoed by her co-chair, Gloria Solorzano Espinosa, a street vendor from Lima who has organized locally for the local and national governments to stop harassing informal workers like her. Similar to Molokoane’s relationship to SDI, Solorzano Espinosa’s efforts in the Peruvian capital led to her involvement with an international advocacy network, Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO).

“The informal economy sector — we feel excluded by different policies from different governments,” she explained. “The theme of Habitat III for us is opening a door to inclusion, to development to generate a more social economy. I think Habitat is the opportunity they are giving us to be part of the dialogue. Through dialogue we can strengthen, influence and promote where we want to arrive.”

Opening space

The two women shoulder an exceptional burden as GAP co-chairs, given that they represent among the world’s lowest-income people. Traveling to a U. N. advocacy meeting is well beyond their financial means, and yet the decisions made at these diplomatic meetings can trickle down to affect their everyday lives.

“Most people don’t know what is the United Nations. ‘I know my councilor, I know my mayor’ — it ends there,” Molokoane explained. “People are not interested in a lot of talk; they just want to see toilet, water, electricity, house, school, health facility, entertainment facilities. Those are the important things that people want to see, not all these talks and big meetings.”

In South Africa, many of those basic needs have come about through a grass-roots relationship with the national government that Molokoane believes is a model for others. “Through our organizing, we started to vigorously open space for ourselves to engage with our government,” she said.

Specifically, her group wanted more say in government housing policies and programmes so that, for example, the “cities

without slums” mantra would not mean the wholesale removal of their townships communities.

As a result of engagement by FEDUP and other similar grass-roots organizations with the national government, the South African Ministry of Human Settlements unveiled the People’s Housing Process in 1998.

This policy adds a qualitative dimension to the quantitative effort of producing enough housing units to keep up with demand. Rather than treating housing merely as shelter, the policy engages residents in a proposed area — whether a slum-upgrading project, new “social housing” effort or township-revitalization project — about what type of dwelling best suits their needs. In effect, it thinks of housing as “home” and not just “shelter”.

The groups’ success in South Africa spread through SDI. The international NGO serves as a hub for grass-roots organizations representing people who live in informal settlements. “Through exchange programmes, we learn from each other,” Molokoane explained. SDI currently works in 33 countries, with Molokoane having shared ideas and strategies with colleagues from Namibia, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, the Philippines, India and Brazil.

What they lack in financial resources and slick presentations, the grass-roots makes up in numbers. SDI is a regular presence at global gatherings such as the World Urban Forum and will be sending a delegation to Habitat III.

WIEGO’s informal workers, meanwhile, have participated in the annual International Labour Conference and also will send a group to Quito. According to the Huairou Commission, a network of grass-roots women’s groups, there will be at least 100 grass-roots representatives who travel to Quito, as well as community leaders from Ecuador. (According to the Huairou Commission, the Habitat III Secretariat is anticipated to finance the bulk of these delegations.)

With such numbers, Molokoane hopes to show that answers begin at the bottom, not at the top. “They are saying reinvent the wheel,” she said, referring, for example, to calls to create a “paradigm shift” through Habitat III. “What we have done on the ground can easily influence the New Urban Agenda.” ■

‘I love cities, but they don’t all love me back,’ advocate for disabled says before Habitat III

Bridging the GAP | The New Urban Agenda fails to mention ‘universal design’ or ‘reasonable accommodations’, two linchpin concepts in legislation to protect those with disabilities.





Victor Pineda, co-chair, Persons with Disabilities PCG, GAP

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When Brazil's financial crisis forced budget cuts to the Paralympic Games, which took place last month, the move seemed like a slap in the face for the global community advocating for disability rights after the media attention lavished on the able-bodied Olympic Games in August.

That sense of second-class citizenship is an everyday experience for those with disabilities who live in cities, and activists are seizing on the opportunity of this month's Habitat III summit to press their case for more universally accessible urban areas.

"I often feel as though I'm a burden, nuisance or bother to my fellow planners and architects," explained Victor Pineda, an urban planner and a founder of the Disability Inclusive and Accessible Urban Development Network. He was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy as a child and today uses an electric wheelchair, but he has gone on to a successful career as a scholar and advocate. He is currently a research fellow at the University of California at Berkeley, where he teaches urban planning, and he co-chairs the GAP constituent group for disabled persons.

"I feel violence and danger when crossing a busy street without adequate signs. I feel rejected when a public bus drives by and denies me a chance for boarding. Or when a public building or sidewalk fails to consider the diversity of all human bodies, of my body," he said at Habitat III hearings held with civil society in June. "Where is the justice in the places we are building? Where is my 'right to the city'?"

According to Pineda, roughly 1 billion people have some kind of disability. But not all disabilities are created equal, and the wide range of possible hindrances means there are few one-size-fits-all solutions.

Mohammed Loutfy, for example, has no problem crossing a street — he can walk just fine — but making sure it's safe to cross is trickier for him, because he's blind. "I feel more confident to cross streets when audio pedestrian signs are installed," he explained. Loutfy is the executive director of the Arab Forum for the Rights of People with Disabilities and a co-chair of the GAP group.

His daily routine in New York City is like an obstacle course, he says. He must navigate around street vendors, trash cans, trees and bike racks. Sharp edges on signs are especially disconcerting. "I could injure myself," he warns, and softening those edges is just one example of something that a city could do to make itself more disabled-friendly.

And the city's hustle and bustle does him few favors. "New Yorkers are in a hurry," he laments. He says they don't always help him despite the obvious sign — he carries a white cane, standard issue for the visually impaired.

Loutfy, however, considers himself independent in a developed-world city like New York. He thinks that people with intellectual disabilities have the most difficult circumstances, because few countries' standards for accessible design take into account what he calls the "simplification of knowledge" necessary for those without the mental cognition to interpret standard signage.

Deaf people in the developing world also are at extra risk. Sign language is not as commonly understood in poor countries, and with lower literacy rates, relying on signage alone is not always adequate.

"A majority of cities in the world have no facilities to accommodate people with disabilities," Loutfy says. "It's an alarming issue."

'Unique experiences'

But disabled activists have some legal muscle at their disposal with the U. N. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which was ratified by member states and came into force in 2008.

As of this year, there are 167 parties to the treaty, including the European Union. The U. S. Senate, however, did

A majority of cities in the world have no facilities to accommodate people with disabilities. It's an alarming issue

*Mohammed Loutfy, Executive Director,
Arab Forum for the Rights of People with
Disabilities*

not ratify the treaty, although a piece of U. S. legislation, the Americans with Disabilities Act, is considered the inspiration for the convention.

As a result of the treaty, countries such as Austria, Brazil, Japan and the United Kingdom passed new national legislation to strengthen the rights of the disabled.

Between the convention and the mention of disabled people in the U. N.'s Sustainable Development Goal on cities, Pineda told delegates in June, "Member states now have a responsibility to ensure that as you're negotiating for Habitat III, that you include language about universal design, language about reasonable accommodations, and language that specifies the unique experiences of disability and how the urban environment can play a role in improving opportunities."

The final draft of the New Urban Agenda was agreed in early September. The text mentions "persons with disabilities" 12 times.

Paragraph 36 discusses this community's needs: "We commit to promote appropriate measures in cities and human settlements that facilitate access for persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment of cities, in particular to public spaces, public transport, housing, education and health facilities, to public information and communication, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and rural areas."

However, the document does not mention "universal design" or "reasonable accommodations," two linchpin concepts in legislation to protect the disabled, nor the convention itself.

Nevertheless, the convention's secretariat is pressing on, with plans for a forum, "Disability Inclusion and Accessible Urban Development," on 16 October, the eve of Habitat III. The forum will build on a June forum on the same topic and a position paper that the secretariat prepared for the New Urban Agenda, "Accessibility and Disability Inclusion in Urban Development."

These public events provide an opportunity to share best practices, which Loutfy said can be found in cities such as San Francisco, Toronto and Vancouver, as well as to insist that accessibility be universal. Historic preservationists, for example, sometimes push back against additions to old buildings that are not contextual.

Calling such arguments "not valid" and insisting there is "no excuse" not to undertake such action, Loutfy argues forcefully: "Accessibility has to be considered for modern and old buildings. You can still do something to pursue the rights of the disabled without making buildings lose historic value."

At the end of the day, disabled activists insist they are not trying to bend cities to their will but rather working to level the playing field. "I love cities. Whether big or small. Young or old. Clean cities, dirty cities. I love them all," Pineda said. "But the problem is, they don't all love me back."

Note: This story has been updated. ■

The indigenous demand for Habitat III? Territoriality

Bridging the GAP | Huge numbers of indigenous communities live in urban areas across the globe, but often they're there due to circumstance rather than choice.

This story is part of an occasional series on the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), the main vehicle for civil society to organize and advocate ahead of Habitat III, the U. N. urbanization summit in October in Quito. The GAP represents a wide range of interests, which have coalesced into 16 constituent groups. Citiscope is profiling these groups and their preparations on the road to Quito with a focus on why sustainable urban development matters to their constituents.

Next week — 12 October — marks the 524th anniversary of Italian navigator Christopher Columbus's purported discovery of the Americas for the Spanish Crown in 1492. The occasion will be celebrated as Columbus Day in the United States, Discovery Day in the Bahamas, and Day of the Americas in Belize and Uruguay. Italian communities worldwide also will celebrate their heritage.

For the indigenous peoples of the Americas, however, the holiday is not so rosy. Columbus's arrival marked centuries of warfare, genocide and disease that decimated ancestral populations and traditional ways of life. Indigenous peoples now constitute about 5 percent of the world's population yet account for about 15 percent of the world's poor, according to the U. S.-based NGO Cultural Survival. There are approximately 370 million indigenous people in the world, making up 5,000 groups in 90 countries.

The backlash against Columbus grew only recently, in the run-up to the 500th anniversary of his voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. In 1990, some 350 indigenous representatives met in Quito, Ecuador, for the first Intercontinental Gathering of Indigenous People in the Americas. There, they agreed to protest the quincentenary of Columbus's journey.

Their movement galvanized action at the city level, with the small U. S. city of Berkeley the first to start a trend of officially renaming the holiday as "Indigenous Peoples' Day" or "Native American Day." Now dozens of U. S. cities and towns have taken the symbolic gesture — including, as of last week, major metros such as Denver and Phoenix. In Seattle, home to a large native population, there is scheduled a daylong celebration with drumming and ceremonies.

'Cosmic vision'

If Quito, itself home to a large Quechua-speaking indigenous community, sparked a movement for indigenous rights, it will have another opportunity to raise the profile of these

marginalized groups later this month when the city hosts the U. N.'s Habitat III summit. The 20-yearly conference will see representatives from all U. N. member states gather to adopt a new global vision for sustainable urbanization — the New Urban Agenda.

For Ana Lucy Benogchea, a Garifuna activist from Honduras, the summit is an opportunity to share the indigenous vision of the world. She said she hopes the New Urban Agenda will reflect "our cosmic vision of man and nature." For indigenous people, she explained, every feature of the natural world, from a tiny plant to a giant mountain, is sacred. "Each one of these signifies a life for us," she said.

In the city, their situation is more precarious and they have more necessities. They suffer discrimination, too, and health and education access is harder for them.

Ana Lucy Benogchea, Garifuna activist from Honduras

She also wants the New Urban Agenda to force governments to consult with indigenous people in decision-making that affects their lands and livelihoods. She summed up the indigenous demand ahead of Habitat III in one word: "territoriality."

With rampant discrimination at the hands of national governments, indigenous activists have long turned to the United Nations as an ally, especially following the adoption of the 2007 Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Five years later at the Rio+20 conference — a major sustainability-focused U. N. summit — an entire indigenous village was set up inside the Rio city limits. Indigenous groups were some of that conference's most visible activists. The summit's outcome, "The Future We Want," even included a reference to "Mother Earth," a concept shared by many indigenous cosmologies.

"U. N. declarations and treaties serve as powerful standard-setting instruments, as common measuring sticks that the 'world' agrees to," said Cultural Survival's Agnes Portalewska. "They are only effective if these standards are utilized — in advocacy by indigenous peoples — if we collectively use them to hold governments and corporations accountable to their promises and obligations to implement the standards and respect, protect and fulfill rights."

To that end, the New Urban Agenda mentions indigenous peoples 11 times and twice singles them out for special consideration.

"We will engage indigenous peoples and local communities in the promotion and dissemination of knowledge of tangible and intangible cultural heritage and protection of traditional expressions and languages, ▶



Indigenous women on the streets of Uummannaq, Greenland, March 2014.

including through the use of new technologies and techniques,” states Paragraph 125 of the agenda’s final draft, as agreed last month.

In Paragraph 38, governments commit to “safeguard and promote ... indigenous cultures and languages, as well as traditional knowledge and the arts, highlighting the role that these play in the rehabilitation and revitalization of urban areas, and as a way to strengthen social participation and the exercise of citizenship.”

Such terms are valuable, even in a non-binding, voluntary agreement like the New Urban Agenda. “The more they are quoted and utilized in all spheres — advocacy, legal settings and politics — the more power they have,” Portalewska said.

Two worlds

While the New Urban Agenda does acknowledge the outcome document of the Rio+20 conference, it does not mention the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Ultimately, Habitat III’s urban focus is not likely to draw the

same level of indigenous activism as Rio+20’s environmental focus — but that sense ignores demographic realities.

“Many indigenous people live in two worlds, in an urban setting and migrate home several times a year to ancestral lands for ceremonies and family visits,” said Portalewska, pointing out that the largest indigenous community in the United States lives in New York City.

Still, indigenous people often find themselves living in cities not by choice but by circumstance. “Historically, indigenous peoples have moved to cities because of push factors: climate change, being persecuted, displaced from land grabs, pollution ... forced assimilation, or for economic and social reasons like access to health care, seeking employment and education,” said Portalewska, “largely because of being forced or lack of opportunity on their ancestral lands.”

Urban life is often not easy on traditional peoples. “There are negative impacts because in their rural areas they live off the land,” explained Benogchea, the Garifuna activist. “In the city, their situation is more precarious and they have more

necessities. They suffer discrimination, too, and health and education access is harder for them.”

Benogchea’s own indigenous affiliation, the Garifuna people descended from African slaves and the native peoples of the Caribbean islands, have largely moved to the urban centres of Honduras and Belize, as well as emigrated abroad. An estimated 100,000 Garifuna, out of a global population of 600,000, live in New York City.

But cities don’t have to be hostile places for indigenous communities. When First Nations activists in Toronto surreptitiously changed street signs to reflect pre-English names, a local business-improvement district opted to make the new bilingual signs permanent. Such signage is already de rigueur across swaths of metro Vancouver, a trend begun ahead of the 2010 Winter Olympics. The Spokane Tribe, outside of the U. S. city of the same name, has partnered with a national grocery store chain to alleviate the community’s food desert.

Quito, meanwhile, is home to some 92,000 indigenous people, according to Ecuador’s 2010 census. Many are clustered in dense hillside neighbourhoods around the Mercado de San Roque, on the edge of Quito’s

historic district, where rural vendors bring their goods to market.

Quechua, rather than Spanish, is their lingua franca, although recent educational reforms that have mainstreamed indigenous students into citywide high schools has diluted their language training. In secondary school, Quechua is an optional course of study rather than the language of instruction.

Ecuador’s leftist president, Rafael Correa, drew political support from indigenous groups with a shared dislike for neoliberal economic policy that they perceive as degrading the natural environment through oil, natural gas and mining. Many indigenous concepts, such as the Quechua notion of “buen vivir” (living well), the “Rights of Nature”, and Madre Tierra (Mother Earth) are enshrined in Ecuador’s 2008 constitution, which Correa oversaw.

However, recent political tensions have seen Correa clash with indigenous activists, and if there are protests in the streets of Quito during Habitat III, indigenous groups are likely to be part of the mix. Perched high in the Andes, the Quechua heartland, Quito’s indigenous presence is likely to leave a mark on the legacy of Habitat III. ■

Can Habitat III prompt new focus on urban journalism?

Bridging the GAP | As global leaders gather in Quito next week to adopt the New Urban Agenda, a little-discussed part of this process has focused on educating reporters and editors on the city as a story.

This story is part of an occasional series on the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), the main vehicle for civil society to organize and advocate ahead of Habitat III, the U. N. urbanization summit in October in Quito. The GAP represents a wide range of interests, which have coalesced into 16 constituent groups. Citiscope is profiling these groups about their preparations on the road to Quito with a focus on why sustainable urban development matters to their constituents.

During the preparations for Habitat III, next week’s major U. N. summit on sustainable urbanization, the example of climate change has loomed large. Here is a global, existential issue that has political buy-in at the highest levels, overwhelming public discourse, and robust science undergirding innovation and (most) policymaking. Could the urban discussion, which many supporters see as just as vital, ever hope for such mobilization?

Many of those who have been shepherding the Habitat III process over the past two years certainly believe so, and they have increasingly been contextualizing their efforts

as an attempt to put in place the foundations of a global urban “movement”. And again taking a cue from the climate discussion, they have included in the preparations a notable although rarely discussed focus on the media.

Next week, global leaders — and, reportedly, nearly 50,000 others — will gather in Ecuador’s capital for the Habitat III conference, where they are set to adopt a new global vision on sustainable urbanization called the New Urban Agenda. By the time they arrive in Quito, 22 formal media trainings will have taken place on five continents under the auspices of the Habitat III Secretariat. Those Urban Journalism Academies included the participation of around 700 journalists from local and global media, organizers say. (A capstone event will take place in Quito on 18 October.)

The idea started at the World Urban Forum in Medellín, Colombia, in 2014. But even then it was undertaken with an eye toward Habitat III — and its legacy, organizers say. (Citiscope has been involved in some of the UJAs and also is involved in a network of editors and reporters working on Habitat III.)

“The idea was simple although pioneering,” said Rosa Suriñach with the Habitat III Secretariat. “The purpose was to make urban knowledge, data and analysis accessible to journalists and communications professionals, so they might be able to create awareness on urban issues through stories and media coverage.”

Suriñach said the attempt was a call for the media’s participation in a global debate that was lacking its presence. Like climate journalism, this new focus — sometimes called urban journalism — looks at issues from the most

global to the most local level, from how actions taken in the community affect the global and vice-versa. That's a potent tool, backers say.

"One of the main impacts of the UJAs is the global exchange of media experiences and best practices and to bring international examples closer to local professionals," Suriñach said. "Our hope is that media will play a crucial role in following up the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, improving the democratic control and participation on how urbanization is effectively put in place both at local and global level."

From 2014 to 2016, she said, Internet references to "urban journalism" have increased exponentially. The UJAs series may also be continued in the future, including through an online platform and at future World Urban Forums. Practitioners say the field is burgeoning, too.



"The state of urban journalism is quite fragmented, since cities are not always among the main topics at national level even though these are the places where most of the challenges — such as economic growth, the integration of migrants, etc. — are taking place," said Simone D'Antonio, an Italian journalist who has been involved in several of the Urban Journalism Academies over the past year.

"Nevertheless, in many countries some good experiences of urban journalism are coming out not only from the traditional newsrooms but from a wide range of actors such as bloggers, architects and urban planners, freelance journalists and more," he noted. "In South African townships or in urban slums in Nairobi or Jakarta many great examples of urban journalism, often in collaboration with residents, are shaking up the debate. In some cases,

they're pushing more relevant media outlets to focus on urban issues — such as housing, urban transport, energy poverty — from different perspectives."

Sounding board

The Habitat III process has actually made some history for the media. For the first time in a U. N. process, the run-up to next week's conference has seen the media represented as its own stakeholder group. Media is one of the 16 "constituent groups" of the General Assembly of Partners, a global umbrella group that came together ahead of Habitat III.

In part, this unique inclusion is due to the proliferation of new media and the unprecedented reach of some of this media brought about by new patterns of news consumption, organizers say.

"Media, especially new forms of media, play an increasingly important role not only as a source of information but as a means of communication," said Nicholas You, founder of the World Urban Campaign and a co-chair of the GAP media group. "Indeed, real change only occurs when the issues at stake and their policy implications make their way into the hearts and minds of people. The challenges of sustainable urbanization and their potential solutions are such that they require buy-in and a shared sense of ownership by each and every inhabitant of our cities."

Of course, journalists, editors and publishers are far from monolithic, despite the tidy usage of the catchall term "the media" — and neither are their readers. Those reporting on or in cities face massively disparate forces, from fickle readerships to outright violence and political repression, meager salaries to opaque official processes.

So what would the media, as a group, be looking for from the New Urban Agenda? The media constituent group has no agenda of its own, says You, who is also a Citiscope board member. Instead, the group aims to function as an independent messenger and a sounding board, seeking to integrate the views of the 15 other constituent groups — government officials, the private sector, academics, farmers, grass-roots groups and more.

"What are the issues that are of concern to the inhabitants of the city and how are these being translated into different stakeholder positions?" he said. "Conversely, how are the positions voiced by different stakeholder groups perceived by the inhabitants of any given city? But most importantly, how can the diversity of interests and positions of the various constituency groups be distilled into a common platform and a common agenda?"

Following the policy debate and public-input process during the formulation of the New Urban Agenda is one thing. Where many say the media's role will become far more critical is after next week's conference finishes up and everyone goes home — presumably, to get to work on turning the vision of the New Urban Agenda into a variety of realities.

A key question that remains unanswered in the Habitat III process will be on how to formally track progress on implementation. In a last-minute compromise last month, U. N. member states agreed to agree to disagree on this contentious issue and, instead, to have the U. N. General Assembly take up this complex question and make a decision in coming years.

In the meantime, backers say, journalists have a variety of important roles to play, whether in watchdogging commitments from governments, the private sector and others, or in spreading key lessons of innovative response from one city to the next.

“What is clear is that we need, in addition to quantitative indicators, stories,” You said. “Stories of how different stakeholders working together are able to make positive change is what will inspire people and their communities to innovate and to learn from each other to make a difference. The media will thus be focusing on what works, how it worked and the lessons to be learned and shared.”

Communicating impact

Of course, stories of urban development and related lessons need not be focused specifically on the New Urban Agenda. But journalists working on urban reporting say the background of the Habitat III process will also help in their storytelling.

“The media is looking for inspiration on how to cover urban issues at the local and national level from a different perspective,” said D’Antonio, the Italian journalist. “The New Urban Agenda can be important to define the state of the art of the global urban debate, highlighting approaches and practices which are often less covered by media.”

This will find particular relevance in the developing world, D’Antonio says, given the New Urban Agenda’s focus on issues such as urban innovations, social inclusion and more. (The document’s final draft text can be found [here](#).) The new international agreement also is expected to impact on how international aid flows are structured, potentially leading to greater focus on urban-level projects rather than primarily on national-level funding.

Still, is this type of material of interest to readers, in any region? D’Antonio admits that a key priority for journalists working in this field in the coming years will be to make the issue “sexier”. The challenge will be “to communicate in terms of concrete impact on urban contexts, highlighting concrete examples and showing precise objectives and targets to be reached.”

Yet as an approach this has been done before, and indeed, is something that journalism is well-equipped to do. Again, particular lessons could be found in coverage of last year’s COP 21 climate talks in Paris. In the run-up to that summit, journalists around the world were able to report on a dizzying spectrum of interrelated issues — the human impacts of climate change, the intricacies of the political negotiations, the technicalities of the science and of the potential solutions.

“The New Urban Agenda can help journalists in finding new angles ... on cities and to foster the use of data to analyze urban phenomena,” D’Antonio said. “Training editors in developing countries on how cities will be even more important in the next years as decisive players in national and global politics is one of the priorities to foster better coverage of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.” ■

Habitat III is ‘third act’ for growing philanthropic focus on cities

Bridging the GAP | Foundations are increasingly looking at cities to leverage the impact of their grants, and have been major forces in stakeholder participation around the New Urban Agenda.

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In 1889, the Scottish-born industrial Andrew Carnegie, who made a vast fortune in the United States as a steel manufacturer, wrote “The Gospel of Wealth”. In the article, he said, “Surplus wealth is a sacred trust which its possessor is bound to administer in his lifetime for the good of the community.” Carnegie led by example, giving away 90 percent of his fortune, some USD 350 million — the equivalent of nearly USD 80 billion in today’s value.

Among the many fruits of Carnegie’s generosity, his endowment constructed more than 2,500 libraries from 1893 to 1919 in cities and towns across the United States, United Kingdom and British Commonwealth — in Suva, Fiji; San Fernando, Trinidad; and many more places. With their elegant architecture, Carnegie libraries remain a historic landmark in many communities and oftentimes planted the seed of a more robust public library system.

This effort was an early indication of how philanthropy can invest in civic infrastructure to supplement the efforts of a municipal government. Carnegie sparked a wave of philanthropy among the titans of industry in the United States. In 1913, for instance, John D. Rockefeller dedicated ►

a portion of his oil fortune to an endowed foundation. Two decades later, carmaker Henry Ford established the Ford Foundation.

A century later but still with broad missions to improve livelihoods across the globe, foundations are increasingly finding themselves looking at cities in order to leverage the impact of their grants. In preparations for next week's Habitat III conference on urbanization, the Ford Foundation has co-chaired the General Assembly of Partners' philanthropy constituency group.

"Cities are where people live, work and play. Cities are not silos — they are complicated interlinked systems, which is why they need our sustained attention," said Ford's Ana Marie Argilagos. "Many philanthropies are place-based and as so naturally work on cities."

Creating engagement

To that end, Habitat III is a major opportunity to continue the global work that foundations began last year in the run-up to two major agreements struck last year — the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Paris Agreement on climate change.

Ahead of the SDGs, a 15-year plan to end global poverty, philanthropies formed the SDG Funders Platform, and have already prepared deep dive reports on how their grantmaking ability can help achieve the SDGs. This month, Bill Gates of the Gates Foundation outlined renewable energy to reduce climate change as a major priority, while Silicon Valley billionaire Tom Steyer has made the issue into the signature effort of his philanthropic investments.

"Habitat III makes sense because it's like the third act," said Argilagos.

But first, foundations needed to make it known that there was a third act to be had in the aftermath of last year's landmark agreements. "Our job is to create awareness and engagement," said Oscar Fergutz, the other co-chair of the GAP philanthropies group, with the Latin America-based Avina Foundation.

The pair drew on global networks of foundations such as Worldwide Initiatives for Grantmaker Support, as well as regional networks from Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, and the United States. Then, they sought to generate interest in the New Urban Agenda — the 20-year vision that will be adopted at Habitat III — from a range of foundations, including Indonesia's Danamon Peduli Foundation, Kenya's Community Foundation and Brazil's Fundação Roberto Marinho.

When Habitat III convenes next week in Quito, Ecuador, the group will host a philanthropy roundtable. One of the sector's main goals at the summit will be to remind the public that foundations are more than just their endowments. "Foundations can play a variety of roles — seldom do they like to see themselves as merely ATMs," Argilagos said.

Ford has led by example, supporting Habitat III in several ways outside of grantmaking. Its main contribution

was to host the conference's secretariat, the staff who administered the two-year preparatory process that produced the New Urban Agenda, in its Manhattan headquarters, just across the street from the U. N. building.

The decision to offer coveted New York real estate is part of a new sense at Ford about how to use all of the tools at its disposal, not just its financial ones.

"We don't want to use just our grants for making change; we want to use all of our resources," Argilagos said. "Our building should be a centre for dialogue and conversation."



Photo: Blue Island/Shutterstock

As a result, Ford became a nerve center for the Habitat III process that helped facilitate access, as compared to the high-security U. N. building. In addition to the everyday flow by U. N. staff, the building was a revolving door of civil society activists, think tank and university researchers, national government delegations and city leaders.

Ford hosted monthly civil society meetings, a half-dozen breakfast sessions bringing together U. N. diplomats and urban experts, and numerous panel discussions on the sidelines of major events such as the annual meeting of the U. N. General Assembly.

"The U. N. is like a big fortress, and getting in and out is quite tedious, which is not conducive to engagement and transparency," said Argilagos. "Having the Habitat III Secretariat in a building that represents civil society, you are really incentivizing for communication to be flowing."

Leading and convening

As a convener, Ford preferred to stay out of the nitty-gritty debates on the New Urban Agenda and did not participate in the technical "policy unit" process, which generated a series

of expert reports that provided much of the document's content. (The final draft of the New Urban Agenda was agreed in September and can be found [here](#).) Avina and the Rockefeller Foundation, which has a major urban focus with its 100 Resilient Cities initiative, did participate in the policy units.

Overall, though, Argilagos said that the diverse goals of the philanthropic sector means it doesn't have singular demands in the Habitat process. "Philanthropy — you can't put them into a bucket," she said. "Most of them would agree with the concept of inclusive and sustainable cities: leave no one behind."

Ford also used its traditional grantmaking capacity to support Habitat III, for example by funding the Global Platform on the Right to the City, an advocacy effort that succeeded in its lobbying for the concept of the "right to the city" to appear for the first time in an internationally agreed U. N. document. (Ford also supports Citiscope's coverage of Habitat III.)

The Avina Foundation also has put money behind its emphasis on sustainable cities in an effort to lead by example. On the ground, it works in 80 cities across 15 countries in Latin America to improve the lives of recycling workers and waste pickers — some of the most marginalized of informal labourers.

Avina also funded UN-Habitat research that resulted in a groundbreaking 2014 study, "Construction of More Equitable Cities," that analyzes Latin American inequality at the more granular city level rather than at the broad-brush national level. The report illustrates, for example, that although a measure of Brazil's inequality (a metric known as Gini coefficient) has gone down in recent years, inequality has actually gotten worse in some cities, even as gains in other cities have improved the overall national ranking.

Such research can help guide policymaking in the most urbanized but most unequal region in the world. Ironically, that dual claim to fame has made Avina's job harder as it has pushed the relevance of Habitat III, which by dint of its location in Quito has even more incentive to encourage Latin American participation.

"Because Latin America is the most urbanized region on the planet, it's so obvious that we're in cities so we don't feel the need to talk about 'urban' issues," said Fergutz. He related an example from his conversations with Brazilian social-impact investment network GIFE. "They'll say, 'We don't work directly with cities.' Then what do you work with? 'Education, gender, health, worker inclusion, youth,'" he said.

But, he continued: "Where is this work happening? In cities." ■

Private-sector role is discussed at Habitat III but few businesses show up

As the summit marks the start of implementation of the New Urban Agenda, everyone is interested in financing. But the business presence at this week's conference was light.

QUITO, Ecuador — Everyone seems to agree that the business sector is indispensable to getting much done on the big challenges facing cities — particularly the estimated US\$78 trillion needed to finance sustainable infrastructure over the coming decade.

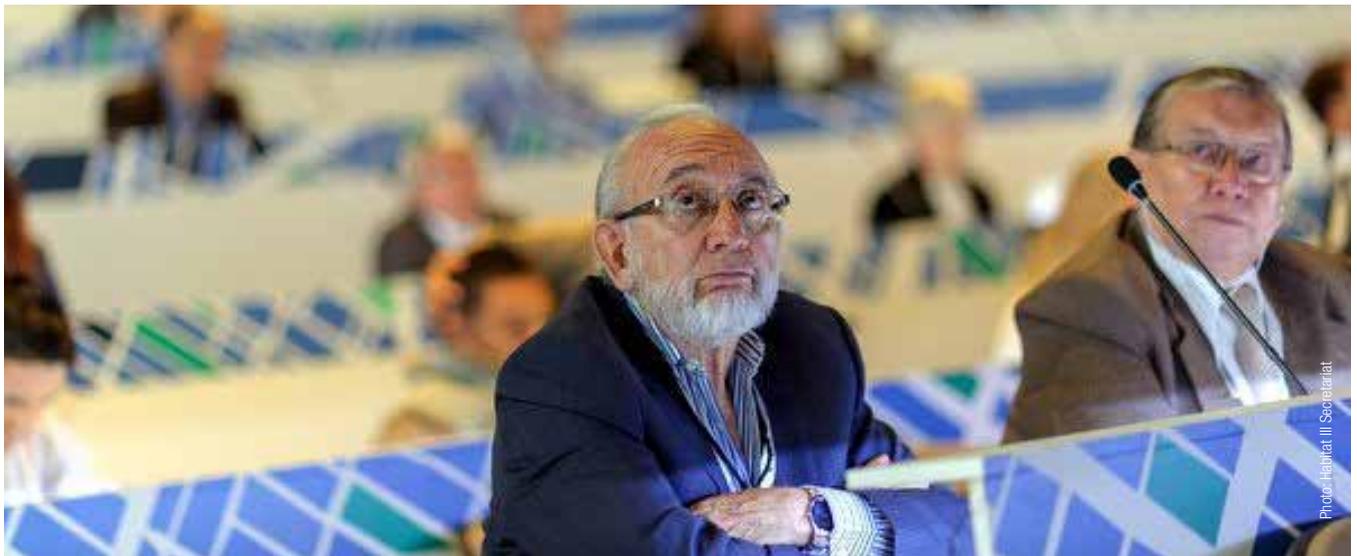
But doubts abound over whether business will act, whether it will spend real money and exert serious influence. There have been some corporations represented at this week's Habitat III summit on sustainable urbanization. However, much of the participation in the process has come not from business directly but rather from those representing various coalitions of firms.

Several of those coalitions — representing dozens or even hundreds of corporations each — did make announcements at Habitat III regarding new and ongoing initiatives around research, monitoring frameworks and multi-stakeholder forums. But no private-sector entity made a major financial announcement. Rather, whatever significant monetary pledges were made at Habitat III were offered by governments and NGOs, according to the Quito Implementation Plan database.

Still, the role of the private sector has been an issue of significant priority here this week, as has the broader issue of financing the New Urban Agenda, the 20-year strategy on how to plan, build and manage sustainable cities that nations are adopting here this week. Dozens of side events have discussed related issues as the Habitat III summit marks the transition away from policy discussions and toward strategies for how to turn the vision of the New Urban Agenda into reality for cities across the globe.

At a panel here Wednesday, representatives from business stepped up to take on the big questions. Bertrand Benichou of ENGIE, a French multinational electric utility, was quick to call out obsolete regulations. He told a story about an effort to install solar panels on buildings in Barcelona some years back, only to find that doing so was illegal. "Now we need to create space for an accelerated platform," he said.

Others worry that public policy is not keeping up. Khoo Teng Chye of the Centre for Liveable Cities pointed out that until this century, Singapore had separate departments for



A business assembly met at Habitat III on 16 October.

nearly every aspect pertaining to water — supply, storm water drainage, sewage — all of it organized into separate agencies. Now there's an integrated water system, he said, yielding huge savings.

There's also the matter of the language barrier, and not the usual one. "Business and government don't speak the same language," said Shipra Narang Suri, the head of ISOCARP, an international planning association. "And in the past, the process was only transactional — not very inclusive, and so not very effective." Suri argued vigorously for better incentives and a lot more money.

Alice Charles of the World Economic Forum hit the economic issue even harder, calling for more hard-headed thinking about what actually works, across all fronts of the challenges to cities. She said that the public sector is best for convening at the front end and monitoring results later but urged that "the private sector should take responsibility for designing and implementing solutions."

And don't forget the informal business sector — it makes up to three-quarters of the actual business activity in the development world, said Ani Dasgupta of the World Resource Institute Ross Center for Sustainable Cities.

Recognized partner

The good news, said Bert Smolders of Arcadis, is that "it appears that business is now in a serious role" on the urbanization discussion. People are finally realizing, he said, that you must have business at the table from the very beginning. If you're cleaning up a brownfield for redevelopment or reacting to what Hurricane Sandy did in the New York region, business needs to be brought in as a stakeholder from the outset.

Bolstering that realization could be an important legacy of the Habitat III process, he suggested. Arcadis, a global engineering consultancy, co-led a business stakeholder group in the preparations for Habitat III under an umbrella group called the General Assembly of Partners. Smolders and others this week noted that this was a unique inclusion.

"The fact that we are here is not that obvious. For a long time, the private sector has not been taken as a serious partner in these processes," he said. "There's been policy development, and at the other hand there was the daily practice in which the private companies are working."

Through the group's work with the GAP, however, Smolders indicated that he thinks business groups "have been able to include important points for the private sector in the New Urban Agenda."

At the same time, Smolders recognized that increased reliance on the private sector to fund urban development comes with dangers. "This is also a big responsibility," he acknowledged. "I think we have to be very careful how we as the private sector work in this implementation process."

Others also noted increased interest from all sides in deepening participation with the private sector, particularly around innovation and monitoring.

"From the perspective of the three private-sector organizations I'm most involved in, all this year members were very focused on Habitat III," said Gary Sharkey, with the Global Cities Business Alliance. "I think that the trend of businesses becoming more focused on cities and aligning their products and services to the challenges and opportunities cities face is continuing."

Still, he acknowledged that thus far Habitat III has seen relatively less direct engagement by business interests than other recent high-level agreements, including the Paris Agreement on climate change and, particularly, the Sustainable Development Goals finalized last year. The SDGs are the U.N.'s 15-year framework to guide anti-poverty efforts; the New Urban Agenda is aimed at guiding efforts at implementing those goals in cities.

"I think now that we have the Paris Agreement, the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, hopefully that will provide us with good grounds to continue that scale-up," Sharkey said. "But in particular, the SDGs seem to be the one that businesses are taking to heart now and starting to move forward." ■

After Habitat III, what's next for the urban movement?

Official and unofficial mechanisms are quickly falling into place to follow and prod implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

QUITO, Ecuador — After four intense days of the United Nations' Habitat III conference on the future of cities, the urban circus has finally left town. Signs have been taken down, security cordons removed, temporary bike-share stands packed up and streets reopened to traffic. The crowds and vendors have left El Ejido Park, where thousands queued

and milled about for a glimpse of the action during Ecuador's first U. N. summit.

Now that the estimated 10,000 foreign participants in the conference have scattered back to the 167 countries they represented at last week's conference, an obvious question remains: What's next for the urban movement?

It's undeniable that the movement for better cities has grown in the 20 years since Habitat II. There are new NGOs, advocacy campaigns, think tanks, city-to-city networks, research institutes, university programmes, awards and consulting firms. And many of them weighed in to shape the New Urban Agenda, the urbanization strategy formally adopted by all 193 U. N. member states at the conclusion of the conference.

"The urban movement for Habitat III ... has demonstrated the power of collective advocacy and action," Shipra Narang Suri, vice-president of the International Society of City and Regional Planners, told Citiscope. ▶



Habitat III participants walk past wall displays of text from the New Urban Agenda. Quito, 18 October.

Two decades ago, mayors were not yet connected by United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the world's largest network of cities. Students couldn't yet study at the London School of Economics' Cities Programme. Activists couldn't yet call on the "right to the city" as a legal mandate from Brazil to Ecuador to Mexico City to Saint-Denis, France. And curious readers couldn't find specialized media catering to the urban scene, Citiscope among them.

So, as the dust settles from Habitat III, it's time for reflection from this constellation of civil society actors. Most came together around the U. N.'s third-ever human settlements confab because they believe in the urban cause — including some who still frame it in terms of the 1996 Habitat Agenda. Meanwhile, many of the new players invested enormous time, energy and resources in the two-year run-up to the adoption of the New Urban Agenda.

They may not be wholly satisfied with the outcome, but the civil society activists that Citiscope spoke with last week all said they are committed to encouraging the implementation of the document and the broader global agenda on urban issues, which includes elements of the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals.

"The implementation of the New Urban Agenda may not be a legal obligation of the member states," Suri said at the opening plenary that included heads of state, ministers and U. N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon last Monday, "but it is certainly a moral imperative, a new moral compact among member states and between member states and stakeholders, to realize a new urban future, to switch from business-as-usual, to business-unusual."

She continued, "Let us resolve to use it as a starting point, a minimum, from where to go forward — not an end goal, a maximum, a finish line."

GAP future

Suri was offered a prime speaking slot at Habitat III because she is also vice-president of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), an umbrella coalition of stakeholders who advocated for specific proposals in the New Urban Agenda on behalf of civil society. With 16 constituency groups ranging from youths to older persons, farmers to professionals, indigenous communities to parliamentarians, they claim to represent the voice of a billion people worldwide.

The GAP formed in April 2015 and received institutional and financial support from the Habitat III Secretariat, which used funds to from the Habitat III Trust Fund to support travel for the body's constituency leaders to a string of preparatory meetings in the run-up to Habitat III. This year, the advocacy umbrella explained its intentions through a document called "Partnerships for the New Urban Agenda."

Yet the GAP suffered setbacks over four months of political negotiations, which refined the New Urban Agenda to its final version last month. They lost two concrete proposals, for a Multi-Stakeholder Panel on Sustainable Urbanization and a U. N. International Decade on

Sustainable Urbanization. The former would have provided an institutional mechanism by which they could further their advocacy on this issue; the latter would have helped raise awareness more broadly about the topic.

However, the GAP's "valuable contributions" are acknowledged as part of the legacy of Habitat III in the document's "Means of Implementation" section, which suggests that life after Quito is possible. According to GAP's leadership, that is exactly what they have planned.

"Clearly, this window for engaging stakeholders in the New Urban Agenda — earlier in its development, from here onwards in its implementation — must be expanded and further strengthened," Suri told Citiscope.

Part of the GAP's forward momentum comes from its key role in the conference, where over 30 hours of sessions were dedicated to the lessons learned from its advocacy efforts within the Habitat III process. The GAP's leadership also was given an audience with the U. N. secretary-general. In addition, Habitat III Secretary-General Joan Clos acknowledged the group's collective role in a letter and offered institutional support going forward on behalf of UN-Habitat, the agency of which he is executive director.

To that end, the GAP plans to consult with its membership on preferred future plans, amend its constitution as necessary, push for inclusion in next year's debate on follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda and explore how the GAP model can be applied to other aspects of the U. N. Its leadership anticipates a possible GAP 2.0 by April, when UN-Habitat's Governing Council meets in Nairobi.

New leadership

The GAP isn't the only civil society effort around urban issues with support from UN-Habitat. Founded in 2009, the World Urban Campaign (WUC) has slowly built steam as a broad-based coalition of urban actors with a focus on institutions rather than individuals as members.

On the sidelines of Habitat III, the WUC elected two new co-chairs, Rose Molokoane of South Africa and Sandeep Chachra of India. With long backgrounds in the rights of slum dwellers, informal workers and the urban poor, the duo will bring a strong voice for the developing world to the WUC's advocacy efforts in a bid to push implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

Noting the relative lack of implementation for the outcomes of the first two Habitat conferences, Chachra, executive director of ActionAid India, told Citiscope, "These things can be lost if there isn't an active body mobilizing around it, creating momentum, holding governments to account, raising a public debate and offering solutions."

Solutions have been the WUC's stock in trade as of late, including through the presentation during Habitat III of 164 "urban solutions" that came out of an open call this year. These ideas, which draw on the collective knowledge of the WUC's partners, build on the series of self-organized events ahead of Habitat III known as Urban Thinkers Campuses, dozens of which took place all over the world.

Those gatherings — which ranged from a tea party in Vancouver to a street party in Recife to a formal conference in New York — contributed ideas to “The City We Want 2.0”, a civil society manifesto delivered in time for the drafting of and negotiations over the New Urban Agenda.

The WUC has some concrete plans for the coming year. For instance, there is expected to be a call for another round of Urban Thinkers Campuses, focused on implementation, early next year. The idea is that those events will be designed to conclude ahead of World Urban Forum 9, which is to take place in Kuala Lumpur in February 2018 and is being seen as a key milestone post-Quito.

For Molokoane, who leads a grass-roots women’s group affiliated with Slum/Shack Dwellers International, WUC’s goal is to generate “projects that will showcase the New Urban Agenda as a real document.”

Such a demonstration would throw down a gauntlet on the implementation question and, ideally, push national governments to do their part. “Our aim is not just to monitor the policies and how the member states are taking this document back to their offices,” she said. “Our aim is to show what is it that this New Urban Agenda is planting on the ground. The people are there in need of solutions.”

Outside pressure

Not all civil society actors who advocated in the Habitat III process are comfortable working inside the system and with institutional U. N. support, however. The proliferation of alternative and parallel events to the official conference was evidence of this approach, especially the Habitat III Resistance forum held at the Universidad Central del Ecuador.

At the four-day event inside the university’s School of Architecture and Urbanism, participants engaged in discussions of land rights, forced evictions and building materials for the rural poor — topics less common at the urban conversation just a few kilometres away inside the U. N.-sanctioned Habitat III conference. Leftist students in T-shirts and indigenous activists in traditional clothing mingled for demonstrations of adobe brickmaking and low-cost emergency shelter for responding to disasters such as April’s earthquake that devastated Ecuador’s coast.

The scene recalled the focus on individual human-settlement needs that dominated the Habitat I conversation 40 years ago, when the emphasis was on making rural lives viable in the face of urbanization. While Habitat III Secretary-General Clos said Wednesday that such an approach was misguided because millions of people moved to cities in the two decades after Habitat I took place in Vancouver in 1976, one of the organizers of Habitat III Resistance, Alvaro Puertas, retorted, “Did they move to live or to suffer?”

Puertas is the general secretary of Habitat International Coalition (HIC), a group that has watchdogged the outcomes of the Habitat conferences for four decades. Although it is a registered NGO at the U. N., where it regularly presents

reports of land and housing rights violations, it chose not to participate in officially sponsored Habitat III processes such as the GAP. At the alternative forum, representatives from over 36 countries adopted a People’s Habitat Agenda as an alternative to the New Urban Agenda.

“We agreed on the need to have that habitat approach instead of an urban focus,” Puertas told Citiscope against a backdrop of drums and flute as several dozen people danced and sang in a “madre tierra” (Mother Earth) ceremony led by an indigenous priest as the alternative forum came to an end.

“They all acknowledge that having only an urban approach is going to really violate their rights to land, especially those living in rural areas,” Puertas said. “Why are we only presented a single urban future but not other options? All these people are here to claim for that.”

As the group moves forward, Puertas said, HIC intends to support “people’s Habitat committees” — already present in Argentina, Bolivia and Mexico — in order to agitate for these baseline issues, as well as new topics that the New Urban Agenda does not include.

“There are positive aspects with the new agenda, but there are plenty of things that are missing,” Puertas said. “Not only the previous Habitat commitments but all the things that have changed in the last 20 years. For instance, war and occupation is something that is not clearly discussed or included in the new agenda.”

Right to the city

One component of the New Urban Agenda that is missing from its predecessor and meets HIC’s approval is the “right to the city”. The inclusion of those four words is thanks in no small part to the Global Platform for the Right to the City, an international network of advocates who pushed for member states to include the concept in the document.

That effort also will continue into the New Urban Agenda’s implementation phase, drawing on national committees that already have formed in Colombia, India and Kenya. The platform also intends to launch an issue-oriented campaign — for example, on how equitably improving public space is a form of urban development in line with “right to the city” principles.

“At the international level we plan to follow the process of internationalizing the right to the city, especially in the global human-rights system, by promoting dialogues with the U. N. Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights,” said Nelson Saule, the platform’s coordinator and a lawyer at the São Paulo-based Pólis Institute. “The debate continues whether the right to the city already exists as a collective right based on international human-rights treaties, or is it necessary to have some kind of international norm on this right.”

While Habitat III advocates have differing views about the why and the how of what comes next, they all seem committed to staying engaged. As HIC’s Joseph Schechla said, “As in most things, like policies, laws or college degrees, the new agenda will only be as good as its partners make it.” ■

Después de Hábitat III, ¿cuál será el siguiente paso del movimiento urbano?

Rápidamente se están desplegando los mecanismos oficiales y no oficiales para dar seguimiento e impulsar la implementación de la Nueva Agenda Urbana.

QUITO, Ecuador- Después de cuatro días intensos de sesiones en la conferencia de las Naciones Unidas Hábitat III sobre el futuro de las ciudades, el circo urbano al fin se fue de la ciudad. Se retiraron los carteles, se quitaron los cordones de seguridad, se desarmaron los estacionamientos temporarios compartidos para bicicletas y se reabrieron las calles al tránsito. Las multitudes y los vendedores abandonaron el parque El Ejido, por donde miles de personas circularon e hicieron fila para vislumbrar algo de la acción de la primera cumbre de la ONU realizada en Ecuador.

Ahora que los 10.000 extranjeros que se calcula participaron en la conferencia han retornado a los 167 países representados en el encuentro de la semana pasada, surge una pregunta obvia: ¿cuál será el próximo paso del movimiento urbano?

No hay duda de que el movimiento que aboga por la creación de mejores ciudades ha crecido en los últimos 20 años desde la realización de Hábitat II. Hoy en día existen nuevas ONG, campañas de incidencia, usinas de ideas, redes interurbanas, institutos de investigación, carreras universitarias, premios y consultoras. Y muchos de ellos contribuyeron a darle forma a la Nueva Agenda Urbana, la estrategia de urbanización aprobada formalmente por los 193 Estados miembros de la ONU al cierre de la conferencia.

“El movimiento urbano que apoyó Hábitat III demostró el poder de la influencia y la acción colectivas”, le dijo a Citiscope Shipra Narang Suri, vicepresidenta de la Sociedad Internacional de Urbanistas.

Hace dos décadas, los alcaldes aún no estaban conectados entre sí por Ciudades y Gobiernos Locales Unidos (CGLU), la red de ciudades más grande del mundo. Los alumnos aún no podían inscribirse en el Programa sobre Ciudades de la London School of Economics. Los activistas todavía no podían invocar el “derecho a la ciudad” como un mandato legal desde Brasil hasta Ecuador, pasando por la Ciudad de México y desde allí hasta Saint-Denis, Francia. Y los lectores curiosos no podían encontrar medios especializados que se ocuparan de las cuestiones urbanas, entre ellos Citiscope.

Por consiguiente, a medida que todo vuelve a la calma después de Hábitat III, es hora de reflexionar sobre esta constelación de actores de la sociedad civil. La mayoría

de ellos se congregaron en torno a la tercera edición de la conferencia sobre asentamientos urbanos impulsada por la ONU porque creen en la causa urbana, incluidos algunos que todavía la enmarcan en el contexto de la Agenda Hábitat de 1996. Mientras tanto, muchos de los nuevos jugadores invirtieron gran cantidad de tiempo, energía y recursos en los dos años previos a la aprobación de la Nueva Agenda Urbana.

Es posible que no estén plenamente satisfechos con el resultado, pero todos los activistas de la sociedad civil con los que Citiscope habló la semana pasada dijeron estar comprometidos en la tarea de promover la implementación del documento y la agenda global más amplia sobre cuestiones urbanas, que incluye elementos del Acuerdo de París sobre el cambio climático y los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sustentable.

“La aplicación de la Nueva Agenda Urbana puede no constituir una obligación legal para los Estados miembros”, señaló Suri en la plenaria inaugural del último lunes, en la que participaron jefes de Estado, ministros y el Secretario General de la ONU, Ban Ki-moon, “pero sin duda es un imperativo moral, un nuevo acuerdo moral entre los Estados miembros, y entre éstos y las partes interesadas, dirigido a producir un nuevo futuro urbano, que permita pasar de una forma de trabajo habitual a formas novedosas y diferentes”.

Y agregó: “Utilicémosla como un punto de partida, un nivel mínimo desde el cual avanzar, y no como un objetivo final, el punto máximo o un punto de llegada”.

Ahora que los 10.000 extranjeros que se calcula participaron en la conferencia han retornado a los 167 países representados

El futuro de la GAP

A Suri le ofrecieron un lugar destacado para hacer una intervención en Hábitat III dado que ella es también vicepresidenta de la Asamblea General de Socios (GAP, por su sigla en inglés), una coalición de partes interesadas que defendió la inclusión de propuestas específicas en la Nueva Agenda Urbana en nombre de la sociedad civil. Conformada por 16 grupos en los que participan desde jóvenes hasta personas de la tercera edad, desde productores rurales hasta profesionales, desde comunidades originarias hasta parlamentarios, esta organización paraguas sostiene que representa la voz de mil millones de personas de todo el mundo.

La GAP fue creada en abril de 2015 y recibió apoyo institucional y financiero de la Secretaría de Hábitat III, que utilizó fondos del Fideicomiso Hábitat III para ayudar a cubrir los gastos de viaje de los líderes de las diversas unidades constitutivas de la coalición a una serie de reuniones preparatorias en el período previo a Hábitat III.

Este año, la organización explicó cuáles eran sus intenciones a través de un documento titulado “Alianzas para la Nueva Agenda Urbana”.

Sin embargo, la GAP sufrió varios traspés en el transcurso de los cuatro meses que duraron las negociaciones políticas, en las que se fue puliendo la Nueva Agenda Urbana hasta llegar a su versión definitiva el mes pasado. Perdió dos propuestas concretas: una vinculada a la creación de un Panel Multiparticipativo sobre Urbanización Sustentable y la otra relativa a la declaración de un Decenio Internacional de la ONU de la Urbanización Sustentable. La primera habría proporcionado un mecanismo institucional mediante el cual la coalición podía profundizar sus acciones de incidencia en esta cuestión; la segunda habría ayudado a generar más conciencia sobre el tema.

No obstante, los “valiosos aportes” de la GAP han sido reconocidos como parte del legado de Hábitat III en la sección sobre “Medios de implementación” del propio documento, que sugiere que hay vida después de Quito. Según los dirigentes de la GAP, eso es exactamente lo que han planeado.

“Sin duda, debemos ampliar y fortalecer aún más esta oportunidad que tuvieron los grupos interesados de participar activamente en la Nueva Agenda Urbana”, le comentó Suri a Citiscope.

Parte del impulso de la GAP para seguir adelante surge del papel clave que tuvo en esta conferencia, donde se dedicaron más de 30 horas de reunión a tratar las lecciones aprendidas a partir de sus esfuerzos de incidencia dentro del proceso Hábitat III. Los dirigentes de la GAP también tuvieron una audiencia con el Secretario General de la ONU. Asimismo, el Secretario General de Hábitat III, Joan Clos, reconoció en una carta el papel colectivo que desempeñó el grupo y ofreció apoyo institucional para el futuro en nombre de ONU-Hábitat, el organismo en el que ocupa el cargo de director ejecutivo.

A tal fin, la GAP tiene previsto consultar a sus miembros respecto de los planes futuros, modificar su constitución según sea necesario, impulsar su inclusión en el debate que tendrá lugar el año próximo acerca del seguimiento y la revisión de la Nueva Agenda Urbana y analizar cómo se puede aplicar el modelo de la GAP en otros ámbitos de la ONU. Sus dirigentes prevén una posible GAP 2.0 para abril, cuando el Consejo de Administración de ONU-Hábitat se reúna en Nairobi.

Nueva conducción

La GAP no es la única iniciativa de la sociedad civil dedicada a las cuestiones urbanas que cuenta con el apoyo de ONU-Hábitat. Fundada en 2009, la Campaña Urbana Mundial (WUC, por su sigla en inglés) ha ido cobrando fuerza lentamente como una coalición de actores urbanos de base amplia interesada en incorporar a instituciones más que a particulares como miembros.

Al margen de Hábitat III, la WUC eligió dos nuevos copresidentes: Rose Molokoane, de Sudáfrica, y Sandeep

Chachra, de la India. Con una larga trayectoria en la defensa de los derechos de los habitantes de los asentamientos precarios, los trabajadores informales y los pobres urbanos, este binomio aportará una voz fuerte en representación del mundo en desarrollo a los esfuerzos de incidencia de la WUC en un intento por impulsar la aplicación de la Nueva Agenda Urbana.

En alusión a la magra implementación de los resultados de las dos primeras conferencias Hábitat, Chachra, que ocupa el cargo de Director Ejecutivo de ActionAid India, le dijo a Citiscope: “Estas cosas pueden perderse si no hay un organismo activo que se movilice en torno a ellas, genere impulso, haga que los gobiernos rindan cuentas, promueva un debate público y aporte soluciones”.

Las soluciones han sido la contribución más reciente de la WUC, incluso a través de la presentación en el marco de Hábitat III de 164 “soluciones urbanas” que surgieron de una convocatoria pública realizada este año. Estas ideas, que nacen como producto del conocimiento colectivo de los socios de la WUC, se suman a la serie de numerosos eventos organizados por la propia WUC con anterioridad a Hábitat III, conocidos con el nombre de Urban Thinkers Campuses, que se desarrollaron en todas partes del mundo.

Esos encuentros -que adoptaron formas tan diversas como un té compartido en Vancouver, una fiesta en las calles de Recife o una conferencia formal en Nueva York- aportaron ideas a “The City We Want 2.0”, un manifiesto de la sociedad civil que fue entregado a tiempo para la redacción y las negociaciones de la Nueva Agenda Urbana.

La WUC tiene algunos planes concretos para el próximo año. Por ejemplo, tiene previsto convocar a una nueva ronda de Urban Thinkers Campuses, centrada en la implementación, a principios del año que viene. La idea es que esos eventos finalicen antes del Foro Urbano Mundial 9, que tendrá lugar en Kuala Lumpur en febrero de 2018 y que es considerado actualmente como un hito clave posterior a la conferencia de Quito.

Según Molokoane, que dirige un grupo de base de mujeres afiliado a Slum/Shack Dwellers International, el objetivo de la WUC es generar “proyectos que exhiban la Nueva Agenda Urbana como un documento real”.

Tal demostración plantearía un desafío sobre la cuestión de la implementación e, idealmente, instaría a los gobiernos nacionales a cumplir con su parte. “Nuestro objetivo no es sólo monitorear las políticas y el uso que le dan los Estados miembros a este documento en sus oficinas”, dijo. “Nuestro objetivo es mostrarles qué es lo que esta Nueva Agenda Urbana propone hacer en la práctica. La gente necesita soluciones”.

Presión externa

Sin embargo, no todos los actores de la sociedad civil que defendieron el proceso Hábitat III se sienten cómodos trabajando dentro del sistema de la ONU y con su apoyo institucional. La proliferación de eventos alternativos y paralelos a la conferencia oficial dejó esto bien en claro, en

especial el foro “Resistencia a Hábitat III” organizado en la Universidad Central del Ecuador.

En el evento de cuatro días que se llevó a cabo dentro de la Facultad de Arquitectura y Urbanismo de esa universidad, los asistentes debatieron sobre los derechos de acceso a la tierra, los desalojos forzosos y los materiales de construcción para los pobres de zonas rurales, temas menos comunes los que abordó, a pocos kilómetros de distancia, la conferencia sobre urbanización Hábitat III avalada por la ONU. Alumnos de izquierda en camisetas y activistas de los pueblos originarios vestidos con sus trajes tradicionales se mezclaron para hacer demostraciones de la fabricación de ladrillos de adobe y refugios de emergencia de bajo costo para ser utilizados en desastres naturales, como el terremoto que azotó la costa ecuatoriana el pasado mes de abril.

La escena trajo a la memoria el énfasis sobre las necesidades de determinados asentamientos humanos que dominó el debate de Hábitat I hace 40 años, ocasión en que se hizo hincapié en tornar viable la vida en las zonas rurales frente a la urbanización. Cuando el Secretario General de Hábitat III, Joan Clos, dijo el miércoles que ese enfoque estaba equivocado dado que millones de personas se trasladaron a las ciudades en las dos décadas siguientes a la realización de Hábitat I en Vancouver en 1976, uno de los organizadores del foro de la Resistencia a Hábitat III, Álvaro Puertas, replicó: “¿Se mudaron para vivir o para sufrir?”.

Puertas es secretario general de la Habitat International Coalition (HIC), un grupo que ha seguido de cerca los resultados de las conferencias Hábitat durante cuatro décadas. Si bien es una ONG registrada en la ONU, donde presenta informes periódicos sobre violaciones a los derechos de acceso a la tierra y la vivienda, optó por no participar en los procesos de Hábitat III con patrocinio oficial, a diferencia de la GAP. En el foro alternativo, representantes de más de 36 países aprobaron una Agenda Popular del Hábitat como alternativa a la Nueva Agenda Urbana.

“Coincidimos en la necesidad de tener ese enfoque sobre el hábitat en lugar de un foco en lo urbano”, le comentó Puertas a Citiscope mientras se escuchaban tambores y flautas de fondo que acompañaban a decenas de personas que bailaban y cantaban en una ceremonia a la Madre Tierra celebrada por un sacerdote indígena en el cierre del foro alternativo.

“Todos reconocen que, con un único abordaje urbano, en verdad se violarán los derechos a la tierra, en especial los de aquellos que viven en zonas rurales”, señaló Puertas. “¿Por qué nos presentan solamente un único futuro urbano sin ninguna otra opción? Todas estas personas están aquí para reclamar eso”.

Puertas también dijo que, de aquí en adelante, la HIC pretende respaldar “los comités populares por el Hábitat” -que ya funcionan en la Argentina, Bolivia y México- para abogar por estos temas de base, así como por los nuevos temas que la Nueva Agenda Urbana no incluye.

“La nueva agenda contiene algunos aspectos positivos, pero carece de muchas cosas”, afirmó Puertas. “No sólo los

compromisos previos de Hábitat, sino todas las cosas que cambiaron en los últimos 20 años. Por ejemplo, la guerra y la ocupación son un tema que la nueva agenda no incluye ni aborda con claridad”.

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“¿Por qué nos presentan solamente un único futuro urbano sin ninguna otra opción? Todas estas personas están aquí para reclamar eso”

El derecho a la ciudad

Un componente de la Nueva Agenda Urbana que le falta a su predecesora y cuenta con la aprobación de la HIC es “el derecho a la ciudad”. La inclusión de esas cinco palabras se debe, y no en pequeña medida, a la Plataforma Global por el Derecho a la Ciudad, una red internacional de activistas que instaron a los Estados miembros a incluir este concepto en el documento.

Ese esfuerzo también se mantendrá activo durante la fase de implementación de la Nueva Agenda Urbana, con la ayuda de comités nacionales que ya se han constituido en Colombia, la India y Kenia. La plataforma también tiene previsto lanzar una campaña orientada a temas específicos: por ejemplo, la mejora equitativa del espacio público como forma de desarrollo urbano en sintonía con los principios del “derecho a la ciudad”.

“En el ámbito internacional, tenemos previsto continuar con el proceso de internacionalización del derecho a la ciudad, en especial en el sistema global de derechos humanos, a través de la promoción de diálogos con la Oficina del Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos”, dijo Nelson Saule, coordinador de la plataforma y abogado en el Instituto Pólis de San Pablo. “Aún se debate si el derecho a la ciudad ya existe como derecho colectivo sobre la base de los tratados internacionales relativos a los derechos humanos o si es necesario contar con algún tipo de norma internacional sobre este derecho”.

Mientras los defensores de Hábitat III tienen opiniones diferentes sobre el porqué y el cómo en relación con los pasos a seguir, todos parecen comprometidos a seguir participando. En palabras de Joseph Schechla, de HIC, “como ocurre con la mayoría de las cosas, como con las políticas, las leyes y los títulos universitarios, la nueva agenda logrará tanto como lo que se propongan hacer sus socios con ella” ■

The New Urban Agenda's Road Map for Planning Urban Spatial Development: Tangible, Manageable and Measurable

Genie Birch, President, General Assembly of Partners



The New Urban Agenda highlights the need for evidence-based and practical guidance

In 2015, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Agenda set the pace for many aspects of the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable

Urban Development (Habitat III), to be held in Quito, Ecuador, from 17 to 20 October 2016. While the complete set of SDGs is important for Habitat III, Goal 11, “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”, with seven associated targets, is especially critical because it

embraces several components that make cities and regions sustainable, including housing, transport, planning, cultural and environmental heritage, disaster risk reduction, environmental impact and public space.

The recently drafted New Urban Agenda, which Governments will

adopt in Quito, reaffirms Member States' support of all the components of Goal 11. Both parts of the outcome document—the “Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All” and the “Quito Implementation Plan for the New Urban Agenda”—clearly enunciate three priorities that will frame the successful execution of Goal 11 and the urban aspects of the other SDGs, and lead to the achievement of sustainable urbanization in the coming decades. These priorities are: having a supportive governance structure; inventing and maintaining twenty-first century planning and managing urban spatial development; and establishing sound financing mechanisms.

While the New Urban Agenda advocates pursuing these priorities with simultaneous and synergistic actions, the recommendations for city planning provide a clear road map for public and private decision-makers to tailor programmes to their particular environments. For overall guidance, they reference the *International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning*, adopted in April 2015 by the Governing Council of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). The *Guidelines* provide direction in establishing planning functions at several levels: national (e.g. connecting and balancing the system of towns and cities); metropolitan (e.g. regional economic development, rural-urban linkages, and ecosystem protection); municipal (e.g. design and protection of citywide systems of public space, capital investments in basic infrastructure, overall block layout, and connectivity); and neighbourhoods (e.g. site specific design and local urban commons).

The remaining provisions of the Agenda present several concepts for the structure and form of cities and regions. One calls for “implementing integrated, polycentric and balanced territorial policies and plans.” Here, the Member States recognize that metropolitan areas composed of settlements of different scales and functions enable people to choose from a variety of living arrangements; can provide for

the economies of scale that contribute to efficient, synergistic activities yet avoid diseconomies related to current congestion and excess densities in many places; and allow for the conservation of valuable agricultural land and ecosystem services, and the elimination of settlements in disaster-prone areas such as flood plains and steep slopes. The inclusion of “integrated” in this directive refers to providing and knitting together complementary internal systems, such as transportation, water and sanitation, housing, open space and community services within urban areas. This would improve their functioning of internal systems and similar external systems, as required by cities, towns and villages to ensure strong rural-urban synergies for the exchange of goods (e.g. food to cities) and services (health care to rural areas).

In accordance with its mandate emanating from a conference on housing and sustainable development, the New Urban Agenda places housing at the centre of its provisions. It makes a strong reference to the right to adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living established in earlier United Nations agreements, notably the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A fundamental commitment here is the promotion of security of tenure, as well as calling for basic service provisions. The Agenda also specifies the need to build mixed-income neighbourhoods, combined with an effort to ensure affordable units and address homelessness, link public transportation, accommodate vulnerable people (senior citizens, women and persons with disabilities), and deal fairly with refugees.

In addition to promoting functioning cities and regions, a major objective of the planning provisions, and of sustainable urban development on the whole, is to reduce or prevent sprawl. While urban areas only occupy approximately 2 per cent of the earth's surface, they are usually situated near bodies of water and fertile agrarian land, since large urban populations must have access to food and water. When

their populations grow, cities expand their peripheries in a fragmented and uncontrolled fashion, wreaking havoc on agriculture, threatening biodiversity and weakening ecosystem services. As a preventive measure, the New Urban Agenda calls for the use of planned urban extensions to manage urban spatial development and accommodate the growing numbers of city dwellers, whether they are rural migrants or second-generation slum dwellers. An urban extension is a large area of vacant land on the periphery that is connected to the existing city by thoroughfares, as well as transportation and water systems. Its layout features set-asides and protection of sufficient land for a serviceable street network, basic community facilities (e.g. schools and health clinics) and open recreational space; the remainder of the land is available for self-constructed housing. Naturally, slum upgrading programmes accompany urban extension programmes. The Agenda suggests arrangements for transport, water, sewers and electricity, education and health. Executing an urban extension/slum upgrading policy depends on the authorities having a supportive legal framework that would likely include the use of eminent domain and regulatory arrangements to protect public space. Furthermore, it calls for strengthening a range of financing capacities, as pronounced in the Agenda.

Member States acknowledge the need to control sprawl by including in the SDG indicators a measure of land-use efficiency, a ratio of the rate of land consumption to the rate of population growth. This data point can be used, along with per capita consumption of land, for monitoring and controlling the direction and quality of growth. Fortunately, advances in remote sensing and associated population modelling will allow urban managers to employ these measures economically and efficiently. Two examples will be unveiled at Habitat III: the joint UN-Habitat, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy and New York University Stern Urbanization Project, mapping 200 cities and their extension over time; and the

European Commission Joint Research Centre's Global Human Settlement Layer, outlining the built-up area of the world and linked with Columbia University's population grids. These tools are contributing to the growing science of cities.

Another exciting proposal that builds on the recommended urban extension/slum upgrading policies will also be announced at Habitat III: the Urban Prosperity Prize/RENEW Zones. This initiative envisions the use of circular economy techniques to link an urban extension to existing settlements. It was launched by a multiparty coalition initiated by the United States Department of State and several partners, including the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, the World Resources Institute, the design and engineering departments/schools of the University of Pennsylvania, Texas A&M University, Missouri University of Science and Technology and others. The initiative aims to incentivize ideas for decentralized, closed-loop models of spatial planning and peri-urban service provision that replace fossil energy with renewables; derive new water, biogas, and fertilizer from wastewater; and produce food and biofuel with recycled inputs, all co-generated at near net-zero waste. Each RENEW Zone would offer, within walking or cycling distance, a green space for community recreation, recycling and sanitation services, as well as a place to purchase fresh food, recycled goods, biofuels and safe drinking water. A RENEW Zone placed at the outer edge of an existing informal settlement would provide a bridge to an adjacent urban extension.

Additional planning considerations mirror Goal 11, as a close read of the New Urban Agenda reveals. In addition to the housing, transportation and planning provisions, the Agenda includes leveraging and protecting cultural and natural heritage; developing platforms for meaningful participation in decision-making; enhancing disaster risk reduction; promoting environmentally sound waste management; and providing

publicly accessible open and green space.

Finally, the breakthrough is not that the New Urban Agenda is promoting Goal 11 for its own sake, but that it serves as a means of reinforcing the Goal's principles for sustainable urban development, such as leaving no one behind; eradicating poverty; leveraging the agglomeration benefits of urbanization to engender prosperity; and promoting environmental sustainability in tangible, manageable and measurable terms. Thus, it offers strong arguments for well-planned cities and regions. Going beyond this assertion to offer many specific details, such as the smooth function of the many systems supported by effective land use and building codes, and equitable fiscal policies, the Agenda offers practical guidance for Member States seeking to take action.

While the New Urban Agenda is a Member State-generated document focused on national government roles in promoting housing and sustainable urban development, it also emphasizes the need to involve a wide range of non-governmental stakeholders in its implementation. Fortunately, the Agenda offers important encouragement in several areas. It underlines the importance of establishing national urban policies and empowering local and subnational authorities to undertake responsibilities relevant to their jurisdictions. It also recognizes the importance of involving stakeholders, including those organized under the rubrics of the traditional major groups, and further notes the importance of other innovative platforms that emerged in the Habitat III preparatory processes. While all are not named in the Agenda, they are well documented in public information sources, including official United Nations records of resolutions and statements made at meetings, academic journals and the press, represented by *Citiscopes*, *Next City* and *Cities Today*. These innovations include the use of expert-driven policy units and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments; the formation

of the General Assembly of Partners for Habitat III; the creation of 11 regional and thematic conferences; and the institution of formal stakeholder hearings.

The Agenda highlights the need for evidence-based and practical guidance, innovation, and robust science-policy interfaces in urban and territorial planning and policy formulation. It also supports institutionalized mechanisms for sharing and exchanging information, knowledge and expertise, underlining an associated need for capacity-building. Further, the Agenda calls on UN-Habitat to be a focal point for collaboration among United Nations agencies to recognize the linkages with other initiatives, including sustainable development, disaster risk reduction and climate change. Notably, it calls for an assessment of UN-Habitat to see if its work on the Agenda will require a revised mandate to undertake these responsibilities effectively. Finally, the Agenda insists that the post-Habitat III architecture build on existing platforms, such as the World Urban Forum, and calls on the General Assembly to report every four years on the progress made.

In sum, with regard to sustainable urban development and the means to achieve it, the New Urban Agenda outlines three key priorities: governance, planning and finance. It supplies amply substantive guidance on each of these topics, especially planning, without being prescriptive. The Agenda takes into account the need to invent governmental and multi-stakeholder coalitions for implementation, and recognizes the necessity to refresh and amplify the science of cities through evidence-based and practical knowledge creation and dissemination. This 24-page document is packed with ideas. It is now up to Member States to create an enabling environment for the application of this road map. While the suggested changes will take some time to implement, staying focused on the key elements, as described above, will increase the chances of making significant progress for the people who live in cities and regions around the world. ■

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