



Photo: Habitat III UN

IMPLEMENTING THE NEW URBAN AGENDA IN THE UNITED STATES

building on a firm foundation

Achieving sustainable urban development as set out in the New Urban Agenda will require integration of public policies vertically (from global to local) and horizontally (among entities at various governmental levels).

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Laying the foundation for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda

Before turning to the emerging New Urban Agenda implementation efforts, it is useful to review the preparatory processes that provided the foundation for this approach, which is essential for ensuring the achievement of the overarching goals of sustainable urban development as expressed in the New Urban Agenda (leave no one behind, ensure inclusive economies and support environmental sustainability) and is grounded in governance formulae that:

“recognizes the leading role of national governments, as appropriate, in the definition and implementation of inclusive and effective urban policies and legislation for sustainable urban development, and the equally important contributions of sub-national and local governments, as well as civil society and other relevant stakeholders, in a transparent and accountable manner.” (paragraph 15b)

The months of preparation prior to the October 2016 HABITAT III Conference held in Quito (Ecuador) offered two vehicles for Member States to receive inputs from sources outside of national contributions. Organized by the Bureau and Secretariat for the Conference, they were: 1.) Eleven conferences organized by regional and city leaders on topics such as governance, informal settlements, financing, technology, and public space. These meetings attracted attendees and speakers from multiple stakeholder groups. Each one produced a declaration on its particular concerns that fed into the drafting ideas for the New Urban Agenda. 2.) Ten policy unit papers written by 200 experts nominated by Member States and civil society organizations. These papers synthesized 22 policy papers previously submitted by UN agencies and organized around six themes (social cohesion and equity, urban frameworks, spatial development, urban economy, urban ecology and environment and urban housing and basic services). While the UN agency papers were not unusual as a similar format informing the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) Conference in 2012, the policy unit papers were an innovation because they provided an additional Non-Member State input absent in previous UN conferences (Birch 2016).

While these inputs were emerging, the Bureau and Secretariat encouraged the creation of two civic engagement platforms. The first was the Global Task Force on Local and

Regional Governments, formed in 2013, that aimed to serve as a coordination mechanism for subnational units' advocacy at UN conferences including HABITAT III. The second, the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), formed in 2015 for HABITAT III, that zeroed in on building consensus among 16 Partner Constituent Groups (PCGs) composed of the UN's nine major groups, the HABITAT Agenda Partners and others related to sustainable urban development. While each group would represent its particular concerns, GAP developed a collective vision for common areas to be included in the New Urban Agenda and how each might continue in the post-HABITAT environment, claiming competence in knowledge, advocacy, experimentation, monitoring and finance oversight.

With the completion of the preparatory processes, the Bureau and Secretariat organized a series of public hearings at UN headquarters to further enhance Non-Member State participation and exchange. The first, held in April 2016 prior to the issuance of the zero draft of the New Urban Agenda, focused on delivering the contents of the policy unit and regional and thematic conferences. The second and third, held in May and June respectively after the release



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GAP's Executive Council met with SG Ban Ki-moon and UNH ED Joan Clos at the Habitat III Conference

of the zero draft of the New Urban Agenda, consisted of testimony from more than 80 civil society representatives organized by the Global Task Force and GAP. The Member States recognized GAP speakers in the subsequent informal meetings in New York City and in Surabaya at the Third Preparatory Committee (Prep Com III) that resulted in the draft New Urban Agenda delivered at HABITAT III. In addition, the conference's co-facilitators (authors of the document) met several times with GAP representatives for substantive discussions. In the end, the New Urban Agenda strongly represents many of the views solicited through the consciously planned and carefully executed participatory practices.

In the coming months, the Global Task Force and GAP are developing implementation activities based on this preliminary work. For example, GAP PCGs are developing strategic frameworks identifying aspects of the New Urban Agenda on which to focus their own group efforts and outlining cooperative agreements with other PCGs for others. These efforts will require extensive consultation and energizing national to local activities. Further, both groups worked closely with UN-Habitat (UNH) leaders on the Action Framework for the New Urban Agenda (AFINUA), endorsed by the UNH Governing Council in May 2017.

Implementation provisions in the New Urban Agenda

Within the two-part New Urban Agenda are the "Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All" and the "Quito Implementation Plan for the New Urban Agenda".

The longer section, the Implementation Plan, has three sections, one specifying transformative commitments, one detailing elements of effective implementation and one listing items for follow-up and review.

The effective implementation section focuses on three types of activities: establishing legal frameworks based on subsidiarity (each level of government doing what it does best) accompanied by strong multi-stakeholder engagement, planning and managing spatial urban development (based on the International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning [2015]), and means of implementation (including knowledge-sharing, financing and capacity-building).

The Implementation Plan is the heart of the work that will unfold in the ensuing decades before HABITAT IV, scheduled for 2036. Along the way, the Member States will issue reports to the UN starting in 2018, and quadrennially thereafter. Other UN forums will serve as arenas for displaying implementation work including the bi-annual UNH's World Urban Forum (WUF) and the annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) on the reporting mechanism for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that will focus on SDG 11 "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" in 2018. These and other meetings dealing with such sectoral issues as health, resilience, food security that are covered in the New Urban Agenda will feature multi-stakeholder participation and will provide opportunities for the "horizontal" integration of the New Urban Agenda at the global level.

Localizing the New Urban Agenda

Translating the lofty ambitions of the goals and the specifications of the implementation provisions of the New Urban Agenda into cross-cutting programmes in the 193 countries that approved the document will occur according to their particular contexts but will require horizontal and vertical integration. In the United States, a framework for both types of implementation is present.

The federal level provides an example of both horizontal and vertical integration. In 2014, the US Department of State and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), shared responsibility for the US inputs into HABITAT III. While the State Department was in charge of the diplomatic negotiations, HUD provided substantive material for US support of the document.

As an example of horizontal integration, the two partnered federal agencies convened a national committee of 40 stakeholder groups charged with conceiving preparatory activities that would contribute to national government understanding of the work and to disseminating the federal messages to the localities and local interests back to the center. This committee developed a portfolio of projects that included publication of a supplement representing stakeholder inputs to the US national report presented to the Bureau, convening regional conferences related to specific US interests to be added to the New Urban Agenda (investing in people and communities for upward mobility, securing housing options for all and responding to change and building resilience) in Chicago, Philadelphia, Denver, Miami and El Paso. Furthermore, it organized a five-session global conversations series in Washington DC to elevate and inform discussion within the U.S. government policy community about sustainable urban development and its important global implications (for a full description of these activities see: HUD User 2016).

In the post-HABITAT III environment, the federal agencies and stakeholders are poised to build on this work. However, the US elections have resulted in a changed administration whose commitment to implementation of the New Urban Agenda is yet to be determined. But the institutional framework and human capital has been created and is ready to be deployed to support the horizontal and vertical integration of public policy.

At the local level, many groups are organizing to work vertically (state and municipal government to neighborhood) and horizontally (among governmental agencies). Of interest is emerging work occurring in New York City's HABITAT III Civil Society Working Group, a pre-HABITAT III informal organization dating from 2014.

Composed of stakeholders drawn from non-governmental organizations, academia, and professional associations, the group began as a self-appointed "host committee" to welcome visitors to New York City during the preparatory meetings (shortly after its organization, a number of activists based in other US cities joined the monthly meetings via teleconference). It soon became a channel for information exchange and advocacy with the HABITAT III Secretariat and the General Assembly of Partners (GAP).



Photo: UN-Habitat

Emilia Saiz, co chair, Local and Subnational Authorities Partner Constituent Group of GAP, at the 26th UN-Habitat Governing Council, May 2017

After the Conference, the HABITAT III Civil Society Working Group reconvened ostensibly to recap the event and to end its activities. However, they quickly decided to continue focusing on implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

After debating on the form and structure of future activities, pondering whether to sponsor a single event like an Urban Thinkers Campus or to engage in a more extended effort, they settled on the latter. They conceived a strategy of reaching out to New York City government officials, civic activists and the general public on selected topics with the actual activities to be decided through the various dialogues. They believed that the work would be granular, developed organically and tailored to conditions on the ground. However, they were clear about the overall objective: to ensure that local authorities knew about the New Urban Agenda and were working to integrate elements of it into existing efforts and/or to stimulate additional policies and programmes in support of sustainable urban development. They settled on five topics: older persons, youth, gender, food security and affordable housing around which leadership and interest existed within the working group.

A focus on older persons: a developing programme

Exemplary work relating aspects in the New Urban Agenda to New York City and its ageing urban population is being led by Katherine Kline, long-time member of the HABITAT III Civil Society Working Group and Co-Chair of GAP's Older Persons Partner Constituent Group. This brief case study delineates the work-in-progress of translating the specifics – there are twenty-seven specific references to older persons in the New Urban Agenda – to the local level. This multi-step process includes fact-finding, identification of areas of convergence among local efforts with those promoted in the New Urban Agenda, and strengthening support for public policies sympathetic to the aims of the New Urban Agenda.

To Kline's mind, many of the twenty-seven references to older persons in the New Urban Agenda were highly compatible with Age-Friendly New York City, an effort that began in 2008 based on the 2007 World Health Organization (WHO) Initiative on Age-Friendly Cities. To wit, the New Urban Agenda calls the adoption of "sustainable, people-centered, age-and gender-responsive and integrated approaches to urban and territorial development" (paragraph 15); recognizes the need "to give particular attention to addressing multiple forms of discrimination faced by (...) including older persons" (paragraph 20); promotes "age-and gender-responsible planning and investment for sustainable safe, and accessible urban mobility (...)" (paragraph 13); for older

persons' full access to basic physical and socio-economic infrastructure, including "affordable serviced land, housing, modern and renewable energy, safe drinking water and sanitation, safe, nutritious and adequate food, waste disposal, sustainable mobility, healthcare and family planning, education, culture, and information and communication technologies" (paragraph 34). It singles out older persons for special attention in transportation / mobility programmes, especially road safety (paragraph 113). It underlines the necessity of their protection against undue taxes (paragraph 134). It makes specific references to building capacity to sensitize those working with issues concerning older persons (paragraph 148) and also to strengthen and empower older persons to fully participate in public decision-making (paragraph 155). As part of this effort, it calls on national governments and other data-gathering sources to make the information available to older persons (paragraph 156). And most important, it "promotes participatory age-and gender-responsive approaches at all stages of the urban and territorial policy and planning process, from conceptualization to design, budgeting, implementation, evaluation, and review" (paragraph 92).

Armed with this guidance from the New Urban Agenda, Kline set to work to learn what New York City was doing post-HABITAT III particularly through its Age-Friendly New York City Programme begun in 2008 as part of the WHO Age-Friendly Cities Initiative. Well connected within the UN system efforts on older persons as a former volunteer representative at the UN for AARP (American Association of Retired Persons) – the largest US non-profit, non-partisan organization representing the interests of the 50+ US population which supports US Age-Friendly Communities – an affiliate of the WHO Initiative, Kline was aware of the international reach of the WHO Age-Friendly Cities Initiative. This is an advocacy effort dating from 2007 aimed at improving the well-being of all through programmes focused on those neglected aspects of urban life that specifically relate to urban ageing, such as housing, transport, health, outdoor space and community participation.

She discovered that New York City had adapted the global programme as policy, iterated in OneNYC (2013, 2015), the Mayor's strategic plan and reinforced it with partnerships with the Office of the Mayor, the New York City Council and through its partnership with the New York Academy of Medicine that have devised tangible implementation initiatives. She noted the current Mayor's reinvigoration of the city's Age-Friendly NYC Commission (established in 2010) with 22



Photo: UN-Habitat

GAP's Executive Council met in Nairobi prior to the 26th UN Habitat Governing Council to discuss their implementation strategies for the New Urban Agenda, May 2017

new commissioners added in 2015, charged with monitoring and enhancing the city's age-friendly policies (for information on the New York City Age-Friendly Cities effort see NYAM 2017)

Further, she reached out to local political leaders in the City Council and the Borough of Manhattan, finding strong support from her own council member and borough president. In the next few months, she will be working with these parties, especially with the New York Academy of Medicine to enhance advocacy, communications and programming among a wider group of stakeholders. A spring launch of Age-Friendly New York City Initiatives will include references to the New Urban Agenda.

Conclusion

As can be seen through this short essay, the US efforts toward implementing the New Urban Agenda are evolving. It is too early to do more than recount the beginning efforts, noting their origin in the preparatory processes for HABITAT III at the global, national and local levels. At the national level, the successful collaboration of the State Department and HUD began a practice of horizontal collaborative work and understanding of their respective internal and external operations. The appointment of a national committee forged

new dialogues between the federal agencies and national and local civil society. Their co-sponsored projects – the publication, regional conferences and DC Global Policy Conversations Series – demonstrated cooperative efforts across political domains, vertically and horizontally. The evolution of New York City's Civil Society Working Group from an entity with an outward view that is global to one that is looking to translate global issues locally represents an example of the first steps towards localization.

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