

Inclusion and Innovation: The Many Forms of Stakeholder Engagement in Habitat III

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Abstract

With an unprecedentedly high level of stakeholder participation, Habitat III offered many opportunities for contributions to the New Urban Agenda. This innovative and inclusive process created a strong framework for continued involvement in the subsequent implementation of the agenda. These efforts are an important and lasting part of the Habitat III legacy.

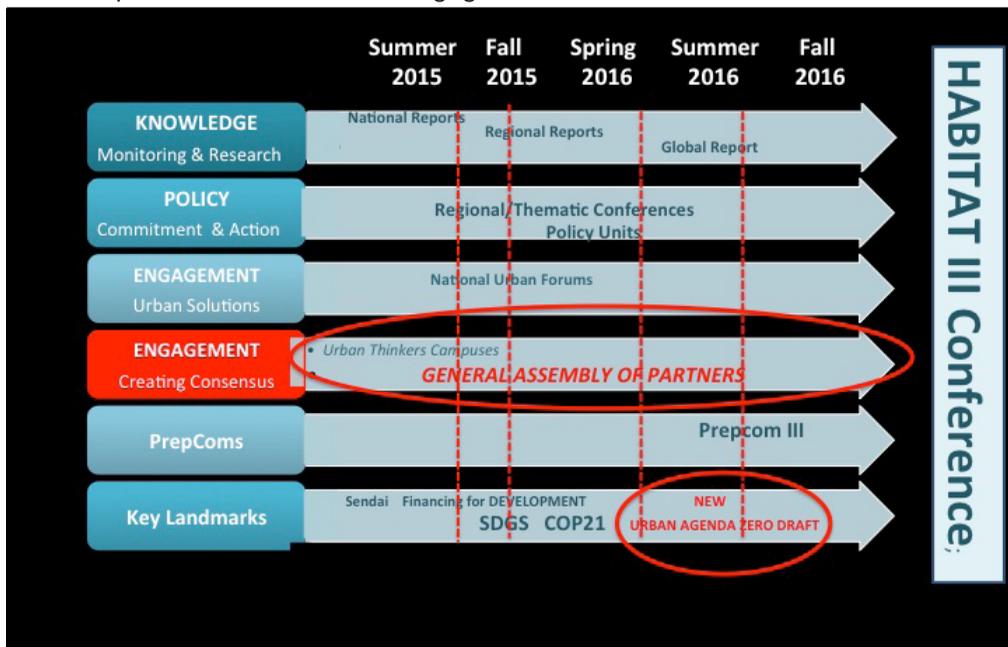
Introduction

In 2013, as the United Nations (UN) General Assembly approved the details for the Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) preparations, the member states made an explicit request to Joan Clos, the Habitat III Secretary General charged with overseeing the arrangements along with a bureau composed of representatives of 10 member states. They called for “improved participation of local authorities and other stakeholders in the preparatory process and the conference itself” (UN General Assembly, 2013: 4). Clos quickly transformed this request into an innovative, 18-month, multistep, multiparty process that involved thousands of participants in specific activities aimed at delivering a strong conference outcome. Clos also knew, as a former mayor, that if the conference was to be effective, he needed to develop a broadly accepted outcome document (named the *New Urban Agenda*) through intense and widespread involvement of many stakeholders (Scruggs, 2016a). Finally, he knew that beyond the formal commitments of the member states to the *New Urban Agenda* at Habitat III, the implementation to take place during the following two decades would require strong multiparty stakeholder participation, the foundations for which would be laid during the preparatory process.

Thus, the preparatory process developed under his direction and embedded in ongoing courses of action had three types of components: (1) knowledge sharing and reflection, (2) policy recommendations, and (3) engagement activities.¹ Each component had stakeholder involvement depending on the nature of the desired contribution to the preparations, the conference, and later implementation. The result was the involvement of thousands of participants, even before the conference that had some 30,000 attendees, whose interests were ignited for ongoing work (Scruggs, 2016b). This article provides an overview of these efforts and discusses how they constitute an important legacy on which to build strong implementation programs. It will have a special focus on the development of the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), a new engagement platform created for Habitat III. Exhibit 1 illustrates the elements of the preparatory process.

Exhibit 1

The Components of Stakeholder Engagement



Knowledge Sharing and Reflection: Stakeholders Contribute

The knowledge sharing and reflection component involved national governments and regional commissions. It asked them to evaluate their work on housing and sustainable urban development since Habitat II, sharing this evaluation with stakeholders. The United States, for example, assembled a national committee of governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders who reviewed

¹ The other ongoing processes were the Habitat III preparatory conferences held in October 2015 (New York, United States), April 2016 (Nairobi, Kenya), and July 2016 (Surabaya, Indonesia), and the UN deliberations around disaster risk reduction, financing development, sustainable development goals, and climate change.

a seven-chapter national report, largely written by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and opted to develop an annex to the U.S. report in time for the conference. In addition, the U.S. National Committee solicited U.S. aspirations to be reflected at Habitat III by convening five regional conferences and sponsoring a discussion series on global agreements in Washington, D.C., for national leaders. The National Committee met three times during the preparatory period, was invited to become part of the U.S. delegation to Habitat III, and now constitutes an organized body (open to other members) to contribute to implementation as individual organizations or collectively. Their next target will be the United Nations Programme for Human Settlements (UN-Habitat) biannual World Urban Forum (WUF), one of the monitoring mechanisms for the *New Urban Agenda*. In the past, HUD's Office of International and Philanthropic Innovation has led in organizing stakeholder contributions to WUF, a role it is likely to continue for the next convening in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2018.

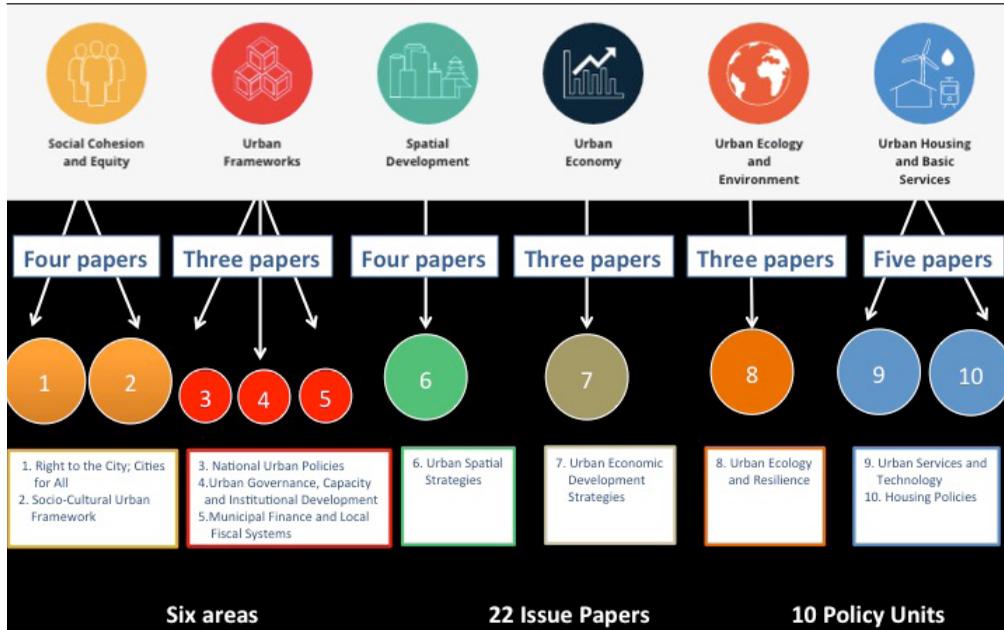
Policy Recommendations: Stakeholders Involved

To collect policy recommendations for the *New Urban Agenda*, the UN General Assembly accepted the Secretary General's plan of soliciting two official input streams derived from the Habitat III Policy Units and the Habitat III Regional and Thematic conferences. The policy unit concept was new to the UN. It brought in 200 experts nominated by the member states and civil society organizations to synthesize material from 22 issue papers written by UN staff from agencies throughout the organization. The topics for both the papers and the policy units were organized under six large headings: (1) social cohesion and equity, (2) urban frameworks, (3) spatial development, (4) urban economy, (5) urban ecology and environment, and (6) housing and basic services. Exhibit 2 illustrates this format. The policy units had a presence in official hearings held at the UN prior to the issuance of the zero draft of the *New Urban Agenda* and had special sessions at Habitat III. UN-Habitat, the coordinator of the *New Urban Agenda* implementation, now is calling on them to contribute to an emerging strategy document, tentatively entitled *Action Framework for the New Urban Agenda*, to serve as guidance for member states.

The 11 Habitat III Regional and Thematic conferences, which convened between the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2016, developed declarations that served as the second official input for the *New Urban Agenda*. Four regional conferences, sponsored by member states, took place in the Czech Republic, Indonesia, Mexico, and Nigeria. Seven thematic conferences, sponsored by local governments, took place in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (renewable energy); Barcelona, Spain (public space); Cuenca, Ecuador (intermediate cities); Mexico City, Mexico (financing development); Montreal, Canada (metropolitan governance); Pretoria, South Africa (informal settlements); and Tel Aviv, Israel (civic engagement). These meetings involved local stakeholders, thus magnifying stakeholders' ability to participate in crafting the outcome document. The momentum gained in these conferences will be integrated into the programming of the WUF through its plenary and other events.

Exhibit 2

Habitat III Issue Papers and Policy Units



Engagement Activities: Stakeholders Active in Formal Channels

To ensure representation of key stakeholder groups, the Habitat III secretariat encouraged the creation of an innovative engagement platform, the General Assembly of Partners. The idea for GAP originated in the workings of UN-Habitat’s World Urban Campaign (WUC), the members of which quickly realized that WUC, a UN-Habitat project formed to advocate that agency’s work, was not be able to act as an independent entity for a UN-wide conference. To remedy this problem, they conceived of GAP at the first Urban Thinkers Campus held in Caserta, Italy, in October 2015. They devised a constitution, consulted among the likely stakeholders, and proposed the organization at the second Habitat III preparatory conference in April 2015. As its designers intended, GAP was to emulate the UN General Assembly in structure and purpose. It was a representative body, led by a president and vice president, composed of 14 GAP Partner Constituent Groups (PCGs)—the UN’s 9 major groups recognized in 1992 at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Earth Summit), the Habitat Agenda Partners (formed after Habitat II), and other interested groups. It aimed to contribute to Habitat III and the *New Urban Agenda* by providing an official channel for stakeholder engagement and collaboration, developing and advocating for common positions, and elaborating and adopting position statements while respecting the individual differences among the PCGs. The GAP constitution called for elected co-chairs to head each PCG and an executive committee composed of the PCG co-chairs and the officers. The constitution called for GAP members to meet in plenary as a decision-making body. The UN General Assembly acknowledged GAP in its December 2015 resolution recognizing the modalities for Habitat III (UN General Assembly, 2015).

During the months prior to Habitat III, the executive committee met six times, and the GAP full membership met four times to develop its position. GAP issued two declarations—the Nairobi Declaration, presented to the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee (hereafter, the Bureau), articulating its presence and commitment to developing collective contributions to the *New Urban Agenda* and the New York Declaration, detailing GAP's intended legacy document. In May 2016, GAP issued its legacy document, *Partnerships for the New Urban Agenda*, which identified areas of contributions from the partners in the implementation of the *New Urban Agenda* (knowledge, advocacy, piloting, and innovation, and monitoring). This document became the basis for GAP interventions with member states as they developed the *New Urban Agenda*.

GAP was extremely active in the deliberations for the *New Urban Agenda* in several ways beyond promoting its partnership agreement. Its involvement increased with growing recognition of GAP by the member states. GAP representatives were official members of the drafting committees for the Habitat III Regional and Thematic conferences. GAP mounted side events at the conferences. The regional conference in the Czech Republic invited the GAP president to address the opening and closing ceremonies. Further, GAP members were well represented as individual experts in the Habitat III Policy Units. In June 2016, GAP organized the stakeholder hearings mandated by the UN General Assembly modalities in which each PCG and more than 40 stakeholders commented on the zero draft of the *New Urban Agenda*. At this time and forward, GAP had multiple, lengthy meetings with the Bureau and co-facilitators (UN ambassadors charged with assembling the final drafts of the *New Urban Agenda*). GAP PCG chairs were recognized to make statements at the informal meetings held in New York City in May and June and at the Third Preparatory Committee of the Habitat III Conference. Throughout this time, GAP increased the number of PCGs, adding one recognizing older persons and another recognizing persons with disabilities; its membership exploded, rising from about 100 at its formation in April 2015 to more than 1,200 unique organizations and individual members in September 2016. Overall, its membership encompassed 58,000 networks and had an outreach in the millions.

For Habitat III, GAP was quite visible. It organized 16 roundtables and 4 assemblies, with the president's and vice president's speeches included in the opening and closing ceremonies. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon met privately with the GAP Executive Committee. In an analysis of the *New Urban Agenda*, GAP identified 20 paragraphs in which its interventions on behalf of knowledge, advocacy, innovation, and monitoring were present. Each PCG, in similar analyses, found many areas of support for their respective interests. Finally, the *New Urban Agenda* recognized GAP by name.

GAP was originally intended to be a short-term project, to self-extinguish with the end of the Habitat III Conference, as reflected in its constitution. However, at its Fifth Plenary meeting, held at the Habitat III Conference, its members decided otherwise. Encouraged by the Habitat III Secretary General to capitalize on the positive momentum generated in the preparatory process and at the conference, and by a sense of accomplishment as enumerated previously, they voted to extend the GAP's life into the *New Urban Agenda* implementation stage.

Currently, GAP leadership is engaged in the adaptation process. Its executive committee met in January 2017 in New York City, where they hammered out the revised constitution and pledged to

develop focused strategic implementation frameworks built on intra- and inter-PCG relationships and commitments. A follow-up meeting held in New York City in April yielded the final program that was approved at GAP's Sixth Plenary prior to UN-Habitat's Governing Council meeting in Nairobi in May 2017. Forster (2017) underlined the importance of the ongoing GAP work.

Although GAP organized the 16 PCGs, it was not the only stakeholder activity recognized in the Habitat III preparations and conference. Notably, the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments—which formed in 2013 to offer a platform for subnational governments at UN conferences, represents thousands of localities throughout the world, and drives its messages straight to the community level—was extremely active. It participated in the Habitat III Regional and Thematic conferences; co-chaired one of the Habitat III Policy Units; organized the mandated hearing for mayors, county, and provincial leaders to comment on the zero draft in May; and put together a roundtable and the multiday Second Global Assembly of Local and Regional Authorities toward Habitat III. It is now engaged in multiple follow-up activities around the *New Urban Agenda*. For example, it brought mayors to the 61st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March to discuss the *New Urban Agenda* and will continue to do so in UN meetings related to urbanization and sustainable development throughout this year.

Conclusion: The Many Forms of Stakeholder Involvement

The many entry points for stakeholder involvement is a hallmark of Habitat III, born out of the desire to mobilize strength for the implementation of the *New Urban Agenda*. Its predecessors, Habitat I and II, did not support the extensive preparatory experiences demonstrated by Habitat III. The creation of the Habitat III Policy Units and their work in developing one of two official input streams to the *New Urban Agenda*, the organization of Habitat III Regional and Thematic conferences with drafting committees empowered by recognition as the other official input stream to the *New Urban Agenda*, were innovative. As were the preparatory conference modalities that called for expert and stakeholder hearings and permitted stakeholder visibility via making statements at member state meetings. The recognition by the Bureau and the co-facilitators of stakeholders in their dialogues with stakeholders were exceedingly important in opening up Habitat III and the *New Urban Agenda* to voices beyond the member states.

Although the *New Urban Agenda* reflects these inroads, which represent greater recognition of the importance of stakeholder engagement in crafting global agreements—especially those related to cities and human settlements—the real proof of this progress is yet to come. Responsibilities will lie on both sides: the stakeholders will need to continue to engage seriously in the implementation activities, and member states will need to retain openness to these activities, distribute powers to the appropriate level of government, and engage in dialogues to make it possible. GAP represents more than 58,000 networks and the Global Taskforce of Local and Regional Governments—representing thousands of subnational governments worldwide—which lay the foundation for bringing the aspirations and commitments of the *New Urban Agenda* to the local level. The follow-up work, engaging multiparty stakeholders with all spheres of government, will need to be contextual and tailored to the localities in which it will take place. This effort will involve not only growing the number of stakeholders energized through the Habitat III, a process requiring substantial

organizational and communication skills, but also working out the allocation of tasks to the appropriate groups, governmental entities, and partnerships that will make achieving sustainable urbanization a reality. The framework exists, and energetic leadership on all sides will be necessary.

Acknowledgments

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