Concept Note and Draft Programme

Expert Group Meeting – Asia-Pacific Regional Observance of World Habitat Day 2022

3rd October 2022 from 9:30-15:30 UTC+7

Organized in person at the UN Conference Centre, Meeting Room G, Bangkok, Thailand, with online participation on zoom (link to be provided)

In English only

“Leveraging Sustainable Development Goal Localization to strengthen cities’ role in addressing interlinked crisis in the post-pandemic era to Leave No One and Place Behind”

Background information

World Habitat Day is held on the first Monday of October and launches Urban October. The day centres around the global observance, which is held in a different country each year with keynote speakers and roundtable discussions focused on a specific theme. World Habitat Day was first celebrated in 1986 in Nairobi, Kenya, with the theme ‘Shelter is my right’.

On 3 October 2022, the Global Observance of World Habitat Day, under the theme “Mind the Gap. Leave No One and Place Behind”, will look at the problem of growing inequality and challenges in cities and human settlements. This Expert Group Meeting (EGM) will in keeping with the tradition address the theme and contribute to the discussions taking place around the world.

Thematic focus and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Cities and urban areas have been at the epicentre of the COVID-19 pandemic which has drastically impacted all aspects of urban life, including public services, employment and use of the infrastructure, affecting all, but foremost the most vulnerable groups and spatially disadvantaged areas in cities.

Urbanization and sustainable development are inextricably linked. The benefits of urbanization include economic growth due to economies of scale due to greater densities, the
fostering of innovation, and higher wages and dividends. However, unplanned and unmanaged growth of cities increases congestion, urban decay, pollution, environmental degradation, and inequalities and places a burden on limited city infrastructure and resources. Unplanned urban expansions have resulted in sprawl, environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity, generation of large volumes of solid waste and increases in urban air pollution. The Asia-Pacific region is already experiencing unprecedented urban challenges that compromised the urban health, sustainability, and resilience of cities. Many local governments struggle to meet existing infrastructure, housing and services backlogs with limited resources and capacity. Affordability issues and limited supply cause a significant proportion of the urban population to reside in settlements that are under-serviced, making them more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, natural disasters, and public health emergencies. The increased demand for energy and water resources will continue to put pressure on the environment and challenge the capacities of cities to provide adequate urban services and countries to meet climate and SDG targets, especially SDG 11.

According to the UN Secretary General’s Policy Brief, COVID-19 in an Urban World, an estimated 90 per cent of all reported COVID-19 cases globally were in urban areas given their higher population levels, densities, and greater levels of local and global connectivity. COVID-19 presented a dual health and economic crisis that has significantly impacted both the survival of urban households and the sustainability and resilience of cities. In addition to the loss of life and the pressure placed on the health systems and essential workers, many cities were brought to a standstill during the COVID-19 pandemic due to lockdown measures, which had severe social and economic implications. The centrality of adequate housing, greater social protection measures for the most vulnerable, more effective urban services and infrastructure including water, transport, energy along with the effective use of technology and digital solutions, and the need to revisit urban planning and sustainable mobility to create greener and liveable cities has been brought to the forefront during the pandemic. Post pandemic, the repercussion of COVID-19 continues with many cities and countries in Asia-Pacific struggling to recover economically, with increasing food, energy and economic insecurities.

**Thematic focus**

The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) will focus on the experience of cities in developing Voluntary Local Review (VLR) reports during the global pandemic as part of the ESCAP and Penang Platform for Sustainable Urbanisation (PPSU) supported *Asia-Pacific Regional Guidelines on Voluntary Local Reviews*, as one key instrument in localisation and acceleration of SDGs in the region’s diverse municipalities. The EGM will further identify how VLRs, as well as other instruments for progress, can be leveraged within a post-pandemic era.
SDGs

The EGM will focus on achieving SDG 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, including its targets:

- By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated, and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries
- By 2030, support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning

The 169 SDG targets and 232 indicators provide a comprehensive framework for sustainable development. VLR reports serves as a tool for cities to use SDGs as a framework and identify the interlinkages between social and economic progress and environmental conservation within the context of the city and its peripheries. Progress across the 17 goals is critical for achieving SDG 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. Therefore, this EGM will unpack the interlinkages between SDG11 with the localisation of all SDGs, as well as other global agreements, such as the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

Key Focus:

The EGM will focus on the ways, means and key recommendations for cities in Asia-Pacific to deliver sustainable urban progress in meeting the SDGs and other key global agreements in the context of interlinked crisis, heightened risk, uncertainty and instability in the post pandemic era.

For more information on the EGM, please contact:

Mr. Omar Siddique, Sustainable Urban Development Section, ESCAP, omar.siddique@un.org
Draft Programme

09:30-9:40 (UTC+7) Opening

- Mr. Sangmin Nam, Director, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP
- UN Secretary General and UN-Habitat Executive Director’s Messages for World Habitat Day 2022

9:40-10:30 Presentations and discussion by ESCAP and PPSU members on good practices to recover and develop sustainable cities and communities by utilising VLRs and other local instruments for SDG acceleration.

- Mr. Curt Garrigan, Chief, Sustainable Urban Development Section, ESCAP
- Ms. Norliza Hashim, CEO, Urbanice and Chair of PPSU (tbc)
- Mr. Srinivas Popuri, Senior Human Settlements Officer, UN-Habitat (tbc)
- Ms. Bernadia Tjandradewi, Secretary General, UCLG ASPAC (tbc)

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-12:00 City experiences session on developing and implementing VLRs during and post pandemic

Moderator: Ms. Paavani Reddy, Senior SDG Localisation Advisor, ESCAP
- Mayors and/or senior local government officials participating from ESCAP supported VLR cities

12:00-13:00 Lunch Break

13:00-14:30 Breakout group discussions on overcoming persistent gaps cities are facing in localizing SDGs

Moderator: Ms. Paavani Reddy, Senior SDG Localisation Advisor, ESCAP
- Group 1: Legislative and policy reform
- Group 2: Fiscal autonomy and fiscal administration
- Group 3: Data for evidence-based policy making

14:30-14:45 Break

14:45-15:15 Discussion and reaching consensus on key recommendations
Moderator: Mr. Curt Garrigan, Chief, Sustainable Urban Development Section, ESCAP

15:15-15:30 Key conclusions by ESCAP and PPSU Chair and members
- Mr. Sangmin Nam, Director, Environment and Development Division, ESCAP
- Ms. Norliza Hashim, CEO, Urbanice and Chair of PPSU (tbc)
- Mr. Srinivas Popuri, Senior Human Settlements Officer, UN-Habitat (tbc)
- Ms. Bernadia Tjandradewi, Secretary General, UCLG ASPAC (tbc)

15:30-17:00  **Official World Habitat Day 2022 Networking Reception**

**Concrete outcomes from the EGM:**

The concrete outcome will be to provide ESCAP and its partners with inputs and renewed guidance as to how VLRs and other instruments for local policy making can be further utilised to accelerate the SDGs in Asia-Pacific cities. The inputs will feed into the regional review of SDG11 being conducted as part of the preparations for the 2023 Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development as well as the next ESCAP flagship report on cities to be launched at the 8th Session of the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-8).