

**“Regional Partners Forum @Quito+1
Strategies and Priorities to Ensure the Implementation of the NUA in Asia and the Pacific”**

**28-29 November 2017, Bangkok, Thailand
Hosted by UNESCAP and UN-Habitat during 2017 SDG Week**

CONCEPT NOTE

Background

Urbanization is a defining megatrend in the Asia-Pacific region, transforming its societies and economies while multiplying environmental challenges¹. By next year, more people living in the region’s cities than in its rural areas. By 2050, two thirds of the region’s population will live in cities. In 2014, the region had 17 of the world’s 28 megacities (cities with population of 10 million or more). Those, however, accommodate only 1 in 10 urban citizens. Over half of urban residents live in smaller cities of less than 500,000 inhabitants.²

Cities are central to national economies, and urbanization has played a vital role in economic development across the region.³ More than just major manufacturing centres, an increasing number of cities across the region are taking global leadership roles in addressing climate change, education, science, technology and innovation.

There is a significant reduction of the urban population living in slums in the region, from 44.3 per cent in 1995 to 26.9 per cent in 2014.⁴ However, of the world’s total slum population about half derives from Asia and the Pacific and the slum dweller numbers in the region have decreased in absolute numbers.

Rapid urbanization in the region resulted in strong environmental degradation, with the pressure on natural resources, the generation of waste, the exposure to pollution and disasters, and vulnerability to climate change all exponentially increased.

The global community has two bold agendas to address urbanization - the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** and the **New Urban Agenda (NUA)**.

¹ ESCAP, UNU, UN Environment and IGES (2016) *Transformations for Sustainable Development*.

² ESCAP & UN-Habitat (2015) *State of Asian and Pacific Cities Report 2015*.

³ Richard Dobbs and others, *Urban World: Mapping the Economic Power of Cities* (McKinsey Global Institute, 2011).

⁴ ESCAP statistical database, 23 February 2017. Available from http://data.unescap.org/escap_stat/.

Agenda 2030 clearly acknowledges the importance of cities in the pursuit of sustainability. Moreover, all of the 17 sustainable development goals of the 2030 Agenda have an urban dimension. Without local-level involvement, successful achievement of 65 per cent of the SDG targets will not be possible.⁵

The NUA was adopted at the third United Nations Conferences on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador in October 2016. The NUA provides a vision and a implementation roadmap for building cities that can serve as engines of prosperity and centres of cultural and social well-being while protecting the environment. The New Urban Agenda builds upon other global development agendas, such as Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Paris Agreement on Climate Change and Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development (AAAA F4D). The tenet of the New Urban Agenda is that cities and local development, if well planned and managed, can significantly contribute to national sustainable development.

The New Urban Agenda identifies several transformative commitments for sustainable urban development, i.e. Leaving No One Behind (inclusion and eliminating poverty), environmental management and resilience and prosperity through an equitable economy with decent urban work. It calls on member states to come forward with inclusive, integrated and transformative National Urban Policies and to improve the frameworks of implementation, regarding urban governance and balanced urban and territorial spatial planning. The New Urban Agenda also sets out several means of implementation, most notably regarding better financing mechanisms, more effective urban legislation, appropriate technologies and innovation, enhanced and shared knowledge and capacity as well as more and more diverse partnerships.

Governments are moving forward with the implementation of the NUA. Some have established or strengthened Habitat National Committees and/or national urban forums, with a view to strengthen multi-stakeholders partnerships and monitor the progress of the implementation. Others have started to promote localization of the NUA in tandem with 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda working in conjunction with cities and sub-nationals.

Implementation frameworks have also moved forward globally. UN-Habitat developed an Action Framework on the Implementation of the New Urban Agenda (AFINUA), which was presented to its Governing Council in May 2017. The Council requested the framework to be tested in a number of countries and to be developed in the contexts of regions, in collaboration with the UN system and a wide array of stakeholders. The regional roles for follow-up and review are also acknowledged in the NUA itself.

In this context, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) jointly convene the Regional Partners Forum as a regional contribution to this follow-up and review. The Forum also feeds into the review of SDG11 as part of the 2018 SDG review of the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, on the transformation towards sustainable and resilient societies.

⁵ Cities Alliance, “*Opportunities for the New Urban Agenda*” (2015) p. 19
<http://www.citiesalliance.org/sites/citiesalliance.org/files/Opportunities%20for%20the%20New%20Urban%20Agenda.pdf>

As the invitation letter spell out, the Partners Forum builds on recent regional inter-governmental as well as stakeholder fora and declarations, including at APUF-6, APMCHUD-6, MCED-6 and two regional stakeholder meetings.⁶

Objectives of the Regional Partners Forum

The Regional Partners Forum aims to identify the first good approaches on the implementation of the NUA and SDG localisation in the region and to jointly promote key strategies and priorities for actions. It shall produce a Partners Guidance document with strategies and priorities to better ensure the full implementation of the NUA in Asia and the Pacific.

Knowing the many complexities, challenges and the inherent diversity of urban development in the region, the Forum has the format of an intensive two-day discussion among decision-makers and prominent stakeholders in the region. For this purpose, invitations are extended to officials of national focal agencies on the NUA and the SDGs, representatives of local governments, local government associations and stakeholder organisations, as well as a number of regional thematic experts and specialists from international development partners.

The outcome will be taken forward for broader consultation at the World Urban Forum 9 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (7-13 Feb 2018) and the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development in Bangkok, Thailand (28-30 Mar 2018). The context-tested guidance will also feed into the first Global Report on the Implementation of the NUA, which is due at the next UN General Assembly session of 2018-19.

Programme Structure

- (i) Take stock on national, regional and global follow-up after the adoption of the NUA and of voluntary national reviews of SDG11 and localization of the SDGs, capturing challenges and early good approaches and practices;
- (ii) Formulate strategies and priorities to better ensure the implementation of the NUA in a coordinated way with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, through monitoring of the transformative commitments, the promotion of appropriate policy and implementation frameworks and identification of effective means of implementation.
- (iii) Promote partnerships for the further development of Regional Partners Guidance, including through partner initiatives at the occasion of forthcoming World Urban Forum 9 and the Asia Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development.

⁶ 6th Asia Pacific Ministerial Conference of Housing and Urban Development Ministers, Delhi, India, 2016; 6th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Development, Astana, Kazakhstan, 2010; Asia-Pacific Urban Forum 6, Jakarta, Indonesia 2015.

Expected outcomes

1. Draft “Partners Guidance on the NUA in Asia and the Pacific; Stakeholder strategies and priorities to ensure the implementation of the NUA in a coordinated way with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in Asia and the Pacific”;
2. A timeline for further stakeholder consultation and collaboration on strengthening the follow up and review of the NUA and SDG localisation.

Tentative agenda

1. Opening session – objectives and expected outcomes.
2. Global, regional and national updates on the implementation of NUA and localisation of the global agendas.
 - 2.1 Global and regional updates by UN-Habitat and UNESCAP
 - 2.2 National updates on implementing NUA and localisation of the SDGs by participating countries
 - 2.3 Updates and perspectives from stakeholder representatives
3. Implementing the New Urban Agenda and the urban SDGs: early good practices, common challenges.
 - 3.1 Strengthening the national enabling environment for cities: round table of NUA focal points
 - 3.2 Local partnerships for city wide SDG action: panel discussion of local governments and stakeholder representatives
 - 3.3 Financing the urban transition for sustainable development: roundtable with development financing institutions
 - 3.4 Monitoring the NUA commitments as part of SDG implementation: panel discussion of SDG focal points and regional experts
4. Towards the Partners Guidance.
 - 4.1 Introductory presentation
 - 4.2 Breakout sessions
5. Concluding Session.
 - 5.1 Milestones for preparation of regional stakeholder guidance and key regional and global processes in 2018