

**UN-Habitat input to the thematic review of the 2024 HLPF on the theme
“Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and eradicating poverty in times of multiple crises: the effective
delivery of sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions”**

This document responds to the 01 November 2023 invitation letter from the President of ECOSOC to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to provide inputs to the 2024 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). Throughout the remainder of this document, we respond to four proposed input areas from the perspective of our agency.

I. Impacts of multiple crises on the implementation of SDGs 1, 2, 13, 16 and 17 from the vantage point of your intergovernmental body.

A confluence of global crises in recent years has contributed to lagging progress on the SDGs. The five goals under review in 2024 – on poverty; hunger; climate action; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships – have been no exception to this trend. Each has, to varying extents, been hampered by crises ranging from escalating geopolitical tensions and democratic backsliding, to proliferating conflicts and displacement, to the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss.

Cities have often been at the centre of both crises and progress in implementing the SDGs¹. This makes urban actions and policies vital to the success of virtually all efforts to implement the SDGs, including for those under review in 2024. The following paragraphs provide more detail on urban linkages with each of these SDGs under review in 2024 and offer our analysis of the impacts of key crises on progress towards these goals.

Goal 1 – No poverty

The world has made substantial progress in reducing poverty over the last few decades, in large part due to continued economic growth driven by innovation and, to some extent, urbanization. Extreme poverty has steadily declined over the past three decades from approximately 38 per cent in 1990 to less than 9 per cent in 2019². At the same time, the world has continued to rapidly urbanize with the share of urban dwellers increasing from 43 per cent to over 55 per cent over this same period³. Two phenomena appear to link these two coinciding trends. First, is the historical trend of urbanization contributing to economic growth and reduced poverty in the 20th century. The mechanism for this link is strong: cities offer economic opportunities, idea exchange, and key public services such as water, electricity, health care, and education that should lift people out of poverty. However, recently some researchers have scrutinized this historical link between urbanization and poverty reduction, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa

¹ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/11/sdg_11_synthesis_report_2023.pdf

2023 SDG 11 global synthesis report: *Rescuing SDG 11 for a resilient urban planet*. UN-Habitat.

² <https://ourworldindata.org/poverty#:~:text=25%25%20of%20the%20world%20lives,in%20upper%2Dmiddle%20in%20countries>. Our World in Data & World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform (2023).

³ <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization> Our World in Data & World Bank based on data from the UN Population Division.

where the correlation has not been as strong in recent decades⁴. This leads to the second phenomenon – the “urbanization of poverty” – wherein urban poverty has increased in some sub-Saharan African countries as impoverished people have simply migrated to urban areas without reaping many of the historical development benefits⁵.

Despite the overall continued decrease in global poverty, however, the world is still off track to meet the targets of SDG 1 by 2030. Even at current rates of extreme poverty reduction, for example, the world is still likely to fall short of Target 1.1 of “eliminating extreme poverty” by reaching a rate of less than 3 per cent⁶. Meanwhile, limited data availability inhibits our ability to evaluate progress on other targets such as 1.4. on ensuring access to urban basic services (1.4.1) and legal housing, land, and property tenure (1.4.2). However, based on available proxy data and qualitative analysis, our estimate is that we are similarly off track for meeting this target as well.

While official data are not yet available, the recent crisis of proliferating conflicts is likely contributing to localized increases in poverty in conflict zones⁷. From Sudan to Gaza to Ukraine, conflicts have contributed to rapid downward economic spirals consisting of supply-chain disruptions, reduced consumer demand, and unemployment. Loss of human life and service infrastructure have furthermore contributed to reductions in urban basic services, while the destruction of homes and ongoing threats of violence have led to widespread displacement and further deterioration of housing, land, and property (HLP) tenure, largely in places where formal security of tenure and recognized rights were already limited. The resulting economic instability and HLP tenure insecurity not only mark a descent into greater poverty in these conflict regions, but also provide a substantial barrier to the investments and economic activity needed to rebuild the public services and infrastructure vital to poverty reduction.

Conflicts have furthermore, in combination with rising geopolitical tensions and anti-globalist sentiment dating back to the 2007-2008 global financial crisis, led to a continued slowing in the rate of economic globalization. This has been seen most acutely in global trade where the volumes of internationally exchanged goods and services have remained largely unchanged since 2010. In part, this could help explain why, despite continued urbanization, poverty reduction has slowed over the past decade as some goods and services have become less affordable to lower-income consumers, particularly in the Global South⁸.

Goal 2 – Zero hunger

Hunger and food insecurity have overall decreased over the last two decades, yet with a notable increase seen in years since 2015. Experts largely attribute this latest increase to crises such as

⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4123908/> The Global Pattern of Urbanization and Economic Growth: Evidence from the Last Three Decades.

⁵ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/07/chapter_3_wcr_2022.pdf
World Cities Report 2022, Chapter 3, Section 3.4. UN-Habitat.

⁶ <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/sdgatlas/goal-1-no-poverty>
World Bank

⁷ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/fragility-conflict-on-the-front-lines-fight-against-poverty> World Bank

⁸ <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/global-supply-chain-barriers-lowest-hanging-fruit>
World Bank

climate change, conflicts, trade barriers and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the short term, perhaps the biggest shock has been Russia's war in Ukraine and its disruptions to critical food and grain supply chains. This, in combination with increasing global trade barriers driven by growing geopolitical tensions and anti-globalist sentiment, has led to higher food prices that have contributed to reduced food security and nourishment among lower-income consumers, particularly in the Global South.

In the longer term, however, climate change poses perhaps the greatest threat to global food security. Extreme weather events such as wildfires, floods and droughts have already increased and pose increasing risks to agricultural outputs⁹. These risks will only become greater as these weather events continue to become increasingly frequent amidst a rapidly changing global climate. Given that cities will continue to comprise an even larger share of humanity in the coming years and decades, the urban response to both these short-term and long-term threats will become increasingly salient¹⁰.

Goal 13 – Climate action

Global climate change has continued to occur rapidly, with 2023 now being the hottest year on record¹¹. At this rate, the world is far off track in achieving either the targets of SDG 13 on climate action or the commitments under the Paris Agreement across mitigation and adaptation efforts¹².

The triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss is, of course, the greatest obstacle to achieving SDG 13. Most obviously this is because of the direct challenges of climate change, but also because of the connection between climate change and biodiversity loss. Biodiversity is essential for building the resilience of life on our planet against a changing global climate. Yet both anthropogenic climate change and rapid human expansion are currently threatening the disappearance of more than 250,000 species from our planet in a sixth, rapid mass extinction.

Cities are at the centre of both climate change and biodiversity loss. Together, cities account for more than 70 per cent of carbon emissions, making them vital to global mitigation efforts. Yet, when considering that cities also contain more 56 per cent of the global population¹³ and produce more 80 per cent of its economic output, cities also offer a model for how greater density can enable greater greenhouse-gas-efficiency and environmental sustainability¹⁴. Greater urban density and compact design can furthermore also help to prevent the loss of biodiversity by supporting the preservation of natural spaces against urban sprawl and thus support enhanced resilience against climate change.

⁹ <https://www.fao.org/3/i5188e/i5188E.pdf> *Climate change and food security: risks and responses*. FAO.

¹⁰ <https://ourworldindata.org/urbanization> Our World in Data. UN Population Division.

¹¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/01/1145457> UN WMO

¹² https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal13#progress_and_info

¹³ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/11/sdg_11_synthesis_report_2023.pdf

2023 SDG 11 global synthesis report: *Rescuing SDG 11 for a resilient urban planet*. UN-Habitat.

¹⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/urbandevelopment/overview> World Bank

Goal 16 – Peace, justice and strong institutions

The proliferation of conflicts across the globe is obviously a large barrier to peace efforts under SDG 16. Yet this is not the only crisis currently hampering progress on the goal. Democracy has been in retreat across the globe amidst declining support among voters, aided in large part by a rise in concerted, web-based misinformation campaigns¹⁵. This shifting view among voters has enabled the rise of alternative, anti-globalist politicians that have repeatedly attacked democratic institutions and the rule of law in major democracies across the Global North. Meanwhile, in the generally less democratic countries of the Global South, opportunistic autocrats have taken the opportunity to seize control amidst public apathy towards democracy, as reflected in the seven successful coups d'état or unconstitutional transfers of power that have occurred in Africa since 2020¹⁶.

Amidst this global weakening of democratic institutions in nation-states, it is unclear how local institutions have fared. A recent UN-Habitat survey of 272 cities in 96 countries indicates that participation in planning and decision-making remains limited at the local level¹⁷. Yet, despite this, some scholars and observers see cities as “reservoirs of democracy” amidst changing national political tides¹⁸. This perspective would align with the growing urban-rural political divide observed in the US and some other democracies, where the importance placed on democracy is higher among urban voters than their rural counterparts^{19,20}.

II. **Three key areas where sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions for achieving the SDGs are being effectively delivered**, especially related to the cluster of SDGs under review in 2024, bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets.

UN-Habitat and other key stakeholders are currently delivering solutions in three key areas – among others – related to the SDGs under review in 2024: (1) housing, land and property tenure; (2) urban basic services; and (3) urban climate action.

1. Housing, land and property tenure

Strong housing, land and property (HLP) tenure are the critical basis for broad social and economic stability and the avoidance of urban poverty, as reflected by SDG indicator 1.4.2. For

¹⁵ UN <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal16#overview>

¹⁶ https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-02/undp_trends_report_deck_2024.pdf
2024 UNDP Global Trends Report

¹⁷ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/11/sdg_11_synthesis_report_2023.pdf
2023 SDG 11 global synthesis report: *Rescuing SDG 11 for a resilient urban planet*. UN-Habitat.

¹⁸ <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/briefs/global-cities-as-reservoirs-of-democracy/>
Global Cities as Reservoirs of Democracy. New America.

¹⁹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/05/22/urban-suburban-and-rural-residents-views-on-key-social-and-political-issues/>
Pew Research Center

²⁰ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/00027162211070061>
The Growing Rural-Urban Political Divide and Democratic Vulnerability. Mettler, Brown.

this reason, UN-Habitat has been working on enhancing HLP tenure security through a variety of innovative solutions. Most notably has been the development and implementation of the Building and Establishment Automated Mapper (BEAM) tool as part of UN-Habitat's partnership with the UN Office for Information and Communication Technology (OICT) and HafenCity University in Hamburg in the United Nations Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities (UNITAC). The BEAM tool aims to strengthen housing and property tenure by helping cities identify rooftops in informal settlements through an automated process rooted in machine learning and artificial intelligence²¹. BEAM was first implemented in the eThekweni municipality in South Africa, where it has helped the city identify households for the provision of critical basic services and enhance tenure security, while reducing the time and cost previously needed by the municipality to map these homes manually.

Additionally, UN-Habitat has also led numerous initiatives aiming to advance HLP tenure documentation and the protection of rights through innovative fit-for-purpose land-administration tools targeting vulnerable communities, including internally displaced persons in conflict zones. These efforts, among many others, have contributed to improved institutional frameworks for land rights recognition and protection, while also fostering food security with sustainable agricultural practices and creating greater resilience to climate change.

2. Urban basic services

UN-Habitat has also led the delivery of numerous innovative solutions aimed at bolstering access to urban basic services, another key component of poverty reduction reflected in SDG indicator 1.4.1. One of the most prominent among these has been the Waste Wise Cities Tool (WaCT), an innovative monitoring methodology for SDG 11.6.1 developed by UN-Habitat, that has been applied in more than 50 cities across the Global South²². Collected data from the WaCT has been used to quantify municipal solid waste management flows through the spatiotemporal quantification of plastic pollution origins and transportation (SPOT) model developed by the University of Leeds²³. The SPOT model has since been updated to include machine-learning predictions for controlled disposal in cities across the globe. The WaCT has been globally successful in helping cities across the Global South begin to diagnose and address their key waste management problems. In Cagayan de Oro in the Philippines, for example, the WaCT has helped the city develop an action plan for marine litter and improve the delivery of waste-treatment and sanitation services to its residents.

3. Climate action

Finally, UN-Habitat has been leading a number of climate initiatives focused on both mitigation and adaptation in urban environments. The Sustainable Urban Resilience for the Next Generation (SURGe), launched by the first ministerial meeting on urbanization and climate change at COP27, has been critical in promoting local government climate action, including by supporting their role in shaping Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs). UN-Habitat has also

²¹ <https://express.adobe.com/page/kyYWPHoATpii6/> UNITAC BEAM

²² https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/11/sdg_11_synthesis_report_2023.pdf
2023 SDG 11 global synthesis report: *Rescuing SDG 11 for a resilient urban planet*. UN-Habitat.

²³ <https://unhabitat.org/wwc-tool> Waste Wise Cities Tool. UN-Habitat

supported the implementation of nature-based solutions for climate resilience in the most vulnerable communities of Lilongwe, Malawi; Honiara, Solomon Islands; and Morondava, Madagascar as part of the Resilience for Urban Poor Communities (RISE-UP) flagship programme. In Morondava, specifically, this included adapting to the impacts of storm surges and saltwater intrusion by afforesting 89 hectares of mangrove forest and desilting water channels to reduce the flood impacts on vulnerable coastal communities. In Honiara, efforts focused on slope stabilization along the riverbanks of the Mataniko River, which has in turn helped to increase the climate resilience of informal settlements.

UN-Habitat's contributions to biodiversity have included support to land-based marine plastic litter action plans in six cities and to the implementation of community and city level priority actions in the Philippines. To this end, regional workshop was held jointly with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to support replication across the region in conjunction with the Asia-Pacific Forum for Sustainable Development.

III. Three examples of **specific actions, policies and measures that are most urgently needed to effectively deliver sustainable, resilient and innovative solutions to eradicate poverty and reinforce the 2030 Agenda**, building on interlinkages and transformative pathways for achieving the SDGs.

1. Inclusive and effective multilateralism

In line with the Secretary-General's "Our Common Agenda" and the theme of the Second Session of the UN-Habitat Assembly, "A sustainable urban future through inclusive and effective multilateralism: achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in times of global crises", Member States have endorsed resolutions on "Enhancing the interlinkage between urbanization and climate change resilience" (HSP/HA.2/Res.5), "Accelerating the Transformation of Informal Settlements and Slums by 2030 ([HSP/HA.2/Res.2](#))", "Localization of the Sustainable Development Goals (HSP/HA.2/Res.6)", and "Creation of a human settlements resilience framework for early warning, foresight, risk reduction, crisis response and post crisis recovery and reconstruction" (HSP/HA.2/Res.9), calling for stronger multilevel governance systems to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs, in particular SDG 1, 11, 13 16 and 17.

2. Multilevel governance for accelerating the achievement of the SDGs

At the twenty-seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, national Governments pledged their support for the first urban initiative led by the President of the Conference of the Parties, namely the Sustainable Urban Resilience for the next Generation (SURGe) initiative, which is dedicated to enhancing urban climate action through multilevel governance, and multi-stakeholder engagement and delivery. In 2022, the Group of Seven, the Group of 20 and the Commonwealth Heads of Government emphasized the importance of cities, urbanization, and multilevel climate action for sustainable development.

3. Acting where vulnerabilities are the highest:

Cities in each country have heightened vulnerability to climate-related hazards, such as floods, droughts, and storms, while also being increasingly adversely impacted by various urban, social, economic, and political stressors. Marginalized urban populations, such as those residing in informal settlements and in urban poor communities who lack access to basic services and infrastructure, are disproportionately affected by these myriad challenges and have limited coping or adaptive capacities. In fact, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stated in its recent 6th Assessment Working Group II report on Impact, Adaptation and Vulnerability, that 3.3-3.6 billion people live in hotspots highly vulnerable to climate change. Under UN-Habitat's Flagship Programme "Resilient Settlements for the Urban Poor" (RISE UP), the agency and its partners are committed to redirect climate finance for large-scale resilience solutions to the benefit of the most vulnerable urban poor communities.

IV. Recommendations and key messages for inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF.

We offer the following key messages²⁴ for potential inclusion into the Ministerial Declaration of the 2024 HLPF:

1. **Cities are critical to achieving progress on the Agenda 2030** as they are the locus of opportunity to accelerate progress on the *five P's* of the Sustainable Development Goals: people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. Delivering on each of these areas will be increasingly determined by how well we plan and manage our cities and human settlements, the effectiveness of local action, and responses to emerging crises and opportunities.
2. **A critical predictor of the ability to pursue a healthy, productive and peaceful life is directly tied to *where* someone lives and what that place offers.** Well-planned, -managed and -governed cities and human settlements with access to sufficient resources are a potent positive force for sustainable development, but inadequate or poor planning, management, governance and investment can easily degrade quality of life
3. **The response capacity of local and regional governments to crises and threats shapes impacts globally.** The disruptive nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as more subtle recent crises such as rising geopolitical tensions and anti-globalist sentiment, are stark reminders that urban areas need to be prepared for dynamic and unpredictable futures. Likewise, the climate and biodiversity emergencies, violence and armed conflicts, inflationary pressures, displacement and other natural and human-caused disasters manifest most acutely in cities and force local governments to the forefront of the response
4. **The New Urban Agenda is a necessary accelerator for the SDGs.** It defines ways in which better planning, design, management, governance and finance will allow cities to enable the realization of the 2030 Agenda. It addresses a wide range of actions and avenues that are necessary for making cities spatially effective for sustainable development and details strategic actions necessary for ensuring that cities and human settlements support and facilitate the implementation of the SDGs.

²⁴ https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2023/11/sdg_11_synthesis_report_2023.pdf

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