



**STATEMENT  
FROM THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PARTNERS (GAP)  
ON THE  
REPORT OF THE HIGH LEVEL INDEPENDENT PANEL  
TO ASSESS AND ENHANCE EFFECTIVENESS OF UN-HABITAT  
(A71/1006- August 1, 2017)**

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*On August 28, GAP's 16 Partner Constituent Groups issued the following response to the report of the High Level Panel to Assess the Effectiveness of UN Habitat. The full statement follows this summary of key points or can be viewed on the [GAP website](#):*

**Key Points**

1. GAP welcomes the report and its emphasis on giving priority to sustainable urban development that is inclusive and fair for all.
2. GAP calls for a new urban approach based on greater knowledge and increased expertise in understanding patterns of global change especially related to global urbanization; as well as on the development of integrated, co-ordinated and participatory public policies that recognize the interdependence of the Sustainable Development Goals which must be mostly implemented at the local level.
3. GAP supports the Panel's call for broad stakeholder involvement, especially with local governments and multi-stakeholder partnerships, in the implementation of Agenda 2030 and of the New Urban Agenda. GAP notes that both the Global Task Force and the General Assembly of Partners are poised to be of assistance in promoting inclusive stakeholder efforts and partnering with UN-Habitat, other UN development agencies, and among themselves.
4. GAP is encouraged by the Panel's recommendations to create an UN-wide UN-URBAN and a new governance structure for UN-Habitat, but raises a number of questions about the functioning of the proposed entities, particularly about the inability of the Panel to propose a genuine tripartite arrangement involving local authorities and stakeholders.
5. GAP makes several observations about how UN Habitat could be more "fit for purpose" in terms of adjusting its mandate, increasing its funding, institutionalizing its support for the World Urban Forum, and better integrating its regional offices and the New York office.
6. GAP underscores the Panel's highlight of the need to address informal settlements and work systematically but, at the same time, points out that parceling out areas such as housing, municipal finance, food security etc to organizations other than UN-Habitat could be detrimental to addressing poverty, inequality and informality in cities.
7. GAP concludes with an appreciation of the hard work and consultative nature of the Panel given its tight deadline, but expresses some concerns about the methodology involved in gathering and employing evidence for the report.

*The General Assembly of Partners (GAP) supports the New Urban Agenda with its global membership of more than 1,200 unique organizations (including 58,000 networks) and several hundred individuals organized in 16 Partner Constituent Groups.*  
<http://generalassemblyofpartners.org/>



## STATEMENT

We welcome the *Report of the High Level Independent Panel to Assess and Enhance the Effectiveness of UN-Habitat* which is both frank in its assessments and clear in its recommendations. Of note, the Panel exhorts the Secretary General and the UN as a whole to focus on inclusive, sustainable urbanization as a priority matter and as a force for sustainable development; and recommends a series of mechanisms to address this concern. We also note that the Panel could have gone even further by being more ‘outward-looking’, for example, emphasizing more strongly the fact that at least 12 of the 17 SDGs will have to be implemented in cities, an interdependence that should provide a substantive rationale for determining the mandate, resources, organization and leadership of UN Habitat in the future.

We need a new urban practice and to develop it we need a new approach to urban issues in the UN, one that entails acknowledging the urgent need for more knowledge and expertise about patterns of global change and urbanization. There are many issues about the future of urbanization about which we simply do not know enough. Patterns of urban change are diverse, highly dependent on external forces, and, in some cases, surprisingly rapid. This highlights the need for the Report to call for a stronger research and monitoring function in UN Habitat and the UN system more generally.

Finally, we are most appreciative of the Panel’s suggestions for new roles for civil society in the efforts to implement the New Urban Agenda and Agenda 2030. The comments that follow reflect this appreciation.

### **We support the Panel’s key assumptions:**

#### **1 Today’s ongoing urban transition while presenting challenges is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to support sustainable development that is fair and inclusive for all.**

- a Since the urban transition will be completed in approximately fifty years, time, investment, and adequate policy frameworks are of the essence. Awareness of urban issues must be more effectively brought to the attention of member states;
- b We have less than a generation to succeed in bringing cities, metropolises, and urban ecosystems towards social inclusion, shared innovation, environment and biodiversity balance;
- c Critical global challenges (climate change, social exclusion, inequality, conflict, global unemployment, decent work deficit and mass migrations) are increasingly manifested in urban areas; we observe that many aspects of the 17 goals of Agenda 2030 are located concretely in cities;
- d While the concept of a “hard” urban/rural divide is diminishing, certain demographic characteristics are present: urban poverty and the associated increase of informality and precarious employment are rising. While rural poverty is still a problem; it is declining;
- e Sustainable urban and territorial growth and social and economic inclusion for all are inter-related – one does not exist without the other;
- f Studies by UN-Habitat have shown that urbanization should be associated with women’s prosperity, yet in practice, few women have actually benefitted from the economic growth of cities;
- g Global governance of urbanization is as urgent now as was the establishment of global governance of climate change and environmental issues thirty years ago.



- 2 **Broad and inclusive stakeholder involvement – from national to subnational to non-governmental groups – in program development, financing, execution, knowledge production, and monitoring is essential to any success in promoting sustainable development**
  - a Integrated, co-ordinated, and participative public policies informed by science policy interfaces – at national, subnational and local levels – are essential to the implementation of both the *New Urban Agenda* and *Agenda 2030*;
  - b Localization via effective and well-financed local government needs to be improved. Adequate, sustainable, accountable financing for local and regional government to invest in urban and local public services and infrastructure is a pre-condition to spur inclusive local economic development;
  - c In order to succeed, future global and local urban policies will need to include a broad array of participants drawn from governmental and non governmental groups, joined in multi-stakeholder partnerships as drivers and catalysts of future ideas and standards.
  
- 3 **The UN’s responses to these phenomena need to be organized within *Agenda 2030* with the *New Urban Agenda* serving as an implementation roadmap, one which calls for a “transversal urban perspective” in all the goals and goes well beyond SDG 11 to address the subnational, urban and territorial dimensions in all related SDGs .**
  - a UN-Habitat is a key agency in these efforts within the UN Development system. However, its role and mandate need to be clarified and strengthened. In this vein, we believe that UN-Habitat will be more fit-for-purpose, if it is better able to pose, answer, and sustain inquiry on fundamental questions about the urbanization process.

**We are encouraged by the call for UN-Urban, a UN-wide coordinating body, to provide effective guidance for the UN integration of urban issues in all of its development work and by the Panel’s proposals for UN Habitat’s governance. Yet, we have some questions about how the proposed system would function.**

- 1 UN-Urban could be transformative. However, the member states need to make sure that the appropriate collaboration, policy coordination, and integration takes place should it designate this body. This means supplying a well-defined mandate for UN-Urban and providing the adequate incentives to member states to engage in the articulation process to be led by UN-Urban, while also assuring that UN-Habitat is effectively strengthened and financed to carry out its key functions. (See below.) In creating UN-Urban, member states should build on the Habitat3 experience in bringing different agencies together through the UN Task Team (UNTT) on Habitat3 that contributed the policy reports, later commented on the drafts of the *New Urban Agenda* and has convened since the Quito meeting to discuss implementation. We also need to know what has been learned from past Habitat projects and initiatives and the other UN models: UN Water, UN Energy, and the Committee on Food Security, and from key aspects of the H3 preparatory process. Are they successful in (i) integrating their respective topics (and associated funding in the case of water and energy) across the UN development group and (ii) conveying guidance/information to the member states?
  
- 2 An alternative proposal to the UN-Urban format could be the establishment of an Intergovernmental Panel on Urban Change (IPUC) (or some such title), based upon an updated model of the IPCC for climate change. An urban UN Framework Convention on Urban Change (UNFCUC) should complement IPUC, in an even more efficient way than UNFCCC. The other strength of such a solution would be to upgrade significantly knowledge of urban issues as the

IPCC did regarding environment and climate change.

- 3 The proposed arrangement for UN-Habitat governance (as illustrated in Figure 1) is clearly a compromise, far short of a genuine tripartite arrangement involving member states, local authorities and stakeholders. If member states cannot agree to a governance structure that is not a fully authorized tripartite arrangement, then it is vital that they authorize the full inclusion of local authorities and other stakeholders at all levels through the proposed specific mechanisms. *The success of the proposed governance structure will depend on the leadership of the different components.*

**Figure 1 (from the Report)**



- a. Further, we understand the proposed organization conceptually, but are not sure how the Urban Assembly, Policy Board and CPR will align in practice.
  - i. In governance, the respective "authorities" of each need careful delineation. What lessons can be learned from other universal membership agencies?
  - ii. In overall UN organization, UNH's relationship to UN-Urban would also need careful delineation – UN-Habitat resources need to be strengthened not diminished to foster concrete actions and implementation.
  - iii. In mandate, balancing the normative and operational roles is essential – how can a group do normative work without employing the lessons of operational activities? However, this balance must be effectuated through budget allocations that support both basic data gathering and analysis to inform normative outputs, and the required monitoring, reporting, and knowledge generation/support of operational activities. The proposal to earmark some technical cooperation funds for normative activities is an interesting one and should be developed further.
- b. We have concerns about the proposed Committees of Local Government and Stakeholders. We are disappointed that the Panel did not recommend seats at the Policy Board table for local government and stakeholders.

That being said, our concerns about the committee proposal are: What would their powers be? How would the committee members be selected? How would the Committee of Local Government relate to UNACLA? With regard to the Committee of Stakeholders recommendation of five urban experts and five private sector representatives, how would these categories be defined (e.g. urban expertise lies in all of GAP's 16 Partner Constituent Groups; the term private sector refers not only to business but also to other non-publically financed groups)? We believe that it is important that the other stakeholder groups be offered an equal voice in this Committee.

Finally, we believe that any stakeholder process is not only about 'urban expertise' but about democratic, legitimate representation of non-governmental actors and social partners that cannot fit into the small number of urban experts specified. Clearly, the number of experts should be increased perhaps to 15 (as many as the number of countries within UN Security



Council) or 16 to represent GAP's 16 partner categories. In sum, it will be difficult to establish a new system that can effectively research, monitor, analyze and deliberate on urban issues as they develop in real time without the participation of a range of stakeholders well beyond the number proposed by the Panel.

- c. Highlighting local government is key and the recognition of stakeholders important. Here, we note that "urban" issues encompass metropolitan concerns worldwide and wish to highlight the need to create partnerships and coalitions that include local governments together with civil society partners in order to manage broad, complex and interconnected urban/metropolitan ecosystems. The Global Task Force and others are prepared here, as is GAP.

GAP is an agile model of organization that favors consensus building, cross-cultural and cross-sectoral work. We can see the Global Task Force (GTF) and GAP as a counterpart to UN Urban (if it should be created and funded by the member states) as well as to UN-Habitat. GAP already has members/leaders who are bridging more than one area beyond UN-Habitat e.g. the Farmers work closely with the Rome-based food agencies (FAO, IFAD AND WFP) as well as the major groups and other stakeholders coordination mechanism; the Researchers already work with UNDP, WHO, UNH (UN-UNI) ; some in the Older Persons groups are involved with WHO; and Women, especially the Huairou Commission, are active in disaster reduction and so forth.

- 4 We commend the Panel for underscoring the areas of UN-Habitat expertise (leading work "on urban planning, legislation, norms and standards, and on national urban policy, including attention to decentralization, governance and capacity building" and "on urban equity, addressing vulnerabilities and exclusion, and ensuring that informal settlements and their implications are fully recognized and addressed"). However, we would also underline the necessity of a UN Habitat mandate that encompasses managing and planning urban spatial development writ large and including attention to informal settlements as a critical part of this task. Yet, while the Panel shows UN-Habitat's linkages with other areas (health, safety, disaster preparedness and reconstruction, climate change, food security, housing finance, migration), it seems to have been too quick to parcel these out to other UN agencies without establishing whether other agencies are able to take these on effectively and with trained eye toward their dynamics in an urban context. With the exception of health and food, which are the respective mandates of WHO and Rome-based agencies (RBAs), other thematic areas mentioned above have no strong champions for urban research, monitoring, and implementation. It may not be wise to delegate them without properly thinking it through.

The H3 legacy efforts have had a focus on developing cooperative relationships through convening Expert Group Meetings to identify areas of collaboration. These meetings showed that breaking down silos is exciting BUT difficult work. Many expert groups formed during the H3 process have continued into the New Urban Agenda follow-up and preparations for 2030 agenda follow up and review<sup>1</sup>. Lastly, we recommend that the future UN Habitat connects with ISO, IEEC and other major standards and norms organizations in order to enrich the latter's technical expertise with a more holistic understanding of urban systems.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in May 2107 three expert group meetings were held on the following: UN Habitat and FAO in relation to the food security and nutrition content of the NUA to discuss the bridge between SDG 2 and SDG 11 becomes increasingly important in the urban transition ; UN Habitat and UNODC (UN Office of Drugs and Crimes) on Safe Cities; UN Habitat, OECD co-hosted a meeting on national urban policy.



- 5 We applaud the recommendation to make the World Urban Forum (WUF) a permanent event that would channel its outcomes into the Policy Board. We would also call to institutionalize these outcomes, making them the official input of the stakeholder committees to the Policy Board in order to take this meeting to a new, meaningful level. Missing in the overall report is linking WUF to the HLPF reporting (and to UN Urban if it emerges) but that can be fixed and tested in 2018 at WUF and the HLPF which will cover SDG 11 in 2018.
- 6 Strengthening the New York office is essential for bringing urban topics forward to the global geopolitical stage. The New York office needs to constantly remind member states and other UN agencies that the *New Urban Agenda* fills certain important gaps in the SDGs and provides a complementary roadmap for their localization and coordinated implementation. Such a new geography of UN Habitat would also reinforce the connection between the agency and member states, other UN agencies headquartered in New York, as well as other UN initiatives such as the Global Compact.
- 7 We agree with the suggestion that the locations of regional offices of UN-Habitat be re-evaluated in relation to the overall UN reform. We recognize that Africa and Asia will be the continent where urban growth will be concentrated in the coming decades.
- 8 We agree that UN-Habitat should take a leadership role in promoting urban equity, with an emphasis on mainstreaming women's issues, achieving gender equality, and recognizing relevant organizations in this work thus reducing the exclusion of vulnerable populations as called for in the New Urban Agenda.
- 9 One of the Panel's most insightful observations is on data – pointing out that disaggregation means more than the persistent dichotomy of urban/rural. The Panel's emphasis on the necessity of collecting sub-urban data if the world is going to deal seriously with inequality and social exclusion (or in the language of the agreements “leaving no one behind”) is just what is needed in the promotion of evidence-based research and policy. Urbanists have been calling for this kind of analysis for years -- but many economists and statisticians have not agreed. This is something a multi-stakeholder partnership could pilot and illuminate -- so much is going on in this area from the grassroots organizations with substantial local knowledge as exemplified by SDI's “Know Your City” campaigns to the researchers' pioneering work on detailed remote sensing and big data analysis. Further, we note the importance of including indigenous peoples and communities in all decision-making and implementation processes in order to incorporate their values and knowledge of ancestral practices that preserve natural resources and conserve the territories that affect their livelihoods in urban and rural environments. Finally, we observe that various groups are gathering data in isolation. They need to be brought together systematically for knowledge-sharing and capacity building for public officials and advocacy groups.
- 10 Finally, the prominence of informal settlements in the document is a critical step forward in the UN treatment of urban dynamics. GAP could be an efficient platform, contributing its PCG knowledge and experience to the development of renewed development models connecting investments in physical infrastructure with building human and social capital in cities.

A few final words on the methodology of the assessment. We are concerned about the rather thin response to the surveys and e-mailed questionnaires and the Panel's inability to visit enough field activities to understand the breadth of UN-Habitat's work and the depth of its partnerships at the local level. We also believe that findings of recent assessments such as the MOPAN Assessment (2017) could have been better reflected in the Panel's report. While documentation of the impact of



UN-Habitat's work on the lives of urban and peri-urban dwellers was not the prime purpose of this Assessment, it could have used evidence better to emphasize the UN-Habitat's strategic advantages and past and future focus areas.

Overall, GAP wishes to express its thanks to the Panel for its hard work on this report and for attempting to be as inclusive and consultative as possible in their approach. We hope that the discussions to be held at the meeting convened by the President of the General Assembly on 5-6 September in New York and subsequent consultation and decision-making events will further enhance this approach and will bring some additional perspectives to the table, and we look forward to actively participating in the same.

Signed,

- 1. Business and Industry**
- 2. Children and Youth**
- 3. Civil Society Organizations**
- 4. Farmers**
- 5. Foundations and Philanthropy**
- 6. Grassroots Organizations**
- 7. Indigenous Peoples**
- 8. Local Authorities**
- 9. Media**
- 10. Older Persons**
- 11. Parliamentarians**
- 12. Persons with Disabilities**
- 13. Professionals**
- 14. Research and Academia**
- 15. Trade Unions and Workers**
- 16. Women**
- 17. President of GAP**
- 18. Vice-President of GAP**

28 August 2017