




UN-Habitat United Nations Human Settlements Programme

برنامج الأمم المتحدة للمستوطنات البشرية
联合国人类住区规划署
Programme des Nations Unies pour les établissements humains
Programa de las Naciones Unidas para los Asentamientos Humanos
Программа Организации Объединенных Наций по населенным пунктам



MEMORANDUM

To: Senior Managers Date: 16 January 2002
Through:
From: Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka  Reference:
Executive Director
Subject: **Urban Forum**

You will find attached a note prepared by Daniel Biau on UN-Habitat Strategy for the Urban Forum.

I fully support the proposed strategy and request all managers to commit time and effort to ensure the success of the first Urban Forum. I also encourage you to mobilize all interested and qualified partners who could contribute positively to the Urban Forum.

The coordination of the teamwork required in the preparation of the Forum will be a main task of the Senior Management Board in the coming weeks. I count on the active participation of all branches of UN-Habitat in this collective undertaking.

A Strategy For the Urban Forum

Being a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty, the Urban Forum should build on the experiences of these two former bodies, which have been quite successful in mobilizing partners around Habitat priorities. The strategy of the Urban Forum should improve and update the strategies of UEF and IFUP, in relation with Habitat updated mandate and strengthened status.

1 Knowing Habitat Agenda Partners

All partner groups involved in international cooperation on shelter and urban development should play an active role in the Urban Forum. Habitat needs to know the expectations of each group in order to adopt a strategy which could both benefit from maximum support and result in a satisfactory outcome. It is envisaged that five partner groups be actively involved in the Urban Forum. Below is a political analysis of their respective positions.

1.1 National governments

The aim of the Urban Forum being to facilitate the advancement of collective knowledge among cities and their development partners, national governments should be willing to contribute from the substantive point of view. This means that government representatives should rather come from the technical side than from the diplomatic side. Ideally, they should be the managers of urban programmes in international cooperation departments and of international services in sectoral human settlements ministries.

National governments will have different expectations:

- Among OECD countries, G7 governments generally tend to under-value the development role of the United Nations. With the notable exception of the UK, G7 governments would not like to see a strong Urban Forum, their position may be similar to the position of "political NGOs" (see below), i.e. they may consider the Urban Forum as just another international meeting whose cost should be minimized. The other OECD countries are likely to be more enthusiastic and to contribute more actively, as they would expect the Urban Forum to be the think-tank that the Commission/Governing Council cannot be in view of its political decision-making dimension. Generally speaking, most OECD governments would expect a facilitating role of UN-Habitat in the Urban Forum as part of the new normative function that they have promoted since 1999;
- Among G77 countries, some governments (from East Asia and Middle East sub-regions) would certainly expect that the Urban Forum keeps a low profile, and

remains strictly “technical” as it is not an inter-governmental body. They would insist that the Urban Forum advises the Executive Director and not directly the Governing Council. A majority of developing country governments however would expect the Urban Forum to be a showcase of international cooperation opportunities and would contribute actively to the debate, with a view to influencing international programmes.

1.2 Local Authorities

Local authorities should be encouraged to be the driving force behind the Urban Forum. However their international associations are still weak in substantive terms and should be strongly supported by UN-Habitat. Only three associations are really active and have a well-organized constituency: FMCU-UTO, IULA and Metropolis, coordinated through WACLAC.

Created in January 2000, UNACLA has not been used by Habitat to its full potential due to a lack of inter-sessional follow-up. So far UNACLA has met 4 times but has not developed specific activities. The recognition of Habitat as UN focal point for local authorities by the Secretary-General in June 2001 remains rather implicit than explicit and a lot remains to be done to strengthen UNACLA and take advantage of its powerful membership.

Local authority associations will contribute to the Urban Forum, not only on agenda items directly relevant to their role but also on broader issues such as “Cities without slums” and the global campaigns. It is expected that local authorities take increasingly the lead in the future, by hosting the following sessions of the Urban Forum and financing the associated costs. Already Barcelona and Dubai have proposed to host the second (2004) and third (2006) sessions respectively. This would follow the pattern established by UEF and IFUP, which held their sessions in cities such as Dakar, Madras, Istanbul, Shanghai, Moscow, Cape Town, Recife, Florence and Marrakech.

1.3 NGOs

The world of human settlements-related NGOs is very diversified and heterogeneous. Among the main categories, one could identify the following:

- The traditional “political” NGOs, mainly from the North, created in the 70s and coordinated through HIC (Habitat International Coalition). Their impact is quite limited in the field but they are very vocal and would probably like the Urban Forum to be another (informal) gathering, critical of governmental policies and achievements and not linked to the Governing Council;
- The large humanitarian NGOs (Oxfam, Care, SCF, etc) which support sometimes shelter projects but ignore completely the UN institutional machinery. An effort should be made to bring them into the Urban Forum (the same applies to large Western Foundations such as Ford and Rockefeller);

- The new NGO networks (such as Slum Dwellers International, SDI), coordinating grass-root organizations, particularly active in Asia. Due to their practical experience and legitimacy, their participation to the Urban Forum is crucial. They probably would be motivated to influence the international agenda on issues such as fight against evictions, participation of the urban poor in decision-making, role of women in micro-credit schemes, etc;
- The Women networks, relatively powerful in terms of advocacy and lobbying. Their leaders would certainly be visible at the Urban Forum and ensure that the discussions are gender-aware and gender-sensitive;
- The small local NGOs, sometimes representing specific groups (women, youth...) or sectors (environment...) They may attend if they are involved in international cooperation programmes able to provide financial support;
- The pro-life NGOs, mainly from the USA, which try to use international conferences to promote their anti-family-planning ideology. Their presence in the Urban Forum would not be helpful.

The Urban Forum will have to take into account this variety of non-governmental actors and be as inclusive as possible. However, in case of conflictive situations, priority would have to be given to dynamic NGO networks ready to share their substantive experience.

1.4 Professionals

Professionals should play a major role in the Urban Forum as experts in shelter and urban policies and practices. They can also be seen as representing the private sector. They are relatively organized at the international level and generally supportive of UN-Habitat. Technically, their international associations are a bit conservative (more interested in master planning than in slum upgrading) but they are willing to participate in multi-stakeholder debates. They should be encouraged to contribute policy papers to the Urban Forum and may act as rapporteur in the Steering Group.

1.5 International Organizations

International organizations include multilateral and bilateral agencies. Among the multilateral agencies key players are sister UN agencies (UNDP, UNICEF, UNEP etc), the World Bank and the EU. As far as the UN system is concerned the Urban Forum should be seen as a key component of the Habitat Agenda Task Manager system. The World Bank and the EU should be prominent among the Urban Forum participants as main provider of international (technical and capital) assistance. Already the World Bank has expressed a strong interest in the Urban Forum, in relation to its involvement in the Cities Alliance. Regarding the European Commission, everything remains to be done (Habitat Brussels Office).

The bilateral agencies such as DFID, US-Aid, GTZ, SIDA etc, should not only be leading governmental delegations (see 1.1 above), they could also use the Urban Forum as a sounding board to test their policy priorities and as a platform to present their Urban Programmes. They will probably also sponsor a number of participants.

2 Proposed Strategy

Based on the above analysis of the expectations of various partners as well as resolution 18/5 of the Commission on Human Settlements and resolution 56/76 (?) of the General Assembly, it is possible to define a strategy for the Urban Forum. The proposed strategy takes into account the lessons learnt at the Second Committee of Habitat II (the Partners Committee), at the Thematic Committee of Istanbul+5 and at the various sessions of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty, both created in 1996. The strategy encompasses the objectives of the Urban Forum and the means to reach these objectives.

2.1 Objectives

The objectives of the Urban Forum should be, from the start, extremely ambitious. By involving all concerned partners, the Urban Forum should progressively become the major international think-tank on urbanization issues. Ultimately the Urban Forum could indeed become the World Urban Forum, similar to the World Economic Forum of Dawos and the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre. While initially set up by UN-Habitat, the Urban Forum should progressively be owned by the coalition of partners described in the first section of this document.

The Urban Forum should be seen as complementing the work of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat, not as competing with this policy-making organ of the United Nations. The Urban Forum should be able to make substantive recommendations, through the Executive Director, to the Governing Council. In return, the Governing Council should be able to refer substantive issues, through the Executive Director, to the Urban Forum.

2.2 Organizational arrangements

It is clear that the Urban Forum is not an inter-governmental policy-making body of the United Nations. But, in the interest of Habitat Agenda partners and of UN-Habitat in particular, the Urban Forum should be more than a biennial international conference. Because it is an advisory body to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat and a broad assembly of all partners involved in international cooperation on human settlements, the Urban Forum needs to adopt, at its first session, simple working arrangements which will affirm its legitimacy and credibility.

A lesson learnt from both UEF and IFUP is that open discussion cannot happen spontaneously and requires a well-structured framework. The organization of work proposed for the first Urban Forum responds to this requirement by adopting the dialogue

format tested on several occasions since 1996. The establishment of a Steering Group of 5 members, intended to symbolize the partnership spirit of the Forum, goes in the same direction. A major task of the first session of the Urban Forum will be to review the proposed arrangements, which should be presented by Habitat as tentative and should be subject to open discussion. In general terms, the Urban Forum will have to respect the organizational mechanisms and working methods of its constituents (such as the Cities Alliance).

2.3 Substantive partnerships

The first session of the Urban Forum needs to be Habitat-driven as Habitat Agenda partners are not yet familiar with the new body. Therefore the pre-session and post-session documentation of the first Urban Forum will have to be mainly drafted by Habitat and the organization of most dialogues will also heavily rely on Habitat human resources.

It is advisable that key partners be mobilized to contribute to the documentation (by providing comments on drafts or by producing their own papers) and to co-organize some parts of the first session. This process has already started. For instance WACLAC and SDI have been invited to jointly organize the session on "Cities without Slums", with Habitat appearing only as a supporting partner.

The general approach of Habitat should be to offer a platform to partners (including in priority local authorities and bilateral agencies) and to decentralize as much as possible the organization of specific events/dialogues. But the overall framework and a continuous quality control (at least on core Urban Forum activities) should remain under Habitat responsibility during the first session(s) of the Forum..

The agenda of the first Urban Forum is very straightforward as it includes only 5 substantive items:

- Cities and sustainable development (in preparation for WSSD) where hopefully governmental delegates will be very active;
- Role of partners, where local authorities and NGOs will take the lead;
- Cities without slums, to be organized directly by two networks of cities and slum dwellers, in conjunction with the Cities Alliance;
- The global campaigns, involving all partners of the two campaigns;
- Monitoring and assessment, of particular interest to researchers and professionals.

On each of these topics, it is very important that high-quality pre-session reports be prepared in a consultative way (i.e. with feedback and incorporated inputs from key partners and from the CPR) and that post-session summary reports be available

immediately at end of the session (i.e. on 4 May). The kind of internal reporting mechanisms used by UN-Habitat for the Commission could also be utilized during the Urban Forum as they have demonstrated their effectiveness. The report of the first Urban Forum will have to be forwarded to the preparatory committee of WSSD on 6 May 2002. It will also be made available to the Governing Council of UN-Habitat as Information Document.

2.4 Human Resources

In view of the crucial importance of the Urban Forum in positioning Habitat as the centre of excellence on shelter and urbanization issues, all professionals should put the preparation of the Urban Forum on top of their priorities. So far a number of centre-wide discussion meetings have been held (16 August, 10 September, Senior Managers Board of 26 November), in addition to many meetings at the Global Division level, to define the main features of the Urban Forum and to mobilize staff ideas and energy. However a few professionals are not yet fully committed and regard the Urban Forum as a simple expert-group meeting.

A clear message from the Executive Director is necessary to confirm, once and for all, that all managers are required to work in the same direction and devote more efforts to the preparation of the Urban Forum. In addition coordinating responsibilities and authority should be clearly spelt out, based on past experience in organizing similar events (Istanbul 1996, IFUP, UEF, Thematic Committee of Istanbul +5).

2.5 Financial Resources

As the working languages of the Urban Forum will be those of ECOSOC (E, F, S), the main cost of the first Urban Forum to Habitat will be related to translation of documentation and interpretation during the session itself. This cost (roughly USD 150,000 according to Conference Services) will have to be covered by the Foundation or by earmarked contributions. Additional expenditures may be envisaged to sponsor some participants (including prominent experts attractive to the media).

Future sessions of the Forum will not be held in Nairobi. The host city/country will finance logistical support and interpretation services. The only costs to Habitat will be those related to translation. Experience learnt from IFUP and UEF (a separate brief on this topic is under preparation) shows that with a minimal contribution from the Foundation (between USD 50,000 and 100,000), each session of IFUP or UEF has been able to attract about USD 500,000 of earmarked and parallel funding, covering also many developing country participants. The merger of UEF and IFUP will in fact result in savings for Habitat as the number of meetings will be reduced.

2.6 Timetable

Drafts of most expected reports have been prepared during November-December 2001 and reviewed by the Ag. Deputy Executive Director (see attached table of 24.12.01). They are currently circulated to selected partners for comments. They will be revised by mid-January for submission to the CPR prior to its next meeting (23.01.02). The Bureau of the CPR will soon establish a specific Working Group on the Urban Forum, probably chaired by the Ambassador of Argentina, which will discuss the institutional set-up of the Forum and look at the draft reports. Their comments will be incorporated and reports will go to Conference Services for translation into French and Spanish at the end of February. Simultaneously they will be posted on Habitat website.

By end of January a substantive brochure on the issues to be addressed by the first Urban Forum will be published by UN-Habitat to raise interest and awareness on the event. Following the positive outcome of the General Assembly, a media strategy should now be designed to ensure a good press coverage of the Forum at the international level and to present the new UN-Habitat.

To summarize the strategy:

- the Urban Forum should be promoted by Habitat as the new global think-tank on urbanization, it should focus on the real issues, sometimes controversial, of shelter and urban development in the urban millennium;
- the Urban Forum should be more than a cycle of biennial conferences, it should be the Assembly of all Habitat Agenda partners involved in international cooperation;
- the Urban Forum should be initially led by Habitat but progressively owned by a broad coalition of (governmental and non-governmental) partners;
- as per its mandate, Habitat should provide the overall framework of the Urban Forum and adequate quality control but it should also advocate substantive partnerships and promote actively a decentralization of responsibilities to leading actors (local authority associations, NGO networks, bilateral agencies...);
- Habitat should adopt a unified view on the Urban Forum and devote sufficient human and financial resources to the preparation of the first session to demonstrate its commitment;
- The Urban Forum should be publicized in relation with a media campaign on the new status of UN-Habitat.