



Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

Discussion paper

Framing, Impacts and Key Elements of the New Urban Agenda

February 2016

Cities Alliance Joint Work Programme (JWP)

This discussion paper is based on an input paper prepared by adelphi for the annual meeting of the Cities Alliance Joint Work Programme (JWP) for Habitat III. It reflects the discussions at the JWP meeting, January 2016. We hope this discussion paper will contribute to further reflections and inputs by individual members and partners.

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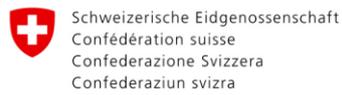
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1 Introduction

In the process of drafting the New Urban Agenda, questions regarding its form and function will be of paramount importance. This discussion has three dimensions. **Firstly, the broader framing of the New Urban Agenda needs to be discussed.** Will the New Urban Agenda reflect a clear vision on urbanization and sustainable urban development, and if so, how? How will it be linked to other international agreements? **Secondly, once the broader framing of the New Urban Agenda has been agreed upon, its specific goals and aspired impact need to be clarified.** What responses and actions should it trigger, and from which actors? And, **thirdly, the structure and content of the New Urban Agenda need to be discussed.** These should ideally be designed to create the desired framing for the Agenda, and help it achieve its specific goals and expected impact. Examples of structural characteristics relate, for example, to the role of monitoring and review mechanisms, and voluntary partnerships in the Agenda.

The following paragraphs briefly outline key debates on the New Urban Agenda related to these three dimensions.

2 Framing

How should the New Urban Agenda be framed?

As a universal agenda, a key issue with respect to the framing of the New Urban Agenda relates to the extent to which it provides clear guidance for member states, while still leaving room for adaptation to national circumstances. It is essential that the New Urban Agenda is *both* normative (with a clear vision for the cities of the 21st century) *and* action-oriented (spelling out clear guidelines and tools to help implement the normative vision). Moreover, it needs to be easily understood and translatable into concrete policy measures.

In recent decades, a slow but steady shift in thinking about cities has taken place as it has become clearer that well-managed cities can be sustainable and inclusive drivers of economic growth. Nonetheless, in some states cities are still understood primarily as a problem, and urbanization as an undesirable trend. The New Urban Agenda can play a pivotal role by *communicating the benefits of well-managed urban development*, and outlining the tools for achieving this.

However, the New Urban Agenda should do more than just emphasize that cities are *sites* of sustainable development. It should also highlight that cities (i.e. the sum of *all* urban actors, not just local authorities) are key *actors* for sustainable development and stress their pivotal role in implementing global agendas such as Agenda 2030. This necessitates a fundamental change in the way policy makers at all levels think about cities, the conditions cities need in order to fulfil these responsibilities and how they are managed. Ultimately, it means to rethink the relationship of nation states and their system of cities as such.

What should be the relationship between the New Urban Agenda, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, Agenda 2030, the Paris Agreement and the upcoming Humanitarian Summit?

Strong and practical linkages between the New Urban Agenda and other international agreements can be of mutual benefit. Considering the currently limited political commitment to and visibility of the Habitat III process, linking the NUA to other international agreements can help to strengthen the relevance of the Habitat III process and the NUA for policy makers. In turn Habitat III can make a substantial contribution to the discussion on implementing these agendas and provide a much needed impetus to trigger action.

Recently adopted agreements such as the Agenda 2030, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda (AAAA), the Paris Climate Agreement and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction will not only drive political attention, programming and spending of multilateral and bilateral donors. They also define the

direction for sustainable development which the New Urban Agenda has to build upon and *contextualize for cities*. The ambitious goals of these agendas can only be met if sufficient attention is paid to their implementation, in and by cities, in the coming years.

The linkages between Agenda 2030 and the New Urban Agenda are the most obvious, and extend well beyond the specific city Goal 11. Discussions are however also emerging regarding the role of cities and urban issues in the Paris climate agreement and the AAAA. The Paris climate agreement tries to define the role of cities and sub-national governments under the new climate regime, and their specific contributions to implementing and measuring action. In addition, COP21 has once again intensified the debate on climate finance and access to funding for cities. With its focus on cities and sub-national governments, the Lima-Paris Action Agenda in particular could provide a platform to facilitate collaboration between the NUA and the climate regime. This is even more relevant considering that the AAAA includes some references to the role of cities and local governments, but lacks concrete measures to support cities. The NUA could make a clear contribution by emphasizing the role of cities in financing development and, for instance, highlighting how the Global Infrastructure Forum called for in the AAAA could be an important platform for urban finance. It can also support the launch of additional initiatives and platforms to connect the issues of development funding and urban development.

3 Goals and expected impact of the New Urban Agenda

What should the New Urban Agenda achieve in terms of policy responses?

As outlined above, the New Urban Agenda should frame cities both as key *sites* and *actors* for sustainable development. Consequently, a priority of the Habitat III process and the New Urban Agenda should be to *gain renewed political commitment for sustainable urban development*, and catalyze concrete actions to support this. A stronger commitment to sustainable urban development can be instigated by clearly defining the role and relevance of cities in policies and frameworks, such as the intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs) towards the achievement of the objectives of the UNFCCC.

Relatedly, the New Urban Agenda should *enhance the visibility and recognition of cities* as development actors by promoting their relevance and integral role in achieving sustainable development at all levels, but particularly also at the national level. This will help to increase the willingness of states to implement enabling frameworks for urban development and to support cities in their efforts to implement concrete actions. This lays the foundation for improved vertical integration across different levels of government. Moreover, increased recognition of cities as key actors may lead to new or enhanced initiatives and global partnerships that involve a variety of stakeholders, including cities and city networks. It should also facilitate access to new (financial) resources and thus strengthen implementation capacities.

The NUA should pay greater attention to *implementation than previous agendas*. In this context, strong reporting, monitoring, and review mechanisms (MRRM) are an essential part of the agenda to guide decision-making and strengthen the agreement's inclusiveness, legitimacy and accountability. They will also help to make progress, successes and challenges visible and thus motivate decision makers to continue and even intensify their efforts to achieve sustainable urban development.

Who should the New Urban Agenda address? Who can be effectively reached by an UN-agenda?

As an agreement between UN member states, the NUA first and foremost addresses national governments. National governments are the primary decision makers in terms of establishing the national and institutional frameworks for multi-tier governance, and for setting the national developmental agenda. However, considering that the NUA concerns sustainable urban development, it needs to *include and mobilize a broad range of urban actors*, and instigate partnerships including (but not limited to) member states, civil society, private sector, scientific community and United Nations institutions. The surprisingly progressive rules that define stakeholder engagement in the Habitat III process provide a good first step to ensure that stakeholder demands will be included in the NUA, e.g. through the proposed two informal two-day hearings between civil society, local authorities and national governments. These discussions should also consider the role and share of tasks of stakeholders in implementing the New Urban Agenda.

What action, and by whom should the New Urban Agenda initiate (e.g. international cooperation – ODA, networks of cities, NGOs, philanthropy, UN System, national and local government, civil society, private sector)?

While it is too early to discuss specific responsibilities for all relevant actors before the zero-draft, some assumptions can be made about the general role of certain stakeholders. First, it is clear that *city administrations and other forms of local and even regional governments* will play a key role in the implementation of the NUA. Therefore, it is important to engage with them at an early stage, not least to generate ownership and political will to play an active role in the implementation process. Second, national governments and especially UN institutions need to provide a supportive institutional structure for city-based action and financial support. This includes designated bodies to orchestrate and coordinate action on the ground, as well as active and ongoing advocacy.

City networks will play a vital role in furthering advocacy for cities and provide much needed technical support, including capacity building for local governments. They can enable peer-to-peer learning among practitioners and strengthen coordinated action across national borders and policy frameworks. Additionally, city networks can mobilize civil society organizations, which are often reluctant to engage with government directly. A similar role can be assumed for philanthropic institutions, as their current city based initiatives are often network focused. Further, philanthropies can provide an important interface to engage the private sector, building on their experiences from various initiatives in the climate sphere (e.g. C40, What Works Cities, 100 Resilient Cities).

4 Key Elements of the NUA

What elements does the New Urban Agenda have to include to achieve the aspired goals and impacts?

Suggestions for the structure and key elements of the New Urban Agenda should be based on the desired framing, goals and expected impact of the Agenda.

Thus, the New Urban Agenda needs to formulate a *clear vision and narrative* on the future of our cities and urban development, as well as *guiding principles* that are of global relevance – both in advanced as well as emerging economies and developing countries – to provide the normative base and thematic context of the agenda. This should be laid out either in a preamble or a declaration.

The New Urban Agenda must also specify the *specific targets for the New Urban Agenda*. Where possible, these should be linked to other international agreements, such as the Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement, to increase political attention and commitment. Implementation of these targets needs to be supported by *strong monitoring, reporting and review mechanisms (MRRM)*. MRRM can support policy learning and enable policy adjustments where necessary. A collaborative, multi-level monitoring system that aggregates different existing monitoring activities and facilitates participation by a wide range of actors should be considered. The NUA should also include a sound support mechanism to incentivize member states to subject to a critical review process and help them implement commitments under the NUA. These mechanisms do not need to be elaborated in the Agenda in full detail (e.g. with a full list of indicators), but it should provide a suitable framework for MRRM.

The New Urban Agenda must also outline a *delivery framework* that provides guidance on how to transform vision into action and enables local governments and other urban actors to become effective agents of implementation. This delivery framework should be made up of three components: policy frameworks, partnerships and national action plans.

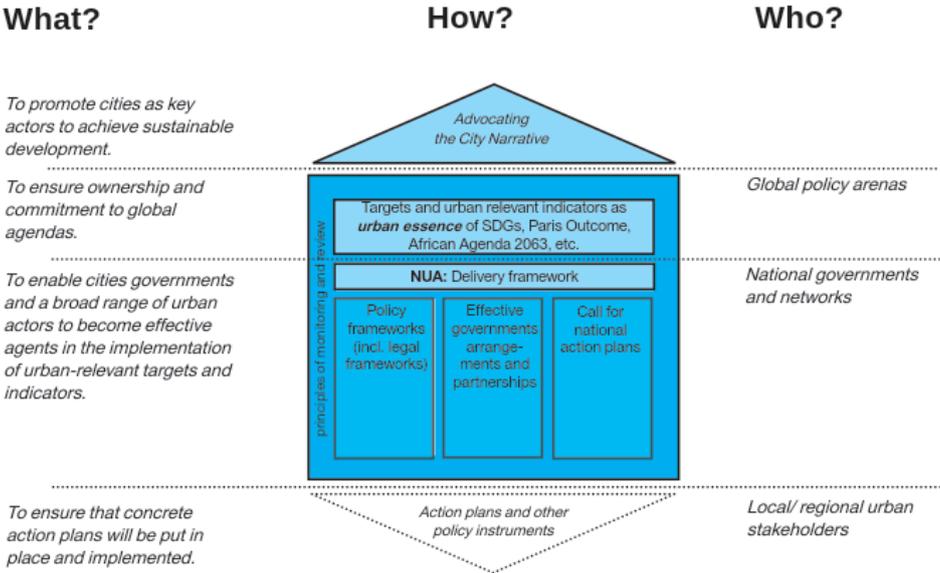
Firstly, the *policy framework* should define the necessary steps to reach certain implementation milestones, what policies are needed to address specific issues, and who is responsible for which steps.

Secondly, a further important element of the New Urban Agenda should be *multi-stakeholder partnerships*. The NUA needs to provide the foundation for a successful global network of partnerships that

mobilizes the resources and knowledge of all relevant actors for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Partnerships can also help strengthen the legitimacy and inclusiveness of an agreement.

And, thirdly, the agenda needs to emphasize the importance of *national action plans* as the main tools for implementation. These national action plans will also be a means to adapt the goals and targets of the New Urban Agenda to specific national contexts.

The diagram below summarizes the abovementioned elements for the New Urban Agenda.



Source: Prof. Dr. Philipp Misselwitz, Habitat Unit/ Technische Universität Berlin

How can the NUA inspire and motivate the UN system, national governments, cities and other stakeholders to contribute to sustainable urban development?

The New Urban Agenda has to achieve both *horizontal integration* within the UN system, as well as *vertical integration* between actors at national, subnational and local levels.

In order to inspire and motivate other actors and agencies within the UN system, the New Urban Agenda has to position *sustainable urban development as a cross-cutting issue*. The relevance of sustainable urban development for most UN activities has to be emphasized, both in written policy and strategic planning. The NUA can help other UN agencies and programs develop city focused strategies in their respective fields, thus creating ownership for the issue.

To mobilize actors, such as national governments, cities, citizens and civil society and other interest groups to contribute to sustainable urban development, it is not enough to only generate political commitment and ownership during the drafting process of the agenda, but also during the implementation phase. The abovementioned partnerships and MRRM provide opportunities to encourage engagement by these actors.

What additional messages should be included in and associated with the New Urban Agenda?

While sustainable (urban) development and cities as key actors should be the overarching framing for the NUA, a number of specific issues should also be translated into strong messages. These additional

messages address politically sensitive issues. Nevertheless, they are important to ensure the integrity and credibility of the document. Addressing these questions can also distinguish the NUA from other agendas and agreements, giving it a distinct character and adding fresh ideas to international debates.

As sustainable urban development is a global challenge, the NUA must be of universal nature, similar to the SDGs. On the one hand, this means that the agenda is applicable and relevant for all member states, effectively addressing issues in developing countries, emerging economies and developed countries alike. For this, it has to clearly *emphasize the link between urbanization, economic growth and development*.

On the other hand, being a development agenda, the NUA needs to address a large variety of actors, including the most vulnerable groups. Like its predecessors, the NUA should reaffirm member states' commitment to address inequality in urban areas as well as *citizens' rights to the city*, which can touch upon important questions of human rights. This includes equal access for all to urban services, economic opportunities and urban policymaking.

To fulfill the promises inherent in the two messages above, cities need more room to maneuver, both in terms of policy making and funding. Therefore, the NUA should *emphasize the principle of subsidiarity*, and also address issues of fiscal decentralization.

The NUA will introduce a new dimension to global policy making and the development debate, *introducing a spatial or territorial perspective*. Putting cities at the heart of the agenda will not only define them as key actors, but also as specific loci of action. In this, the NUA will differ from the Agenda 2030, which focuses more on the universality dimension of development. At the same time, the NUA should be applicable to all regions of the world, setting it apart from regional agendas such as African Union's Agenda 2063.