



This review of the New Urban Agenda is part of an analysis commissioned to IIED by Cities Alliance that aims to help a range of urban development actors understand how six global agreements can support the advancement of sustainable urban development.



International Institute
for Environment
and Development

The New Urban Agenda

[The New Urban Agenda](#) (NUA) was adopted at the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in Quito, Ecuador in October 2016. It is meant to provide the global principles, policies and standards required for sustainable urban development for the next 20 years.

The NUA has three transformative commitments: (1) Sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all, (2) Sustainable urban development for social inclusion and poverty eradication, and (3) Environmentally sound and resilient urban development.

Key components to achieve these are: (1) National urban policies for integrated, coordinated urban development; (2) strong urban governance; (3) strengthened urban and territorial planning; and (4) effective financing frameworks.

The NUA recognises the role of local and regional government, and their responsibilities are referred to in basic service provision, housing, governance, action on climate change, policy/planning, and finance. In most cases, however, it is in a subsidiary role to the 'leading' role of national governments.

The NUA does not sufficiently acknowledge how much-needed urban interventions are best planned and managed at the local level, with local finance and accountability. Although some mention is made of various platforms for partnership, it gives little attention to the importance of urban governments working with civil society – notably representative organisations and federations of urban poor groups – and the private sector.

The New Urban Agenda refers to other global agreements including the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Sendai Framework. Yet, it does not provide sufficient linkages and guidelines on how to achieve these commitments in and with cities.

Strengths

There is a great potential for the NUA to increase its relevance and leverage support from those committed to other global agreements, if it:

- Highlights the importance of local and regional governments and other local actors to achieve the different agendas, for instance, with regards to disaster risk management, climate action and building strong equitable economies;
- Outlines clearly the roles and responsibilities of local actors and necessary resources in urban areas with regards to the different commitments;
- Demonstrates how to incorporate urban issues and actors into the follow-up and review processes of the global agreements;
- Refines how urban and rural contexts differ and require different targets and treatment; and
- Operationalises the need for disaggregated data on urban areas (informal settlements in particular), which can be supported through civil-society led data gathering efforts.

In the operationalisation of implementation strategies for the NUA, narratives and linkages across international agendas should be coherent and reinforce the relevant issues on urbanisation and cities.

Challenges

Global agreements should not be assessed based only on content, but on how they catalyse and build support for action. The NUA's eventual success will depend on whether its recommendations related to the unfinished business since Habitat I, as well as to the challenges and opportunities that have emerged, are sufficient to garner commitments from civil society groups. The NUA advocates for national urban policies that result in meaningful support for and engagement with local democratic processes and equitable and sustainable urbanisation.