

# The role of National Urban Forums as multi-stakeholder platforms to accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda

Report on the Expert Group Meeting

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Virtual event co-hosted by UN-Habitat, Israel Urban Forum and Israel Ministry of Construction and Housing



MINISTRY OF  
**CONSTRUCTION  
AND HOUSING**

**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



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## ACRONYMS

DFID	Department for International Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUA	New Urban Agenda
NUF	National Urban Forum
NUP	National Urban Policy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PWDs	Persons with Disabilities
SAGE	Stakeholder Advisory Group Enterprise
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
VLRS	Voluntary Local Reviews
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WUF	World Urban Forum

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 20-21 October 2020 UN-Habitat, in collaboration with the Israel Urban Forum and the Ministry of Construction and Housing of the state of Israel, held an online Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on National Urban Forums (NUFs) and their role in accelerating implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and New Urban Agenda (NUA) in the Decade of Action.

A range of experts, many from member states with experience hosting NUFs, reaffirmed the value of the NUFs for creating and carrying forward a “common vision” of sustainable urbanisation, shared by multiple stakeholders and across levels of government. With the world still in the grip of the COVID-19 pandemic, experts noted that this “common vision” is critical for building back better and developing cities that are inclusive, green, and resilient to numerous challenges, including climate change and future pandemics.

This report summarises the proceedings of the EGM, highlighting case studies, best practices, and recommendations from experts and participants.

The EGM discussions highlighted how NUFs play a fundamental role in connecting local, regional and national governments, as well as civil society and non-government partners. Experts highlighted the pivotal role of partnerships and the importance of identifying and including relevant stakeholders (civil society, business, academics, the United Nations) to take part in NUFs, contribute to urban policy discussions, and monitor outcomes. In particular, they identified the need for governments to formalise relationships with civil society partners and for NUF hosts

to actively think about how to bring in urban actors, such as the urban poor and those living in informal settlements, who typically fall outside the “mainframe” of sustainable urban development.

The NUFs are a valuable platform for formulating, implementing, and reviewing the implementation of national urban policies, as well as communicating about policy outcomes and progress on priority areas. They provide a valuable policy feedback loop. At the same time, NUFs link with global development agendas and are critical for accelerating implementation of the NUA and SDGs.

Following the [Abu Dhabi Declared Actions](#),<sup>1</sup> produced at the Tenth Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF10), held in Abu Dhabi, UAE, in February 2020, UN-Habitat is promoting the production of action-oriented documents at NUFs, which can then be used for follow-up and review. NUFs are encouraged to produce their own Declared Actions, monitor progress on these, and share the outcomes at the biennial WUFs.

EGM participants emphasised their need, and willingness, to collaborate at the international level by sharing experiences and learning from each other about good practices for NUFs, different NUF models, and ways of building and strengthening partnerships, particularly across different levels of government. This spirit of collaboration extends to WUF11, taking place in Katowice, Poland, in 2022. Moving forward, UN-Habitat plans to promote further knowledge exchange and international collaboration between countries and cities that host NUFs through a global NUF alliance, while working within the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Insights and recommendations

- NUFs can create a “common vision” for sustainable urbanisation across levels of government and among diverse stakeholders, encouraging vertical and horizontal collaboration.
- NUFs are a platform for formulation, implementation, and review of the progress on National Urban Policies (NUPs), thus creating a policy feedback loop. To do this effectively, they cannot be one-off events and must maintain a continuous momentum.
- NUFs can be a major tool for monitoring and reporting on efforts to achieve the SDGs and the NUA in the Decade of Action. NUFs are encouraged to produce action-oriented outcome documents (e.g., NUF Declared Actions), which can be used for follow-up and review and can feed into the WUF process.
- NUFs provide opportunities to partner with key and diverse stakeholders (e.g., business, academics, professionals, civil society, government, parliament, municipalities) as well as key urban actors (e.g., communities, women, youth, the urban poor and minority groups). This applies to engagement in the NUF itself, discussions around sustainable urbanisation across levels, and for monitoring progress on implementation of the SDGs and NUA. NUF hosts need to actively seek out relevant stakeholders and consider ways of strengthening their capacity to participate.
- There is a need to encourage and strengthen civil society's ability to be actively engaged in sustainable development policy formulation and implementation. It is therefore important to have formal and legitimate representation of civil society at NUFs and in decision-making institutions.

- NUFs should be proactive and responsive to the COVID-19 pandemic as an urban crisis that also provides an opportunity to rethink cities, address inequalities, and build green, resilient and inclusive cities.
- NUFs should recognise that cities are frontline responders to the pandemic and other issues (e.g., climate migration). In most cases, collaboration across levels of government is weak. If cities want to play their frontline role it needs to be complementary to national level engagement. NUFs can help to overcome some of the barriers to collaboration, which are sometimes political.

## NUFs moving forward

The EGM reaffirmed the importance of the NUFs as an advocacy and action platform. NUFs can play a valuable role at many levels for setting a “common vision” for diverse stakeholders - particularly at the time of COVID-19 - and can help bridge political divides. They should be seen as a process and not as one-off events.

The NUFs provide an opportunity for UN-Habitat to learn about how its partners are dealing with the challenges of sustainable urbanisation. NUFs have an important role to play in the mobilisation of national, regional, and local governments and stakeholders on the road to WUF11.

In the run-up to WUF11, UN-Habitat will work to coordinate international collaboration and knowledge exchange between NUF hosts through a global NUF alliance. The aim is to support implementation of the NUA and SDGs and create synergies between local, regional, national, and global efforts toward sustainable urban development in the Decade of Action.



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