GUIDEBOOK

A GUIDE TO SETTING UP AN URBAN OBSERVATORY

UN-HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

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Introduction

In many parts of the world, lack of good quality, relevant, accessible and timely data on cities is a key element impeding progress in monitoring and reporting on global agendas such as the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and its related Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda (NUA). The lack of sound urban data also affects the formulation of evidence-based policies and designing of programs that respond to urban dynamics and related challenges. Indeed, many countries are still in need of tools and capacities to improve their data collection, validation, and reporting practices, as well as the necessary connection to policies. As a result, many urban planners and decision-makers are operating in an environment of uncertainty, allocating resources to immediate and pressing issues (reactive processes) rather than investing in progressive change over the long term.

As countries move towards increased decentralization and localized decision-making, there is need for local monitoring systems that can support tracking of progress, identification of setbacks using new approaches and techniques and supporting the formulation of evidence-informed policies. Local authorities also require periodic assessments of their state of development and accurate tools to evaluate policy outcomes and the impact of specific plans and actions. Moreover, the SDGs introduced a new reporting territorial level—the city—whereby a significant number of indicators will not only be reported at the urban and rural levels, but also at the city and sub -city levels as a unique entity of analysis. As such, effective monitoring and timely implementation of SDG 11 - *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable* - as well as other urban related SDGs requires a strong involvement from both local and

BOX 1

In September 2015, the international community recognized urbanization and city growth as a transformative force for development by endorsing a goal on cities (Goal 11)– Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, as part of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework. This goal was further reinforced by the adoption of the 2016 New Urban Agenda (NUA) in Quito—which is the urbanization action blueprint for member states, UN-Habitat and other UN agencies, civil society, communities, the private sector, professionals, and the scientific and academic community. These two complimentary frameworks are central to the achievement of the people-centered sustainable urban development goals. There are substantive linkages between SDG 11 and NUA; with the later focusing on a wide range of strategic actions necessary for making cities and human settlements vehicles of attaining sustainable development.

regional governments in data collection, analysis and reporting. Doing so requires a concerted effort to institutionalize urban development monitoring systems. As stated in the NUA, strengthening data and statistical capacities at national, subnational and local levels should be a priority to effectively monitor progress achieved in the implementation of sustainable urban development strategies and to inform decision-making and policy formulation (Art. 158). The importance of improved data collection and disaggregation was also recognized by the 2030 agenda in order to leave no one behind.

As the UN specialized agency on human settlements, UN-Habitat has been at the forefront in finding solutions to the urban information crisis, helping countries increase access to reliable information that provides insights into urban conditions and trends worldwide, and supporting the monitoring and reporting on global agendas. Specifically, the Data and Analytics Unit of UN-Habitat (formerly known as the Global Urban Observatory Unit) has been leading the development of tailor-made urban monitoring solutions to understand and measure urban development trajectories and conditions. This ranges from the development of the urban observatory model; management of the urban indicators database; the Millennium Development Goals indicators monitoring, including the design and global monitoring of slums; development of the City Prosperity Index; development and refinement of methodologies for the SDGs, among others.

This technical guide aims to describe the urban observatory model and to provide the necessary guidance on how to set up and maintain an urban observatory by local and national governments, city leaders and various stakeholders involved in monitoring, reporting and making investment and policy decisions at the local and national urban levels. This is part of UN-Habitat's efforts to provide the necessary technical support to national and city governments and meet their needs in terms of urban monitoring and data-driven decision-making processes.

THIS TECHNICAL GUIDE AIMS TO DESCRIBE THE URBAN OBSERVATORY MODEL AND TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY GUIDANCE ON HOW TO SET UP AND MAINTAIN AN URBAN OBSERVATORY BY LOCAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS, CITY LEADERS AND VARIOUS STAKEHOLDERS INVOLVED IN MONITORING, REPORTING

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