



How to Formulate a National Urban Policy

A PRACTICAL GUIDE

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How to formulate a National Urban Policy: A practical guide

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FOREWORD

It is my pleasure to present the practical guide on how to formulate a National Urban Policy.

Cities are centres of democracy, innovation, economic development and chaos. They can “make or break” the achievement of global agendas on environmental sustainability, adaptation to and mitigation of the effects of climate change, poverty reduction, and addressing hunger and socio-economic inequalities. Effective measures at global, regional, national and sub-national levels are therefore needed to ensure their success. Crucially, sustainable urbanization will require national and sub-national urban policies that can leverage the opportunities cities possess to transform them into vibrant hubs catalysing global prosperity.

The publication illustrates the process of formulating an urban policy, including who should develop and implement it, how it could be funded, its alignment with international development frameworks, and the role of the sub-national governments in its implementation. This Guide can help identify what issues and processes need to be considered to ensure that a national urban policy (1) responds to the country's development priorities, (2) is based on sound evidence, and (3) is focused on outcomes.

It also contains good practices on how to formulate policies which ensure that cities are more equitable, efficient, economically advanced, innovative, and ecologically sustainable.

This Guide comes at a crucial time; according to the joint National Urban Policy global report (2018) by UN-Habitat and OECD, 58 countries are in the earlier stages of developing a national urban policy. This Guide can be a valuable resource for such countries.



The design of an urban policy is not the only step in the process of developing a national urban policy, nor is it the final one. It is however the most important element of the process. In my experience, the way in which a policy is formulated will have a significant bearing on its success. Possibly the most important characteristic of a successful urban policy (in terms of both process and outcome) is its inclusiveness. This Guide therefore places a strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement, insisting that any national urban policy must have the “buy-in” from all stakeholders for it to be implementable.

I am confident this Guide will provide the necessary guidance needed to effectively formulate national urban policies, I wish all countries and stakeholders undertaking this exercise, the very best in their endeavours.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maimunah', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif
Under-Secretary-General
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The adoption of international agreements such as the New Urban Agenda (NUA) and the 2030 Agenda provides both a strong imperative and rationale for countries to develop and implement inclusive and participatory national urban policies (NUP) and frameworks. Adding a sense of urgency to this is that the current rate of urbanization will see 5.17 billion people living in urban areas by 2030 – up from 4.22 billion in 2018.

Urbanization has many features that can be leveraged to improve the livelihoods of all citizens – rural, peri-urban and urban. Urban areas help a country to compete and provide an opportunity to improve economic, environmental and social outcomes; but an opportunity is only realised if there is a plan in place to take advantage of it. If this does not happen, then the problems associated with urbanization – unemployment, slums, disease for example, will be the likely future scenario. It is for this reason that a national urban policy is necessary.

One of the main goals of a NUP is to achieve better wellbeing for all and to ensure nobody is left behind; this can be achieved through, for instance, poverty reduction, improved environmental conditions and climate resilience, economic development, social and spatial integration, better governance and institutional planning. This Guide provides a framework for undertaking the formulation of a NUP. It provides practical steps and a coordinated process to formulate an urban policy that adheres to five key principles: participation, inclusion, affordability, sustainability and implementability.

It is mainly aimed at those involved in urban policy formulation, implementation or review, in particular policy makers, urban development departments and ministries, but it can be of use to anyone who needs to understand or be engaged in the urban policy and implementation process.

Many governments have difficulty in formulating a NUP due to insufficient capacity, ever changing political contexts, complex relationships between government departments/ministries, and political pressures from interest groups. Consultation is key during the formulation phase to build consensus. Good policy formulation requires political will, visionary leadership, organizational know-how, effective consultative mechanisms, and good negotiating skills on the part of the ministry or department in charge of urban issues.

This Guide suggests that before starting the formulation process, it is essential that a thorough diagnosis of the urban sector is carried out, with extensive data collection, review and analysis. It is also advisable to assess the available capacity (human, financial, institutional and technical). Following this, aspects to consider in the formulation of a NUP include the selection of the lead agency, the quality of the data and information that is available, how the various stakeholders will participate, what resources are available, how the process will be coordinated, and what the context is – the needs and issues that will frame the policy.

The effectiveness of the policy and the success of its implementation depend on the quality of the formulation process; specifically, the quality of the leadership, the active, inclusive

and informed participation of all stakeholders. Extensive consultation and analysis is followed by an assessment of the policy options. The lead agency is usually the body responsible for comparing the options with each other for their feasibility, adoption and implementability, and for ensuring all stakeholders are kept informed.

There are several ways to enforce and activate a national urban policy, but it is important the recommendations and commitments are effectively integrated into the government's annual planning and budgeting and that the finalized NUP is widely shared.

The NUP's substantive content will vary enormously from country to country. This will be reflected in the country-specific urban diagnosis. Nevertheless, there are six important issues that are common to all countries: urban governance, spatial sustainability, financial sustainability, economic sustainability, social sustainability, and environmental sustainability and resilience.

Urban governance: Good urban governance must be participatory, accountable and transparent. It should be based on two pillars: a solid institutional framework and an enabling regulatory framework.

Spatial sustainability: A country should

Economic sustainability: To ensure economic sustainability and prosperity, the NUP needs to a focus on infrastructure provision and maintenance, and this requires significant public investment, close coordination between government spheres, careful phasing and continuity of interventions.

Social sustainability: Housing and adequate shelter are an integral part of a strategy to promote social inclusion, which is a main concern of a NUP and a comprehensive housing policy must look at the needs of all levels of society, while ultimately focusing on the needs of the urban poor.

Environmental sustainability: All NUPs should aim to reduce cities' environmental impacts, increase their resiliency to natural disasters and protect their population from the effects of climate change. Achieving these goals requires an integrated approach involving the planning of urban growth and public services provision, incentives for energy efficiency in business and homes, and cooperation among jurisdictions for the most efficient use of public services and infrastructure.

As with all policy-making, it is essential that policy directions and decisions are translated into actions that can achieve tangible and positive changes. During the NUP development

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