



HOUSING AT THE CENTRE

of the New Urban Agenda

H@C
HOUSING AT THE CENTRE

UN HABITAT
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



Position paper, October 2015

UN HABITAT

HOUSING & SLUM UPGRADING BRANCH

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*Photos on this page: An overview of Shanghai, China © Julius Mwelu/UN-Habitat,
A section of Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya © Julius Mwelu/UN-Habitat*

I. Introduction

The shift towards a predominantly urban world makes the process of urbanization one of the most significant global trends of the 21st century. The significant transformation that has occurred in recent decades has given greater understanding and recognition to the role of urbanization in development.

However, the issues around housing have not received sufficient attention within the urbanization process. Compounded by rapid population growth and remaining high levels of poverty, cities in the developing world are facing persistent challenges to meet their housing needs. Not only the lack of adequate housing is enormous, but in many countries the stock of vacant houses increases even when millions of people have nowhere to live. Housing affordability has become a global crisis with strong negative impact on the wellbeing of people and on the exacerbation of urban inequality. One of the worst global economic crises of last decades had housing at its epicentre, entrenched in a combination of aggressive financing and ownership models that stressed speculation over social welfare.

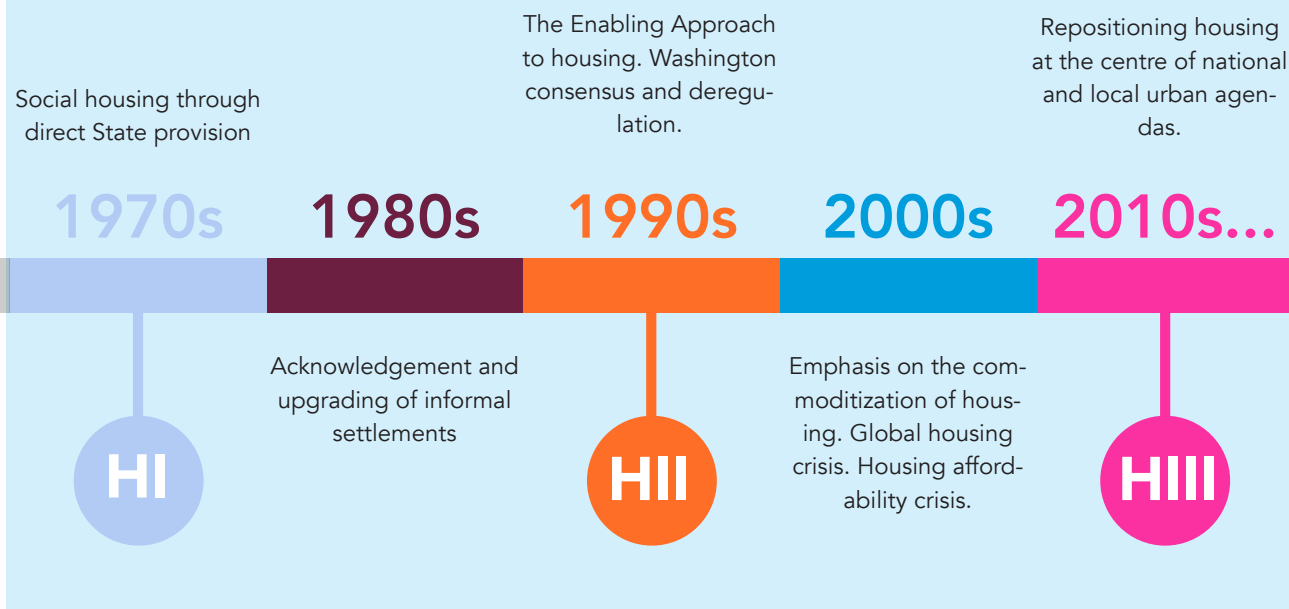
Clearly, a lot of what has gone wrong with cities is related in one way or another to housing. The way housing is being produced and consumed has shaped urban growth, regretfully, in many cases, by producing cities

that are fragmented, unequal and dysfunctional. The sustainable future of cities and the yields of urbanization will therefore strongly depend on facing and tackling the housing problems.

UN-Habitat is mandated to promote sustainable urbanization and adequate housing for all. At the core of the strategic direction of UN-Habitat's work is an increasingly accepted new vision of the role of urbanization in sustainable development. UN-Habitat has pursued urbanization as the engine of development, a transformative force which can potentially lead the world to overcome challenges related to sustainability, climate change, poverty, exclusion and inequality. With an emphasis on urban legislation, urban planning and urban economy, UN-Habitat has sought to develop an integrated framework for planned urbanization - the "Three-Pronged approach" – designed to better respond to the challenges and harness the opportunities of cities and human settlements.

Towards Habitat III, UN-Habitat has concentrated efforts to re-establish the role of housing for the future of sustainable urbanization. With that aim, it is proposing the 'Housing at the Centre' approach¹, which comes to position housing at the centre of national and local urban agendas. 'Housing at the Centre' aims to shift the focus from simply building houses to a holistic framework for

Milestones in the Global Housing Agenda



1976

Vancouver Declaration and Plan of Action

1980

Shelter, poverty and basic needs (World Bank)

1988

Global Shelter Strategy

1992

Agenda 21

1993

Enabling Housing Markets to Work (World Bank)

1996

Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements - Habitat Agenda

2000

*MDG
United Nations Millennium Declaration*

2001

Declaration on Cities and Other Human Settlements

2013

UN-Habitat Global Housing Strategy

Post 2015

SDG

2016

New Urban Agenda 'Housing at the Centre'

4 | Housing at the Centre of the New Urban Agenda

1 In its resolution HSP/GC/25/L.6, the 25th Session of the Governing Council of UN-Habitat "Takes note of the 'Housing at the Centre approach', which positions housing at the centre of national urban policies and of cities, and encourages the United Nations Human Settlements Programme and member States to consider the implementation of the Global Housing Strategy, as appropriate, including through the design of tools and mechanisms to promote inclusive housing finance at the national and local levels to bridge the housing gap and to contribute to the progressive realization of the right to adequate housing for all."

housing development, orchestrated with urban planning practice and placing people and human rights at the forefront of urban sustainable development. At the national level, the goal is to integrate housing into National Urban Policies and into UN-Habitat's strategic thinking on planned urbanization. At the local level, the approach is to reinforce the importance of housing for urban planning and concomitantly to the development of cities and people. With the 'Housing at the Centre' approach, UN-Habitat will re-establish housing problems and opportunities in the international development agenda in an increasingly strategic manner vis-a-vis the future of urbanization.

Towards the New Urban Agenda for the 21st century

The 'Housing at the Centre' approach builds on previous work UN-Habitat has been doing since the Vancouver Declaration for Human Settlements (1976), the 'Global Shelter Strategy for the Year 2000' (1988), the Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda (1996), and more recently in the framework of the 'Global Housing Strategy' (GHS). Since 2013, UN-Habitat has promoted the GHS as a collaborative movement towards adequate housing for all, based on the principle of inclusive and human rights-based cities as the foundation for sustainable urban development.² The GHS is designed to assist governments in the formulation and implementation of national housing and slum upgrading policies, contributing to increased awareness and political commitment on the important role of housing for sustainable urbanization.

The outcomes of prior summits, declarations and strategies have laid a solid foundation for sustainable urban development. The 'Housing at the Centre' approach draws on these grounds to re-establish housing as an important element of the New Urban Agenda for the 21st century.

'Housing at the Centre' approach comes to position housing at the centre of national and local urban agendas. 'Housing at the Centre' aims to shift the focus from simply building houses to a holistic framework for housing development, orchestrated with urban planning practice and placing people and human rights at the forefront of urban sustainable development.

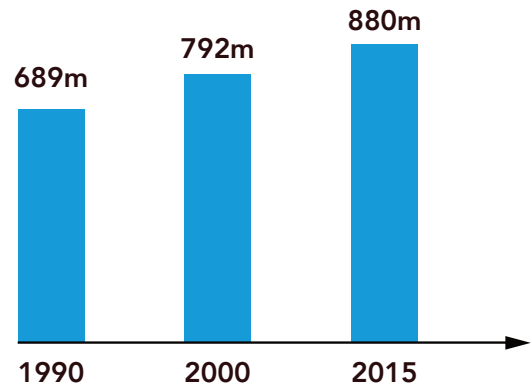


Young men make bricks out of sand to build houses in Olumogbogbo-Ama settlement, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. © Wendy Bruere/IRIN

² The Global Housing Strategy was approved at the 24th session of the Governing Council as Resolution 24/9.

6 out of 10

people expected to reside in urban areas by 2030

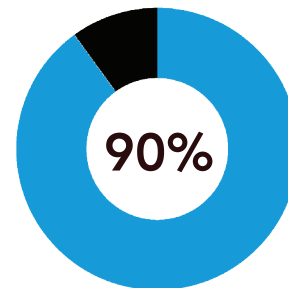


880 million

people are currently living in slums in developing countries

90 percent

of urban growth by 2030 will take place in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caibbeam



II. Why do we need Housing at the Centre?

*“For too long we have put the economy and jobs at the centre of city planning and development. People are what make cities and they would follow the jobs. It is now necessary to think about people’s needs and aspirations, including where they will live, and put them at the centre of city development”.*³ (Dr. Joan Clos, Executive Director of UN-Habitat).

Housing has been regarded as one of the most daunting challenges of urbanization, particularly conspicuous in view of the unprecedented proliferation of slums and informal settlements, manifested in cities as a result of inefficient policies and a chronic lack of adequate and affordable housing. Despite the significant efforts of some countries to improve the living conditions of 230 million slum dwellers in the last decade, the net growth of slums continued to outpace the improvement. Over 880 million people are currently living in slums in developing countries cities, up from 792 million in 2000 and 689 million in

1990⁴. The housing challenge the world is facing today is likely to persist with six out of every ten people expected to reside in urban areas by 2030. Over 90 per cent of this growth will take place in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. It is estimated that the struggle to obtain adequate and affordable housing could affect at least 1.6 billion people globally within a decade.⁵

The adoption of the 1996 Habitat Agenda marked a radical change in housing provision approaches, with governments assuming the role of enablers in housing development and backing away from direct delivery processes. However, the policies put in place in line with the ‘enabling approach’ have not led to the outcomes sought. Most governments have reduced their role in direct supply without providing enough input, planning and regulatory frameworks to allow other actors to step forward and provide adequate housing at the pace of urban population growth and at prices people could afford. With the exception of a few countries, resources and investments have been curtailed and the scope of state engagement reduced. Less government intervention in the majority of cases has resulted in fewer or no housing opportunities for the most poor and those living in vulnerable situations, such as youth, elderly, displaced persons and migrants, homeless persons and especially women in

³ <http://unhabitat.org/affordable-housing-should-be-at-the-centre-of-cities-joan-clos/>

⁴ The Millennium Development Goals Report (2015). United Nations, New York.

⁵ McKinsey Global Institute (2014). *A blueprint for addressing the global affordable housing challenge*. MGI Report.



these categories. At the strategic level, absentee governments and the weak performance of other actors created a gap and eventually contributed to housing overlooked as a priority in the international development agenda.

The growing urgency to provide adequate housing to millions of households and the need to do so in ways to guarantee a sustainable future for cities calls for a paradigm shift in housing policy and practice. UN-Habitat proposes that this shift, referred to as 'Housing at the Centre', comes to position housing as a priority in the public debate around urbanization, integrated within the framework of national urban policies and urban planning. 'Housing at the Centre' re-establishes the important role housing has in development, stimulating the economy, reducing poverty and promoting inclusion in cities, and will position housing issues on the international development agenda in an increasingly strategic manner vis-a-vis the New Urban Agenda. 'Housing at the Centre' departs from an understanding of housing as more than a roof and four walls, but the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity.⁶ It not only takes into account the socio-developmental dimension of housing, but places people and human rights at the forefront of urban sustainable development.

'Housing at the Centre' becomes imperative given the emerging forms of urbanism that are producing cities as places of exclusivity, rather than opportunity. Cities, especially in the developing world, are growing fragmented, unequal and dysfunctional with the current models

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