



World Urban Forum 4
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HARMONIOUS URBANIZATION

REPORT OF THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE WORLD URBAN FORUM

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Report of the fourth session of the World Urban Forum¹

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¹ Mention of firm names and commercial products in the present report does not imply the endorsement of the United Nations.

Contents

Overview	4
Harmonious urbanization	4
Partners	4
Affordable housing finance.....	6
Cities and climate change	6
Engagement.....	7
Gender and intergenerational issues	7
Global economic crisis.....	7
Introduction	8
I. Organizational matters	8
A. Attendance	8
B. Opening ceremony	9
C. Opening plenary session.....	9
D. Establishment of an advisory group.....	10
E. Organization of work.....	10
F. Plenary session of 4 November 2008.....	10
G. Plenary session on 5 November 2008.....	11
H. Dialogues	11
I. Round tables	11
J. Special sessions	11
K. Networking events.....	11
L. Exhibition	11
II. Arrangements for the fifth session of the Forum	11
III. Endorsement of the report on the session.....	11
IV. Closing.....	12
Annexes	
I Summaries of the statements at the opening session.....	13
II. Summaries of statements delivered at the opening plenary session	16
III. Summary of the statements at the 4 November plenary session.....	19
IV. Summary of the statements at the 5 November plenary session.....	22
V. Reports on dialogues.....	23
VI. Report of the round tables.....	37
VII. Summary of the special sessions	50
VIII. Summary of the Habitat seminars.....	62
IX. Summary of networking events	66
X. Summary of closing plenary	69
XI. Nanjing Call for Harmonious Urbanization	71

Overview

The fourth session of the World Urban Forum in Nanjing, China, 3–6 November 2008, was attended by approximately 8,000 participants from some 155 countries. The exhibition attracted more than 20,000 visitors in four days.

In clear messages to policymakers at every level of national and local government, the Forum cited the need for policies and interventions to ensure that the growing legions of urban poor in a rapidly urbanizing world did not get left behind.

The Forum, at many levels and in many debates, stressed the importance of the link between overcoming urban poverty and winning the battle against the scourge of climate change.

There was much debate on the critical challenge of affordable housing finance and ways of tapping into the global financial system to which all cities were linked, to bring improvements to that problem area. There was wide agreement that attaining the Millennium Development Goals was a major contributor in that regard, and that Governments had to provide better support for cities and local authorities in the quest for safer, cleaner, greener and inclusive cities with affordable housing for all. The private sector also needed to be encouraged and supported to do more for the urban communities in which it operated.

There was clear consensus on the imperative of having all key stakeholders (State, non-State and international organizations) at all levels of governance (local, city, national, etc.) to work in partnership in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

For the UN-Habitat medium term institutional and strategic plan, the Forum was a watershed that served to reinforce and firmly establish several of its main pillars: the centrality of partnerships, governance, affordable housing and services and strengthening housing finance systems for sustainable urbanization. Accordingly, the recommendations of the Forum are to be used to guide UN-Habitat activities under the plan.

Harmonious urbanization

The theme of the fourth session, harmonious urbanization, encompassed the environmental and economic cornerstones of sustainable development in addition to the critical, but often neglected, human element. The idea as expressed by many representatives from around the world had always been to keep the individual at the centre of all urban policymaking.

The harmonious urbanization concept also encompassed the less measurable dimensions of sustainable development such as culture, whether contemporary or as part of a heritage, identity, respect for diversity and a sense of belonging. Those elements constitute the soul of the city and the elements that give it meaning. They determine the extent to which people take pride in their city and thus their commitment to shaping its future.

The Forum also conveyed the message that balanced territorial development was an important aspect of harmonious urbanization. It emphasized the role of civil society as a key partner in the quest for harmonious cities and sustainable urban management.

The particular vulnerability of indigenous peoples to the effects of chaotic and unplanned urbanization was highlighted. The Forum further stressed the continuing need to incorporate gender issues into all housing and urban development policies and programmes.

The Forum cited employment and, in particular, decent work, as a fundamental means of achieving harmonious cities.

Partners

UN-Habitat partners used the Forum creatively to deepen and widen networks, and to obtain a clearer idea of where they all stood in promoting sustainable urbanization. The Forum also provided partner networks with an opportunity to work together in ways not possible at previous sessions.

The Forum was praised as an interactive exchange platform for the world's cities and was hailed by participants as a great success.

Development agencies at the Forum, for the first time at such biennial gatherings, viewed inter-agency cooperation and partnership no longer as an option, but as a necessity. They recognized that the enormity of the challenge of rapid urbanization demanded a higher degree of coordinated action. The seriousness of rising oil and food prices, the global credit crisis and climate change

heightened that need and forced discussion between agencies about new ways of working together. Consultations throughout the four days were held by UN-Habitat, the World Bank, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and regional financial institutions, among others.

Participating national government delegations engaged in spirited exchanges throughout the Forum. The opening plenary, ministerial round table, dialogues and networking events enabled Governments to share their respective urban policies and interventions. The peer exchange between Governments stimulated each to articulate, with greater clarity, how they planned to achieve sustainable urbanization. Participating Governments included over 50 member States from five continents representing a wide range of portfolios such as housing, finance, environment and land.

Representatives of 1,000 cities and 120 local government associations representing half the world's population gathered in Nanjing for the Forum. For mayors, councillors and city administrators, Nanjing provided the opportunity to set their priorities. At previous sessions of the Forum, held in Nairobi, Barcelona, Spain, and Vancouver, Canada, local authorities had participated in great numbers but had pursued a disparate agenda ranging from finance to land regularization, from infrastructure to local economic development. In Nanjing, however, participating local authorities and their associations agreed to focus on decentralization and capacity-building. They agreed that Governments and municipalities had to strengthen their cooperation and translate challenges into opportunities. Thus, high on their agenda were the guidelines for decentralization adopted by the UN-Habitat Governing Council in 2007. Strategies to fill capacity gaps at both the elected and administrative levels to deal with rapid urbanization were also in focus.

For non-governmental organizations, the Forum reiterated the importance of alliances, of reaching out to as many communities and people in need as possible and of projecting a more powerful voice. Nanjing provided an open and inclusive opportunity for non-governmental organizations to define their agenda more precisely so as to communicate with private companies, Governments, urban poor organizations, professional associations and local authorities. It enabled them to advance their vision of sustainable urbanization. Non-governmental organization participants included over 200 young people's groups, development organizations, membership associations, women's groups and research and advocacy organizations.

More than 500 young people from groups from over 50 countries joined members of the Nanjing Youth Federation at the World Urban Youth Forum from 1 to 2 November 2008. Participants at the meeting, the third of its kind held on the eve of the World Urban Forum, discussed the concerns and aspirations of young people growing up in a rapidly urbanizing world. They called upon local authorities to play an active role in the involvement of young people in youth-led development. The need to engage with young people as key stakeholders in policy development for harmonious urbanization was underlined. A statement was released calling upon Governments to back the UN-Habitat Opportunities Fund for Urban Youth-led Development launched at the Forum with support from the Government of Norway.

Urban poor organizations participated in the Forum on more levels than previously. In past forums those groups had sought primarily to appeal to Governments to promote a people-centred approach in service delivery and housing programmes. In Nanjing they expanded that strategy by engaging directly with private sector banks, financial institutions and water utilities, in addition to local and central governments. Urban poor organizations included representatives from Africa, Asia, Latin America, Canada and the United States of America.

In like manner, the private sector enhanced its understanding of its role in helping cities to manage rapid urbanization. By aligning business activities with social and environmental concerns in a mutually beneficial manner, the private sector identified a significant role to play in improving the overall quality of life and providing access to basic services for all citizens, in close coordination with local and national governments. Whereas at previous meetings of the Forum private companies had focused on corporate social responsibility, in Nanjing they described how they were contributing to more sustainable urban development. The private sector defined five objectives in its drive for better cities: affordable housing solutions; sustainable water, sanitation, waste management and infrastructure; clean urban energy; climate change mitigation and adaptation; innovative information and communications technology solutions; and disaster mitigation and post-disaster reconstruction. It was emphasized that Governments and local authorities should create an enabling governance and regulatory environment to facilitate private sector investments that could improve the lives of the urban poor. Participating private sector representatives included over 50 private firms.

Members of professional associations also engaged more fully with the Forum. That was especially the case for planners, who recognized the significant challenge of helping cities to plan for

and manage rapid urbanization, combat poverty and tackle climate change. They reiterated the call for all spheres of government to fill capacity gaps in planning. Nanjing also afforded associations of quantity surveyors, water operators, architects, housing developers and municipal officers a chance to debate on many fronts. Both the meetings and the exhibition facilitated opportunities for networking and exchange between more than 75 professional associations at the Forum.

Universities met at the Forum to endeavour to bridge the gap between research, education, policy development and practice in the area of sustainable urban development. Over 15 universities from as many countries prepared inputs. Many were of direct relevance to the further development of the Habitat Partner University Network within the framework of the Sustainable Urban Development Network, a global initiative of UN-Habitat.

UN-Habitat coordinated 23 training events that drew 850 participants at an average of 37 participants per event. Approximately half of the events were conducted by United Nations agencies, while the other half were conducted by international training institutions. The participants' evaluation of the events was extremely positive, with an overall average of 3.8 out of a maximum score of 5.0.

UN-Habitat also launched the *State of the World's Cities* report in various locations worldwide. During the Forum, national media coverage was excellent, whether in the local newspapers, radio or television. The international media coverage of the Forum by almost 200 journalists from around the world was modest, however, because of a number of constraints. Chief among those was that the event fell on the same dates as the United States presidential election. Budgetary constraints related to the global financial crisis also prevented a number of international agencies from sending correspondents to the Forum. That made for modest coverage in the international press, although both the Forum and the *State of the World's Cities* report were extensively covered by the BBC World News, BBC World Service, Al Jazeera, *The Economist* and *The Guardian*. The full media clips can be obtained from the World Urban Forum secretariat.

Affordable housing finance

The Forum highlighted the fact that provision of basic services and affordable housing was no longer simply a sectoral objective but rather a strategic means of attaining the Millennium Development Goals. Never before had housing and urban development been more central to the social, economic and environmental pillars of sustainable urban development and the Habitat Agenda been more relevant. Governments and municipalities therefore had to strengthen their cooperation to turn challenges into opportunities. The private sector and foreign investors had to be welcomed as partners. Sustainable cities with affordable housing required the support of Governments and parliaments, and ordinary people had to be involved more in the decision-making process.

In spite of the economic crisis, capital markets had a significant role to play in facilitating the provision of low-cost housing. The key was to have responsible leaders, responsible counterparts, responsible investors and responsible end-users. There was a case for Governments in less-developed economies to put financial instruments to good use in providing low-cost housing for people in need. Private companies employing large numbers of people should play a more active role in improving living standards in the communities in which they operated.

One clear message that emerged from the discussions was the consensus on overcoming the income divide that had led to deprivations in shelter, water and sanitation, among other basic needs. Against the backdrop of the current global financial crisis, emphasis was laid on the need to mobilize sufficient finance to enable the billion poorest people to gain access to affordable housing.

Cities and climate change

The Forum stressed that no successful city in the modern world could afford to ignore the effects of climate change. Among the main hazards that it created, besides the risk of increasingly violent tropical storms, were rising sea levels. Thus, harmonious urban growth had to go hand-in-hand with disaster mitigation and vulnerability reduction. There, the installation of improved early warning and surveillance systems was of paramount importance. It was vital to climate change mitigation that cities began by cutting their waste output and emissions and consuming less energy.

In many countries in the developing world, declining agricultural productivity as a result of climate change-related weather patterns, population pressures and, in some cases, conflict, were pushing greater numbers of rural residents towards cities.

The nexus between rapid and chaotic urbanization and climate change had multiple impacts on highly vulnerable groups, particularly women, young people and the extremely poor. The need for coordinated and joint action in that regard at the normative and implementation levels was emphasized.

Numerous practices were presented and discussed at the Forum highlighting the actions taken and results achieved to date by cities in reducing their ecological footprints and their carbon emissions. The emerging groundswell of local initiatives underlined the need for international and national decision-making processes to incorporate the cities and climate-change agenda into post-Kyoto mechanisms and programme. By far the best approach to tackle climate-change-related challenges in cities was through rational urban planning using a people-centred approach.

Engagement

In line with the call made at the Forum session held in Vancouver to turn ideas into action, and building on the recommendations of the 2008 *State of the World's Cities* report, Nanjing witnessed the emergence of new concepts and operational methods. One of the key developments was the higher-order engagements of cities with local, regional and international stakeholders. Based on synergies between various stakeholders, those higher-order engagements went beyond the traditional scope of enabling policies and legislation. They were not confined to conventional compacts or agreements between, for example, the local authority and the business community, or the local authority and trade unions. Rather, they consisted of city-wide strategic and forward-looking planning exercises involving stakeholders, actions and resources at various levels. While specific actions might be initiated or led by various combinations of stakeholders, they fitted, much like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, into a larger and more coherent whole. That larger and comprehensive whole contained high-level values and goals, such as a greener or cleaner city, and corresponding strategies and investment programmes focusing on such areas as employment, housing or transport.

Compelling examples of that form of strategic and forward-looking planning were found in other Chinese cities and in Nanjing itself. Local authorities, as described by a Chinese participant, provided the overall framework for urban development by selling development rights to the private sector. The private sector invested in housing while the local authority used part of its proceeds to finance further infrastructure development and investment opportunities. That generated employment and created wealth.

Gender and intergenerational issues

The Forum underscored the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment and their contribution to the Millennium Development Goals. It also noted that tackling gender issues in urban planning and management helped cities to become more socially and culturally inclusive. In particular, a call was made for all States to ensure that the equal rights of women to land, housing, property and secure tenure was respected and promoted. The relevant knowledge and tools were already in existence; the critical need was for local governments to apply those in scale, taking women's concerns fully into account. The Forum also emphasized the importance of building on women's potential to contribute to harmonious urbanization, as illustrated by the significant role that women played in mobilizing community savings to finance the development of human settlements.

It was also made clear that urban planning had to take into account the needs of all age groups. That meant providing access for all generations to opportunities, services, shelter, welfare and infrastructure.

Global economic crisis

The Forum was held in the midst of a devastating global financial crisis, rooted in a huge increase in mortgage defaults caused by poor-quality underwriting and a sudden rise and fall in house prices. The combined impact of those two processes on the international financial markets underlined, more than ever before, the need for Governments and international organizations to ensure a balanced or harmonious approach to harnessing the benefits of market forces while limiting their negative impact on the poor and disadvantaged segments of society.

The deliberations highlighted the lessons learned from that and similar financial crises in the past, in addition to pointing to possible ways forward. Those included the strengthening of global and national financial regulatory frameworks and improving the flow of financial information on government interventions. They also involved strengthening borrowers' financial literacy, making greater use of microfinance for progressive home construction in cities within developing countries and reviewing the international architecture of finance.

Introduction

1. The World Urban Forum was organized and convened by the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) pursuant to paragraph 10 of resolution 18/5 of the Commission on Human Settlements in which the Commission requested the Executive Director “to promote a merger of the Urban Environment Forum and the International Forum on Urban Poverty into a new urban forum, with a view to strengthening the coordination of international support to the implementation of the Habitat Agenda”. Subsequently, the United Nations General Assembly decided, in its resolution 56/206 of 21 December 2001, that the Forum would be a “non-legislative technical forum in which experts can exchange views in the years when the Governing Council does not meet”. In addition, in paragraph 7 of its resolution 56/205 of 21 December 2001, the General Assembly encouraged local authorities and other Habitat Agenda partners to participate, where appropriate, in the World Urban Forum in its role as an advisory body to the Executive Director of UN-Habitat.

2. The theme of the fourth session of the Forum was “harmonious urbanization”. Six dialogues focused on the following aspects of harmonious urbanization: territorial balance in urban development; promoting social equity and inclusiveness; making cities productive and equitable; harmonizing artificial and natural environments; preserving the historical roots and soul of the city and creating a city for all generations. In addition, eight round-table discussions brought Habitat Agenda partners together in peer group sessions to share experiences and views on the theme of the Forum. More than 72 networking events, 69 Habitat seminars and 23 training events were also held.

I. Organizational matters

A. Attendance

3. The fourth session of the Forum was held in Nanjing, China, from 3 to 6 November 2008. A total of 15,730 people registered online for the Forum and 8,000 participants actually attended. The gender ratio of participants was 35.4 per cent female and 64.6 per cent male. Of the participants, 24 per cent were from local authorities, 13.5 per cent from national Governments, 14.3 per cent from non-governmental organizations, 13 per cent from the private sector and 11 per cent from academic institutions. The host city provided 568 volunteers.

4. Table 1 shows the breakdown of the top 10 participating countries and the percentage of registered participants.

Table 1
Top 10 participating countries

<i>Attendance by country</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
China	48.1
Kenya	3.5
Nigeria	3.2
Sweden	3.0
United States of America	2.2
South Africa	2.0

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