The History of Habitat

The United Nations General Assembly convened the Habitat I conference in Vancouver in 1976, as governments began to recognise the need for sustainable human settlements and the consequences of rapid urbanisation, especially in the developing world.

At that time, urbanisation and its impacts were barely considered by the international community, but the world was starting to witness the greatest and fastest migration of people into cities and towns in history as well as rising urban population through natural growth resulting from advances in medicine.

The Vancouver commitments were reconfirmed twenty years later, at the Habitat II conference in Istanbul. World leaders adopted the Habitat Agenda as a global plan of action for adequate shelter for all, with the notion of sustainable human settlements driving development in an urbanising world.

Forty years later, there is a wide consensus that the towns and cities structure, form and functionality need to change as societies change. The legacy of the city of the twentieth century, in terms of spatial pattern, is growth outside their boundaries to satellite or dormitory towns and suburban neighbourhoods. Cities have continued to expand outwards beyond their peri-urban areas, often due to weak urban planning, poor urban management, land regulation crises, and real estate speculation factors. In 2010, the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) reported that more than 827 million people were living in slum-like conditions.

It is time to think urban: how to mobilise the global community and focus all levels of human settlements, including small rural communities, villages, market towns, intermediate cities and metropolises for demographic and economic growth. Habitat III can help systematise the alignment between cities and towns and national planning objectives in their role as drivers of national economic and social development.

Towards Habitat III 2016

‘Habitat III’ is the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, to take place in 2016.

Habitat III will be one of the first global conferences after the Post 2015 Development Agenda. It is an opportunity to discuss and chart new pathways in response to the challenges of urbanization and the opportunities it offers for the implementation of the sustainable development goals.

The conference promises to be unique in bringing together diverse urban actors such as governments, local authorities, civil society, the private sector, academic institutions and all relevant interest groups to review urban and housing policies affecting the future of cities within an international governance architecture, with a view to generate a ‘New Urban Agenda’ for the 21st century which recognizes the ever-changing dynamics of human civilization.

Habitat III offers Member States an opportunity to discuss a New Urban Agenda that will focus on policies and strategies that can result in effectively harnessing the power and forces behind urbanization.