

Intervention by Grete Faremo

**Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director,
United Nations Office for Project Services General Debate, HABITAT III,**

Quito, Ecuador – 17 October 2016

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Context

As we will hear many times over the coming days, improving the way cities are planned and managed is one of the greatest global challenges of the 21st century.

The challenge is enormous. More than half of the world's population live in cities, and this is expected to increase to two thirds by 2050. This vast movement of people is for the most part taking place in developing countries.

Over coming decades extreme weather events will increase in frequency and intensity. Destructive floods, droughts, storms, heat-waves will, one way or another, seriously affect the ten billion people that will inhabit our earth by the middle of the century.

Natural disasters aside, billions of people lack basic amenities. To ensure stable, peaceful and just societies, we need to rectify this while at the same time addressing climate-related challenges. We need safe water every day. We need electricity. Because no other development will happen without access to water and to power.

Future urbanisation must be resilient to natural disasters. Roads should withstand the floods that come with climate change. We all need safe, well run schools. We all want to be safe and secure. And we all need employment and economic opportunity. We need resilient utilities. We need to achieve this while lowering carbon emissions dramatically.

To do this we need to build low-carbon, climate-resilient infrastructure at an unprecedented scale. In turn, that means we need global investments of immense proportions.

Evidence-based infrastructure

We must remember that whilst the Paris agreement represents a long-term vision for decades to come, we are dealing with the realities of climate change now. Decisions taken today on building infrastructure could lock in carbon emissions for decades. The choice to build a highway rather than a mass transit

system, for example, will have significant long-term climate consequences.

The way to tackle this is by planning and implementing infrastructure investments through a holistic “system of systems thinking”.

This means moving away from silo-based individual projects to national infrastructure planning that will satisfy growing socio-economic demands without damaging the environment.

This “interdependent” thinking will create efficiencies, improve resilience and ensure long-term performance.

Financing

Yet, to get there will require trillions of dollars of investment over the coming 15 years. So how do we pay for all this?

The Paris Agreement recognised the need for appropriate funding to transform ambitions into reality. In fact, ahead of COP21 many countries pledged additional funding to combat climate change, setting the stage for the historic agreement.

Today, the need for investments to fulfill our common global ambitions, as articulated in the sustainable development goals, is, however, measured in the trillions of dollars every year. It is quite clear that this will not be mustered in the forms of grants from country to country.

Investments on this scale will only come about when governments, the private sector and international organizations work together. If we are to create the investments needed on a global scale, we must also unleash private sector investment of a new magnitude.

My organization, UNOPS, is the operational arm of the United Nations. UNOPS is at the forefront of such “evidence-based infrastructure” thinking, working with countries and academic institutions to develop sustainable and practical solutions. We are eager to use our competence and capacity to help unleash new flows of foreign investment in low- and middle income countries where they are needed the most.

Resilience / build-back-better

If we build, we must build to last. UNOPS has more than 20 years of experience in developing resilient infrastructure.

Through our role as co-chair of the International Recovery Platform we help countries "build-back-better" and be more resilient to shocks and stresses such as cyclones, floods and earthquakes.

We bring together community and public sector engagement, in areas including resilient cities and urban environments.

For example, a few years back, in San Salvador, a city exposed to increasingly strong and frequent tropical storms and hurricanes. Rivers in the city flood regularly, sometimes with devastating consequences for people living on the banks. Some year back a bridge was washed away with a whole bus full of people.

UNOPS rebuilt the bridge, but also enforced the banks and redesigned the gorge so that it will withstand future flash floods.

Conclusion

In summary, as leader of the implementation organisation in the UN with a mandate for infrastructure, I feel a deep responsibility to the new urban agenda.

With UNOPS hands-on experience in housing and resettlement and our technical expertise across infrastructure development, we are a ready to support your efforts to deliver a better future.

Thank you