

Children and Youth Constituent Group

General Assembly of Partners, Habitat III

Response to the New Urban Agenda Zero Draft

The Children and Youth Partner Constituent Group of the General Assembly of Partners welcomes the Zero Draft and overall commends the depth of content and vision for this document. The New Urban Agenda is positioning urbanisation as an opportunity for people-centred sustainable development where city dwellers, especially the most vulnerable, shape the city they want to live in. The emphasis on stakeholder engagement and partnerships celebrates the idea that intelligence can be gathered from diverse sources and promotes the notion of generating shared value in the city.

While a very successful conference, the Habitat II process received both concerns and criticism about its failure to set clear targets and binding means of addressing the issues it identified within the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements¹. Hence, as the first UN conference after the successful adoption of the 2030 Agenda, Habitat III should not follow Habitat II's course. The New Urban Agenda reaffirms commitments made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris agreement on Climate Change, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. However, Habitat III needs to intentionally identify and seek commitments to concrete outcomes benefiting all city dwellers, especially the most vulnerable groups such as children, youth, migrants, women and the elderly. If the New Urban Agenda is to truly be an action-oriented roadmap for implementation to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Goal 11, it needs to clearly address:

- How exactly will the New Urban Agenda secure renewed political commitment for sustainable urban development, which will determine the long-term impact of SDG Goal 11?
- How will partnerships between governments and all city actors be formed to progress the Quito Implementation Plan?
- How will progress and accomplishments be measured and by whom? Who is accountable?
- How will the Quito Implementation Plan be financed by multilateral organizations, financial institutions and development banks?
- How exactly will the New Urban Agenda support the implementation of the SDGs beyond the Urban SDG #11?

Detailed Response

Vision

We endorse and commend the **rights based and people-centred approach** applied throughout the New Urban Agenda to include the most vulnerable and marginalised in all the opportunities and benefits that urbanisation can offer.

- The current and future generation must be consulted about the city they want to live in. The New Urban Agenda must highlight the need for the genuine participation and ownership by young people on city planning and key decision making processes. It is concerning to see that children and youth are still identified throughout the Agenda as mere beneficiaries. Whereas, they should be identified as a key resource and agents of change to drive social, political, technological and economic transformation in the city.
- As the current and future leaders of our cities, children and youth must be regarded as valued contributors to implementation, monitoring and evaluation of The New Urban Agenda. *The New Urban Agenda* will not succeed if children and youth are not represented in

¹ The Habitat Agenda: <http://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/The-Habitat-Agenda-Istanbul-Declaration-on-Human-Settlements-2006.pdf>

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local, national and regional decision-making processes. We need children and youth to make us all accountable.

- The impact of urbanisation on children and youth cannot be underestimated. As the current and future leaders of our cities, children and youth must be regarded as valued contributors to implementation, monitoring and evaluation of The New Urban Agenda. *The New Urban Agenda* will not succeed if children and youth are not represented in local, national and regional decision-making processes. We need children and youth to make us all accountable.

Transformative Commitments

Leave no-one behind, urban equity and poverty reduction

We agree that the success of the New Urban Agenda will depend on how we effectively **promote urban equity, ensuring that no one is left behind** from the opportunities and benefits urbanisation can offer, leading to decent, dignified and rewarding lives.

- However, inadequate living conditions are among the most pervasive violations of children's rights in urban contexts.
- Children are the first casualties of urban poverty. Trapped in fragile pockets of cities across the world, children suffer terrible violations of their basic human rights; lacking access to services; living in overcrowded spaces, often on streets contaminated with garbage and dangerous waste, they lack safe public spaces to play, are vulnerable to crime and violence, prostitution, abuse and exploitation. In fact, some slum environments mirror chronic humanitarian crises as a daily way of living.
- Children's vulnerabilities are heightened in situations of urban protracted crises and urban disasters where their schooling and health are affected, and where they are likely to lose parents/carers or be subjected to forced displacement, at times unaccompanied, resulting in violations and exploitations of their basic rights affecting their wellbeing.
- As city populations grow, urban and social planning must consider policies, programs and services that promote the inclusion and participation of all city dwellers, especially, children and youth. Inclusive cities are sites that can provide social and economic opportunities, more equitable access to services, and greater civic engagement. In order to create inclusive and cohesive cities, The New Urban Agenda must include the notion of shared value in the city.

We support The New Urban Agenda promoting people centred urban development and the realisation of **human rights for all**, facilitating living together, combating discrimination in all its forms and empowering all individuals and communities.

- Everyone has the right to the city. Every child has the right to survival, development to the fullest, protection from abuse, exploitation and discrimination and full participation in family, cultural and social life. The rights of a child needs to be at affirmed in every aspect of the New Urban Agenda. Many children and families living in urban slums of low income countries are far from realising the rights to "adequate shelter for all", access to basic services and "sustainable human settlements development in an urbanising world" as enshrined in the Habitat Agenda.
- The recognition of children's rights, the inclusion of their voices in key decision making processes and the provision of safe spaces to learn, develop and grow in a healthy and stable environment are essential to promote safe, inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities.

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- Diversity is not a driver of poverty, it is marginalisation. Where one group is poorly represented in the community, discrepancies of opportunity and service provision exist for them and their children. While cohesion and inclusion are appropriate reactive goals to protect children living in these contexts, another more active option is to focus on improving the available opportunities, in particular job creation for parents and school leavers. This can then decrease the level of comparative or competitive attitudes present within the community and thus strengthen social cohesion. Promoting collective action is key to making city systems stronger and sustainable.
- The New Urban Agenda fails to mention diversity of religion and faith, which forms the basis of building communities in dense, diverse and dynamic urban environments. It needs to be recognised and celebrated as part of the recognition and leveraging of culture, diversity and safety in cities. Local culture, heritage and knowledge are incredibly valuable to developing local solutions in addressing urban challenges.
- The New Urban Agenda also fails to highlight and integrate the needs of displaced people, refugees and migrants into its transformative commitments for cities. Migrants and refugees, including children and youth, arrive in cities with significant human capital and the potential to contribute to the social, economic and cultural fabric of host communities. Migration can energise labour markets and generate new demand for goods and services, while also contributing to innovation that fuels urban centres. Migrants and refugees, children and youth are key players in urban development, and cities' resilience, growth and future sustainability.

We endorse the New Urban Agenda's call for sustainable mechanisms in cities and human settlements that broaden **democratic platforms that allow participation in decision and planning processes**. We reaffirm the local government's key role in creating platforms of dialogue with all segments of society, including children and youth.

- Children and youth bring diverse perspectives and solutions on key issues relevant to sustainable urban development to inform local, national and regional policy development. Traditionally, the role of children in shaping our cities has been unrecognised. But we have seen that when given the appropriate space and tools, children and youth are able to play multiple roles:
 - Knowledge bearers/experts to the governing bodies about their experiences, needs and solutions to enhance city planning and policy making
 - They can hold governments accountable by fulfilling a monitoring role
- Governments need to ensure both children and youth are given the space and tools to advocate their needs and views by establishing permanent structures of dialogue with children and youth, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable, to ensure cities are places of opportunity for all.

We support the recognition of **public space and the informal economy as vital components of a prosperous and safe city**, and the state of public space directly related to the quality of life for city residents, specifically children.

- In a dynamic changing environment, public space is the stable backbone of the neighbourhood that holds the area together. Social planning contributes not only to an improved physical structure of the city, but more importantly, it provides a stable vehicle to sustainable social cohesion and social capital building.

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- Yet, many children are living in overcrowded spaces in cities of the developing world where streets are contaminated with hazardous waste, leading to inadequate safe spaces to play. Wasted space is wasted asset in the city. Clean, green, liveable space is critical for health and well-being of children and youth.
- The right to safety and security is a key dimension of the Right to the City, but is undermined by ongoing crime and violence in cities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. Municipalities must consider the human and safety element while designing public spaces as they are central to building peaceful and democratic society and encourages social capital and cohesion building. They must formulate, implement and enforce law and regulations that contribute to safety, including safety indicators.

Sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all

We endorse the New Urban Agenda's call for **inclusive economic growth, decent work and jobs** for all as a key priority for the New Urban Agenda. We welcome the commitment to recognise the working poor in the informal economy as contributors and legitimate actors in the economic development process of cities.

- Local governments need to recognise and protect the specific needs of the informal sector of the economy in its economic development policies and strategies. They need to apply an inclusivity principle by including the informal sector in their urban planning and policy development.
- Cities need to adopt an ethical framework to urban development, which promotes responsible citizenry, where the marginalised and vulnerable are included in the wealth creation and not victims of commercial greed and growth. Businesses and private sector's corporate social responsibility and adherence to ethical frameworks and standards are key to addressing the issue. Cities need to encourage and foster local commercial and non-commercial economic development which includes social and environmental considerations.
- The New Urban Agenda does not adequately address the issue of child labour in either the formal or informal economy. Children in informal communities are more susceptible of being forced into child labour. The New Urban Agenda must ensure that children and youth are not engaged in labour in hazardous environments. The link between access to quality education and opportunities for decent livelihoods and employment must be considered in the New Urban Agenda. Strategies should be in place to ensure that youth transition from informal economy and are able to participate in the formal sector. A child's access to quality education (without the need to participate in the workforce), is key to break the urban poverty cycle and improve their health and well-being outcomes.

Foster ecological and resilient cities and human settlements

We welcome the New Urban Agenda's call for **sustainable consumption and production** as critical for global resilience and sustainability.

- Driving opportunistic wealth creation, individualism, creativity and innovation, cities are mass markets for production giants and the commercial world. The size and density of population of mega cities are haven for businesses to promote consumerism. The diversity of businesses and products pushes for severe competition to survive and thrive. In such a profit orientated culture, ethical behaviour is the first casualty.

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- Cities need adopt an ethical framework to urban development, which promote responsible citizenry, where the marginalised and vulnerable are included in the wealth creation and not victims of commercial greed and growth. Businesses and private sector's corporate social responsibility and adherence to ethical frameworks and standards are key to addressing the issue. The city is part of a globally connected network with flows of people, ideas, technology, trade, resources, and finance. Unfortunately, negative externalities such as CO2 emissions embedded in production or waste generated from heightened industrial production and also excessive consumption of goods also affect city living.
- Local government needs to be empowered to launch ethical frameworks and standards that consider the well-being of all, especially children who suffer from poor nutrition in the city or from obesity due to unethical promotion of consumerism

We support the New Urban Agenda's call for an **integrated system of water planning and management**, and encouragement of the adequate management of waste.

- However, the New Urban Agenda fails to identify the urgency of urban sanitation management – an issue area that poses one of the greatest risks to the long term public health of urban communities in many developing countries' urban areas. Uncollected solid waste and unreliable and inadequate facilities for dignified sanitation is a growing problem within informal settlements. These aspects of environmental hygiene are critical determinants to child well-being. Access to clean and reliable water alone significantly influences the probability of whether a child survives their first year of life.

We support the New Urban Agenda's commitment to strengthen the resilience of cities. A city is not sustainable if it cannot manage its risk well enough to prepare for, withstand, and recover from future crises.

- However, the New Urban Agenda fails to define resilience beyond resilience to disasters and climate change and other shocks and stresses – it needs to highlight the importance of social resilience and resilience to conflict and chronic violence. Localised social resilience is critical to leverage and enhance the ability of individuals, households, neighbourhoods/communities and organisations to respond to shocks and stresses.
- This commitment on urban resilience can also be seen as an add-on and fails to be integrated within the other commitments made in the New Urban Agenda, specifically when resilience is a cross-cutting theme across several thematic areas, particularly urban economy and spatial development.

Effective Implementation

Building the urban structure: Establishing a supportive national, sub-national and local framework

We endorse The New Urban Agenda's call for **national and local governments to work and partner with stakeholders** on the Quito Implementation Plan.

- However, the stakeholder engagement framework requires further elaboration in order to ensure that there is a radical shift in the way cities are planned, developed and managed with people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised, who must be seen as change agents rather than beneficiaries.

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- All major stakeholders - children and youth, women, elderly, indigenous people, civil society organisations, grassroots organisations, professionals, business and industries, foundations and philanthropists, research and academia, parliamentarians, local and sub-national authorities, farmers, media - need to be effectively engaged in decision making as well as implementation and monitoring of urban development.

We encourage the greater focus on **collaboration with local, metropolitan and sub-national authorities** to implement effective local governance and **work with local communities** to develop and manage basic services and infrastructure.

- However, the mechanisms for this increased level of collaboration needs to be further unpacked. It is important to mention who will lead national to local level urban policies and lines of accountability, particularly when urban is a cross-cutting area of work across multiple ministries and governmental departments. The New Urban Agenda needs to promote effective mechanisms that are evidence-based and proven successful in many countries to bring them to scale in the next 20 years, otherwise it will be difficult to monitor and evaluate progress.

Planning and managing urban spatial development

We welcome the New Urban Agenda's support to practices such as **participatory planning and budgeting, citizen-based monitoring and co-planning** that are rooted in new forms of direct partnership between state organisations and civil society.

- The local government is a key player and appropriate platform for engagement for reform. City authorities have a critical role in promoting children's' participation in urban development processes - activating a city-wide Children's Rights Strategy; establishing a Children's Rights Unit or coordinating mechanism and allocating children's budget. This will support an enabling environment where children may enjoy the advantages of urban life, including access to educational, medical and recreational facilities.
- Local Governments also need to increase collaboration with local communities and civil society to co-design and co-plan projects that support basic urban services provision. They need seek more partnerships that enable the extension of their urban services to all city dwellers, specifically those living in the fragile pockets of the city.
- National Governments need to update laws, targets and policies to prioritise the provision and access to essential urban services such as water, sanitation and solid waste management. They need to effectively manage public finances in its planning cycle, ensuring service provision to all groups, especially the most vulnerable.
- The New Urban Agenda also needs to identify and address situations of conflict driven migration and its impact on urban spaces.

Enhancing means of implementation of the New Urban Agenda; Financing and other tools of implementation

We agree that the **immense infrastructure financing gap** is one of the most pressing challenges to be addressed to secure adequate service provision to urban dwellers, and that bridging this gap, especially at the local level is a pre-requisite for achieving the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs.

- However, it is not enough to simply recognise the enormous investments needed and to leverage domestic resources and tap into external financial resources to enable local governments to access critical resources. This entire section needs to be strengthened to

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ensure that mechanisms are in place to fund local governments to action the Quito Implementation Agenda. It does not suffice to claim empowerment of local authorities without the provision of agency and tools required to act. Without the ability to directly receive funding and without capacity to manage funds and be held accountable, the New Urban Agenda will never be realisable.

- While the New Urban Agenda addresses climate finance, it fails to address financing in regards to conflict, protracted crises in cities.

We endorse **capacity building to support stakeholders and institutions** at all levels of governance to formulate, implement, manage and enforce public policies towards sustainable urbanisation.

- It is important that communities and relevant stakeholders are equipped with both knowledge and means to express their views, engaging in city management and planning decisions through transparent public discussion.
- Children and youth are the local knowledge bearers of the city. They must be given access to platforms where they are able to contribute their knowledge to public debate and discussions. Schools need to ensure such platforms are created and accessible. Informal discussions to include discussions with most vulnerable children and youth should be promoted.

We support the New Urban Agenda's commitment to **strengthen institutional capacity** to action the Quito Implementation Plan for the New Urban Agenda.

- This is a critical component to create an enabling environment to action the Quito Implementation Agenda and requires further elaboration on the exact mechanisms of how local authorities will be equipped to address urban challenges, how to ensure balanced national growth in situations of fiscal and management decentralisation and other barriers to sustainable urban development.

Follow Up and Review

We reaffirm the need for **periodic, effective, inclusive and transparent follow-up and review framework** of the New Urban Agenda at the global, regional, national, sub-national and local level, involving all stakeholders, specifically children and youth.

- However, given that the New Urban Agenda is legally non-binding for member states, there needs to be further elaboration on what possible measures can be taken to promote, implement, monitor and evaluate actions at local, regional and national levels. There needs to be a comprehensive accountability and follow-up mechanisms.
- The General Assembly of Partners proposes a creation of an open multi-stakeholder Post Habitat III Coordination Mechanisms that seeks to support and facilitate the implementation, accountability, follow-up and review of the New Urban Agenda. This coordination mechanism would be developed within the frame of regular Global and Regional Habitat III Follow up Forums. It will offer a knowledge platform, advocacy arm, innovation laboratory, monitoring mechanisms and investment advisory committee composed of all major stakeholder groups.
- Additionally, while The New Urban Agenda states a minimum of at least 20% of national resources to be provided to local governments, there are no other quantitative targets and indicators in the means of implementing the New Urban Agenda. There needs to be a

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monitoring and evaluation plan that aligns with the SDG targets accordingly.

- Data is central to all the commitments of the New Urban Agenda, yet is mentioned only briefly and needs far greater elaboration. As stated in the World Urban Campaign's *The City We Need 2.0*, The New Urban Agenda should harness the full potential of technologies where all urban dwellers can participate in and interact with data collection and analysis. E-governance solutions are effective means to engage urban dwellers but also to manage the operations of cities, leading to 'smarter' cities that are people-centred and reflect the collective intelligence of communities.
- The New Urban Agenda needs to consider children and youth as a resource to the city. The technology-savvy generation has an important role to play in shaping sustainable urbanisation. This young generation and their involvement is key to creating smarter communities and fostering a sustainable future for this urban century.