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THEMATIC MEETING

METROPOLITAN AREAS

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HABITAT III URBAN DIALOGUES
Montreal Thematic Meeting on Metropolitan Areas

September 22 - October 2, 2015

United Nations

Host Partner

Communauté métropolitaine
de Montréal

Urban Dialogues Overview:

The Habitat III Urban Dialogues hosted a two-week long e-discussion related to Metropolitan areas from September 22 - October 2, 2015. The Dialogues were an initiative within the framework of the United Nations Task Team on Habitat III. Discussions stemmed from two key questions. The first asked, What are major Metropolitan challenges, and what are the good practices and solutions to improve such challenges at the level of public policies, planning, and infrastructure and basic services? The second posed the question, What actions should be made to ensure an adequate institutional and legal framework to govern metropolitan areas?

Key Themes and Takeaways:

Right to the City:

Participants in the discussion highlighted the need for Habitat III to protect, promote, and implement the concept of the Right to the City in all Habitat III documents. This includes enshrining new paradigms for integrated planning and management in the New Urban Agenda. Right to the City ensures inclusive, democratic, secure and sustainable cities, as well as embraces the social function of property by strengthening collective social, cultural and environmental interests over individual and economic interests. Right to the City within the New Urban Agenda needs to incorporate the priorities, needs and experiences of citizens and communities. This is especially true for women, the poor, minorities and vulnerable groups, as well as the organizations supporting them.

There was a call to produce an outcome document with specific and measurable results and commitments. Right to the City would ensure access to basic and social services, mobility, public and green spaces and the enjoyment of natural and built heritage. This would be supported by specific and measurable commitments and results on the implementation of the various components of the Right to the City, as well as from the new Sustainable Development Goals.

More broadly defined, Right to the City was additionally mentioned as a new collective right of the urban inhabitants, in particular of the marginalized groups and people living under vulnerable conditions, that confers upon them legitimacy of action and organization, based on their uses and customs, with the objective to achieve full exercise of the right to free self-determination and an adequate standard of living. The Right to the City is interdependent of all internationally recognized and integrally conceived human rights, and therefore includes all the civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights which are already foreseen in the international human rights treaties.

Right to the City includes the inhabitant´s rights to the resources, services, goods and opportunities of city life, including rights to citizenship, to participation in governance, and to land for housing and livelihoods; while also encompassing emerging collective rights, such as rights to water, energy or cultural identity. The Right to the City challenges the commodification of urban land to argue for recognition of the social function of land and property. Countries and cities have already included these principles and reframed urban legislation accordingly (e.g.: Brazil and Ecuador) and practice (e.g.: Mexico City and Montréal). These concepts of Right to the City should therefore ultimately be

included within the final Agenda. The Right to the City broadens the traditional focus on improvement of peoples' quality of life based on housing and the neighborhood, to encompass quality of life at the scale of the city/metropolis and its rural surroundings; which forms the rural-urban linkages discourse, as a mechanism of protection of the population that lives in cities or regions with rapid urbanization processes.

Local Governments, Metropolitan Governance

The role of local governments should be clearly highlighted in the Habitat III outcomes, as they require the means for effective public management and citizen participation, and to preserve cities as commons. The New Urban Agenda should recognize the central role and responsibility of local government in the promotion, protection and guarantee of human rights and the adoption of Human Rights Charter. The Agenda should recognize the right to a city constituted as a local political community that ensures adequate living conditions and peaceful coexistence between peoples and with government. It should similarly highlight the implementation of real decentralization with the necessary competencies and resources, to ensure that local governments can take effective decisions to fulfill inhabitants' rights. Finally, the Agenda should ensure that all city inhabitants have the rights to participate in political and city management processes and create conditions for citizen empowerment. Reaping the benefits of metro-level cooperation means striking the right balance for each unique urban region.

A separate issue mentioned in the discussion was political representation. Groups already underrepresented within government at large can be further marginalized within metropolitan governance structures. For example, though many municipalities worldwide have established formal youth advisory bodies, oftentimes the purview of these structures are limited to local jurisdiction. This can result in critical perspectives being left out of discussions of important regional issues. Metropolitan governance must take into account and appropriately institutionalize mechanisms to ensure such perspectives are represented.

Metropolitan Challenges in Urban Food Systems and Agriculture:

In order to simultaneously address several metropolitan challenges and urban policy domains (for example related to urban food systems), participants mentioned that new organizational and multi-stakeholder structures is required to facilitate involvement of different government departments and jurisdictions in food planning. Such structures can ensure greater coherence and alignment, while increase efficiency of the policies and programmes that have an impact on the food system (i.e. land use, green space management, food transport and marketing, waste management, environmental and health standards).

One example that was given was the Bristol Food Policy Council in Bristol, United Kingdom. Modeled on precedents in North America, members of the Council draw from a range of stakeholders including local food industry, City Council members, universities and grass-root bodies to develop a Good Food Plan with clear commitments and outcome indicators. Rotterdam in the Netherlands has similarly set up similar multi-actor platforms and networks. Involving stakeholders from public, private

and civic spheres help such partnerships and plans to be less vulnerable to political change. The long-term active presence of food policy forums in Amman, Jordan or Nairobi, Kenya was similarly given as examples.

The challenge was said to lie in developing comprehensive food policies and strategies in city regions where different municipalities have to work together. This also requires collaboration at subnational, provincial levels. Such collaboration, however, was said to also strengthen local and city-region prominence in national and international dialogue on sustainable urban food systems.

Overall, the development of a resilient metropolitan city-region food system was mentioned as requiring political will and use of available policy and planning instruments (infrastructure and logistics; public procurement; licenses; land use planning); involvement of different government departments and jurisdictions (local and provincial) and new organizational structures at different scales (municipal, district). As integrated city-region food strategies cross policy domains, one of the key challenges participants noted was to organize the administrative and political responsibilities for an urban food strategy. Cities around the world are responding with different options varying from a municipal department of food, with food as the responsibility of the planning department or establishment of a food policy council.

Further discussions echoed the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO)'s work, in conjunction with University College London, on 'Pro-poor legal and institutional frameworks for urban and peri-urban agriculture.' Those discussions highlighted that, supporting the most vulnerable groups in an urbanizing world demands discussions on food, agriculture and cities in the context of rural urban linkages. The document shades light into this area of institutional and legal framework in urban development with strong advocacy of a 'pro-poor approach'.

One of the key challenges facing metropolitan areas was said to be sustainable urban food provisioning. Growing urbanization and food insecurity, rising food prices, climate change impacts affecting food supply and resource depletion, have all triggered cities around the world to develop policy and programmes for more sustainable and resilient urban food provisioning and urban food systems. In addition, alarming increases in diet-related ill-health require cities to ensure access to sufficient, affordable, healthy and safe food to their population. Food is also increasingly seen as a driver for other sustainability policies related to health, transport, land use, social and economic development, waste management and climate resilience.

Local and regional authorities have a key responsibility in building more sustainable urban food systems that improve food security and healthy diets, reduce food waste, provide decent livelihood opportunities for those producing, processing and selling food (in rural, peri-urban or urban areas) and promote environmental sustainable forms of food provisioning.

Development of resilient urban food systems requires both political will and the use of available policy and planning instruments such as land use planning, design and development of infrastructure and logistics and public food procurement.

The closing of urban nutrient, energy and (food) waste streams, the creation of short food supply chains and the multifunctional properties and synergies of localized food production to other sectoral policies should be simultaneously taken into account. Only then, an urban food system can be built that is more than just a collection of individual projects.

Spatial Planning:

Spatial planning was another topic that was raised during discussions that often differentiated between urban and rural development. This dichotomy and the resulting administrative boundaries clearly do not reflect the realities of highly interconnected areas. Metropolitan areas are characterized especially by the strong interlinkages between one or more core cities with their peri-urban and rural surrounding areas, not by their population seize or their concentration of economic functions only. These interlinkages are of economic (flow of goods, capital, workforce, information, innovation), social (commuting, cultural, political and educational functions of core cities, multi-locality of households) and environmental (flow of natural resources, city-region ecosystem services, micro climate) nature. Participants noted that Habitat III must acknowledge these new realities in order to influence the existing interlinkages in a sustainable way and adjust or develop policies and governance structures that reflect them.

If the New Urban Agenda is to provide action-oriented guidelines for sustainable urbanization, the Agenda must bridge the rural-urban divide and provide a framework for sound governance structures for better coordination between urban and rural development. The New Urban Agenda should foster cross-sectoral and inter-municipal cooperation, promote integrated urban development, and strengthen local governments in order to enhance access and quality of service provision to all citizens. It will need to promote a positive, mutually reinforcing relationship between cities and their hinterlands. It is thus important to strengthen a culture of cooperation across administrative and territorial boundaries between cities and bordering rural municipalities. Metropolitan governance structures that allow the involvement of multiple stakeholders, sectors and government departments need to be strengthened in order to ensure greater political legitimacy and coherence.

Finally, the New Urban Agenda must acknowledge the fact that practicing integrated development at the metropolitan level can lead to vast efficiency gains, especially with regard to the delivery of basic services, economic development, efficient use and integrated management of natural resources etc. Yet, efficiency gains due to economies of scale always need to be weighed against issues of legitimacy and responsiveness and accountability to citizens. The objective of a metropolitan approach for local governments is thus to cooperate on certain topics/initiatives/services, while possibly competing on others in terms of service quality and cost-effectiveness. Inter-municipal cooperation can be an important instrument to ensure collaboration at a regional level and should be fostered by the New Urban Agenda.

The interconnectivity between the rural-urban linkages forms a very key pillar in delivering sustainability in the urban future. The execution in metropolitan development, on the other hand, could deliver totally segmented and disconnected results, or vice versa. Elements of financing for such developments, stakeholders involvement, expertise and simply holistic approach in the implementation process amongst other core considerations play a major role in the failure or success. It's with this clear underlying understanding of the different parameters of consideration in metropolitan areas, and in general sustainable urban development, that the New Urban Agenda will draw its frame and structure from. This will deliver a subtle, resilient and sustainable future for the world's built environment.

Citizen Participation:

Citizen participation is vital through metropolitan governance in the constant exchange between the authorities and its population. The creation of a metropolitan vision requires significant involvement from all stakeholders and, more specifically, from elected officials and civil society. Discussions highlighted that, at the metropolitan scale, it is key to ensure that each partner must gradually adopt and share the "supralocal and regional vision". In the case of the Greater Montréal, for example, the Metropolitan Land Use and Development Plan (PMAD), which came into force in 2012 following an extensive public consultation, provides the implementation of a biennial metropolitan Agora as a key monitoring mechanism for the implementation of the PMAD. The Agora aims to enable stakeholders, elected officials and civil society, to learn, share, debate and propose ideas about the implementation of the PMAD.

Participants similarly mentioned that during public consultation, it is better to use interactive data, visualization and tools for the public to review and express their input clearly and to the specific development topic. Such mediums allow the data from public to be easily integrated into metropolitan plans and policies. The process of invite and public input towards final outputs for development needs to evolve with process analysis, tools and data integration. Running away from this collaborative implementation process leads to quite unsustainable urban development in cities, since most 'urban templates' need to be localized to its immediate urban context.

Additionally, planning professionals need to lead, manage to produce results in the Cities that they plan. Leaving the 'visionary plans' to be implemented and managed by people without knowledge on urban development process often produce undesirable out comes and performance issues in the Cities. Planning standards and tools need to be more universal for countries to adopt. The adaption of universal standards and process would produce market conditions that can attract more products and services from other nations. Cities also need to consider supply-chain models for products and services to create sustainable developments with civic and private partnerships. The process also can promote the use of locally available sustainable materials, products and processes in the markets. Tapping into local expertise and processes localizes most of the global initiatives when it comes to the implementation phase of urban development in respective cities.