

Kenya Civil Society Habitat III Caucus Joint Statement on the Habitat III-Zero Draft Agenda

4 July 2016

We the Civil Society Organization Habitat III Caucus in Kenya, welcome the HABITAT III Zero Draft for the *New Urban Agenda* suggested by the HABITAT III Bureau and the various processes of engagement among various stakeholders and state parties. During the past two years, we have participated variously as a CSOs caucus or individually at local, national, regional and international platforms negotiating the HABITAT III agenda.

Our participation has reflected on the urban agenda and the much larger theme of land and human settlement in our local context, region of East Africa and how that links with the ongoing movement towards the forthcoming HABITAT III debate. Our engagement with the subject of the *New Urban Agenda* is therefore situated in our context, global experiences and imagination of a just future. In our local experience, we have reviewed the zero draft text in relation to the following on goings (1) The emergence of various mega projects in Africa with great opportunities but which threaten to displace and disenfranchise many poor urban citizens in Africa, (2) The requirement for inclusive and participatory urban governance on whose basis right to the city can be secured for all (3) The proliferation of informal settlements and indignity is such settlements in Africa and (4) the progressive contributions and limitations of the disciplines of built environment whose discourse and process continue to foster inequalities in the urban areas.

In these sessions and in our various discussions in preparatory sessions, we have emphasised that the structure and content of the HABITAT III meeting and its ultimate declarations must be back grounded on the unfulfilled

agenda of HABITAT II declaration and fore grounded on the much larger understanding of the HABITAT III convening as the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development. The key words here are Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, which ought not be displaced or submersed in the theme *New Urban Agenda* that is a rallying call for the HABITAT III.

We appreciate that the zero draft resolution has accommodated decisions and guidelines provided by other United Nations agencies and Rapporteur. More specifically, we welcome the incorporation of suggestions by, Raquel Rolnik the immediate former Special Rapporteur on adequate housing. Her suggestions as incorporated in the draft resolution open ways for possible land reforms that are the bedrock of accessing right to housing as well as Sustainable Urban Development. Similar progress has been made in the recommendation to adopt participatory urban planning and a method and discourse towards realizing *the New Urban Agenda*.

We are however concerned that in the preparatory sessions towards the 3rd UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development and the subsequent HABITAT III Zero Draft for the *New Urban Agenda*, resolution that is currently in circulation has tended to be silent on this critical housing question. Even more so, in appreciating participatory urban planning, the drafters have taken useful steps, which have potential to promote self governance as well as more inclusive urban governance. Yet, we hold that much more should have been done to link geographies, history and current disparities between rural and urban areas. We further hold that the spirit of the present drafting does not lay sufficient premium on the social capital of the urban citizenry, particularly that inherent amongst the disadvantaged social class.

The zero draft has embraced the notion of partnership that does not take into account the role played by various State policies in triggering and perpetuating socio-economic inequality globally. We are worried that the HABITAT III Zero Draft has adopted the language of partnership to create a presumption of homogeneity that aims at silencing the many poor who are marginalized. The idea of partnership suggested in the document is also aimed at muting the hierarchies and position's of those who have benefitted from political and economic systems of inequality. It further promotes paternalistic leadership well captured in the notion 'leaving no one behind' which runs throughout the draft. We also take exception to the attempts to envelope responsibility of duty bearers responsible in development of asymmetries that disadvantage many urban residents.

The proposed *New Urban Agenda* is also characterized with marginal talk of social transformation. We are tempted to believe that the use of the term 'inequality' only once (see paragraph 20) is an indicator of the marginal place to which it has been allocated. The CSOs Habitat III Caucus in Kenya hold the position that the proposed new urban agenda and a world where all its inhabitants have access to housing cannot be realized without interventions that can reverse the current global, regional and national governance trends that displace and disposes the majority. We suggest that for the notion of urban transformation to be realized, there is need for more concise appreciation and commitment to reversing inequality.

It must also be underscored that, the *New Urban Agenda* must be framed in the context of the ongoing surge to build what has been referred to as 'competitive cities' that rarely promote equity, justice and integration. The large, high modernists' infrastructural investment that is now common in most developing countries have been ignored in the entire document. Equally,

the document fails to engage city governance and the ongoing debate of re-imagining and reorganizing cities that were established as racialized human settlements. There has most recently been a crisis in the heritage and spatial configuration of these cities, which cannot escape the 3rd UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development.

While we welcome the understanding that the UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development is a state led commitment, we hold that much more can be done to make the idea of partnership in this commitment more meaningful. Such meaning can be realized if we adopt a clear and unambiguous conceptual framing of what we mean by New Urban Agenda.

We as Civil Society Organizations Habitat III Caucus believe that the works of the Nobel Laureate, Amartya Sen is useful in making the much needed conceptual clarity on where we want to go. Like Sen, we believe that for the New Urban Agenda to benefit all of us, we cannot rely on partnership framed in transcendental approach (of John Rawls), Rather the idea of partnership and interpretation of what is now called the *New Urban Agenda* must be centered on a comparative approach that shall enables us to ask and respond to the question- Why has urbanization this far left too many people behind? We believe that true partnership should be that which promotes more avenues for public reasoning and availability of democratic institutions. We have found this lacking as well.

We understand the primary intent of the forthcoming UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to be that of building partnerships and inclusive policy framework. We however hold that it is not possible to realize that objective without first using the Istanbul resolution of HABITAT II as the basis for current reflection and future negotiations. Most important, we hold that it is only through such an approach that seeks to

evaluate itself and embrace the language of social justice and human rights that the HABITAT III agenda shall live to its promise.

Further, because section C of the document deals with the Follow-up and Review of the Zero Draft of the new Urban agenda, we have additional emphasis to point out to its deficits and what ought to be done for the new urban agenda to be realized. The current Section C does not represent a cohesive proposal on the post-2016 institutional arrangements in the field of human settlements at the international, i.e. United Nations level and the Partners place in them as it lacks an organizational or political plan and strategy to effectively implement the New Urban Agenda [NUA] once finalized and endorsed by the General Assembly.

We believe that while the UN-Habitat and its Governing Council has been given the mandate to implement the NUA, such commitment shall be hollow unless it is accompanied with expansion of the membership to the Governing Council and expanded role for Habitat partners and partner groups. This should go hand in hand with making the work of UN-Habitat more knowledge based.

The implementation, framework and plan, including the role of the World Urban Forum (WUF) should also be made more clear and move beyond mere meeting points and become instead an advisory body to the Assembly on technical aspects of the implementation, making recommendations.

Finally, the implementation of the NUA shall require proper financing as well as more structured model for global as well as country assessments. We suggest that the period should be defined as bi-annual and could benefit from Voluntary Assessed Contributions (VAC) for members of the new Assembly similar to what was done at UNEP.