**The #NewUrbanAgenda and smart cities: thoughts from #Habitat3**

*This week, ITU was at*[*UN Habitat III*](https://habitat3.org/)*talking about Smart Sustainable Cities. ICT advancements have enabled new approaches, tools and mechanisms for improving the quality of urban life, boosting social prosperity, and positively impacting on the growth and competitiveness of economies and cities around the world.*

Today, roughly 50% of the world’s population live in a city; this is estimated to grow to [nearly 70% by 2050](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/news/population/world-urbanization-prospects-2014.html). But, how will our urban ecosystems cope with this rapid urbanization?

Urban development is increasingly dependent on the availability and quality of its digital resources, not just its physical infrastructure.

The [New Urban Agenda (NUA)](https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda) adopted at Habitat III recognizes the need to adopt a smart city approach, which makes use of the opportunities offered by connectivity.

By ushering significant changes in urban development and supporting the delivery of basic services such as transportation and health, broadband and ICTs can contribute to the NUA’s Goals – and the success of [SDG 11](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg11) on sustainable cities and communities.

**What is a smart (sustainable) city?**

Defined by ITU and UNECE as a city that respects the economic, social and environmental needs of its present and future inhabitants, [Smart Sustainable Cities](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-T/focusgroups/ssc/Pages/default.aspx)aim to drive inclusivity, accessibility, safety, innovative labour mobility, increased production and resiliency. They can also act as a brake on migration to towns and cities by bringing sought after urban opportunities to the most remote areas of a country.

Through ubiquitous communication networks, wireless sensor technology, and intelligent management systems, ICTs have an immense potential to improve quality of life and improve efficiency of urban operation and services.

In the developing world in particular, we are seeing some incredible success stories, where smartphone capabilities are being used in applications ranging from the detection and mapping of disease outbreaks, to the proliferation of educational resources everywhere, to delivering digital financial inclusion to millions of the world’s unbanked.

**But, there are some issues to overcome, and ITU is working hard to address them.**

Central to the Smart Sustainable City paradigm is broadband connectivity. But 3.5 billion people, or roughly [half of the global population](http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx), is still offline; in the world’s least developed countries (LDCs), 90% is completely unconnected. Bridging this connectivity gap – as called for by [SDG 9c](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg9) – is essential to ensuring that smart sustainable cities are possible for the whole world. ITU works to spread the benefits of broadband connectivity through a number of key activities and partnerships.

Another crucial issue for Smart Sustainable Cities will be developing interoperable international standards – ensuring that equipment and systems produced by different vendors work together seamlessly and to reduce costs through economies of scale.  This was one of the founding principles of ITU and continues to be a major part of our work, across all of the sectors of the organization.

Another challenge is acquiring the necessary satellite and spectrum allocations, especially for future mobile services.  Since much of the technology will be using radio spectrum, ITU will ensure the availability of internationally agreed frequencies to enable the coordinated development of the Internet of Things (IoT), including machine-to-machine communications and ubiquitous sensor networks.

Finally, we must ensure that the necessary policy and regulatory environment is in place. This means promoting an environment that facilitates and promotes innovation while still delivering effective mechanisms to avoid market dominance and guarantee consumer protection. ITU promotes the good practices and regulatory conditions to address the urban-development challenges through the introduction of public policies to promote social inclusion in smart cities, and improve access to technologies for all.

I leave Habitat III optimistic that the potential of ICTs as a catalyst for the New Urban Agenda will be fulfilled, as a new generation of urban planners and policy makers – born, raised and educated as ‘digital natives’ in our inter-connected world – take responsibility for building the cities of the future.

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