

## HOW IS UN-HABITAT

### MAINSTREAMING HUMAN RIGHTS?

UN-Habitat commenced cooperation with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights as early as 2002 to work together for the comprehensive and progressive realization of Housing Rights under the auspices of the joint United Nations Housing Rights Programme. In early 2013 mainstreaming of human rights was approved as a priority issue by the UN-Habitat Governing Council through its inclusion in the 2014-19 Strategic Plan. Mainstreaming thus empowers UN-Habitat to apply human rights considerations to all parts of its work programme.

### LET'S GET STARTED!

To mainstream and implement human rights, a framework for action is required. Within this framework it is necessary to have a strategic result that indicates the intended impact of mainstreaming on the lives of claims-holders. The strategic result aimed for is that the **human rights to adequate housing and basic services are realised for the urban poor and the most vulnerable urban dwellers.**

### The strategic result is supported by four expected accomplishments

- 1 UN-Habitat enabled to empower stakeholders on human rights issues related to adequate housing and basic services.
- 2 Claim-holders able to assert rights to adequate housing and basic services.
- 3 Duty-bearers held accountable for achievement of rights to adequate housing and basic services.
- 4 Human rights standards for adequate housing and basic services protected, fulfilled and respected by duty-bearers.

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**HUMAN RIGHTS**

**MAINSTREAMING**

**IN UN-HABITAT**

**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE



Urbanization is today one of the most important global trends of the 21st century. It is a transformative force that can be harnessed to enhance economic growth and productivity, as well as wealth and state-building.

It can reduce poverty and has beneficial effects in various development sectors. More than 50 per cent of the world's population is now urban and this is expected to rise to 60 per cent by 2030. 90 per cent of the world's urban population growth during this period will take place in the cities of developing countries, particularly those in Africa and Asia. Regrettably, **urban population growth will thus add to the already close to one billion people who currently reside in informal settlements where access to basic amenities is lacking, and where tenure arrangements are precarious.**

### WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

The most pressing urbanization challenges include: large scale urban poverty in many countries; steady increase in the number of slum dwellers; emergence of new forms of poverty, vulnerability and marginalization; rising inequality in urban areas across the world; decreasing levels of human security and unfair health gaps in cities; the speculative nature of the housing and related markets; discrimination against women in the context of urban poverty and violence; high costs to the natural environment; urban risks of climate change and natural hazards; increasing levels of violent conflicts and crises; and unprecedented levels of crime and other types of violence.

### HOW CAN A HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACH (HRBA) CHANGE THAT?

These challenges are symptoms of a larger deficit to respect human rights in cities, particularly the right to adequate housing and the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. **Only when all dimensions of human rights are respected will urbanization realize itself as the transformative force that it is.** The human rights dimensions relate to the availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability, quality and appropriateness of the rights to adequate housing, safe drinking water and sanitation.

Human Rights, including the rights to adequate housing and safe water and sanitation are contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights instruments including in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which have been ratified by most UN member states. These rights, once so endorsed, do not have a voluntary character. They impose obligations on states and on the international community, they are universal, cannot be waived or taken away, and are legally protected.

The human rights-based approach defines a pattern of human rights relationships between the individual – who is the claim-holder with justified claims on the state – and the state – which is the duty-bearer. This has the effect of removing many decisions from the realms of benevolent or charitable decision-making by the member state, and placing an obligation on it to show evidence of serious efforts to realise the rights it has ratified. The state is held accountable through international governance institutions for making progress in fulfilling the relevant rights. A human rights-based approach involves moving away from assessing the needs of beneficiaries towards empowering and building the capacity claim-holders in asserting their rights.

### HOW IS THE HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACH DOING THAT?

According to the human rights-based approach, the process of urbanization should adhere to the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination, inclusion and participation, accountability and the rule of law. Concurrently, the city, as the outcome of this process, should meet specified human rights standards, for instance: adequate housing, access to water and sanitation, health and education services, work, participation in decisions that affect city inhabitants, or any other rights codified in the human rights treaties ratified by the country in question.

**The human rights-based approach adds value to urban planning by legitimizing prioritization of the interests on the most marginalized in society and their participation in the planning process.** Indeed, the creation and implementation of an appropriate form of urban planning is a precondition in many national contexts for the fulfilment of human rights obligations in the urban context.

### WHY UN-HABITAT?

UN-Habitat is bound by the UN Charter, which recognize human rights as one of its pillars, and is specifically mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. Further, as part of the UN family, **UN-Habitat is mandated to respect, promote, and protect human rights in all of its activities.** All of UN-Habitat's interventions are underpinned by values contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that promote the right to an adequate standard of living, of which the right to adequate housing is a part. UN-Habitat is also a key agency in the implementation of the right to safe drinking water and sanitation. Applying a HRBA to development has become one of the essential platforms for recent transformations in development strategies and has – due to their successful implementation – received strong support from the UN leadership and the UN Member States.

