**WUF12
BACKGROUND
PAPER**

WORLD
URBAN
FORUM
TWELFTH SESSION

CAIRO, EGYPT | 4—8 NOVEMBER 2024

It All Starts at Home

Local Actions for Sustainable Cities and Communities

Introduction

Consider the pressing issues that affect our daily lives: the availability and cost of housing, the ease of commuting, the air we breathe, the safety of our water supply, access to safe public spaces, the impacts of climate change, as well as urban crises and conflicts. These are not trivial matters; they are central to humanity's shared urban existence and how 4.4 billion people live, work and find happiness across cities and communities.

Hence, the theme of the twelfth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF12) is "It All Starts at Home." The concept of "home" extends beyond the physical structures that shelter us to encompass the cultural, social, economic and environmental dimensions of daily life. It further embodies the intangible attributes of belonging, meaning and values that shape the sustainability of our cities and communities.

At WUF12, the focus is on the critical role of local action in enabling accelerated progress towards urban sustainability. The phrase is also an invitation for WUF12 participants to take home values, innovations, solutions and inspiration from the Forum to lead transformational change: locally, together and now.

It All Starts Locally

Local action is essential to achieve sustainable development and promote inclusive, safe and resilient cities. This requires effective localization, which is the process of transforming global goals into reality at the local level, in coherence with national frameworks and in line with communities' priorities. Localization entails meaningful collaboration among all stakeholders, and coordination across sectors and spheres of governance. It is a two-way process where the local meets the national and the global, and vice versa. At its core, localization recognises the unique conditions and priorities of each region, city and community, while aiming to contribute to the national and global pursuit of sustainable urban development.

It All Starts Together

Accelerating progress towards sustainable cities and communities requires all actors to join hands across sectors, levels and places. Localization has the power to fast-track joint action across all levels of society and decision-making. Bringing together subnational and national governments with global thought leaders, entrepreneurs, academics, grass-roots activists and those facing disproportionate levels of exclusion and marginalisation, the World Urban Forum is a unique shared space to collectively envision new positive trajectories for urban life. It offers us an opportunity to find ways to address global challenges collaboratively, for the benefit of all.

It All Starts Now

Effective and inclusive multilateral cooperation has never been more urgent. WUF12 will take place at a moment when the global multilateral system faces unprecedented threats, posing risks to collective progress in tackling shared challenges, including climate change. It comes some weeks after the United Nations Summit of the Future,[1] a once-in-a-generation opportunity to elevate global cooperation and governance and agree on a Pact for the Future. Moreover, WUF12 will be held just five years before the deadline set to realise the 2030 Agenda. The Forum is therefore an exceptional moment to showcase and elevate the role of local action now for rescuing both multilateral cooperation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The WUF12 Dialogues

The WUF12 theme "It All Starts at Home: Local Actions for Sustainable Cities and Communities" is supported by six dialogues, each of which explores a different dimension of the theme. The dialogues will structure WUF12 events and serve as conceptual anchors for activities and discussions. They are curated by UN-Habitat and facilitated by global thought leaders and experts.

DIALOGUE 1
Housing our future

Opens with one of the most important challenges for cities and communities: **adequate housing**. This dialogue explores solutions to the decades-long and ever-growing housing crisis and rising inequalities that spur from it, including opportunities for a renewed social contract.

DIALOGUE 2
Cities and the climate crisis

Addresses the pressing challenge of **climate change** and cities, emphasizing the importance of localized adaptation, mitigation and resilience in ensuring that urban areas can thrive in a future with unprecedented climatic conditions.

DIALOGUE 3
Stronger together

Shifts focus to strategies essential for **partnerships** to bridge global goals with local realities, highlighting the power of collaboration in driving localized progress.

DIALOGUE 4,
Financing localization and localizing finance

Explores the importance of **financial empowerment**, examining mechanisms to ensure that resources are readily accessible at the local level to fuel sustainable development and localization.

DIALOGUE 5
Putting people first in a digital era

Ventures into the sphere of **digital technology** and innovation, and its potential to drive localized solutions and promote inclusive development, while noting the risks posed to cities and communities.

DIALOGUE 6
The loss of home

Invites reflections on the **meaning of "home" amid urban crises**, examining how urban stakeholders, communities and authorities respond to turmoil.

Dialogues are high-profile events, which will take place at WUF and which set the agenda for policy and action. They provide a platform for global thinkers, practitioners and decision-makers to share insights and solutions on themes of global importance and include active discussion with the audience. Discussions collect key reflections on the status of and way forward for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Each dialogue serves as a crucial lens through which to view connections between the concept of "home" and the multifaceted challenges and opportunities entailed in localization. WUF12 will foster conversations in multiple formats, such as roundtables, assemblies, special sessions, etc., which will create diverse entry points for considering the role of all urban actors, including grass roots, civil society, private sector, academia, all levels of government and international organisations, among many more.

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DIALOGUE 1

Housing our future

What needs to change to solve housing inadequacy for billions across our cities and communities?

No region, country, city or community is spared from the devastating impacts of housing inadequacy, which has countless adverse ripple effects on economic and social well-being. Worldwide, up to 2.8 billion people struggle with housing inadequacy, of which nearly 1.1 billion reside in slums and informal settlements, and an estimated 318 million are homeless.[II] Housing inadequacy is closely linked with increased costs of living and urban inequality, which are impacting cities in both high- and low-income countries. The lack of access to adequate housing affects particular groups more severely, such as women, children and youth, persons with disabilities, older persons, migrants and displaced people, and other marginalised populations.

Placing housing at the centre of local actions will have far-reaching impacts in achieving other development goals and expanding other rights, such as access to basic services, health and education. In this light, creating new mechanisms to listen to and empower the most marginalised urban populations, as well as building and regaining trust and legitimacy, are critical for sustainable, affordable, inclusive and resilient urbanisation. Addressing housing inadequacy is a critical component of the New Social Contract, called for by the United Nations Secretary-General in "Our Common Agenda," serving as a necessary means of strengthening the

social fabric and trust between governments and their citizens based on justice and inclusion, and anchored in human rights.

In addition to the massive scale of the problem, it is crucial that solutions to housing inadequacy do not exacerbate other urban problems such as traffic congestion, water scarcity, inequality, carbon emissions and more. Further, these solutions should not exclude marginalised community interests or opinions, as so commonly happens with rapid urban development. Localization is therefore presented as a process to finding the type of solutions which do not compound existing problems.

This dialogue aims to showcase how localized approaches anchored in multistakeholder engagement and multilevel governance are key to ensuring widespread access to adequate housing and reducing widening inequality gaps in cities. This includes exploring how governments, the private sector, communities, activists and other stakeholders have called attention to and addressed these challenges. It does so by delving into the nexus between housing inadequacy and inequality in cities, and identifying tangible, concrete solutions that have successfully served and empowered the most vulnerable, and paved the way for a renewed social contract.

This dialogue sparks debate with the following questions:

> Which innovations, policy reforms, structural interventions or other measures have effectively mitigated housing inadequacies, inequality and extreme poverty, offering models for global replication?

> How can public, collective and private strategies be most effectively combined to deliver adequate housing for all?

> What policies and mechanisms ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalised are prioritised in terms of access to housing, and how can this lead to a renewed social contract, based on human rights, inclusivity and justice?

DIALOGUE 2

Cities and the climate crisis

How can localization drive effective climate action to secure sustainable, safe, resilient and environmentally just cities and communities for all?
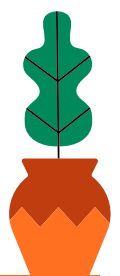
Climate change poses an existential threat across the globe. Urban areas are central to tackling both the drivers and impacts of climate change. Cities face critical risks as the concentrated nature of people, homes, businesses, institutions and infrastructure makes them vulnerable to climate shocks. By 2050, a 2℃ rise in global temperatures, combined with carbon-intensive urban expansion, is expected to place 2.7 billion people, predominantly in urban settings, at moderate or high risk of climate-related impacts.[III] Further, the global urban population facing water scarcity is projected to be 1.7—2.4 billion people by 2050.[IV] Within cities, the effects of climate change are not felt equally, as poor and marginalised communities are particularly exposed to climate disasters, health risks, food insecurity and water scarcity.

At the same time, cities and communities are also at the forefront of addressing climate change. They are uniquely positioned to take actions to increase resilience against the effects of climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, combat water scarcity and ensure environmental justice. Indeed, cities have demonstrated that they are at the cutting edge of global advocacy on climate commitments, many of which are more ambitious than those of national governments: from urban circularity — seeking sustainability through re-use, refurbishment, recycling,[V] – to leveraging the value of proximity to reduce the negative effects of traffic, sprawl and pollution. Similarly, cities are tapping into indigenous knowledge

and nature-based solutions, addressing issues such as urban-rural linkages, food production, biodiversity preservation and more.

Localizing climate action in cities around the world is thus urgent. Global goals on climate change need to be turned into action at the local level, including the Paris Climate Agreement and SDG13. Local actors are well-positioned to address the impact of climate change and be key players in greenhouse gas mitigation, but only if there is political will, along with institutional and financial mechanisms to adequately empower them. Involving marginalised communities, including intersectional categories of women, persons with disabilities, the poor, children and youth, older persons, minority groups and others, is also critical for effective local climate action. Better targeting of local and regional governments through global climate finance is equally urgent.

This dialogue examines how building urban resilience and sustainability in the face of climate change must start at home through local action. It will explore concrete strategies and successful models for adapting to climate change, reducing carbon emissions, encouraging green construction, and developing effective systems for waste management, water conservation and energy efficiency, among others. UN-Habitat's flagship World Cities Report 2024, which is focused on local climate action, will further provide the background to this dialogue.

This dialogue sparks debate with the following questions:

>   How can cities and communities identify and scale up successful, locally-led actions, innovations and solutions for climate change adaptation and mitigation?

> What measures are necessary to ensure that laws, policies and innovations aimed at addressing climate change in urban areas foster environmental justice, inclusivity and equity at the local level?

> What are some of the most successful programmes, policies and infrastructure projects that cities and communities have adopted to deal with increasingly frequent climate change related hazards and disasters?

> How can global climate finance strengthen local climate action through better targeting of local and regional governments?

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DIALOGUE 3

Stronger together

What partnerships are needed to make global agendas work for local realities and ensure local solutions shape global agendas?

The world is behind in achieving the SDGs, particularly SDG11 (sustainable cities and communities).VI Moreover, at least 105 of the 169 SDG targets will not be reached without effective engagement and coordination with local and regional governments. Agendas for Sustainable Development are primarily negotiated between and endorsed by national governments, yet their implementation rests on turning these goals into local action and creating effective partnerships across government levels and sectors. Cities are the central arena where these collaborations are forged, providing opportunities to integrate local calls for action into global frameworks.

Effective localization requires building partnerships across levels and sectors. It is anchored on multilevel governance and whole-of-society approaches, promoting dialogue and shared commitment towards common goals. Coherence is also needed to ensure alignment of policies, allocation of adequate resources and effective implementation at all levels. In addition, successful public administration requires engagement with diverse stakeholders, including civil society organisations, citizens' associations, the private sector, academia and researchers, etc. Because they are the closest level to

communities, local and subnational governments have a key role to play as conveners of urban stakeholders and partnership builders across levels and sectors.

Partnerships between governments and civil society organizations are essential for fostering community-led approaches that guarantee inclusion of those at risk of being left behind. Engagement within international and multilateral arenas by neighbourhood actors and municipal officials is also necessary.

The aim of this dialogue is to explore the ways in which local ideas can inform global agendas and how global agendas can support local action. This dialogue will examine state-of-the-art localization approaches and the role that partnerships of all types, across levels and sectors, can play in enhancing the global agenda's impact on cities and communities. Integral to these efforts are partnerships that recognize and ensure the active, meaningful and inclusive engagement of youth in decision and policy making.

This dialogue sparks debate with the following questions:

> How can we develop innovative models of collaboration to enhance synergy between local governments, businesses and civil society for the realisation of sustainable and inclusive urban futures?

> How can we create opportunities for local, traditional and indigenous forms of knowledge to be considered in global policy frameworks?

> What insights can be drawn from successful examples of multi-level governance, and how can these lessons shape stronger partnerships between different spheres of government, in the future?

> What is needed to ensure the active, meaningful and inclusive engagement of youth in driving local action and influencing policy?

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DIALOGUE 4

Financing localization and localizing finance

How can we unlock financing for local actions to accelerate the achievement of global goals?

Without proper financing, the effectiveness, speed and scale of local actions will always be limited. Despite the push towards greater decentralisation and functional devolution to subnational governments in many countries, outcomes vary, as regional and local governments often face responsibilities that are not adequately matched by resources.

The main challenge is finding sustainable ways of obtaining adequate financing to achieve the SDGs. Yet, given the range of financing mechanisms, there is no single model that will work for all cities. It is imperative that we build up our understanding of the diverse forms of finance to ensure sustainable and inclusive urban development, while incorporating lessons about h ow to avoid unsustainable arrangements.

Localized finance relies on an array of options, including but not limited to, financial transfers from central governments, own-source revenue, concessional finance, private investments, as well as public-private sector partnerships, among others. These options are not mutually exclusive. Within this array of options, access to private finance could play an important role but remains elusive, especially for cities in developing countries.VII On one hand, accessing private finance requires that cities have the capacity to manage

finances and revenue flows, identify and design sufficiently attractive projects, and engage effectively in partnership negotiations. The role of national governments in de-risking and setting regulatory frameworks and conditions for localized finance is therefore critical.

This dialogue focuses on the specific conditions and obstacles for effective financing directed at, and/or stemming from, cities themselves. The dialogue will explore the trade-offs involved in diverse financing models and how different forms of finance have been used to accelerate progress on the SDGs. In doing so, it will not only raise awareness but also increase avenues for both public and private actors to cooperate on the implementation of local accountability and capacity building strategies to improve access to finance at the local level. It also points to the need for a greater local focus in the reform of the international financial architecture aimed at enhanced predictability and ease of access to finance locally.

This dialogue sparks debate with the following questions:

> What challenges do local governments face in accessing private sector finance for local development? What strategies have proven effective in helping local governments overcome these challenges?

> What considerations drive private finance decisions to invest in local development? How can the business models of private finance institutions evolve to align better with local development contexts?

> How can local fiscal management, accountability and transparency be improved in order to unlock access to private finance for the SDGs?

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DIALOGUE 5

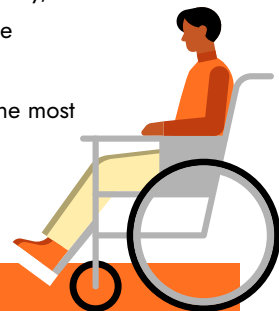# Putting people first in a digital age

How can technology transform cities and communities while ensuring an open, free, secure and human-centric digital future?

The proliferation of digital technologies presents unprecedented opportunities and challenges for urban development. Digitally enabled solutions offer immense potential to transform cities and communities for a better quality of life, and this shift is already under way. With the market value for smart city systems at approximately USD 517 billion, and expected to grow rapidly, the impact of technological innovation on urban environments is profound.VIII However, it comes with significant risks. Considering that one third of the global population is offline, and people in low-income countries are more likely to lack internet access, the benefits of technological transformation are not yet equitable.IX Furthermore, technology-driven urban innovation and digital solutions often fail to promote fair outcomes for all, exacerbating gendered, racial and intergenerational inequities. Digital technology also poses risks to privacy, rights and security if left unchecked, including in the context of accelerated artificial intelligence development.

In this context, a localized approach that embraces innovation is essential to empower cities and communities. Whilst maximising the benefits of digital technology and innovation for urban sustainability,

a localized approach calls for concerted efforts to adopt people-centred initiatives and ensure inclusive outcomes. Fostering innovation while harmonising regulatory frameworks and policy incentives at all levels is key, with a focus on democratising access, reducing discriminatory bias and protecting privacy and human rights. As policymakers and regulators navigate a quickly changing technological landscape, local approaches that enable meaningful community engagement can prioritise and ensure technological solutions that are responsive to citizen interests and re-establish trust between governments and local actors.

This dialogue explores people-centred and innovation-driven approaches to technological advances, smart city development and the application of localized digital solutions for sustainability. Specifically, it focuses on empowering cities and communities to shape more sustainable futures through strategic innovation such as smart infrastructure, digital governance and citizen engagement, digital literacy and accessibility, and e-mobility, among others. Participants will be encouraged to reflect on trade-offs in the use of technology and how to ensure that it works for the most vulnerable.

This dialogue sparks debate with the following questions:

> What digitally enabled solutions and innovations are positively transforming cities and communities, offering lessons for scaling and replication?

> How can communities play a greater role in shaping, monitoring and fostering people-centred approaches to smart cities and technology that protect rights and privacy, while ensuring equitable benefits?

> How can cities create governance and regulatory mechanisms that incentivise and support locally driven digital innovation to promote sustainable cities and communities now and in the future?

> What is needed to address major structural impediments that perpetuate the urban digital divide?

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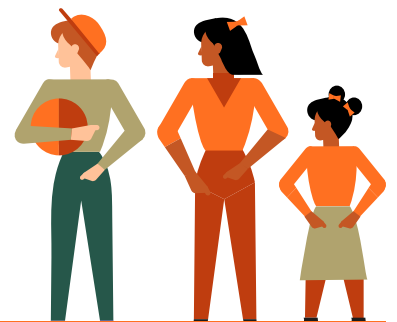
DIALOGUE 6

The loss of home

In the face of destruction, displacement and despair, how can we ensure a safe home for all through local action?

As the world witnesses an alarming number of interlinked global crises,[x] internally and internationally displaced people — including families, women, children and youth, older persons and persons with disabilities — are reshaping human settlements, cities and territories. Urban areas are increasingly both the epicentre of crisis situations and a refuge for the displaced, who are in turn already among the most marginalised groups. Although local and regional governments and urban stakeholders are key front-line responders during urban crises, they face immense challenges, as they are not sufficiently at the centre of multilateral efforts to tackle crises and upheavals. Given increasing global crises, the loss of home has intensified. This loss goes beyond the destruction of the physical structures that house individuals and families; it includes intangible elements of communal life.

Local urban actors can help prevent the loss of home and aid in creating new homes that partially mitigate these harms. Localizing crisis response offers substantial opportunities to go beyond mere recovery

and to enable prevention that fundamentally changes territories, cities and communities for the better. This includes addressing crisis-driven displacement beyond short term stabilisation with solutions that will help communities thrive in sustainable and inclusive ways. This also entails empowering local actors to exercise peacebuilding leadership.

This dialogue focuses on how localization can ensure greater impact in responding to urban crises to protect communities and promote sustainable cities. The dialogue aims at ensuring that home, across all its dimensions, is not lost. The dialogue invites participants to reflect on the interconnectedness between the loss and rebuilding of home, the resolution of crises and the achievement of sustainable development goals. It interrogates the central role of local and regional governments in mobilising the political will and resources for action at scale, shifting fundamental policies and practices to mitigate conflict, adapting to crises and leading to durable solutions.

This dialogue sparks debate with the following questions:

> How have local and regional governments, and their associations and networks, effectively responded to urban crises, and how can these practices be scaled?

> How can multilevel approaches be strengthened in international urban crisis response and recovery?

> What are successful examples of how localization has empowered communities affected by urban crises as architects of their own recovery and as central to rebuilding processes?

> How can people and communities that face displacement (re)create a home away from home until return is possible?
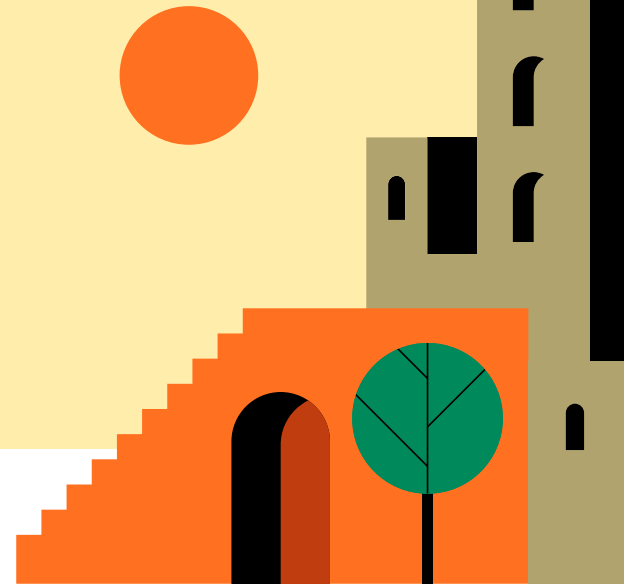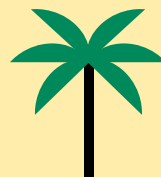
The promise of WUF12

For five days, WUF12 will host thousands of people from all parts of the world. There will be over 300 different events, an extended Urban Expo with Cairo's Urban Week programme, in addition to countless opportunities for networking and informal exchange. The main sessions of WUF12 will be livestreamed and translated into all six United Nations languages as well as International Sign Language in English and Arabic. Further, the WUF12 premises will be universally accessible for people with visual, hearing and mobility impairments.

WUF12 will serve to confront the complexities of sustainable urban development head-on. These discussions will be enriched by a dynamic collective process that encourages deliberation around the uncomfortable truths of our urbanising world. Panel gender parity, geographical representation, inclusion of different ages and diversity of stakeholders and approaches will be ensured in all main sessions.

A focus on initiatives and interventions that showcase concrete, tangible and positive impact will be combined with a space to amplify the voices of all, with an emphasis on children and youth, women, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, older persons, refugees and displaced persons, and other marginalised groups. WUF12 seeks not only to ensure their representation but also to empower them as critical vanguards of change.

WUF12 will invite participants to start changes at home and to make the most of cities' potential to spur global change through local action.

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