



Small islands call for innovative solutions to tackle unique challenges of urbanisation.

Press Release

Quito, 19 October 2016 – Small island leaders met in Quito, Ecuador, yesterday to call for greater support and innovative partnerships to ensure the sustainable urbanisation of small island developing States (SIDS).

The event, held on the margins of the HABITAT III Conference, currently underway in Quito, was co-organised by the Republic of Maldives, UN-OHRLLS, UN-DESA, and UN-HABITAT with discussions centring on the enhancement of urban resilience and promotion of sustainable urban development.

“We are witnessing an increased urgency for small islands to enhance their urban management systems given their higher exposure to hazards and the destructive impacts of climate change. This has been brought into stark reality with the recent devastation by hurricane Matthew in Haiti,” said Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General and High-Representative for Least Developed countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States.

“The cycle of destruction and reconstruction due to disasters has left not only Haiti but many small islands with high debt burdens and lost development gains which were hard won over many years. Collectively the international community must act to support future generations as they develop their towns and cities into sustainable and safe places to work and live.”

Small Island Developing States have a combined population of 65 million people, 59 per cent living in urban areas, the meeting highlighted how the trends for urbanisation requires targeted and focused attention in small islands. Participants discussed how SIDS provide valuable contributions to the implementation of global development agendas including the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the SAMOA Pathway, the New Urban Agenda, the Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.



Coupled with the diversity of island states and their geographic locations, there is growing recognition that the definition of 'urban' for SIDS - besides cities and towns - can also include small towns or villages found along coastal areas and/or a series of islands. The meeting underscored how an understanding of this urban diversity is crucial to discerning the variety of regional and sub-regional challenges that these countries face on human settlements and enabling national ownership of the New Urban Agenda.

On discussions around upgrading of informal settlements, SIDS are facing capacity challenges which require support and partnerships. "In converting informal settlements, among the biggest challenges is money for infrastructure and ensuring communities have access to land titles, said H.E. Powes Parkop, MP, Governor for the National Capital District, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. Governor Parkop highlighted the resilience of communities living in informal settlements in the city of Port Moresby and that with the right support, communities can effectively contribute to the city's economic activities.

The event highlighted how innovative solutions and partnerships are essential for SIDS to guarantee resilient urban settlements. Enhanced adaption to climate change should go hand-in-hand with increased urban resilience as a cost-effective component of sustainable urban development. A number of relatively straightforward interventions in urban and rural areas were discussed in the areas of infrastructure, housing, informal settlements, ecosystems and energy. These could provide significant benefits, particularly when paired with efforts to mitigate climate change, for example, through building codes that encourage both resilience, energy and water efficiency.

The New Urban Agenda to be adopted in Quito provides a renewed opportunity for small islands and their development partners to capitalize on the full potential of urbanisation as a means for structural transformation, building resilience, economic growth and shared prosperity in a sustainable manner.

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