



## Side event: Harnessing the potential of urbanisation in Least Developed Countries

**Habitat III**

**17 October 2016**

**5.30 - 7.00 PM**

**Conference Room A, One UN Pavilion**

**Quito, Ecuador**

Organised by UN-OHRLS and UNOPS

### Background

The population of LDCs is projected to double in size from 954 million inhabitants in 2015 to 1.9 billion in 2050. On the one hand, the percentage of people living in rural areas in LDCs is expected to decline while the percentage of urban dwellers is expected to grow from 32 per cent in 2015 to 50 per cent by 2050. Given the high growth projections for most cities in developing countries, the challenges of urban poverty and more broadly of city management will only worsen in many places if not addressed more aggressively. Even in LDCs with low level of urbanisation to date, namely Burundi, Uganda, Malawi, Nepal, Niger and Ethiopia (where rate of urbanisation is less than 20 per cent), the proportion of urban population will double by 2050. This illustrates the urgency for expanding infrastructure and services to better cope with the growing number of urban inhabitants in LDCs.

Historically, urbanisation accompanied major structural shifts, and rapid economic growth; however in several LDCs, particularly in the case of many African LDCs, urbanisation and structural transformation have not been mutually supportive. As a result, large portions of the urban population in these countries remains trapped in low productivity informal

services, without access to public goods and services and face “urban exclusion” exacerbating inequality, insecurity and unsustainability.

LDCs face significant economic, social and environmental challenges, which need to be addressed to enable them to seize economic advantages associated with urban agglomerations. If these challenges are addressed properly, the urbanisation process taking place in LDCs offers great potential not only to lift millions of people out of poverty but also towards meeting the other goals and targets of the broader UN development agenda.

The Istanbul Programme of Action charts out the vision for achieving sustainable development in LDCs that are relevant to addressing the urban challenges in this group of countries. These include support measures to improve the lives of slum dwellers, affordable housing and access to basic services, resilience building, development of infrastructure and connectivity, access to technology which are essential to build their productive capacity of induce structural transformation that is currently lagging behind the urbanisation process witnessed in several LDCs.

For rapid urbanization to provide opportunities to all, carefully considered urban planning and good governance with effective regulatory frameworks are required. Adequate planning that includes a systems based approach to move away from typical silos, effective governance both at the central and local level linked with financial mechanisms and investment frameworks in , infrastructure including affordable housing , renewable energy, and transport can bring significant economic, social and environmental benefits, reinforcing urban resilience in LDCs.

The New Urban Agenda provides a renewed opportunity for LDCs to rethink their urban capacity, tap into the full potential of urbanisation and use it as a vehicle for structural transformation, economic growth and shared prosperity in a sustainable manner.

## **Objectives**

The side event will explore ways on how LDCs can harness the full potential of urbanisation. It aims to share views on how the urbanisation process in LDCs can simultaneously contribute to internationally agreed development goals of reducing poverty, promoting equality and transition to environmental sustainability. In doing so, the side event will discuss the root causes of urban poverty, urban exclusion and climate related impacts of rapid urbanisation in LDCs.

Emphasis will be laid of strategies to addresses the challenges governments and local authorities in LDCs face across the three dimensions of sustainable development. The side event will also discuss some of the policies and programmes for building urban resilience in LDCs and share lessons learnt. Thus the event will contribute towards providing guidance on key areas for action to tap into the full potential urbanisation brings and how it can be harnessed to create opportunities for all in LDCs.

## **Format and participation**

The side event will be organized in the form of a panel discussion. As panelists relevant Ministers from LDCs and development partners, parliamentarians as well as representatives of civil society and the private sector will be invited. This will be followed by interactive discussion among all participants.

### Proposed discussion questions

- How can the capacity of governments and local authorities in LDCs be better supported to adjust and to meet the growing challenges of sustainable urban development?
- What type of assistance can development partners offer to support LDCs to realise economies for agglomerations through investment in infrastructure, improving connectivity and sharing of technology?
- What policies and changes are needed to strengthen urban resilience of LDCs to climate change and environmental disasters and risks?
- What is the role of the international community to strengthen coherence and synergy in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Agenda and the IPoA?

### Speakers

*Moderator: Diana Mitlin, Professor of Global Urbanism, Managing Director of Global Development Institute, University of Manchester*

- Mr. Gyan Chandra Acharya, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and High-Representative, UN-OHRLLS
- Ms. Grete Faremo, Under-Secretary-General and UNOPS Executive Director
- Mr. Arthur Minsat, Economist, OECD Development Centre
- Mr. Ede Ijjasz-Vasquez, Senior Director of the Social, Urban, Rural & Resilience Global Practice, The World Bank

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