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Implementation of the strategic plan for the period
2020–2023: annual report for 2020 on the strategic plan
for the period 2020–2023

Summary of the Annual Report 2020 on the implementation of the strategic plan of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme for the period 2020–2023

Note by the secretariat

1. In paragraph 3 of its resolution 1/1 (HSP/HA.1/Res.1), the United Nations Habitat Assembly of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to report annually to Member States on progress achieved in the implementation of the strategic plan and the activities set out in the work programme of UN-Habitat. Accordingly, the secretariat prepared its *Annual Report 2020*, setting out progress achieved during the year. A summary of the report, which can be accessed at https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/05/english_-_hsp-ocpr.2021-2.pdf, was presented at the first meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UN-Habitat for a high-level midterm review, held in Nairobi from 29 June to 1 July 2021.

2. The full *Annual Report 2020* was launched on 11 May 2021 and features on both the UN-Habitat website homepage and the Programme's accountability webpage. It was presented at the first meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives for a high-level midterm review. An online version can be accessed at https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/05/annual_progress_report_2020_final.pdf and a short video on the report can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1T38jmK7KA. Printed versions have been shared with all UN-Habitat regional and liaison offices for further dissemination.

3. In line with requests from Member States, the report sets out the progress achieved towards planned results (outcome areas) against indicator targets for 2020. Results were gathered from headquarters offices, country offices and regional offices in a survey-based data-collection exercise undertaken in January and February 2021.

4. The report clearly demonstrates that UN-Habitat is implementing initiatives that contribute to the fulfilment of the Programme's mandate by alleviating poverty and inequality, enhancing shared prosperity, strengthening climate action and preventing urban crisis. It also indicates that the Programme has been advancing its catalytic functions, creating more innovative urban solutions and ideas, working increasingly with strategic partners and delivering more tightly focused interventions.

5. The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic disrupted the implementation of certain activities included in the work programme and budget for 2020, while other activities had to be adapted to address the immediate challenges posed by the pandemic. Implementation was further hindered by a lack of full funding for the approved work programme and the supporting budget. In that

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context, the present report provides information on some of the constraints that led to a number of the key targets set for 2020 not being fully met and certain outcome areas being prioritized through an internal review process. The lessons learned from that process have been incorporated into the planning for 2021 and the draft work programme for 2022.

6. In its first year, and notwithstanding the challenging context described above, the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 proved to be a robust instrument for responding to the global pandemic and preparing human settlements for sustainable recovery. UN-Habitat produced publications, tools, guidelines and technical materials through its earmarked funding and funds available at the country and regional levels to inform its global normative work, improving both its operational activities and its field presence.

7. The *Annual Report 2020* also provides information on the design and launch of the UN-Habitat flagship programmes, which aim to strengthen the delivery capacity and efficiency of the strategic plan by consolidating initiatives to engage with Governments and UN-Habitat partners. The flagship programmes are intended to serve as vehicles to reinforce integration of UN-Habitat normative and operational work for greater efficiency and impact in the four domains of change of the strategic plan.

8. The strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 connects long-term results with global urban development agendas, based on a theory of change with four interlinked domains, which are mutually reinforcing. They are supported by several drivers to support the mandate and expertise of UN-Habitat, including policy and legislation, urban planning, governance and finance.

9. The report marks the first year of implementation of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023. It notes a number of adjustments to the work programme and deliverables, based on an ongoing analysis of external conditions, and presents the results to date. It sets out the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat with related results at the local, national, regional and global levels. Impact is illustrated through specific outcomes and stories for each of the four domains of change and the milestones achieved during the reporting period.

10. The implementation of the strategic plan has been supported by a new organizational structure, designed to strengthen implementation and facilitate a renewed approach to strategic partnerships, knowledge- and evidence-based interventions and the creation of innovative solutions.

11. Important deliverables include innovative financial mechanisms, particularly the Sustainable Development Goal Cities flagship initiative, which will accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level. In addition, the Cities Investment Facility has been designed to serve as a clearing house for urban projects in close collaboration with large-scale investors from the public, private and multilateral sectors.

12. According to the report, 6 of the 12 outcome areas of the strategic plan were relatively underfunded and therefore lagging behind in their implementation. As they are largely project-funded initiatives, achievement of the full strategic plan may rely on donor preferences and strategies. As a result, predictable and long-term funding remains a strategic priority for the organization to ensure a more balanced delivery of outputs and results.

13. Analysis of the integrated nature of UN-Habitat's portfolio across its strategic plan demonstrates existing linkages, strengths and weaknesses across outcomes of the strategic plan. It shows that results are often pursued by a primary outcome in one subprogramme, while ensuring additional contributions to outcomes in another subprogramme. The work on basic services and sustainable mobility (outcome 1.1), while contributing to climate mitigation (outcome 3.1), is a good example of that. That analysis provides a good basis for setting targets for further integrated programming in line with the recalibration of the strategic plan on the basis of the midterm review of the strategic plan.

14. The report contains the following four sections:

(a) Section 1 presents an introduction that outlines the strategic priorities for 2020, the response by UN-Habitat to the COVID-19 pandemic during the year, its focus on advancing urban issues within the United Nations system, and the “centre of excellence” approach it pursues to achieve impact at scale;

(b) Section 2 sets out a detailed assessment of the progress and results achieved in each of the four domains of change, presenting transformative stories and demonstrating results;

(c) Section 3 illustrates the way in which UN-Habitat assumes a catalytic role to advance urban issues through strategic partnerships and provides a brief look ahead towards the strategic plan for 2021;

(d) Section 4 provides an overview of the financial performance of UN-Habitat in 2020.

15. As UN-Habitat reviews its achievements and challenges in the first year of the strategic plan for the period 2020–2023, the report offers recommendations to inform further implementation. Those include planning and setting targets commensurate with secured funding; strengthening the catalytic function of the organization; and refining the approach to establishing UN-Habitat as a centre of excellence. Finally, the report demonstrates the need to customize responses at the local, country and regional levels.
