



UN-HABITAT



# Multi-Level Urban Forums

**A GUIDE**

## **Multi-Level Urban Forums: A Guide**

Copyright © United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) 2024

All rights reserved

P.O. Box 30030 00100 Nairobi GPO KENYA

Tel: 254-020-7623120 (Central Office)

[www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)

**HS Number:** HS/065/23E

### **Acknowledgments**

**Authors:** Michael Kinyanjui and Antonio Kipyegon

**Contributors:** Gonzalo Lacurcia Abaira, Christine Auclair, Martin Barugahare, Sergio Blanco, Eol Chae, Philippe Decorte, Bruno Dercon, Carmen Sanchez-Miranda Gallego, Grace Githiri, Neil Khor, Lucia Kiwala, Dennis Mwamati, Pamela Nutsukpo, Matthijs van Oostrum, Carl Philipp Schuck, Remy Sietchiping, Sinisa Trkulija, Raf Tuts, Jesus Salcedo Villanueva, Edlam Abera Yemeru.

**Design and Layout:** Jean Robert Gatsinzi and Mark Mungai

**Financial Support:** World Urban Forum Legacy Funds

**Disclaimer:** The designations employed and the presentation of materials in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any county, territory, city or area or its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries regarding its economic system or degree of development. Excerpts may be reproduced without authorization, on condition that the source is indicated. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, the United Nations and its member states.

**Please cite this publication as:** UN-Habitat (2024), Multi-Level Urban Forums: A Guide. Nairobi, <https://unhabitat.org/multi-level-urban-forums-a-guide>



# **Multi-Level Urban Forums**

**A GUIDE**

# FOREWORD



I am pleased to share with you this Guide on Multilevel Urban Forums. It serves as a resource to governments at all levels as they hold multi-stakeholders' urban forums with a policy-practice nexus, linking the normative and operational dimension of the forums for continuous policy improvement.

In the context of an increasingly urbanized world, there is a need to promote continuous dialogue that could lead to better urban policy cohesion and coherence at all levels. Therefore, inclusive policy debates, sustained advocacy and capacity development, steadfast cooperation and coordination are important for different scales and actors.

UN-Habitat's support for urban forums is informed by need for United Nations Member States to strengthen mechanisms for enabling the effective participation and contribution of all stakeholders in these forums. The New Urban Agenda (NUA) reaffirms the importance of creating platforms and mechanisms for a wide and meaningful participation at all stages of urban decision-making processes. Since the adoption of the NUA, countries have endeavoured to realign their development efforts to the common vision and the provisions of the NUA to localize, integrate and complement actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and other internationally agreed development

frameworks. Urban forums provide an ideal place to evaluate the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and its progress reports, and review progress in a country's urban policy process. With this guide, UN-Habitat encourages countries to better align the New Urban Agenda reporting with urban forums and urban policies.

This document contains the necessary guidance for Governments to implement successful urban forums at subnational, national, subregional and regional levels in the lead-up to the World Urban Forum, which is held every two years. The guide demonstrates how forums are excellent opportunities to reflect on urbanization trends, identify achievements and impact in the development initiatives, review the progress and outcomes of their urban policy process, identify urbanization opportunities, and propose ideas for positive transformation.

UN-Habitat, through its World Urban Forum Secretariat, will use this guide as a practical tool to monitor and enhance effective preparation of urban forums at any level. The guide has recommendations for tangible outcomes of any forum which will then feed into the subsequent next-level urban forums, all the way to the World Urban Forum and vice versa.

This guide is accompanied by a series of toolkits and templates that can be adapted to local, subnational, national, subregional and regional contexts.

I encourage you to read on and apply the knowledge and recommendations as you organize and integrate urban policy processes into your urban forums to improve the quality of life for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rafael Tuts', with a long, sweeping underline.

*Rafael Tuts*  
Director, Global Solutions Division  
UN-Habitat

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword . . . . .	iv
Executive Summary . . . . .	viii
<b>Chapter I: Background</b> . . . . .	<b>1</b>
Introduction to Urban Forums . . . . .	1
Urban Forums and the Global Goals . . . . .	4
Leveraging Multi-Level Urban Forums for Reporting on the Global Agendas . . . . .	6
<b>Chapter II: Multi-Level Urban Forums</b> . . . . .	<b>10</b>
A Multi-faceted Engagement . . . . .	12
Roles of Stakeholders . . . . .	14
Architecture of the Multi-Level Urban Forums . . . . .	21
The Urban Forum-Policy-Practice Nexus . . . . .	27
<b>Chapter III: Organizing an Urban Forum</b> . . . . .	<b>34</b>
Pre-Forum Activities (Planning Phase) . . . . .	35
In-Forum Activities (Implementation Phase) . . . . .	37
Post-Forum Activities (Reviewing Phase) . . . . .	38
<b>Chapter IV: Towards the World Urban Forum: Consolidation and Actions</b> . . . . .	<b>40</b>
Strengthening Linkage between the MLUFs and the World Urban Forum . . . . .	40
Role of the World Urban Forum Coordination Office . . . . .	42
<b>Conclusion</b> . . . . .	<b>43</b>
<b>Endnotes</b> . . . . .	<b>44</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1.</b> Urban Forums Organized Globally . . . . .	3
<b>Figure 2.</b> Components of a Multi-Level Urban Forum . . . . .	21
<b>Figure 3.</b> Linking the Multi-Level Urban Forums. . . . .	24
<b>Figure 4.</b> Role of Urban Forums in NUP . . . . .	30
<b>Figure 5.</b> Role of NUFs in Liberia Urban Policy Development . . . . .	32
<b>Figure 6.</b> Mainstreaming Declared Actions and Forum Priorities . . . . .	40

## LIST OF CASE STUDIES

<b>Case Study 1.</b> Subregional Urban Forums - The Pacific Urban Forum (PUF) . . . . .	2
<b>Case Study 2.</b> Urban Forums to Localize the New Urban Agenda in Spain . . . . .	8
<b>Case Study 3.</b> Vertical and Horizontal Coordination of Urban Forums in Germany . . . . .	11
<b>Case Study 4.</b> Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in Bolivia . . . . .	19
<b>Case Study 5.</b> Integrating Urban Forums into the Urban Policy Process in Liberia . . . . .	31
<b>Case Study 6.</b> Linking Urban Forums to the World Urban Forum in Serbia . . . . .	41

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease-2019
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>NUA</b>	New Urban Agenda
<b>NUP</b>	National Urban Policy
<b>NUPP</b>	National Urban Policy Programme
<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>WUF</b>	World Urban Forum

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Urbanization continues to offer challenges and opportunities for urban actors and for important policy targets for governments at all levels. Recent global processes<sup>1</sup> have reaffirmed the importance of urban policies for sustainable urban development and the crucial role that national governments play. Urban policies foster an increased level of vertical and horizontal coordination between levels of government. An urban policy is not just a document but “an important process”, that engages top-down and bottom-up policy approaches, creates a collaborative and cooperative institutional environment, and assists with mobilization and coordination of stakeholders and resources.

Similarly, urban forums provide a multi-stakeholder space for dialogue on the process of urbanization, including reviewing development progress made, and charting the future direction for countries and regions. Both urban forums and urban policies aim to capitalize on the opportunities of urbanization through promoting coordination, dialogue and capacity building of stakeholders. By linking the two processes, partnership is strengthened, communication enhanced, and stakeholders become closely involved in shaping their urban future.

Urban forums are a valuable platform for sharing experiences and enhancing and communicating the progress of urban policy development. For instance, for countries without an urban policy, urban forums can advance awareness on the need for an urban policy, while for those countries at the formulation phase, an urban forum is the place to discuss the draft policy, build broader consensus around the core vision, identify policy objectives and agree on transformative actions. For countries at the implementation phase of a national urban policy, urban forums support reviewing progress on related development initiatives, including demonstration projects, and

assessing future initiatives. At the monitoring and evaluation phase of national urban policy, urban forums can provide a feedback loop between the policy and its implementation, helping stakeholders to reflect on achievements of the policy and learn about what has worked or not.

This guide has been developed to support governments at all levels to plan and hold urban forums with an urban policy-practice nexus. Accompanied by adaptable templates and toolkits, the document supports the entire process of planning and holding a forum, and even for post-forum activities. Importantly, the guide demonstrates how urban policy through urban forums can be used as a coordinating framework for implementation of national, regional and global agendas.

Chapter I gives the background to the current state of urban forums. It presents linkages of urban forums to global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda. Chapter II presents the concept of multilevel urban forums. It introduces the new architecture of urban forums, contains details of the urban-forum-urban policy nexus with a description on the way in which urban forums can support urban policy processes. The chapter also has an extensive discussion on the multifaceted stakeholder engagement in the urban forum-policy process. There is also a description of the connection between different urban forum levels, including their linkages to the World Urban Forum.

Chapter III describes the process of organizing and holding an urban forum and contains links to all forum-supporting resources and templates. The final chapter has descriptions of the urban forums cycle and the process of mainstreaming WUF declared actions into the other forums. It also presents the role of the WUF Coordination Office in supporting the multilevel urban forums.

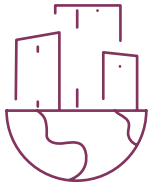




APUF 7 opening ceremony, in Malaysia, 2019 © UN-Habitat

# CHAPTER I: BACKGROUND

## Introduction to Urban Forums



Urban forums are inclusive platforms that bring together a wide array of stakeholders to discuss their urban priorities, chart a common way forward and establish operating mechanisms to achieve their development priorities. An urban forum can create a common vision for sustainable urbanization, informed by the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda (NUA), across levels of government and among diverse stakeholders, encouraging vertical and horizontal collaboration<sup>2</sup>.

A forum provides opportunities for partnerships between the

diverse stakeholders (e.g. national and subnational governments, academia, professionals, civil society, municipalities, the private sector and minority groups) to work together to achieve the common vision.

Importantly, urban forums provide opportunities to advance development of an evidence-based national urban policy (NUP), including the formulation, implementation, review, and the communication and sharing of lessons and experiences on policy progress and outcomes. Urban forums provide a valuable urban policy feedback loop.



*UN-Habitat recommends that Member States lower the New Urban Agenda reporting burden by better aligning it with national urban forums and national urban policies. They need to use the New Urban Agenda reporting process to initiate, evaluate or update their own national urban policy. I strongly urge all Member States to organize national urban forums on an annual basis and to use this forum to prepare a New Urban Agenda progress report.*



Maimunah Mohd Sharif,

Under-Secretary General, United Nations  
and Executive Director, UN-Habitat Jan 2018 to Jan 2024

## Current State of Urban Forums

Since the first session of World Urban Forum (WUF) in Nairobi in 2002, UN-Habitat has supported countries and regions to hold their urban forums to share progress on the implementation of their urban development initiatives, including on WUF declared actions.

The first national urban forum took place in 2002 in the Philippines<sup>3</sup>. Subsequently more than 110 urban forums – 17 being regional or sub-regional – have been organized in 46 countries, four regions and sub-regions. Between 2015 and 2017, several urban forums were held to prepare for the third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III).

Twenty-five urban forums took place in the intersessional period between the WUF9 in Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) in 2018 and WUF10 in Abu Dhabi (the United Arab Emirates) in 2020. Between WUF10, WUF 11 and up to July 2023, more than 43 urban forums were held at various levels, most of them adopting hybrid modalities due to coronavirus disease 2019- (COVID-19) related challenges. Hybrid modalities proved effective as they brought a wider virtual participation. Some of the regional and subregional urban forums held include the Asia-Pacific Urban Forum<sup>4</sup>, Pacific Urban Forum<sup>5</sup>, and the Caribbean Urban Forum (2020), mobilized in collaboration with the United Nations Regional Commissions.

### **Case Study 1. Subregional Urban Forums - The Pacific Urban Forum (PUF)**

The Pacific Urban Forum (PUF) is a regional event that provides a unique and accessible platform for stakeholders to debate sustainable urban future for the region. The first PUF, in 2003, gave rise to the Pacific Urban Agenda, endorsed by United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) in 2004 and by the Pacific Island Forum Leaders in 2005. The fourth Pacific Urban Forum (PUF4), convened in March 2015, developed a Pacific New Urban Agenda for the region which addressed unique and emerging urban development issues to small island developing States. Held in July 2019, the fifth PUF included the following aims: to catalyse engagement and raise awareness on enhancing the role of Pacific cities and towns in the achievement of national and regional policy frameworks and agendas; to create platforms for debates, sharing lessons, best practices and good policies; and to increase action amongst relevant stakeholders for implementation, review and monitoring of the Pacific New Urban Agenda, including through concrete commitments at subsequent global, regional and local forums.

The sixth PUF was held from 5 – 7 September, 2023, in Suva, Fiji, with the theme “Accelerating Action at all Levels for Inclusive, Safe and Climate Resilient Cities, Towns and Communities in Pacific Island Countries”. More than 300 delegates from all over the region attended the forum and thematic side events. The subregional forum culminated in the Suva Statement for a Sustainable Urban Pacific.



### REGIONAL AND SUB-REGIONAL URBAN FORUMS

- » 8th Asia-Pacific Urban Forum
- » ASEAN Sustainable Urbanization Forum
- » ASEAN Mayors Forum
- » Pacific Urban Forum

### KEY

- Urban Forums before 2020
- Urban forums (2020 to Oct 2023)

#### Disclaimer

\*Any reference to Kosovo in UN documents and UN websites, whether to the territory, institutions or population, is to be understood in full compliance with Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo. Kosovo is therefore not listed as a country.

\*\*The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Final boundary between the Republic of Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan has not yet been determined. Final status of the Abyei area is not yet determined.

**BASE MAP** Map, No. 4170 Rev. 19 UNITED NATIONS - October 2020 Office of Information and Communications Technology | Geospatial Information Section  
The boundaries and names shown, and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by UN-Habitat.

Figure 1. Urban Forums Organised Globally (up to October 2023)

## Urban Forums and the Global Goals

### Sustainable Development Goals



**DECADE  
OF  
ACTION**

Multilevel urban forums can be used as convening mechanisms to pull together stakeholders to review urban development priorities. Through the declared actions, urban forums can develop strategies to protect gains and plan actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the Decade of Action. Equally, national urban programmes are recognized

as instruments for countries to implement the global agendas, including the Goals and New Urban Agenda. In 2019, national urban policies became part of the indicator framework for Goal 11 on cities. Thus, to deliver on the Goals, it is important that the global community mobilizes for accelerated policy dialogue and action.

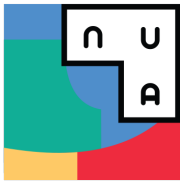
#### ***Box 1. Contribution of Urban Forums to the Decade of Action***

There are several ways that Urban Forums can contribute to the Decade of Action:

- » Promoting scaling up efforts on achieving the Goals in the Decade of Action.
- » Serving as inclusive platforms to advance evidence-based urban policymaking, follow-up and review, and promoting wide engagement at local and national levels.
- » By producing action-oriented commitments (e.g. declared actions), engaging across all levels of government on the progress of national and global agendas, and sharing their declared actions and progress via existing platforms such as UN-Habitat's Urban Agenda Platform. These declared actions can be consolidated and mainstreamed into urban policies for implementation.

By feeding their progress on declared actions and implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and NUA into the WUFs, urban forums play a key role in creating a "shared vision."

## The New Urban Agenda



IMPLEMENTING  
THE NEW  
URBAN AGENDA

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) is the implementation framework of the urban component of the Sustainable Development Goals. Grounded on bold transformative commitments articulated across the three pillars of sustainability (social, economic, and environmental), the agenda provides a blueprint towards the achievement of sustainable urbanization and a qualitative roadmap for its effective implementation. Urban forums played a major role in mobilizing countries'

political commitments towards formulation, adoption of the New Urban Agenda. Paragraphs 41 and 92 of the NUA reaffirm importance of creating platforms and mechanisms for a wide and meaningful participation at all stages of the urban decision-making processes. Indeed, National Habitat Committees (NHC) and National Urban Forums (NUF) can both play a key role or take the lead in advocating, implementing and reporting on the New Urban Agenda.



*The New Urban Agenda, endorsed through the Habitat III Conference held in Quito in 2016, serves as a primary framework for policy and practice to promote a better urban future for all. It was the first internationally agreed framework detailing the implementation of the urban dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals.*



Maimunah Mohd Sharif,  
Under-Secretary General, United Nations  
and Executive Director, UN-Habitat Jan 2018 to Jan 2024

The national urban forum, for example, provides an ideal place to: initiate a New Urban Agenda progress report; to engage local governments and civil society in reporting; or to evaluate the results from a New Urban Agenda progress report.



## Leveraging Multi-Level Urban Forums for Reporting on the Global Agendas



Reporting on the SDGs, the NUA and other global agendas is an essential mechanism to increase awareness and understanding of the progress made on these agenda's and to ensure accountability by countries and other stakeholders on their commitments. UN-Habitat encourages reporting that goes beyond compliance as a '**checkbox exercise**', to using reporting as a tool to accelerate implementation of global agendas at all levels of government. Building on the key

pillars of urban forums – capacity development, stakeholder engagement and peer-to-peer learning and exchange – multi-level forums can be leveraged for better quality, and more inclusive reporting. Three modalities of leveraging urban forums are identified, although these are not mutually exclusive, and governments are encouraged to explore with combination of modalities best suited for their context and level of capacity.

### Three ways of leveraging reporting on global agendas

1. Governments can use urban forums to initiate a progress report on global agendas. In this modality, an urban forum is positioned as a tool to raise awareness and buy-in for the reporting process. The results will eventually be used to inform planning practice and feed into national urban policy.
2. Governments can use urban forums as platforms to engage with stakeholders from governments, civil society, private sector, academia and media to enhance the reporting process and ensure involvement of all multilevel actors. It will also help identify gaps in the progress report, capacity development, peer-to-peer learning, and enhancing bottom-up urban solutions.
3. Governments can use their urban forums to evaluate implementation of important recommendations, outcomes and results from a past reporting process. This gives an opportunity to assess role of the reports in accelerating implementation.

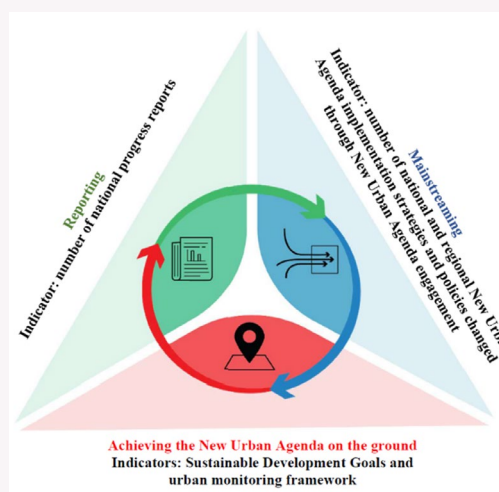
## Box 2. Using an NUF to submit a NUA progress report

In the New Urban Agenda, Member States are encouraged to “carry out a periodic follow-up to and review of the New Urban Agenda, ensuring coherence at the national, regional and global levels, in order to track progress, assess impact and ensure the Agenda’s effective and timely implementation, accountability to our citizens and transparency, in an inclusive manner” (paragraph 161).

To facilitate easier reporting modalities, UN-Habitat is now offering countries to use their NUF as the basis for an NUA progress report, converting the analysis, discussion and recommendations emanating from a NUF to a NUA progress report. A NUA progress report based on a NUF can take the preliminary analysis that informs an Urban Forum Programme and expands on this. The final Urban Forum report, which provides extensive details on the entire forum including background, knowledge, context, urban issues facing the country, and how they were addressed in the forum, can be augmented to serve as a NUA progress report. It is important to align such a national NUA report with the three transformative commitments of the NUA and follows the NUA reporting guidelines. Such a conversion report not only enumerates what was agreed or said within a NUF, but also synthesizes the discussion and provides the appropriate urban context to understand the discussion.

Reporting on the New Urban Agenda through NUFs reinforces mainstreaming of the agenda in national and regional policies such as National Urban Policies, which in turn accelerates achieving the principles outlined in the NUA on the ground. UN-Habitat encourages countries to position NUF, NUPs and NUA reporting as tools to mainstream and implement the NUA.

Detailed guidelines on this can be found on the New Urban Agenda platform (<https://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/>)





### **Case Study 3. Urban Forums to Localize the New Urban Agenda in Spain**

In 2019, the Spanish Urban Agenda was approved by the Government of Spain as a roadmap until 2030 to make the country's towns and cities friendly, welcoming, healthy and sustainable. Among other initiatives, the Spanish Urban Agenda contained a proposal to celebrate biannual Spanish Urban Forums. The forum is conceived as a space for stakeholder participation to promote debate, transmission of ideas, knowledge and experiences on urban issues, and the implementation of the Spanish Urban Agenda. The forum also serves to emphasize action-oriented initiatives and to complement the direction of the Government in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

The first edition of the Spanish Urban Forum (FUE) took place in October 2021 in Seville, Spain, under the theme "the role of cities in social and economic recovery". Organized by the Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda, it brought together representatives of all levels of governments, as well as actors from international organizations, the private sector, academia and civil society.

With the aim of creating synergies on a local and international scale, two high-level events took place in parallel with the forum: the "session on National Urban Policies Spain-Latin America and the Caribbean" with the support of UN-Habitat; and the Global Forum of Local Authorities of Spain, with the support of the Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces.

The second edition of the Spanish Urban Agenda was held on 16 and 17 October, 2023. The objective was to articulate debates around the different implementation experiences, at all levels of the Spanish Urban Agenda, and about the opportunity that local action plans represent for the future of towns and cities.



Spanish Urban Forum 2023 © Ministry of Transport, Mobility and Urban Agenda-Spain

The forum has become an opportunity to create "momentum" and promote the dissemination of general and specialized knowledge in relation to sustainable urban development issues, and to lay the foundations of Spain's participation in global spaces relevant to the progress of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Above all, the forum has become one of the main tools for disseminating the precepts and opportunities established in the Spanish Urban Agenda, for sharing experiences between different municipalities in relation to the action plans, and for promoting understanding and agreements on urban matters between the different levels of administration. The forum is therefore an effective mechanism in the implementation of urban policies within the framework of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Agenda.

SDGS IN  
ACTION

UN HABITAT  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

wuf<sup>10</sup>

المنتدى الحضري العالمي  
World Urban Forum



World Urban Forum  
10 in Abu Dhabi ©  
UN-Habitat

## CHAPTER II: MULTI-LEVEL URBAN FORUMS

This chapter introduces the concept of multilevel urban forums and describes the architecture of the various levels of urban forums, including their components, linkages and the relationship between them and with the World Urban Forum.



With the increasing importance of urban analysis at regional and subregional dimensions and contexts, urban policy development at the levels is gaining interest and traction. Equally, the need to scale from national to subregional and regional-level urban forums has been evident. With many countries implementing, reviewing and undertaking local level review and reporting on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, the need for multilevel evaluation platforms is becoming more important than ever before.

The subnational areas also possess unique territorial characteristics to be addressed at that level. Moreover, these multiple territorial levels exist in a space where social, political and economic interactions take place every day. Distinct commonalities and experiences within the different levels can be harnessed during such multilevel urban forums.

This necessitates the need for urban forums to be held at different levels of governance, including subnational, national, subregional and regional levels.

Pacific Urban Forum,  
2019 © UN-Habitat



#### **Case Study 4. Vertical and Horizontal Coordination of Urban Forums in Germany**

The German National Urban Development Policy has been the driving force for integrated urban development in the country since 2007. The policy follows Sustainable Development Goal 11 of the 2030 Agenda as well as the New Urban Agenda and guides the implementation of the resolutions of the ministers responsible for urban development of the European Union member States on the “New Leipzig Charter – the transformative power of cities for the common good” at the national level. As a joint initiative of the three levels of government – federal, state and local – it brings together the various players in cities and municipalities as a cross-level and cross-departmental platform.

The broad participatory process integrates the policy both vertically – federal, state and local levels – and horizontally between the responsible departments. Key partners in the policy process are the German Association of Cities, the German Association of Towns and Municipalities and the Conference of State Building Ministers. Chambers and associations, civil society actors and representatives from business, science and research are also involved in its implementation.

The national congress: The annual federal congresses are the central forum for urban development policy in Germany. They bring together national and international experts from science, politics, civil society and practice to discuss the challenges and solutions of global and local transformation as well as the content, goals and current issues of urban development policy. In addition, new ideas and approaches are presented based on exemplary projects and procedures from Germany and abroad.



The 2023 Congress in Jena, Germany © BMWSB/Roman Möbius

As of 2023, 16 federal congresses had been held with up to 1,400 participants, including high-ranking people from Germany and internationally, with forward-looking contributions. Since 2022, the meetings of the urban development ministers of the Group of Seven (G7) countries – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States – have been closely linked to the federal congress.

In-depth events have been held on various topics and approaches to global and local transformation, such as climate protection and climate adaptation, integration and social cohesion, economy and labour, a new understanding of city and country, urban resilience, urban development funding as an important integrated funding instrument in German municipalities, and digital transformation. The international cooperation of the Bundesministerium für Wohnen, Stadtentwicklung und Bauwesen – BMWSB – (Federal Ministry for Housing, Urban Development and Building) in city networks, e.g., in the framework of the project “Dialogues for Urban Change – D4UC” implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), brings together experts for peer-to-peer exchange and for the joint identification of new approaches in the congress.

The federal congresses are financed by the BMWSB as part of the National Urban Development Policy and take place in a different major German city each year.

## A Multi-faceted Engagement

Urban forums are recognized in the New Urban Agenda as important multi-stakeholder platforms. This enhances their effectiveness as inclusive participatory platforms for urban policy debates. UN-Habitat calls for enhanced mobilization of different stakeholders for effective participation in urban forums and other urban development initiatives.<sup>6</sup> It is vital for such mobilization to include all actors and representing different urban sectors. The actors are encouraged to work together collaboratively and innovatively to deliver inclusive urban forums with division of roles and where all views are accommodated in the policy debates. For example, to gain full support, the forum can be co-lead and chaired by the lead urban development ministry alongside other ministry such as Finance. This will provide opportunities for adequate resource support, as well as the political will and ownership of the forum-policy-practice process.

**Actor:** An actor is a stakeholder with an active role in planning, organizing and holding the urban forum as well as the urban policy process. **Actors** can include the government at all levels, international organizations, the private sector, civil society, multilateral agencies, local organizations, special groups, academia, and development partners. Anchored in different institutional frameworks and levels of powers, urban actors could perform different roles, functions and responsibilities to enhance urban forums and policies. Furthermore, urban forums provide a peer network where participants can exchange, inspire and learn from each other. Thus, participation becomes meaningful when all stakeholders’ voices and inputs are considered, and when they can negotiate and influence the forum, policy development and implementation processes.

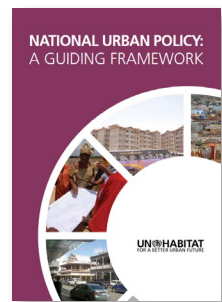
**Sector:** This is a thematic group within which different stakeholders fall. Sectoral stakeholders would generally have expertise or experience in their thematic area. Thematic sectoral issues can include but are not limited to urban economy, housing, transport, energy, water and sanitation, land-use planning, safety and security, waste management, energy and environment. The sectors form important thematic components of the urban forum architecture and are discussed through urban policy dialogue sessions. Sector stakeholders can lead or contribute to such thematic sessions, which significantly contribute to the outcomes of the forum and the understanding of the development priorities for inclusion in the urban policy process. Therefore, it is imperative that all actors (stakeholders) representing different urban sectors are included in the entire urban forum and policy process.

*UN-Habitat's guiding framework on NUP* highlights multi-stakeholder participation as a key pillar on national urban policy development, along with acupuncture projects and capacity development<sup>7</sup>. Urban forums enable the consideration of stakeholders' inputs into the

policy formulation and enrich its implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases. The goal of the NUP feasibility phase, for example, is to make a case for a NUP and build stakeholder support and political will for this vision. Maintaining continuous dialogue through urban forums allows policymakers and all relevant stakeholders to continuously engage. This enhances accountability and supports the urban policy process to be inclusive and is based on lessons and experiences. Equally, urban forums support the shift from policy to action, translating political will into a concrete roadmap.

Some of the principles of stakeholder engagement include:

1. Ensuring all stakeholders participate in the processes.
2. Creating a conducive space for an inclusive and open dialogue, including urban policy.
3. Facilitating consensus building among the parties.
4. Partnership facilitating and creating networking opportunities for all stakeholders.



## Roles of Stakeholders

Below is a summary of key stakeholders and their roles in the forum-policy-practice process:



### **Public institutions (governments)**

Governments at different levels host the urban forums. For national urban forums, the lead urban ministry coordinates the organization of the forum. It could also be co-led by the finance and economic planning ministry to ease mobilization of financial, human and institutional resources. In partnership with other stakeholders, public institutions establish the forum's theme, objectives and expected outcomes. They are also responsible for leveraging legal and institutional capabilities to ensure that all stakeholder groups are empowered with the necessary resources and capacities to participate in the forums.



### **Special groups**

Urban forums are an opportunity for vulnerable groups to insert their voices in urban forum and policy processes. It is vital to directly include these special groups in urban forum and policy planning processes.



### **International and intergovernmental organizations**

International agencies and programmes are important to the forums in strengthening linkages to and understanding of the global frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals and New Urban Agenda among others, to accelerate their implementation. Urban forums can also support following-up, reviewing and reporting on actions to achieve the global agendas.

Intergovernmental organizations such as the Africa Union or the European Union have the opportunity to share their perspectives at the regional and national levels, to enable alignment with the regional or subregional forums.



### **Civil society organizations**

These include non-profit, voluntary citizens' groups structured on a local, national or international level and all non-market bodies that pursue shared interests in the public domain without significant government-controlled participation or representation. In both urban forums and policy processes, civil society organizations advocate for public interests to government authorities and they monitor the inclusion of local needs and priorities. They can raise awareness, mobilize and voice public opinions and concerns regarding urban development.



### **Professional and knowledge Institutions**

Universities, research centres and professional institutions are resourceful and bring a wide range of knowledge and experience on urban issues to the urban forum and policy formulation processes. Such knowledge enhances the quality of urban policy discussions, resulting in action-oriented sessions which could lead to longer-term benefits especially to the most vulnerable. Furthermore, they offer insights from applied research, lead in capacity development, policy advice and advocacy, and knowledge management.



### Private sector

The private sector is a diverse group with diverse interests and perspectives to enhance the urban forum policy nexus. Entities in this sector can mobilize resources needed to support the urban forum and policy development process. They can also propose the most cost-effective approaches to implementing urban forum initiatives. Based on their expertise, financial resources and mobilization capacities, they can influence urban policy processes, including its effective implementation.



### Media

Media is an important stakeholder group that provides visibility for the forum and policy. It is through the media that other parts of the country or region can be made more aware of the forum, its objectives and outcomes. Media play a monitoring role, checking from the government the progress in the commitments that arise from the forums and how this is effectively engaged in the urban policy process.





Forum level	Description/objective	Actors and Stakeholders	Sectors
<b>Subnational</b>	<p>This forum converges stakeholders at local level to discuss, support development and implementation of subnational urban policy and contextualize/ align NUP priorities to subnational level. This forum ensures local issues are identified, analyzed, consolidated, and considered in the national urban development policies and plans. Sub - National Urban Policies (SUP) may be developed and analyzed at this level. Where NUP is under development, the forum provides an opportunity to identify and collate subnational priorities to be included in the SUP or NUP under formulation. The sub national urban forum is also very useful in other processes such as undertaking and voluntary local reviews (VLRs) and reporting on the implementation of SDGs.</p>	<p>Leading stakeholders: State/County government, Provincial authority; Metropolitan Authority, City, Municipality, local authority etc.</p> <p>Supporting stakeholders: National government, international development organizations, UN agencies, Civil society organizations, Academia, Private sector, Local and grassroots communities; Special groups, foundations, and professional institutions.</p>	<p>Housing</p> <p>Climate Change,</p> <p>Land Tenure</p> <p>Economic development</p> <p>Water and Sanitation,</p> <p>Urban Transport and Mobility,</p> <p>Public space,</p>
<b>National</b>	<p>The forum is convened at the national level to review, discuss and prioritize the national urban development agenda and its contribution to the SDGs and NUA. It also provides an opportunity to consolidate and discuss priorities identified at the subnational levels for inclusion into national urban policy frameworks.</p> <p>NUF provides an opportunity to collect stakeholder's views on NUP formulation or to review and validate the progress made in NUP development or implementation. Stakeholders can also share recommendations going forward, to improve the planned NUP outcomes. Equally, the forum provides a platform to review and evaluate implementation of NUP and WUF declared actions. NUF greatly benefits from subnational urban policy declarations.</p>	<p>Leading stakeholders: Ministries, Departments and Authorities leading urban development work with support from ministries of finance and economic planning; national agencies; Parliamentarians; Foundations, etc.</p> <p>Supporting stakeholders: public and private sector, civil society, grassroots organizations, professional organizations, multilateral agencies, and donor partners.</p>	<p>Safety and Security,</p> <p>Slum Upgrading;</p> <p>Solid waste management;</p> <p>Migration,</p> <p>Planning,</p> <p>Urban Agriculture,</p> <p>Energy,</p> <p>Social development</p>

Forum level	Description/objective	Organizers and Stakeholders
<b>Sub-regional</b>	<p>Countries that share borders may experience similar urban development issues or suffer from same urban challenges. In some cases, the countries form regional blocs and implement same regional development frameworks with common implications to their urban areas, including some regional and sub regional urban agendas.</p> <p>Sub regional urban forums are held to discuss and address the common regional urban policy issues among such countries and to identify strategies to address common priorities as well as review the countries progress in implementing the SDGs and NUA. They form platforms to share best practices and lessons between countries at different levels in development of their national and sub national urban polices. Experiences and knowledge shared can be used as a benchmark by countries planning to initiate or to effectively implement their national urban policy.</p>	<p>Leading stakeholders: Sub regional economic blocs, National governments, subregional intergovernmental organizations, international organizations, United Nations Organizations; Parliamentarians;</p> <p>Supporting Stakeholders: Regional public and private sector from participating countries, civil society organisations, academia, professional bodies, foundations and technical and financial partners from the participating countries.</p>
<b>Regional</b>	<p>Similar to the subregional level, continental regions such as Africa, Europe, Asia, and Latin America share common urbanization challenges and opportunities. The opportunities can be harnessed for enhanced shared prosperity. Regional urban forum is organized to provide opportunities to mobilize common actions and strengthen partnerships for sustainable urban development in the region. The forums also provide an opportunity to review region's progress towards implementation of the global development goals. They also identify and localize common regional messages and Declared Action from the World Urban Forum.</p> <p>Lead participants in this forum are member countries from the region. Countries from other regions can be invited to share their experiences in urban development including in urban policy, NUA and SDGs. Like lower-level platforms, the regional forum enables knowledge and experiences sharing on NUPs formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.</p>	<p>Leading stakeholders: Regional Commissions (e.g UNESCAP), Intergovernmental organizations (e.g EU, AU), UN Organizations, and national governments.</p> <p>Supporting stakeholders: Development Banks (AfDB, ADB, etc), international civil organizations, ministries, mayors, private and public companies, academia etc.</p>

Forum level	Description/objective	Organizers and Stakeholders	
<b>Global Level- World Urban Forum</b>	<p>WUF is the premier global conference on sustainable urbanization. WUF provides a global platform for member states among other stakeholders to engage in substantive discussions, share knowledge and experience, and identify ways forward to accelerate implementation of NUA and the SDGs including sharing experiences on achievements.</p> <p>At WUF, the declared actions from the various regional and national forums can be presented and will contribute to development of the WUF Declared Actions. The global platform also provides a wide range of opportunities for countries to share experiences, best practices and lessons learned in the development and implementation of urban policies.</p> <p>WUF is recognized by Member States as a key platform to collect inputs for the quadrennial report on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and provides a unique space to discuss and consolidate progress made among a wide range of stakeholders. This may include methodologies, plans, policy initiatives and tools as well as results and impacts.</p> <p>To date, 11 sessions of WUF have been held, convening thousands of participants in each forum.</p>	<p>Leading stakeholders: UN-Habitat, UN Regional Commissions, other UN Organizations and national governments (including hosting city), Foundations, Parliamentarians;</p> <p>Supporting stakeholders: Intergovernmental organizations, international civil organizations, ministries, mayors, private and public companies, academia, professional bodies, special groups, etc.</p>	

Table 1: Summary of the multi-Level urban forum sessions

#### Case Study 4. Strengthening Multi-Stakeholder Engagement in Bolivia



Participatory NUP Development Process in Bolivia © UN-Habitat

The national urban policy process in Bolivia started in 2018 with technical support from UN-Habitat. The policy seeks to be deployed on three levels: intra-urban, urban-territorial, and urban-national. Its objectives are to achieve inclusive, healthy cities with a good quality of life and productive, orderly, sustainable and resilient cities, in addition to good governance of the cities.

#### Participation at the core:

A major component of the national urban policy process in Bolivia has been active multilevel and multi-stakeholder participation, which is also a fundamental pillar of the country's "urban forum for urban policy practice initiative". The broad and plural participatory process involved nearly 250 sessions and workshops throughout the country, involving more than 7,000 participants from a wide range of organizations, authorities and groups. The NUP process has also featured in two national urban forums – in 2018 and 2019.

## The path to NUP in Bolivia



The 2018 national urban forum saw the attendance of over 400 diverse participants from the Government, international organizations, academia, the private sector and civil society. The forum was headlined by the Vice President of Bolivia, national authorities, mayors and other departmental and municipal authorities. The forum marked the beginning of inclusive public discussions which culminated in a declaration of commitment to development of the country's national urban policy. The second national urban forum (2019) brought together over 300 diverse stakeholders to review and validate the diagnosis note and to formulate and review policy proposals.

In addition to the two national urban forums, Bolivia held 9 departmental forums, 3 metropolitan forums and at least 50 other workshops as part of the NUP development process. UN-Habitat has extensively supported development of the Bolivia National Policy for the Integral Development of Cities.

The policy has a timeframe of 15 years, or three legislative periods, coinciding with the rounds of the Comprehensive Planning System of the State, as well as with the two major milestones in international agendas: the Sustainable Development Agenda of 2030 and the IV Conference of the United Nations on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development of 2036.



Launch of the Bolivia Cities Policy in 2020 © UN-Habitat

## Architecture of the Multi-Level Urban Forums

The new generation urban forums are structured into various components to cover urban development thematic issues that need to be addressed. Core forum components include the main urban forum plenary; thematic policy dialogues; a development partners session; resource mobilization roundtables and media roundtables/academies. However, additional components may be added depending on context. The forums are also supported by key cross-cutting pillars mainstreamed across all the components. They include stakeholder engagement, capacity development and peer-to-peer knowledge exchange.



Figure 2. Components of a Multi-Level Urban Forum

## Forum components:



**Urban policy dialogue:** Urban policy dialogues are an opportunity for stakeholders to review and discuss context-based priority urban development issues that are or will be included into the urban policy. These may include thematic areas such as climate change, housing and slum upgrading, urban basic services, resilience, food systems, disaster risk reduction, security of tenure, among others, as selected by the forum organizers. The outcomes of these thematic dialogues can be included as priority inputs to the urban policy development process. Essentially, urban policy dialogue illuminates the important contributions that an inclusive urban policy process makes to the country/region's pursuit of sustainable urban development. These dialogues could also share policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation experiences from different countries or contexts. These dialogues are led by policy experts with wide knowledge and experience on urban policy issues.



**Development partners session:** This session is a platform to discuss various sectoral issues which may not be urban in nature but are key development priorities of the country or region. This session also enables development partners to hold thematic sessions to support urban development mandates at national, regional, or global levels. For example, discussions from the session help to further align and strengthen linkages between the national and regional development priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals, and the NUA among other global frameworks.



**Resource mobilization / donor roundtables:** This session aims to identify strategies to mobilize financial and human resources to support implementation of the forum's declared actions and the urban policy process. The session can invite the donors from public (government agencies), intergovernmental organizations, United Nations agencies, foundations and the private sector to support and/or pledge contributions to the urban forum, urban policy and implementation of other sustainable urban development initiatives.



**Media academy / roundtable:** This component aims to create awareness, and review and discuss urban development issues with media organizations at the urban forum. It enhances media reporting on urban forums and priority issues, including urban policy. The roundtable provides good training for the media on how to communicate, disseminate impacts on sustainable urban development implementation of global agendas with an urban focus, and the role of NUPs in achieving the agendas' objectives. This helps to increase the visibility of the urban forums and to enhance public awareness on the ongoing development initiatives available to address urban urbanization challenges.

## Forum pillars:



**Capacity development:** Capacity development is crucial in all urban forums to enhance stakeholders' urban skills and knowledge in implementing sustainable urban development priorities in an inclusive way. More specifically, during an urban forum, capacity development involves strengthening the technical knowhow of governments at all levels and other stakeholders, on the urban policy development process.



**Stakeholder engagement:** Inclusive and effective urban forums are those where all relevant stakeholders are invited to participate and make contributions related to their urban contexts and needs. The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals calls for the mobilization of everyone, everywhere, grounded on a level of ambition that supercharges ideas into concrete, bold and implementable solutions. Effective engagements are encouraged to adhere to geographical, gender balance as well as stakeholder categories.



**Peer-to-peer learning and exchange:** The urban forums are not only platforms for participants to learn from urban experts and actors but they also provide space for the participants to learn from each other, in terms of personal/local experiences, best practices and lessons learned. This enables the stakeholders to identify areas of potential collaboration and the possibility of replicating the good practices. Through peer-to-peer learning and exchange, participants can get a clearer picture of how discussions, debate, engagement and learning can contribute to informing urban policy and practice on the ground. It would offer practical experiences for urban policies in terms of lessons learned from actual formulation and implementation of evidence-based NUPs.



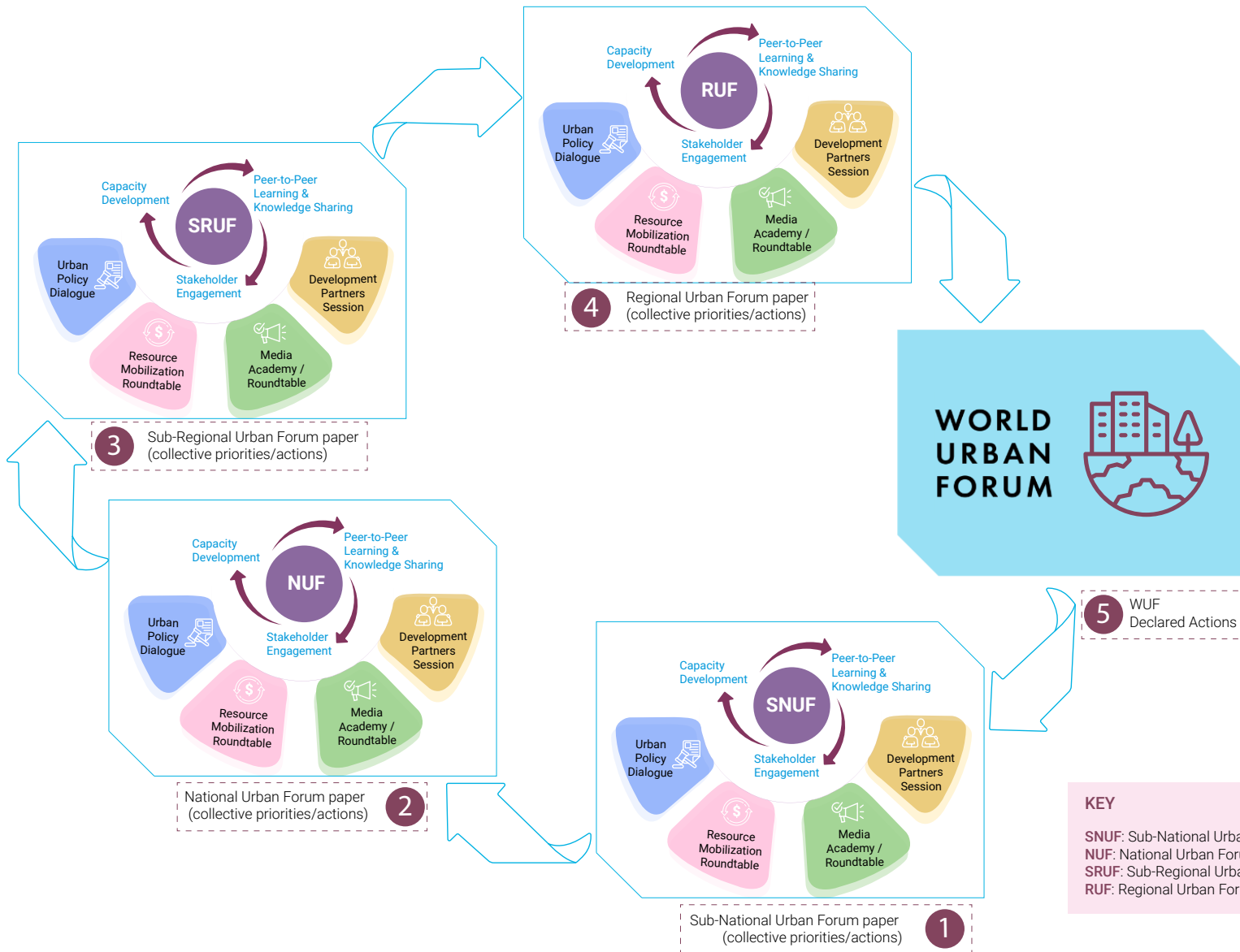


Figure 3. Linking the Multi-Level Urban Forums

As indicated in Figure III, the new generation of multilevel urban forums is interconnected and they feed into each other. Each forum comprises of thematic components/sessions discussed earlier and the urban forums lead to the World Urban Forum. The process may begin at any level leading up to the next. For example, if a city or metropolitan authority holds a subnational urban forum, the outcomes and actions will feed into the substantive discussions at a national urban forum. Equally, the national level-declared actions contribute to

the subregional or regional urban forums. The declared actions at the regional urban forum will enable regions to participate at the World Urban Forum in one voice.

It is also important to note that the forum levels do not necessarily have to feed in to the next level, but their outcomes could directly contribute to the World Urban Forum. For instance, where there is absence of a regional/subregional urban forum, the outcomes of a national urban forum could directly contribute to the upcoming World Urban Forum.

### *A Multi-Level NUP Coordination Process in Ghana*

The Ghana National Urban Policy, 2023, is built on the progress and results achieved by the 2012 policy. It seeks to fill identified policy implementation gaps, propose new strategies to harness emerging opportunities, and address existing challenges in the country.

**Lead agency:** The Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development (MLGDRD), with support from other sector ministries – particularly the Ministry of Works and Housing – has consistently organized urban forums in Ghana, with forums in 2012, 2015, 2016, 2018, 2020, and in 2022 under the theme “Rapid urban growth in Ghana: promoting effective urban planning for liveable and sustainable cities and towns”. This regular convergence of all stakeholders – the national Government, sectoral ministries, agencies and departments, metropolitan, municipal and district assemblies, local enterprises, residents, traditional authorities and civil society organizations – has enabled dialogue on urban challenges and opportunities, as well as on inclusive decision-making and urban policy directions.



Participants following proceedings at the Ghana Urban Forum 2022 © Ghana/MLGRD

Among the key focus of the Ghana Urban Forum as evident in 2022 has always been to advance stakeholder interest on the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the national urban policy through a consultative process.

Financing of GUF and policy process has come from various sources, with the coordinating ministry leveraging internal and external resources from partners such as the World Bank, Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction, GIZ, Cities Alliance, RMG Ghana, the United Nations Children’s Fund, World Resource Institute, and the Centre for Urban Transitions among others.

Coordination: Implementation arrangements of the Ghana Urban Policy 2023 follows an elaborate multilevel, multisector, multi-actor approach to overall planning, monitoring and coordination by the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralization and Rural Development. Strategic direction and policy oversight rests with a Policy Steering Committee (PoSC) made up of senior representatives of key implementing organizations and national oversight bodies. The PoSC is supported by a multisectoral Technical Working Group that follows-up on the performance in the 10 strategic objectives of the NUP.

Key sector ministries and Regional Coordinating Councils provide coordination and monitoring support within their respective sectors and levels of government. The Office of the Head of Local Government Service, the Inter-Ministerial Coordinating Committee on Decentralization and the National Development Planning Commission perform coordination functions within their specialized mandates. The Ministry of Finance performs its resource mobilization, allocation and monitoring functions in support of policy implementation.

Policy implementation is in the purview of the Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies and their departments, national and sector departments, specialized public agencies, and the development authorities. Policy implementation is also undertaken by the private sector and communities as required.

## The Urban Forum-Policy-Practice Nexus

### » National Urban Policies (NUP) and Sustainable Urban Development

An urban policy is defined as a coherent set of decisions through a deliberate, government-led process of coordinating and rallying various actors towards a common vision and goal that will promote more transformative, productive, inclusive and resilient urban development for the long term.

Recent global processes<sup>8</sup> have reaffirmed the importance of urban policies for sustainable development and the crucial role that national Governments play. This has seen increased policy needs and actions to support countries' efforts to develop and implement urban policies. UN-Habitat, for example, has supported urban policies in more than 57 countries. The work is rooted in the Governing Council Resolution<sup>9</sup> on national urban policies.

The importance of NUP in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda (NUA) was further solidified in 2019, at the fifty-first session of the United

Nations Statistical Commission when it was adopted as a Goal 11 indicator (Goal 11.a.1). Urban policy is also recognized as one of the five main pillars of implementation and monitoring of the New Urban Agenda<sup>10,11</sup>. Furthermore, urban policy contributes to Outcome 2 of UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan, enhancing shared prosperity in cities and regions. The urban analysis and diagnostic work that are undertaken as part of NUP preparation can also contribute to the preparation of progress reports on global agendas such as the NUA.

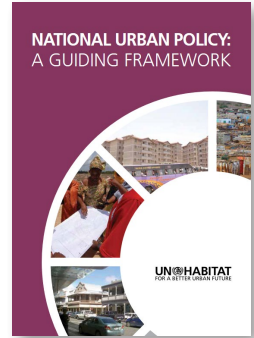
Urban policies foster an increased level of vertical and horizontal coordination between levels of government. It is not just a document but "an important process", that engages top-down and bottom-up policy approaches, creates a collaborative and cooperative institutional environment, and assists with the mobilization and coordination of stakeholders and their capacities.

## » Urban Forums for Policy Practice

Urban forums provide a platform for dialogue on the process of urbanization. They bring together stakeholders in an environment that promotes discussion about achievements and the future direction for countries and regions. Both the urban forum and national urban policy aim to capitalize on the opportunities of urbanization through promoting the coordination, dialogue and capacity building of stakeholders. By linking the two processes, a partnership is formed, communication is enhanced, and stakeholders become closely involved in the shaping of urban

policy.

Urban forums are a valuable platform for sharing experiences and enhancing and communicating the progress of all phases of urban policy development. UN-Habitat encourages each country to hold frequent NUFs for the continuous discussion and advancement of urban policies. The UN-Habitat National Urban Policy Guiding Framework explains how to steer engagement, accountability and delivery of urban policies in countries, irrespective of the stage they are at in the policy development process.



## » Role of Urban Forum in NUP Phases:



Countries **without a NUP**

The phase determines the viability of a NUP. NUF can facilitate consultation, dialogue and consensus among stakeholders on the value for developing and implementing a participatory and inclusive NUP. See *National Urban Policy: A Guiding Framework*.



**Feasibility phase**

The phase determines the viability of a NUP. NUF can facilitate consultation, dialogue and consensus among stakeholders on the value for developing and implementing a participatory and inclusive NUP. See *NUP feasibility guide*.



### Diagnostic phase

NUFs are useful to map and identify all stakeholders and their roles in the policy process. Forums also enable the stakeholders to collaboratively identify their common challenges and opportunities and to validate the *diagnostic* findings.



### Formulation phase

An urban forum is the place to discuss the draft policy, build broad consensus around core visions, identify policy objectives and agree on transformative actions and investments: *National Urban Policy Formulation Guide*.



### Implementation phase

Urban forums can raise awareness about the existence of the national urban policy and its goals. The forum can also be a platform to identify key areas of interventions depending on emerging issues and trends, as well as being the place to present progress on demonstration projects implemented as part of the policy piloting process.



### Monitoring and evaluation phase

Urban forums can provide a feedback loop between the policy and its implementation, helping stakeholders to reflect on achievements of the policy and learn about what has worked or not. The *UN-Habitat Monitoring and Evaluation Guide for NUP* provides clear steps and tips on how stakeholders can discuss, review, and propose future actions to achieve their country and global development goals.

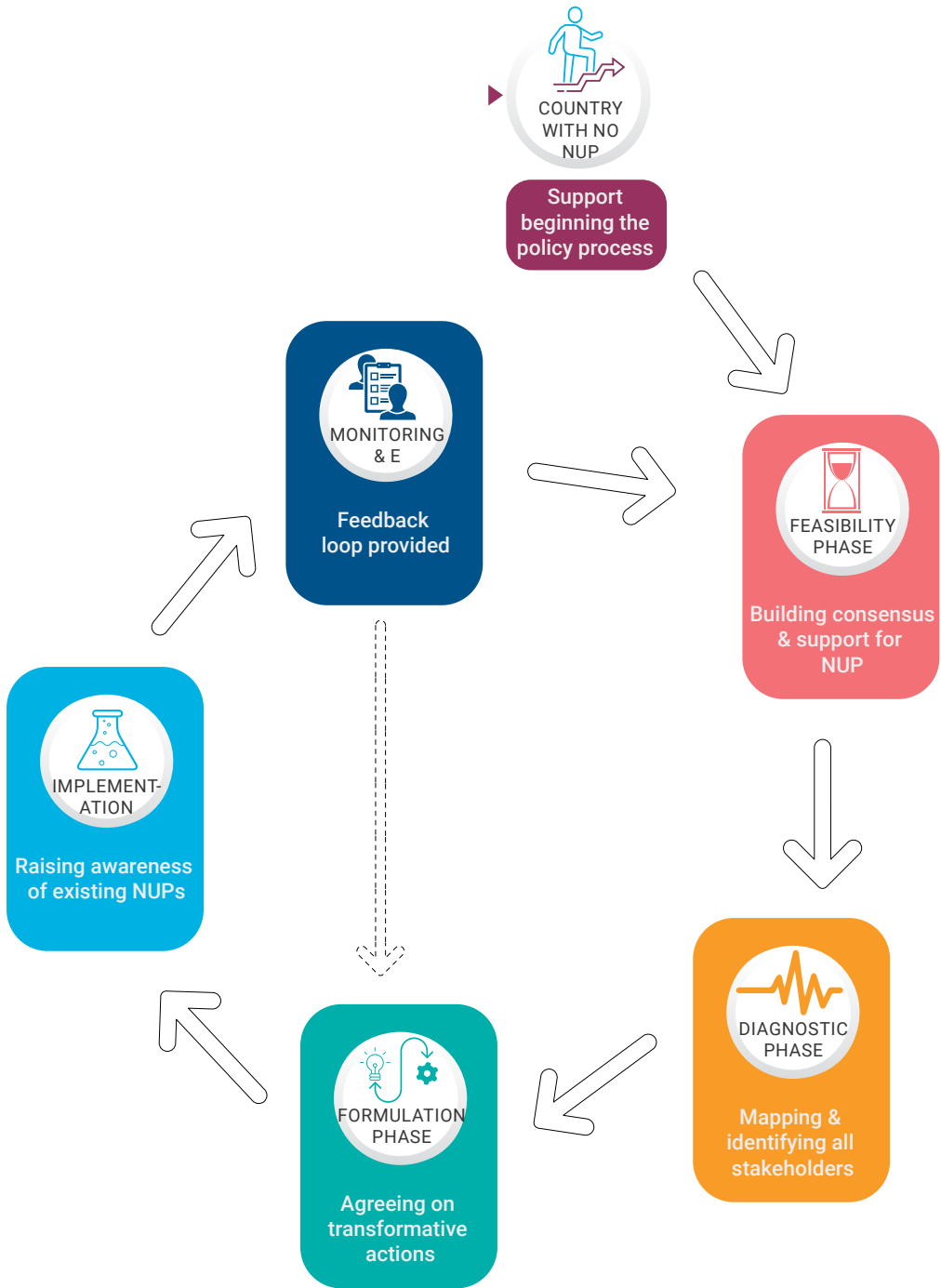


Figure 4. Role of Urban Forums in NUP

### Case Study 6. Integrating Urban Forums into the Urban Policy Process in Liberia

The national urban policy process of Liberia aims to coordinate the work of different sectors, establish incentives for more sustainable practices, and spur a balanced system of cities and towns through strengthening urban-rural linkages and equitable resources allocation.

National urban forums and other forms of convergence have been a key feature of the process, facilitating inclusive and participatory review, validation and advancing the NUP.

In 2019, Liberia transitioned to the diagnosis phase of NUP. A national urban forum was organized by the country's Ministry of Internal Affairs, Cities Alliance and UN-Habitat, and was attended by over 250 diverse participants from 123 organizations.

The forum provided a platform to review NUP progress and results, give and dialogue inputs to the Diagnostic Note of the NUP, and to seek further commitments to the pending NUP activities. The NUF culminated in the *Monrovia Communique*, which expressed renewed commitment to and ownership of the national urban policy process and its outcomes.



The NUP of Liberia advanced to the formulation phase, with a multi-stakeholder session led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the capacity of the participants the NUP formulation strengthened in 2022. This involved several consultative workshops and policy dialogues to enable inclusion of all stakeholders' interests in the NUP



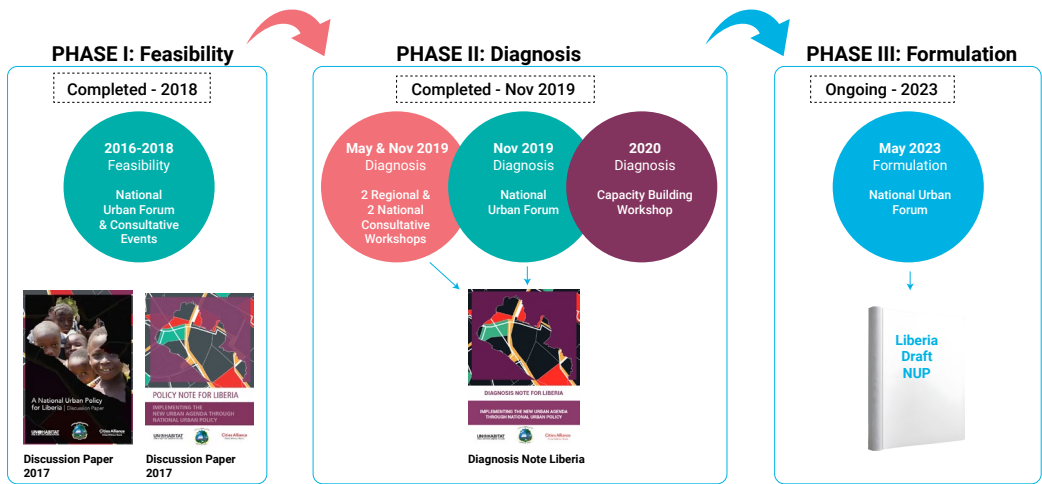


Figure 5. Role of NUFs in Liberia Urban Policy Development

Urban policy has also featured centrally in many other national and regional forums:

- » **Asia and the Pacific** – The Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF) places urban policy as an important theme. The declared actions of APUF-6 in 2018 emphasized the need to “involve the poor in urban policymaking to achieve sustainable urban development that effectively eradicates poverty and ends marginalization”.<sup>12</sup>
- » The NUP formulation process in **Cambodia** was a recommendation from their national urban forum declaration. Future urban forums will strengthen public-private partnerships.
- » In **Cuba**, the National Urban Forum deliberated on the approval of the new urban and territorial planning law in 2021 as a framework to domesticate the Sustainable Development Goals and the NUA,<sup>13</sup> ensuring the law is effectively understood and implemented.
- » In **Colombia**, NUF was instrumental to the formulation and adoption of a national policy based on a system of cities and will continuously support the review of its implementation.
- » **Tunisia** NUF 2021 aimed to support urban development processes and contribute to international urban policy dialogues and strategies.
- » In **Turkey**, the 2021 NUF aimed to reveal impacts of urban forums on urbanization and policy-making processes, in particular how urban forums contributed to urban development and different levels of policymaking; and the extent to which decision makers used the forum outcomes to impact urban policies.

30 June 2022

Daily programme

Event

THE WUB: PRESS CONFERENCE CENTRE EVENTS (interpretation to Polish, Spanish, Thai, Arabic & Russian) + UN WEB TV Streaming

PC 15 - TBC

PC 16 - Prospective Territorial Industrial Atlas of Mexico  
UN-Habitat, UNDO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Mexico

PC 17 - UN-Habitat and Bank of Development of Latin America  
President CAF, UN-Habitat, Minister of Environment (Colombia), Ibero

PC 18 - Better Cities Film Festival: Announcement of Results  
UN-Habitat

Urban Literary Interpretation in Polish, Spanish, English, French, Urdu

UL 18 - Integrating health in urban and territorial planning: the case of  
World Health Organization

UL 19 - New Bauhaus - sustainable architecture, open building and the case of  
Saudi Arabia

UL 21 - The City We Need is Affordable (by) People  
FIABCI  
France

Daily programme

Venue/Room

Urban Expo Urban Library room

Spodek Arena

WuFi1 Entrance

UN HABITAT FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

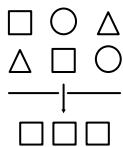


Download the WuFi1 app  
Please bring your WuFi1



World Urban Forum  
11 Programme  
© UN-Habitat

## CHAPTER III: ORGANIZING AN URBAN FORUM



A multilevel urban forum can be organized into three main phases: pre-forum; forum and post-forum phases, each with distinct activities. However, urban forums vary based on context, themes selected, financial and human resources capacities and contextual priorities. Throughout the forum, it is imperative to involve all relevant stakeholders.

### Overall considerations:

**Duration:** The duration of an urban forum will be determined by its level. A subnational urban forum may include fewer stakeholders and themes than a regional urban forum which may involve many and diverse stakeholders. Equally, consolidation of national urban forum outcomes would differ from subregional ones. These factors determine the number of days the forum takes, however the minimum would be two days for a subnational forum to six days for a WUF.

**Frequency/occurrence:** To regularly monitor progress, urban forums are proposed to be recurrent events, for instance, annually or biennially for WUFs. This supports a periodic implementation review of the global agenda, the declared actions and urban policy progress.

**Time:** This is determined by the country/region's planned strategic milestones. A country may plan to use urban forums to validate or review NUP, discuss voluntary local review reports etc. UN-Habitat proposes holding them during Urban October to benefit from global visibility.

**Venue:** Venue is dependent on the level and the strategic goals of the forum. UN-Habitat proposes national or regional urban forum be

held in cities other than the capital of a country. This will propel the city's visibility, issues it faces and the opportunities for a shared prosperity; intermediary cities, for example, may increase their global visibility and recognition by hosting an urban forum.

**Theme:** Organizing partners can discuss and agree on the theme. This could be guided by urban development challenges and priorities for the year, country or territory. The urban policy priorities and UN-Habitat's Urban October theme could be used to arrive at the urban forum theme.

**Format:** Effective urban forums need to be inclusive, participatory and outcome oriented. Key thematic components include the main plenary, urban policy dialogues, development partners' session, resource mobilization roundtables and media academy/roundtables. These need to be catalysed by: stakeholder engagement, capacity development and peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange. Urban forums could also use hybrid mode (physical and virtual formats). This will enable some stakeholders to physically attend and others to participate virtually.

## Pre-Forum Activities (Planning Phase)

The effectiveness and success of an urban forum depends on effort put into the preparatory activities. The activities are done to support all stakeholders to understand the purpose, process, components and the intended outcomes, as well as the individual and collective roles of stakeholders in making it impactful.

### STEP 1



#### Invite potential hosting partners to preparatory meetings.

This process needs to be initiated by the host (local, city, metropolitan authority, country or region) who then invites potential lead/hosting partners to discuss and agree on the process, the roles of the lead and other supporting partners, and to develop clear work modalities.

The preparatory sessions are important to identify themes and the priority issues forum, and their links to global development priorities such as the Sustainable Development Goals and New Urban Agenda.

The meetings are encouraged to be inclusive and consultations open, allowing all stakeholders to share their views and roles they can play in making the forum successful. This would enhance awareness of the forum and create a sense of ownership.

### STEP 2



#### Form a steering committee

The steering committee provides overall leadership, guidance and oversight of the forum. It includes the lead authority in charge of urban development in the region, country or local authority, representatives from other ministries and departments as well as from urban development partners. The committee provides the governance structure and mandate of the forum. For national urban forums, the National Habitat Committees have previously taken the role of a steering committee. At subnational, subregional or regional levels, similar committees may be formed. At the subregional/regional levels the committee shall be made up of representatives from the participating countries. The committee may form thematic sub-committees to organize side events and coordinate the planning and organizing of such sessions in the urban forum.

The committee also provides strategic guidance to the secretariat through reviewing and validating the objectives, expected accomplishments, resource mobilization strategy, calendar of events and overall operation.

### STEP 3



#### Establish the forum secretariat.

The secretariat is the focal point for all operational matters of the forum. With guidance and oversight from the steering committee:

The Secretariat designs, implements and monitors the forum including:

- » Designing the forum concept note which contains the forum title, theme, time and organizing institution. It also contains the logical framework: the objective, the expected accomplishments and the corresponding outputs and activities [*see Urban Forum Concept Note*]
- » Developing the workplan [*see Urban Forum Planning Checklist*]
- » Identifying and distributing roles and responsibilities for organizing personnel.
- » Development of the communication and outreach strategy [see Communication Strategy Template]
- » Overall general managing of the events
- » Monitoring and reporting of the forum [see monitoring and evaluation guide].

The secretariat can be hosted by the forum lead agency. It is important for the Secretariat to be inclusive and representative, with membership from all stakeholder groups. (Government, civil society, PWD, women, youth etc).

### STEP 4



#### Develop the Urban Forum Workplan and operational arrangements.

This step will be guided by the forum's vision, objective and expected accomplishments.

The forum secretariat drafts a workplan that covers all planned forum activities from inception to monitoring and evaluation. This is a participatory process with inputs from all partners.

The workplan should contain: [*Link to workplan template*]

- » Calendar of activities and events planned for during and after the forum
- » Roles and responsibilities of different partners
- » Agreed operational arrangements in implementing the activities.
- » Indicative budget for the period.
- » A checklist to support all operational arrangements. [*Link to checklist template*]

## STEP 5



Identify, map, and invite stakeholders to attend the urban forum.

To enhance inclusion, the secretariat should map out all relevant stakeholders and invite them to participate in the forum. These include other government ministries, departments and agencies, non-governmental organizations, professional associations, civil society groups, community-based groups, academia and the private sector. This is done early enough to provide time for partners to plan participation in the urban forum.

Once all the participants have been identified, the secretariat prepares and sends invitation letters [*see invitation letter template*] and a copy of the concept note with goal and expected outcomes of the forum [*see concept note template*]. Furthermore, discussion with partners/participants with leading roles need to happen well in advance, to provide time for partners to prepare and plan their participation in the urban forum.

## In-Forum Activities (Implementation Phase)

### i. Convene the Urban Forum

The main activity at the forum is to bring together all stakeholders to discuss and share experiences on the identified urban development issues, urban policy formulation, implementation, and review and more importantly agree on declared actions to guide stakeholders on the next steps in achieving sustainable urban development. This should be guided by the Urban Forum Programme. [*Link to Urban Forum Programme Template*]

The forum is generally made up of the opening ceremony (main plenary), forum special sessions, networking, trainings and roundtable events that may take policy dialogues; a development partners session; resource mobilization roundtables; media roundtables/academies form; and the closing ceremony. The forum pillars (stakeholder engagement; capacity development; peer-to-peer learning and exchange) are mainstreamed across all areas of the forum.

Some of the activities that take place during the forum are the following:

- » Review, formulation, capacity development on and validation of urban policy
- » Review ongoing contributions to and implementation of global frameworks (Sustainable Development Goals and New Urban Agenda)
- » Share experiences on urban development priorities
- » Review of previous WUF declared actions and discussion on implementation strategies
- » Monitor and evaluate urban policy processes
- » Develop the forum's declared actions

## ii. Finalize the Communique (Declared Actions)

The declared actions are among the main outcomes of an urban forum. These are voluntary declarations and commitments by stakeholders and are intended to guide the implementation of sustainable urban development practices [see *declared actions template*]. They include:

- » Action-oriented commitments with recommendations for decisionmakers, including on urban policy development
- » Ways forward on local and national implementation, monitoring and review of the NUA and Sustainable Development Goals in the Decade of Action.

Declared actions also form discussion inputs to the next upper-level urban forum and implementation actions by stakeholders at lower-level forums.

## Post-Forum Activities (Reviewing Phase)

Post-forum activities mainly involve report development, dissemination of agreed actions and an evaluation of the urban forum to determine the degree of success.

### i. Final Report development

The urban forum report covers the process and demonstrates outcome-oriented results of the forum. [see urban forum report template].

The final report provides extensive details on the entire forum, including background / knowledge / context, urban issues facing country / region and how they were addressed in the forum. The report contributes to the development of coordinated strategic and programmatic interventions at all levels towards a shared vision of inclusive and sustainable cities. The report can be shared with UN-Habitat WUF Coordination Office for the purpose of monitoring and wider dissemination. In the case of an urban forum at the national level, an augmented and extended report can be submitted as a NUA progress report.

### ii. Evaluation of the forum

Urban forums are guided by a theory of change and logical framework [see logical framework] with a clear objective, expected accomplishments, indicators of achievements and corresponding outputs and activities. These are used as benchmarks to evaluate and assess the impacts of the urban forum. [see the monitoring and evaluation template].

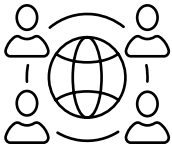


*Discussing  
WUF10 impacts  
during WUF11 in  
Katowice, Poland  
© UN-Habitat*



# CHAPTER IV: TOWARDS THE WORLD URBAN FORUM: CONSOLIDATION AND ACTIONS

## Strengthening Linkage between the MLUFs and the World Urban Forum



The need to scale urban forums from national to subregional and regional levels has been evident, hence the multilevel platforms. Equally, the subnational level is gaining prominence since that is where actual implementation happens. As shown in Figure VI, the outcomes of a subnational forum contribute to the national urban forum, whose declared actions and recommendations are useful

inputs into subregional and regional forums, and the World Urban Forum. While identified priorities at a lower-level contribute to next level urban forum, equally the Declared Actions from the World Urban Forum are mainstreamed through lower-level forums. These multilevel urban forums are valuable platforms for sharing experiences, enhancing and communicating progress on all phases of urban policy development.

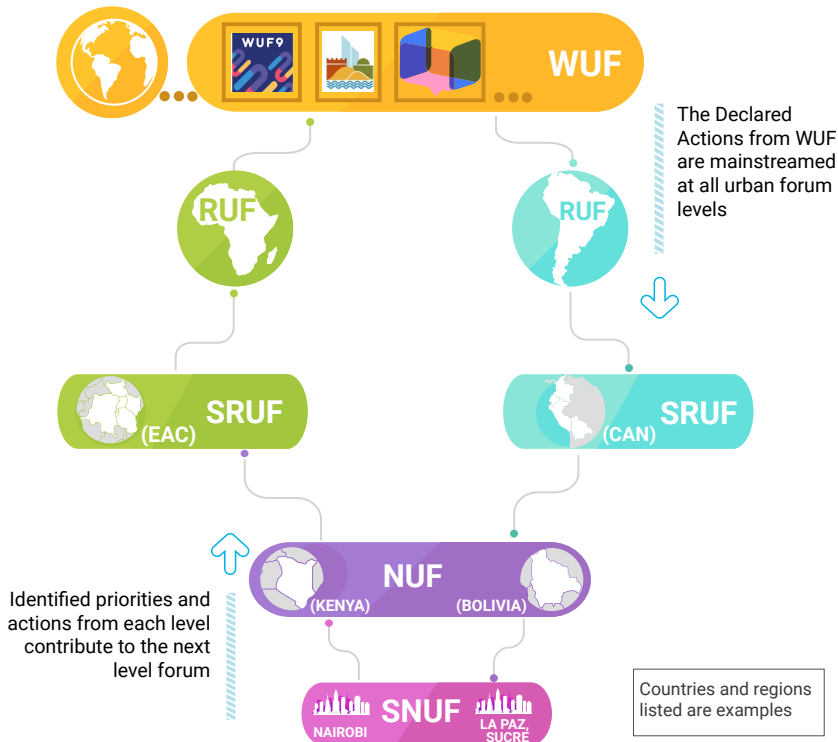


Figure 6. Mainstreaming Declared Actions and Forum Priorities

### **Case Study 7. Linking Urban Forums to the World Urban Forum in Serbia**

The links between national urban policy and urban forums has been evident in Serbia. The 2019 national urban policy in that country (Sustainable Urban Development Strategy of the Republic of Serbia) expressed the need for the organization of a national urban forum among its measures, and more precisely as the activity in the action plan for the implementation of the strategy. Held in Belgrade in April 2022, the forum was organized by the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure, the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities (association of local governments in Serbia), the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office in Serbia and UN-Habitat, and was part of the country's preparations to participation in any future World Urban Forum. The forum was attended by 350 participants with a balanced representation from different sectors: academic 44 (13 per cent); civil society 47 (13 per cent); public national 64 (18 per cent); public local 52 (15 per cent); international 65 (19 per cent); private 35 (10 per cent); and professional 39 (11 per cent).

Organized under the theme “**Better future of urban settlements in the context of new public policies in the Republic of Serbia**”, the forum reviewed key topics and activities for the implementation of the country's national urban policy, as well as other closely related public policies.



Main Plenary Session of the Forum © UN-Habitat

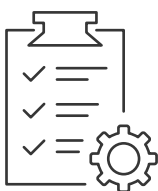


Thematic Session © UN-Habitat

The forum contributed to the establishment of a broader dialogue to better formulate and implement public policies in the fields of urban development, housing, architecture and energy efficiency. As a preparatory process to World Urban Forum 11, the 2022 NUF of Serbia portrays the architecture of the multilevel urban forums, whereby the NUF process and outcomes contribute to the next level urban forum (RUF and/or WUF). Equally, the April 2024 National Urban Forum in the city of Niš, southern Serbia, is conceived as a preparatory platform for the World Urban Forum 12 in Egypt, with the focus on the topic of localizing the Sustainable Development Goals.

In terms of financing, the forum featured well-blended financing mechanisms, with funds from the national line ministry budget, the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office in Serbia and the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities.

## Role of the World Urban Forum Coordination Office



The UN-Habitat WUF Coordination Office is the main contact point for urban forums globally. It monitors, supports and strengthens countries' and regions' substantive urban forums preparation and contribution to the World Urban Forum to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and NUA. Substantive outcomes from various urban forums are compiled and disseminated at World Urban Forum sessions.

Specifically, the office plays the following roles, together with the Urban Forum organisers and partners:

- » Monitors and supports the urban forums at all levels, strengthening WUF host country's preparation and contribution to the event, broadening the impact of the global initiative to accelerate implementation of the NUA and Goals.
- » Streamlines the urban forums are facilitate relevance and coherence.
- » Provides technical support with clear guidance on organizational processes, objectives, outcomes and follow-up of the urban forums, including mobilization and promotion, activity design and programming, and provision of thematic technical expertise.
- » Supports the urban forum to be organized and managed in an inclusive, participatory and transparent manner, with adequate representation of women, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, and grassroots stakeholders, and also that the forum is globally and regionally open to all.
- » Encourages organizing of urban forums in least developed countries and developing countries to achieve regional balance.
- » Aggregates outputs and outcomes from urban forums to strategically contribute to implementation of the NUA and Goals in the Decade of Action.
- » Monitors and supports the urban forum to strengthen the country's preparation and contribution to the WUF, broadening the debate and outreach of this global initiative.
- » Disseminates outcomes from various urban forums will be shared at every WUF session and with the WUF Alumni Network, contributing to implementation, follow-up and review of efforts to achieve the ambitions of the NUA.

## CONCLUSION

Urban forums are critical and inclusive platforms to domesticate and localize global agendas and to advance evidence-based policymaking and review, as well as communicating policy outcomes and progress. They provide a valuable policy feedback loop.

The main objective of this Multilevel Urban Forums Guide is to strengthen the role of multilevel urban forums to become platforms for urban policy dialogue, stakeholder engagement, resource mobilization and other concerted actions towards sustainable urban development.

The urban forums can provide an opportunity for UN-Habitat to strategically support countries by creating synergies at subnational, national, subregional and regional levels to optimize the benefits of rapid urbanization and overcome its challenges. Additionally, these guidelines for structuring urban forums will continually be refined to foster inclusivity and co-creation, foster adequate implementation and urban policy engagement at all relevant levels.

This guide is accompanied by a set of tools/templates which can be contextually customized to fit the various forums.

These templates include:

1. *Urban Forum Concept Note*
2. *Urban Forum Programme Agenda*
3. *Urban Forum Invitation Letter*
4. *Urban Forum Planning Checklist*
5. *Urban Forum Governance and Management*
6. *Criteria for UN-Habitat Supported Urban Forums*
7. *Urban Forum Flyer Template*
8. *Declared Actions Template*
9. Urban Forums Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

## ENDNOTES

1. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 and the New Urban Agenda in 2016 has provided a strong rationale for countries to develop or review their national urban policy frameworks.
2. UN-Habitat (2020). Expert Group Meeting on the role of national urban forums as multi-stakeholder platforms to accelerate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda. 20-21 October 2020.
3. UN-Habitat Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Fukuoka. Operationalizing the National Urban Development and Housing Framework – the Philippine Urban Forum.
4. Seventh Asia-Pacific Urban Forum: [www.unescap.org/news/future-asia-pacific-cities-spotlight-7th-asia-pacific-urban-forum](http://www.unescap.org/news/future-asia-pacific-cities-spotlight-7th-asia-pacific-urban-forum).
5. Fifth Pacific Urban Forum: [www.unescap.org/events/fifth-pacific-urban-forum](http://www.unescap.org/events/fifth-pacific-urban-forum).
6. UN-Habitat (2023). Enabling Meaningful Participation in Spatial Planning Processes. Available at <https://unhabitat.org/enabling-meaningful-public-participation-in-spatial-planning-processes>.
7. UN-Habitat (2015). National Urban Policy: A Guiding Framework. Available at <https://unhabitat.org/national-urban-policy-a-guiding-framework>.
8. The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015 and the New Urban Agenda in 2016 has provided a strong rationale for countries to develop or review their national urban policy frameworks.
9. The twenty-fourth session of the UN-Habitat Governing Council resolution HSP/GC/24/L.6 “requests the Executive Director in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives to develop a general framework for the development, where appropriate, of national urban policies, based on international good experiences, to further support Member States when developing and improving their urban policies”.
10. UN-Habitat (2020). New Urban Agenda Illustrated.
11. UN-Habitat (2022). Urban Monitoring Framework: (UMF-76) Presence of urban policies or regional development plans that: (a) respond to population dynamics, (b) ensure balanced territorial development, (c) increase local fiscal space.
12. One of the declared actions of the Sixth Asia-Pacific Urban Forum: [www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/APUF6-Call-for-Action.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/APUF6-Call-for-Action.pdf).
13. The National Habitat Committee is composed of central government, civil society and private sector representatives to engage productively in the urban debate and organize a national urban forum as its secretariat. The committees are effective in identifying challenges as well as reporting on achievements in addressing urbanization. The committees were reconvened to prepare for Istanbul+5 in 2001.

## MULTI-LEVEL URBAN FORUMS

### A GUIDE

Urban Forums are critical and inclusive platforms to domesticate and localize global agendas and to advance evidence-based policymaking and review, as well as communicating policy outcomes and progress. They provide a valuable policy feedback loop.

The main objective of the Multi-level Urban Forums Guide is to strengthen the role of multi-level Urban Forums to become platforms for urban policy dialogue, stakeholder engagement, resource mobilization and other concerted actions towards sustainable urban development.

The urban forums can provide an opportunity for UN-Habitat to strategically support countries by creating synergies at subnational, national, sub regional and regional levels to optimize the benefits of rapid urbanization and overcome its challenges. Additionally, these guidelines for structuring urban forums will continually be refined to ensure inclusivity and co-creation, foster adequate implementation and urban policy engagement at all relevant levels.

[www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)

 |  : UNHABITAT

 |  : UN-Habitat worldwide | UN-Habitat

[www.urbanpolicyplatform.org](http://www.urbanpolicyplatform.org)

 |  : @UNHABITAT\_PLGS

 |  : UN-HABITAT, PLGS

For further information, please contact:

UN-Habitat Policy, Legislation and Governance Section

Urban Practices Branch, Global Solutions Division

[www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)



UN-HABITAT