



NGO-MAJOR GROUP URBAN THEMATIC CLUSTER 2022- HLPF POSITION PAPER

INTRODUCTION:

The NGO Major Group Urban Thematic Cluster (“Urban Cluster”), aligns with the High Level Political Forum for the Sustainable Development Goals, UN Habitat, the New Urban Agenda, and UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres’ “Our Common Agenda”.

The Urban Cluster recognizes that with an estimated two-thirds of humanity - 6.5 billion people of all ages - living in cities by 2050, increasingly from the developing world, governments cannot achieve sustainability, resilience, and poverty reduction without significantly transforming the way we plan, design, build, and manage our urban areas to “*Leave No One Behind*.”

The Urban Cluster draws attention to the need to address inequalities and challenges to well-being in cities that may arise from pandemics, structural racism, demographic changes and climate inaction. This is particularly relevant and urgent as we have witnessed the consequences of a global COVID-19 pandemic and inequalities, including racial unrest, ageism, the “shadow” pandemic of dramatic increase in domestic violence for all women and children together with growing economic disparities around the world.

As a majority of the world’s population lives in places that extend from urban to rural, the Urban Cluster addresses how Sustainable Development Goal SDG 11 (“Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable”), integrates with the other 16 SDGs, and with other global agreements, such as the *Paris Agreement* and the ***Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction***. The Urban Cluster aligns with the *New Urban Agenda* and the documents developed for its localization from the civil society perspective.

As more than 193 countries endorsed the SDGs to address the global challenge of eradicating poverty and achieving sustainable development in a balanced, equitable, integrated, and cross sectoral manner, the Urban Cluster is focused on SDG 11 as a means to ensure access to safe, adequate, accessible and affordable housing, upgrading and legalizing informal settlements, investing in public transport, creating accessible green public spaces, protecting natural and cultural heritage, reducing adverse effects of natural disasters and the impacts of climate change on cities while improving urban planning and supporting innovative management and governance. The Urban Cluster holds that balanced territorial development should guide national, regional and local policies in fulfillment of SDG 11 which needs to be seen as cross cutting as it relates to other SDGs. Broad stakeholder participation inclusive of marginalized groups often left behind in the formulation, implementation, and monitoring of such policies is essential.

2022 HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM (HLPF):

The theme of the 2022 HLPF is “**Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**”. The HLPF in 2022 will review in-depth Sustainable Development Goals 4 on quality education, 5 on gender equality, 14 on life below water, 15 on life on land, and 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The forum will take into account the different and particular impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic across all Sustainable Development Goals and the integrated, indivisible and interlinked nature of the Goals. While SDG 11 will not be specifically reviewed this year, it has broad application and is aligned with all of the SDGs. Cities have been impacted especially hard during the pandemic and those that have densely populated areas, especially in informal settlements, have contributed greatly to its spread. Cities also have been the place where innovative responses to those challenges have galvanized all community sectors and have shown where increased inequities exist.

SDG 4-Quality Education: The COVID-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact on cities and other human settlements; over 90% of COVID-19 cases are occurring within urban areas. The direct and indirect impacts of the pandemic have resulted in an increase in the number of students who have not been able to attend school,

access virtual learning, and lack important opportunities for social interaction. Recommendations: Resources be allotted to ensure that all students and teachers have access to digital education and training, including internet and technology, with support for mental health and social engagement as part of a holistic approach.

SDG 5-Gender Equality: Gender equality and women's empowerment must be mainstreamed across all policies, budgets, and legal frameworks. Women and girls have been particularly impacted: their increased role as caregivers and front line workers (doctors, hospital workers); heightened domestic violence due in part to social isolation; economic and financial loss due to working in the informal sector; loss of or inadequate shelter resulting in the rise in homelessness; and an increase in pre-existing inequalities in informal settlements. All have been exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic. Recommendations: Support women-led community efforts, local and regional and national governments, private sector and civil society; fund those private volunteer efforts, including to be better prepared to face challenges related to pandemics, crisis and natural disasters. Provide equal compensation for their work. Promote land tenure and secure property rights for all women, especially widows and people with disabilities.

SDG 14-Life Below Water: The pandemic and climate change have affected many coastal cities, rural and urban communities—challenging food sources and food security, dealing with sewage, plastic pollution and industrial waste, impacting health, jobs and mobility, and coping with sea rise and storm surge.

Recommendations: Local, regional, national governments, and the private sector should support solutions for climate change and resilient initiatives for coastal cities and communities – adaptive reuse for industries to enable those cities to solve their problems; e.g., fish breeding, coral reef regeneration, innovative strategies, mangrove projects, restoring wetlands restoration, recycled materials, support for eco-tourism, and community-led efforts, such as beach and other environmental cleanup projects.

SDG 15-Life on Land: Protect, restore and promote life on land – e.g. mangrove projects, wetlands restoration; Integrate urban green public open spaces for health, wellness, and recreation; include the greening of neighborhood streets and restoring parks with indigenous trees and plants. Support community gardens, rooftops and small neighborhood farms. Preserve forests and indigenous lands from encroachment from urban expansion. At the water's edge requires change – Adapt and reuse existing buildings. Build resiliency with sustainable and local materials. Recommendation: Support the implementation of UNHabitat and other UN agencies' policies and programs consistent with the New Urban Agenda and other global agreements.

SDG 17-Partnerships: Post Covid-19 recovery process, the Urban Cluster will continue to focus on new opportunities to bring attention to the importance and need to address issues of sustainable urbanization, resilience, mobility, health and wellness and the public realm. We urge Member States and Local Authorities to support the right to the city, including affordable and accessible housing, for all people to be able to live with equity, equality, inclusion and dignity. Recommendations: The Urban Cluster promotes the need to build cohesive and inclusive partnerships with all stakeholders, including civil society and private sector, to support UN Habitat in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve just spatial, social, environmental and economic aspects of the SDGs to accelerate their implementation.