

COMMUNIQUE TOWARDS EFFECTIVE NATIONAL URBAN POLICIES: LESSONS FROM CURRENT PRACTICE

Madrid, 18 March 2014

Background: 58 urban policy experts from national and regional governments, international organizations and academia including research and training institutions have participated during 2 days in the Global Experts Meeting “Towards Effective National Urban Policies: Lessons from current practice”, held in Madrid this week.

The meeting, organized by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) in collaboration with the City Council of Barcelona, Cities Alliance and the Spanish Ministry of Development, aimed to share recent experiences and approaches on National Urban Policies (NUP), and develop a broad “roadmap” for National Urban Policy implementation strategy.

In a global context where the majority of people now live in cities, and developing countries are urbanizing rapidly, this meeting tried to respond, through discussions, to the challenges linked to rapid urban growth. urban sprawl, informal settlements, squalid living conditions, inadequate and overloaded infrastructure, in order to foster a sustainable urban development path.

Throughout dynamic debates on rapid urbanization, legislative and regulatory processes, economic and environmental issues among others, the participants exchanged experiences and opinions on good practices in national urban policy strategies. Experts also worked in small working groups to discuss specific topics and drafted specific recommendations aimed at advancing the NUP policy framework.

At the end of the two-day meeting, the participants drew a joint communiqué capturing what was discussed.

1. We, participants (53) to the Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on National Urban Policies met in Madrid, Spain, from 17 – 18 March 2014 with the aim of sharing recent experiences and approaches on National Urban Policies (NUP), and developing a broad “roadmap” for NUP implementation strategy.

2. The Expert Group Meeting (EGM) comprised experts from national, regional and city governments, international organizations and academia, including research and training institutions.

3. In a context where the majority of people now live in cities, and developing countries are urbanizing rapidly, we recognize the need and urgency to respond in a collaborative manner to foster a sustainable urban development.

4. We recognize the challenges posed by the need to develop adequate answers to rapid urbanization, urban sprawl, informal settlements, squalid living conditions, inadequate and overloaded infrastructure, transport congestion, vulnerability to various kinds of disasters, etc.

5. We also recognize that countries and cities have a distinct urban development history, are at various stages of the urban development and have different urban capacity (financial, human and institutional).

An adequate response needs to be contextualized and adapted according to the specific experiences of countries and cities.

6. We believe that urbanization is unavoidable and that despite its inherent challenges, it also has potential gains for socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability from careful urban expansion and investment in facilities and services.

7. We affirm the role of NUP that strengthens the collaboration between national and local authorities. NUP can provide an overarching coordinating framework to address urban challenges and foster sustainable urban development, and offer a pragmatic basis for socioeconomic development and the engagement process of relevant stakeholders to maximize the benefits of urbanization, while mitigating potential adverse externalities.

8. We see **NUP as a long-term agenda and a process that requires legal foundation, capacity building, champions and collaborative learning.** We value the importance of sharing experiences and strengthening capacity of actors on NUP.

9. We also see National Urban Policies, developed in close collaboration with subnational, enabling institutions, regional and local authorities, and following local priorities as a key step to reassert urban space and territoriality by providing the needed direction and course of action to support sustainable urban development that positions cities as inclusive engines of growth, clarifies land and property rights, helps protect natural resources and reduces poverty and inequality.

10. We take note that the **key pillars of NUP include legislation, institutions, financing, planning, spatial (place) and their interlinkages.** An effective NUP has to be people-centered, requires a vertical and horizontal approach and must integrate various sectors and actors.

11. We appreciate the range of lessons learned from practice on National Urban Policies drawn from both developing and developed countries presented in this EGM. We recognize that there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to NUP. We advocate for continued effort to distill and apply good experiences, lessons and practices to help countries,

particularly in the context of the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) to be held in 2016.

12. We acknowledge the **need to develop and improve the experiences** and practices on national urban policies processes in the framework of a broader multilevel governance approach in order to respond effectively to the realities of countries in terms of their urbanization and level of development. We recognize the need of a strong and shared political willingness. As countries and cities are diverse, NUP need to be contextualized and adapted accordingly based on the local scenario.

13. We recognize that the NUP process is both technical and political with financial implications. We, therefore, underscore the importance of developing adequate instruments and tools to support the diagnostic, formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of the NUP.

14. We also recognize the fundamental role of legislative frameworks for the effective implementation of NUP and we support their strengthening, improvement and enforcement as one of the main levers of economic and social urban development that will sustain the NUP.

15. We **stress the need for a stronger partnership approach between national and local governments** to effectively respond to urban development challenges using National Urban Policies that seek coherence of sectorial policies and local plans. The formulation of NUP may serve to inform new approaches to meet these challenges

and mobilize private, public and civic stakeholders for its implementation.

16. We also stress that NUP support rural development and recognize the importance of cross national urban corridors.

17. We are of the strong view that many developing countries are at an opportune juncture to start or reinforce efforts to respond effectively to urbanization. The time is right for many countries to embrace urban development as a transformative force and source of wealth to reap social and economic benefits while managing and reducing negative externalities.

18. We note the importance of **supporting countries in the NUP process**, particularly to developing an enabling environment to undertake the diagnostic, formulation, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of NUP.

19. We propose that NUP, developed through stronger partnerships between national and sub-national governments and other actors, should guide the urban development process based on the norms of more compact, more connected, better integrated, socially inclusive and climate resilient cities to strengthen the link between urbanization, socioeconomic development and environmental sustainability.

20. We suggest that the NUP process adopts a bottom-up approach to ensure sufficient buy-in.

21. We call for development partners to contribute and complement their activities in support of the National Urban Policies capitalizing upon new and existing development partnerships

at the country level. We believe that a concerted approach between all tiers of governments and stakeholders can ensure the commitment, accountability and effectiveness of national and local urban policies in the long term.

22. We recommend that countries consider the state of urban policy while preparing their National Report for Habitat III, and engaging in the discussion within the framework of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

23. We highlight the need to develop sustainable financing, legal and administrative instruments for effective national urban policy.

24. We submit that to make NUP work, we propose the following as basic guiding principles:

- Participatory and inclusive.
- Rights-based, gender responsive and sensible to all vulnerable groups
- Affordable (cost-effective and fundable).
- Strategic, pragmatic and context specific (free from undue complexity, functional, respond to priority and catalytic needs).
- Action-oriented and implementable (clear implementation plan, 'What is not implementable does not exist').
- Forward looking.

25. We commit to the following as a **roadmap to advance** the National Urban Policies Strategy (*):

26. Finally, we call for all concerned governments and citizens to join this proposal and discuss it in view of the Post-2015 Development Agenda and adopt it at Habitat III as a promising tool for future sustainable urban development.

(*)WHAT	WHO Lead (others)	BY WHEN	COMMENTS
1. Document and share experiences on National Urban Policy processes	UN-Habitat (other actors and experts)	2015	Share outcome of the regional reviews of NUP experiences
2. Support selected countries in their national urban policy	UN-Habitat (OECD, Cities Alliance, World Bank, UCLG, ECLAC, experts, etc.)	Ongoing	Based on requested and funding availability
3. Work with academic researchers to ensure the NUP agenda enters the research literature (research capacity)	Universities, UNHP	Ongoing	In-kind and direct support by agreement if appropriate
4. Create a platform / network on NUP agenda enters the research literature (community of practices)	UN-Habitat	2015	In consultation with UN-Habitat and other interested parties
5. Development partners to share knowledge	OECD / UN-Habitat		Interested partners to create a task force on NUP, explore opportunities for joint action
6. Develop research and knowledge on urban legislation	UN-Habitat / Institute of Advanced Legal Studies	Ongoing	