

## Guest Editor's Introduction

# Looking Beyond Habitat III

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*The views expressed in this article are those of the guest editor and do not represent the official positions or policies of the Office of Policy Development and Research, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, or the U.S. government.*

What follows a major conference convened by the United Nations? How will the call to action put forward at Habitat III, the third United Nations (UN) Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, throughout its robust preparatory processes and in its formal outcome document be realized? Although it is too early to speak about the long-term legacy of this conference, the broad efforts leading up to it and recent innovative approaches as presented in this Symposium offer some insights into what lies beyond Habitat III.

The first United Nations Programme for Human Settlements (UN-Habitat) conference met in 1976 in Vancouver, Canada, sparking an international dialogue on urban issues. Twenty years later at Habitat II in Istanbul, Turkey, world leaders adopted the Habitat Agenda, a global action plan aimed at providing adequate shelter for all. In October 2016, more than 30,000 representatives of the nations of the world and nongovernmental organizations gathered for Habitat III in Quito, Ecuador.

The Habitat III conference was intended to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization, at a moment in history of rapid global urbanization. The global process leading up to Habitat III centered on engaged participation, organized both regionally and topically, from stakeholders, representatives, and technical experts to draft a *New Urban Agenda*, the outcome document of Habitat III.

The UN opened its process to input from a broad base of countries, interest groups, technical experts, and the general public. In all, 11 regional and thematic preparatory conferences were held around the world. A series of issue papers were created for public feedback. Two hundred technical

experts worked to develop foundational documents to feed into the *New Urban Agenda*, which was negotiated and ultimately agreed on as a nonbinding, consensus document of the member states of the UN.<sup>1</sup> The *New Urban Agenda* is organized around the following—

- Three transformative commitments.
  - Sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty.
  - Sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all.
  - Environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development.
- Effective implementation.
  - Building the urban governance structure: establishing a supportive framework.
  - Planning and managing urban spatial development.
  - Means of implementation.
- Followup and review—organized by UN-Habitat, with national and local governments and other partner organizations.

## U.S. Preparations for Habitat III

The United States participated in the Habitat III conference and preparatory processes for two primary reasons: (1) to further domestic efforts at providing affordable and accessible housing and fostering sustainable, inclusive communities, and (2) to contribute to the global sharing of knowledge and practices and diplomacy around these issues. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), at the request of and in partnership with the U.S. Department of State, led the official U.S. Habitat III preparatory process from September 2014 through October 2016 and the U.S. delegation to Habitat III in October 2016.

Cities and housing are of course domestic policy concerns. Thus, the Habitat III conference touched on several critical domestic issues. Although the *New Urban Agenda* contains some discussion of national urban policies in the document, which is not applicable to governments with a federal structure, including Australia, Canada, the United States, and others, the principles put forward in the *New Urban Agenda* are nonetheless generally aligned with interests that the U.S. government wished to promote, even if their legal implementation may require participation across federal, state, and local governments. With input from the U.S. Habitat III National Committee, HUD identified three main themes to guide the U.S. domestic preparations for Habitat III—

1. Investing in people and communities for upward mobility.
2. Securing housing options for all.
3. Building resilience in an era of change.

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<sup>1</sup> See <https://www2.habitat3.org/bitcache/97ced11dcecf85d41f74043195e5472836f6291?vid=588897&disposition=inline&op=view>.

HUD assembled a Habitat III National Committee, comprising 44 federal government agencies, civil society, research organizations, affinity groups, and philanthropic organizations. Members of the U.S. Habitat III National Committee provided inputs to the U.S. negotiating position on the *New Urban Agenda* at numerous stages in its development. They contributed to HUD's two reports—a U.S. National Report for Habitat III, in line with UN-Habitat guidelines, for purposes of comparable data across countries and regions, and a U.S. 20/20 Habitat III Report. The 20/20 Report presented the U.S. story around housing, community development, and the fostering of inclusive, sustainable, and resilient communities across the United States, spanning the 20 years following Habitat II. HUD cohosted five domestic convenings to engage local and regional practitioners in the preparatory process. A subcommittee organized five simultaneous convenings informing the international affairs community about the intersection of their goals with those of urban development and housing. These sessions covered topics related to sustainable and safe urban development and aimed to advance U.S. policy for an increasingly urbanized world.

The United States actively participated in the Habitat III conference, with HUD Secretary Julián Castro leading the delegation to the conference and addressing the main plenary. Secretary Castro chaired an event, *Equity and Inclusion: A Mayor and Minister Discussion of National-Local Policies To Combat Inequality and Achieve Opportunity for All*. At this event, Secretary Castro and his Canadian counterpart, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development Jean-Yves Duclos, led a discussion among U.S. and Canadian mayors around opportunities to reduce inequality and to find collective, innovative solutions to challenges. Other events were organized by other U.S. federal agencies, and members of the U.S. delegation served on panels and presentations with government and nongovernment partners.

Multiple nongovernmental organizations from the United States also independently participated in the international processes run by UN-Habitat leading up to Habitat III and attended the Habitat III conference independently of the official U.S. delegation.

## **The U.S. Habitat III Documents and This Symposium**

The U.S. National Report for Habitat III provided brief descriptions of efforts across the United States and numeric data for a series of indicators, per the UN-Habitat guidelines (HUD, 2015). The U.S. 20/20 Habitat III Report (HUD, 2016) described policies, programs, and initiatives across the United States organized by the three themes of the U.S. domestic preparations for Habitat III. It contains a variety of contributed essays by outside partners.

My goal in developing this symposium was to share some of the creative and scientific work that Habitat III either stimulated or brought to HUD's attention. The authors have all taken up the call to action of Habitat III to find innovative, yet feasible, approaches to the complex challenges of equitable, sustainable, and inclusive housing and urban development.

The first article, "Urbanizing for Equity: Harnessing Upzones as a Redistributive Policy Tool," by Rachel Fyall and Alexander Casey, presents a very local, innovative approach for addressing challenges of housing affordability—through local zoning tools. This peer-reviewed article considers

the hurdles around providing affordable housing associated with land value. Fyall and Casey (2017) propose an alternative policy that enables cities to capture a portion of this land value increase in order to fund housing equity priorities.

The second article, “Boundary Issues: The 2016 *Atlas of Urban Expansion* Indicates Global Deden-sification,” by John Wihbey, presents a technical approach for documenting and analyzing spatial urban growth. The importance of data, its reliability and availability, and its role in helping develop and refine policies and programs around land use, urban planning, and housing were recurring themes in the Habitat III effort (Wihbey, 2017).

The third article, “Missing ‘Middle Scenarios’: Uncovering Nuanced Conditions in Latin America’s Housing Crisis,” by Kira Intrator and Kaustubh Shivdikar, explores the challenge of data from a dif-ferent perspective—namely the complexity of gathering adequate, accurate, and appropriate data. This peer-reviewed article proposes an innovative approach of utilizing unmanned aerial vehicles and artificial intelligence to gather more detailed information about housing conditions, so that local and national governments and international organizations can better target interventions and specific needs (Intrator and Shivdikar, 2017).

The fourth article, “Inclusion and Innovation: The Many Forms of Stakeholder Engagement in Habitat III,” by Eugenie L. Birch, discusses the stakeholder engagement within the Habitat III effort and provides a commentary on how to further build on this approach. This article positions the importance of the role of stakeholder participation in tackling these issues from the UN to the local government level (Birch, 2017).

The final article is a perspective by Janet Kreda from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corpora-tion on the recent and forthcoming changes in Canada’s policies and approaches toward housing. The Trudeau administration’s development of a New Housing Strategy for Canada occurred in parallel with the development of the *New Urban Agenda*. Given the structural similarities between the governments of Canada and the United States, specifically the power of the provinces within Canada’s federal system, the Canadian perspective can be seen as particularly relevant for U.S. readers (Kreda, 2017).

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## Guest Editor

Katrina Durbak is a program analyst in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research.

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