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World Urban Forum

The 12th Urban Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF12), convened by the United Nations Human Settlement Program (UN-Habitat), and co-organized with the Government of Egypt, took place in Cairo, Egypt from November 4-8, 2024. There were a record number of participants at the venue and online, totaling 63,000 people from 182 countries. The theme for this session was “It All Starts at Home.” There was an emphasis on the importance of localizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by addressing the pressing challenges of inadequate housing, rising urban poverty, and access to basic services exacerbated by global crises.

The concept of “home,” as we know in UNANIMA International, goes beyond the physical structures that shelter us, to encompass the cultural, social, economic and environmental dimensions of daily life. It also defines people's identity and daily experiences. An estimated 318 million people in the world are homeless, 3 billion people worldwide face housing inadequacy, 170 million are displaced, and 11 billion still live in slums and informal settlements.

By 2030, the number of people lacking adequate housing will rise dramatically. Influencing this situation are rising land costs, wars and conflicts, and the impacts of climate change. As highlighted on the second day of the conference, 2024 saw a record rise in global homelessness, with housing insecurity affecting an increasing number of urban populations. Government and community interventions are struggling to keep up with this growing number of people experiencing homelessness in cities around the world.

Drug management—a key issue relating to homelessness—was also presented as a key transnational urban challenge that requires local action. In one session that focused on this issue, the Global Commission on Drug Policy signed a Memorandum of Agreement with UN-Habitat. This marked a commitment to implementing evidence-based drug policies rooted in human rights, health and development.

In another session, data specialists and housing advocates talked about the possibilities for collaboration on a data platform to inform urban development and housing provision. Key insights from this session included acknowledgement that data is not neutral but always political

in nature, and that while data is used to inform interventions, interventions are also a way to gather data.

The final Cairo **Call to Action** is as follows:

1. We call for urgent action to address the global housing crisis

It all starts at home. Tackling the global housing crisis is a prerequisite to accelerate the 2030 Agenda and achieve poverty eradication, climate action and crises response and recovery. The vulnerability of informal settlements and slums calls for their urgent transformation, including through local action. Responding to the housing affordability crisis remains critical in the context of the homelessness challenge. Urban recovery and reconstruction are urgent given the loss of homes and neighborhoods in crisis. Access to urban basic services is at the heart of adequate housing, and leveraging digital technologies can enhance their delivery. We thus call for the prioritization of the right to adequate housing in local, national and global frameworks to ensure dignity and empowerment for all and as a pillar of social protection.

2. We call for achieving global goals through local action

Transforming global goals into a reality at the local level requires effective localization in line with national frameworks and communities' priorities. It is anchored in multilevel governance through meaningful collaboration among all stakeholders, coordination across sectors for alignment of policies and implementation. Given the specificities of each place and community, we call for translating global goals into local action by empowering local actors with the necessary institutional and financial capacities and resources, also through support from national governments.

3. We call for sustaining a systemic representation of local actors at all levels

Localization can only happen when all relevant stakeholders, cities and communities have decision-making power including through meaningful dialogue. The role of youth, women and persons with disabilities is also key for local action, among other stakeholders. We call for sustained and systematic representation of communities as political actors in local and national decision-making processes and for the representation of local and regional governments and other stakeholders in multilateral systems.

4. We call for sharing urban spaces and opportunities inclusively

Localization means reaching every community at all levels and leaving no one behind. Access to public spaces, infrastructure and services, and economic opportunities for all is essential for inclusive cities. The sense of belonging shapes the sustainability of our cities and neighborhoods within the broader meaning of home beyond physical structures, including through a quality of life lens. We call for caring cities where women, children and youth, persons with disabilities,

elderly, indigenous groups, low-income households, migrants, refugees, and all stakeholders, feel safe and included.

5. We call for urban planning to deliver better local outcomes

Participatory urban planning is instrumental to addressing the challenges and unlocking the benefits of urbanization. Effective urban planning is the backbone of delivering inclusion, resilience, accessibility and sustainability in cities and communities. A holistic approach to the social, ecological and economic functions of land and the continuum of land rights are key. Placing proximity and circularity at the center of urban development is necessary to ensure efficient resource consumption, environmental sustainability, economic prosperity and social equity. The promotion of people-centered smart cities principles is key in that endeavor. We call for all actors to apply urban planning and land use articulated around the principles of equity, shared prosperity, and resource efficiency.

6. We call for unlocking finance for cities and communities

Addressing the financing gap to meet urban development needs is urgent. This requires increased flows of financing to local and regional governments and to communities. Better urban planning and regulations are required to leverage untapped sources of revenue and to increase preparedness to access financial markets. Priority setting and sequencing of investments is key to realize local development plans. We call for innovation and cooperation to increase financing for communities and local and regional governments across public, private, domestic and international spheres.

7. We call for ensuring equity and justice for sustainable cities

Prioritizing the needs of marginalized and underserved communities in urban planning and resource allocation is essential. This includes promoting equal access to housing, services, and economic opportunities, and actively addressing systemic inequalities that hinder full participation in city life. We call for equity and justice, including for climate action, such that all residents have a fair chance to thrive.

8. We call for leveraging local and grassroots data for decision-making

Localized data is a pathway to empower communities. Bottom-up data should be recognized and integrated in urban planning, also leveraging technology, to enhance the people's voices. Collaborative efforts for co-production of data and research across relevant stakeholders need to be promoted. We call for greater recognition and use of local, grassroots and disaggregated data as a means to generate greater social inclusion and more localized approaches to urban development, also leveraging voluntary local reviews of the sustainable development goals.

9. We call for harnessing culture and heritage as an asset for sustainability

Cultural diversity is essential for sustainable cities and communities. We need to integrate local traditions and indigenous knowledge into urban development. By valuing and preserving these assets, cities can reduce their ecological footprint and promote sustainable practices. We call for leveraging cultural heritage to drive social inclusion, foster resilience, and offer sustainable economic opportunities.

10. We call for building coalitions and alliances to scale local impact

The magnitude and interconnected nature of urban development challenges and opportunities requires stronger collaboration for progress. Local action is more impactful when driven by coalitions that bring together communities, local and national governments, the private sector and civil society. Empowering local actors through these partnerships and coalitions is a powerful tool for addressing community-specific challenges while aligning with broader national and global goals. We call participants and stakeholders to unite in building action-oriented-coalitions that accelerate progress toward sustainable urbanisation and a better quality of life for all. It all starts with us!

UNANIMA International's Advocacy Priorities at WUF12 are available at this [link](#). The insights gained at WUF12 in Cairo will continue to inform the work of UNANIMA International.

To read a publication from Act Alliance titled “*Non-Economic Loss and Damage*,” click [here](#)