



Konrad  
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**HABITAT III:**

**The Irresistible  
Rise of Cities**

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## Abstract

From 17 to 20 October 2016, Latin America will host for the first time the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, held every 20 years. The third edition of this Conference (Habitat III) will take place in Quito, Ecuador, and will be the first global conference after the approval of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

The United Nations General Assembly decided to convene the Habitat III Conference to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable development and to focus on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Its objectives are: to secure renewed political commitment for sustainable urban development, assess the achievements to date, address poverty and identify emerging challenges.

This report presents the interconnection between Habitat III and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. From a Latin American perspective, we analyse the increasing prominence of cities as international climate actors and the expectations regarding the Conference.



## Introduction

Habitat III was convened by the United Nations General Assembly to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization, and should be built on the basis of previous conferences (Habitat I, 1976, Vancouver; Habitat II, 1996, Istanbul). The conference will result in a concise, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented outcome document: the New Urban Agenda (NUA). This document will set global standards of achievement in sustainable urban development, rethinking the way we build, manage, and live in cities through drawing together cooperation with committed partners, relevant stakeholders, and urban actors at all levels of government as well as the private sector.

The Quito Implementation Plan is one of the two parts of the NUA and refers to specific commitments by various partners intended to contribute to and reinforce the implementation of the outcomes of Habitat III Conference. A draft NUA (Surabaya Draft) is already approved and will be adopted in Quito. These commitments seek to be concrete actions, measurable and achievable, focused on implementation, and with great depth of information for future accountability and transparency.

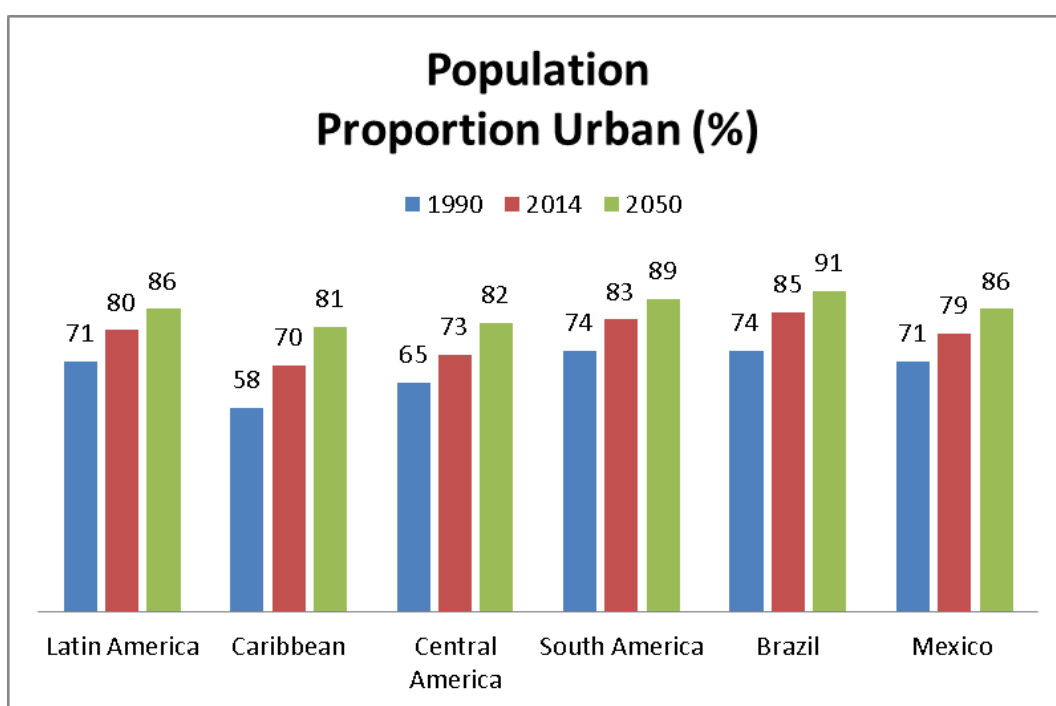
While Habitat I aimed to control urban growth, Habitat II approved the Habitat Agenda, which had two main goals: to guarantee adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world. Adopted by 171 countries, the Habitat Agenda contained over 100 commitments and 600 recommendations. Now, Habitat III advances through the development of national and local urban policies that integrate the notion of equity to the agenda, also encouraging more participative and inclusive decision-making.



## Preparation for Quito and the Post 2015 Agenda

In preparation for Quito, a series of events were conducted, including the Dialogues on Habitat III and NUA in Rio de Janeiro, on September 21, 2016. The proposed topics were in line with the NUA: right to the city, urban sustainability and resilience, decent housing, urban sustainable mobility, urban infrastructure, democratic governance and social participation, urban space and citizen security, metropolitan governance and management. The main objective of the discussions held in Rio was to support the Brazilian position and proposals related to the Post-2015 Agenda and the SDGs, especially the SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), on which the discussions at the Habitat III Conference will focus.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, was approved by the world leaders in 2015 and includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and 169 targets, which officially came into force on January 1, 2016 and are universally applicable for the next 15 years. According to data presented in the SDG 11 mentioned before, 95% of urban expansion in the coming decades will occur in the developing world. Moreover, 828 million people live in slums and the number will continue to increase. One of the targets established by the SDG 11 is to enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries by 2030. Habitat III should prioritize the means to achieve this goal.



Source: Based on data from World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision

## Sustainable Urban Development will be the focus of Habitat

Sustainable development plays an important role in the global climate agenda, especially since the 1987 report "Our Common Future". As a well-known concept, sustainable development is defined as meeting "the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". This concept has emerged as the guiding principle for long-term global development, and consists of three pillars that must be achieved in a balanced way: economic development, social development and environmental protection.

Since the UN Conferences on human settlements, a new type of sustainable development arises in the agenda: sustainable urban development. This means that cities gain prominence in the climate agenda, highlighting the cooperation between them, as C40 Cities Climate Group, 100 Resilient Cities and the CB27, National Forum of the Secretaries of Environment of the Brazilian municipal capitals.

Greater participation and influence of local governments and their representative organizations in the process of global and local governance, what we here call the "Irresistible Rise of Cities", will also be emphasized during Habitat III. The prominence of cities is due to a number of factors: while cities occupy only 2% of the total land, on the other hand they are responsible for 70% of the economy (GDP), more than 60% of the global energy consumption, 70% of greenhouse gases emissions (GHGs) and 70% of global waste. Therefore, there is no effective climate solution without the participation of cities.

The high density of cities can bring efficiency gains and technological innovation while reducing resource and energy consumption (SDG 11). In this regard, joint action between companies, states, municipalities, NGOs and civil society regarding the planning of national and local policies is proposed.

## **The Latin American urban space**

The issue is especially important in, Latin America, one of the most urbanised regions in the world, where 90% of the population is projected to live in urban areas by 2020. Urban areas in the region are often not able to cope with the rapid population growth resulting from rural migration leading to elevated poverty and crime rates. In creating a more sustainable economic order, it is necessary to respect the social dimensions of sustainability and include them in the city planning process. The SDGs aim to "end all forms of poverty, fight inequalities and tackle climate change, while ensuring that no one is left behind". The intensity and speed of urbanization have caused land occupation that does not take into account the environmental conditions and the quality of life of individuals, especially among part of the population with less economic power.

On the top of that, Latin America and the Caribbean are considered particularly vulnerable in this area, with 70% of its urban population living in low-lying coastal areas (LLCAs), i.e. those regions that will be most severely affected by rising sea levels and extreme weather events. This aspect covers the importance of urban planning to ensure individuals greater security against natural disasters. This is intrinsically linked to economic inequality, which generates marginalized who, due to lack of options, end up living on the hills and slopes, more susceptible to natural disasters.

## The "regenerative cities"

One of the issues of great importance to the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, particularly to the Regional Programme EKLA is the energy issue, in which cities also assume prominence today. The future of global energy, especially the issue of power generation that supplies the urban centres, stands out as a major challenge. Although not a new challenge, what is new is the urgency of a definitive transition of the energy matrix from fossil fuels to the use of renewable sources. Geothermal, solar, wind and other sources account for 3% of world electricity grid, while biofuels and solid waste account for 2% and are growing significantly. Facing such a scenario, the tendency is that cities are no longer mere consumers of energy, becoming important centres for solar energy production and use of biogas from solid waste. In the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), for example, it was recently built the largest parking photovoltaic panels in Brazil, whose capacity in times of low peak power can supply power to the entire campus for a few hours.

This ecological transformation of urban systems of production, consumption and construction of energy, waste, food and water falls within the concept of "regenerative cities" or Ecopolis, coined by Stefan Schurig, a researcher at the World Future Council. Assuming that cities must not absorb more resources than they could generate, the proposal is to transform cities in regenerative systems. According to a holistic approach, the objective is to assure that we develop comprehensive strategies for an enhancing, restorative relationship between an urbanising humanity and the ecosystems which we draw resources from for our sustenance.

## Prospects for Habitat III

All these ideas and success stories will be brought to Quito, but the effectiveness of Habitat III is based on the commitment of all partners to the implementation of the NUA, especially regarding the involvement of local authorities. Following a series of conferences and international commitments on climate change and sustainable development in recent years – Rio+20 in 2012, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, COP21 and the entry into force of the Paris Agreement scheduled for November 4, Habitat III can help systematize the alignment between cities and the objectives of national planning, in their role as engines of national economic and social development. Some questions, however, still need answers, especially concerning financing and technical skills, particularly in emerging and developing.

Urbanization has been traditionally considered something to be avoided, due to various problems and challenges it causes. Therefore, Dr. Joan Clos, Secretary General of the Habitat III Conference, invites us to update the approach: the proposal is to consider urbanization as a tool, alongside other strategies such as energy and infrastructure, to accelerate inclusive and sustainable development. We hope that the outcome of Habitat III help us change the focus of this issue.





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