

SLoCaT Report on the Habitat III - “New Urban Agenda” – Informal Intergovernmental Negotiations

New York, 7th – 9th September 2016

I. Background

[Habitat III](#) is the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to take place from 17-20 October 2016. Habitat III will be the first UN global conference following the adoption of the Global Goals on Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change; thus the “New Urban Agenda” (NUA) – the Habitat III outcome document – will be a key opportunity to shape the implementation of these agreements in a number of sectors, including transport.

Eighteen days of informal meetings in New York were scheduled before the three days of formal negotiations at the 3rd Preparation Committee (PrepCom3) in Surabaya, Indonesia from the 25-27th July 2016 and the four days at Habitat III itself in Quito, Ecuador, from the 17 to 20th October 2016.

However, during PrepCom3 it became clear that a number of important outstanding issues needed further discussion before the Habitat III conference, so **it was decided to hold an additional three-day informal intergovernmental negotiation session** between the 7th and 9th September in New York.

II. Informal Intergovernmental Negotiations

The three days of the 7th - 9th September session were designated as “**Informal Intergovernmental Negotiations**” (previously these sessions were referred to only as “meetings”).

With a lot of the meetings taking place behind closed doors by Friday afternoon consensus had been reached on 100 of the 155 paragraphs (up from 38 at the start of the meeting) with non-State actors such as UCLG and ICLIE playing a constructive role.

Negotiations continued through the night Friday and only concluded late on Saturday 10th September. Discussion focussed mainly on Section C on “Follow up and Review” in particular on paragraph 164 of the Surabaya Draft which included 2 options with regards to role of the UN General Assembly, UN Secretary General and UN-Habitat.

Other sticking points related to “common but differentiated responsibilities” (CBDR), the right to development, official development assistance (ODA), unilateral economic sanctions and territories under foreign occupation – common issues of disagreement between the G77 and Developed countries in UN negotiations and not specific to Habitat III.

III. Revised NUA – 10th September 2016

General

The new 10th September version of the NUA text can be found [here](#).

There a considerable number of text changes in the new document which now has ten additional paragraphs. There is a new paragraph 10 on the importance of culture and cultural diversity, not surprisingly the language around “Right to the City” has been weakened.

The “commitment” of then government has been weakened in paragraph 15 to “We commit to **work towards** an urban paradigm shift...”.

The reference to “short lived climate pollutants” has been removed.

There is a new paragraph (83) calling for better UN system wide co-ordination on urban development.

The reference to a “trust fund” for urban development capacity building has been deleted.

A new paragraph (154) recognizes “the significant contribution of voluntary collaborative initiatives, partnerships and coalitions that plan to initiate and enhance the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, highlighting best practices and innovative solutions including by promoting co-production networks between sub-national entities, local governments and other relevant stakeholders.”

Transport

There are a number of further improvements to the language on transport.

In paragraph 52 (**changes in bold**):

*“We encourage spatial development strategies that take into account, as appropriate, the need to guide urban extension **prioritizing urban renewal** by planning for the provision of **accessible and well-connected** infrastructure and services, sustainable population densities, and compact design and integration of new neighbourhoods in the urban fabric, **preventing urban sprawl and marginalization.**”*

In paragraph 54:

*“We commit to **encourage** the generation and use of renewable and affordable energy and **sustainable and efficient** transport infrastructure **and services, where possible**, achieving the benefits of connectivity and reducing the financial, environmental, and public health costs of inefficient mobility, congestion, air pollution, urban heat island effect, and noise.”*

Paragraph 55 now includes a specific reference to the WHO Air Quality Guidelines.

A new paragraph 102 says “We will strive to improve capacity for urban planning and design and providing training for urban planners at national, sub-national, and local levels”

The paragraphs focussed on mobility and transport (now paragraphs number 113 to 118 are largely unchanged). Paragraph now 118 includes a more specific reference to pedestrian infrastructure.

Follow up and review

The final Follow up and Review Section C (paragraphs 161 to 175) is where the most changes have been made.

Whilst confirming the importance of UN Habitat and its Nairobi Headquarters, the text asks the UN Secretary General to conduct an independent review of UN Habitat over the next year.

This in effect postpones and elevates discussion on the role of UN Habitat to a 2-day session of the UN General Assembly (to be held before September 2017) followed by a decision later in 2017 or in 2018.

IV. Conclusions and outlook

The informal agreement on a compromise text will be good news for the Ecuadorians who will now expect a smooth formal adoption of the NUA text at Habitat III in Quito (although there is no guarantee as the September session was “informal” and so the agreed text has no formal status).

The revised text reveals that considerable compromises were made by all sides in order to get agreement on the new text. Parties will be aware that any proposal for text changes in Quito could well open the door other suggestions and the hard fought balance found in NY could well fall apart.

If there is agreement on the text early in the Quito session the remainder of Habitat III could then focus on implementation. A key question will be whether Quito become just another huge urban conference/celebration – or whether there is serious attention given to the implementation and monitoring of the NUA and the significant challenges of delivering sustainable urbanisation in the next years.

After Quito we can expect considerable activity from UN Habitat who will be very keen to demonstrate their effectiveness and leadership in implementing the NUA as the UN SG review gets underway.

V. Sources

1. www.habitat3.org
2. IISD Reporting
3. ICLIE reporting
4. SLoCaT Members in NY
5. www.cityscope.org