



# **YOUTH** AND THE **NEW URBAN AGENDA**

**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

# YOUTH AND THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

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UN  HABITAT





## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Amidst record high youth unemployment rates, a global financial crisis and youth-led demonstrations, cities play a key role for realizing the rights of youth. With people between the ages of 15-24 comprising a staggering 1.8 billion globally<sup>1</sup> and urbanization currently one of the key driving forces of human development<sup>2</sup>, this paper seeks to create awareness around the relevance of focusing on youth as an integral part of urban development, and outline the core ideas of what drives UN-Habitat's work in this area with focus on the three pronged approach.

In order to create a positive correlation between urbanization and development – addressing the root causes of poverty and inequality - urban regulations and policies need to be reflective of the realities affecting young people. Cities can benefit from new thinking on how a youthful population provides opportunities for local economies to close income gaps and expand revenues for local authorities. Coupled with plans that account for larger youth populations living in and migrating to urban areas, cities can increase their potential for becoming prosperous, equitable and innovative. Ensuring youth have a voice and are recognized as stakeholders in legislative frameworks allows cities to harness the potential inherent in the urban demographic youth bulge.

<sup>1</sup> *State of the World Population Report (UNFPA, 2014)*

<sup>2</sup> *Human development is here defined as the choices people have, to lead lives that they value, improving the human condition beyond economic development to encompass social and political aspects of society.*

## INTRODUCTION

The majority of the world's population is now urban, and approximately 600 urban centres generating around 60 percent of global GDP,<sup>3</sup> cities are gaining political and economic importance globally. Meanwhile, populations continue to gravitate towards cities in search of prosperity, enhanced quality of life, knowledge and more diverse opportunities. With people forming its core, the dynamics of urbanization are bringing new issues to the forefront of environmental, political, social and economic development.

This paper is produced at the outset of an international negotiation around urbanization and its implications for human development. The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) will in 2016 bring UN Member States together to agree on a new paradigm for sustainable urbanization. As the third conference of its kind, Habitat III will have a fundamental impact on the future development of cities, creating a new global agenda for sustainable urban development. Habitat III will promote a collaborative, transparent and responsive form of governance and planning for cities that recognizes the multiplicity of government and non-government actors who are – and must be – involved in order to harness the potential of urbanization for sustainable development, bringing together those who are living their lives in cities and those who decide on policies to strengthen support and ownership of sustainable urbanization.

<sup>3</sup> *Urban world: Mapping the economic power of cities* (McKinsey, 2011)

Simultaneously, the Post-2015 Development Agenda is being negotiated, including whether it should focus on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.<sup>4</sup> Going beyond targeting improvements in housing, sanitation and water facilities,<sup>5</sup> the proposed Sustainable Development Goal on cities and human settlements represents a conceptual shift in the ways urbanization is understood, encompassing a more holistic perception of the opportunities and challenges inherent in cities.

*In line with these global processes, UN-Habitat is pioneering a new approach to urban development – the New Urban Agenda – which presents a sustainable, integrated and inclusive model for urban development.*

Representing a paradigm shift towards a renewed model of urbanization, the pillars of sustainability, integration and inclusiveness shapes UN-Habitat's response to the challenges of our age. It advocates that urbanization should be based on integration in bringing the environmental, social and economic objectives of sustainability to the centre of development, while

<sup>4</sup> *Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals (2014)*

<sup>5</sup> *Millennium Development Goal 7, Ensure Environmental Sustainability, Target 7.D: Achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers*

THE THREE-PRONGED APPROACH (UN-HABITAT 2015)



ensuring the protection of human rights and the empowerment of civil society to expand democratic participation and collaboration.<sup>6</sup> It advocates for a new strategic approach based on two premises; the positive correlation between urbanization and development, and the importance of urban legislation, planning and finance to ensure urbanization creates positive outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> *Urbanization and Sustainable Development: Towards a New United Nations Urban Agenda, Policy Paper presented to the High Level Committee on Programmes, Twenty Eight Session UN HQs (New York) (CR-6), 10 October 2014*  
<sup>7</sup> *Urban Solutions (UN-Habitat 2015)*



In operationalizing this new urban paradigm, UN-Habitat promotes compact, mixed, and connected urban growth. UN-Habitat recommends integrating urban planning and design, legislation and regulatory frameworks, and urban and public finance in order to successfully implement sustainable patterns of spatial development in urbanizing areas. Planning in advance of urban growth is necessary to direct growth in efficient, equitable, and environmentally healthy directions. However, planning is not enough to achieve sustainable urban development. Legislative and regulatory structures guide the implementation of plans, and urban finance pays for their enactment. Thus, the integrated, three pronged approach is the means and method for achieving sustainable, inclusive outcomes.

This paper intends to strengthen awareness and collaboration between UN-Habitat and its partners with the goal of promoting the relevance of issues pertaining to youth living in cities; present and future. It will emphasize the importance of ensuring that any urban development outcomes, as a result of UN-Habitat's own programmatic interventions, Habitat III or the Sustainable Development Goals, are attentive to and inclusive of youth, providing recommendations that build on foundations of human rights and youth-led development to create integrated, inclusive and sustainable cities as part of the three pronged approach and the New Urban Agenda.





## DEFINING UN-HABITAT'S WORK ON YOUTH



The Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) seeks to empower the individuals and groups that are otherwise left on the margins of society to claim and exercise their universally recognized human rights, also with view to reducing gender and age inequalities.

*UN-Habitat follows the HRBA to holistically understand **youth and urbanization, analysing the rights and responsibilities of claim holders, and the inequalities, discriminatory practices and unjust power relations which exist in the context of the city**, as seen from the perspective of youth.*

The UN defines youth as individuals between 15-24 years old.<sup>8</sup> However, the statistical and cultural definitions of youth vary significantly at national levels, with countries incorporating a smaller or larger age range into policy and practice. UN-Habitat has adopted an age definition of youth which encompasses people between 15-32 years of age,<sup>9</sup> and further defines youth as people in transition between childhood and adulthood, meaning a phase in life that is linked to age but not necessarily determined by it, where individual roles and responsibilities are changing as per the expectations of society.

This approach implies identifying and mobilizing stakeholders who can affect change - through capacity development and empowerment - as equal partners in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring for accountability.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Secretary-General's Report to the General Assembly, A/36/215, 1981  
<sup>9</sup> As defined by the African Youth Charter (African Union, 2006)

<sup>10</sup> Frequently Asked Questions on a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation (UNOHCHR, 2006)

In promoting an urbanization model that contains mechanisms and procedures which respect, protect and promote human rights, youth-led development is an effective tool with significant benefits for cities.<sup>11</sup> Empowering youth to become change agents within the city has the power to transform attitudes, mentalities and actions among youth and others, particularly the regional and local governments who are closer to them, into a positive and productive influence for the city. It can help cities become more inclusive in addressing socio-economic barriers, reducing social isolation of neighbourhoods and communities, and allowing youth to access opportunities.

Considering the global youth bulge and its impact on the development of cities, it is vital to work with young men and women, taking into account their diverse realities, abilities and experiences, in order to achieve sustainable urbanization. As a cross-cutting issue for the agency, UN-Habitat has operationalized projects to better the livelihoods of urban youth – strengthening the basis for evidence based policy recommendations - while also working to mainstream youth into programming across the agency. It has further engaged youth at the global level, to help formulate an international understanding of pressing urban youth issues, while at the same time relying on strong partnerships with national and local governments to translate the global discourse and knowledge into tangible improvements in the daily lives of urban youth.

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<sup>11</sup> In 2007, UN-Habitat developed a series of principles of youth-led development which guide its own programming, and serves as guidelines for cities and other partners in developing programs and policies related to youth. Utilizing a youth-led model on development, youth are effectively recognized as a development partner: a partner who should be fully integrated and engaged in sustainable urban development. For more information, see the *Global Youth-Led Development Report Series (2): State of the Field in Youth-Led Development through the Lens of the UN-Habitat's Urban Youth Fund (UN-Habitat, 2012)*

## CONTEXTUALIZING THE URBAN DEMOGRAPHIC YOUTH BULGE



Cities became the primary habitat for humanity in 2007. At the same time, the urban population has become increasingly younger, with as many as 60% of all urban dwellers expected to be under the age of 18 by 2030.<sup>12</sup> This is largely a phenomena with geographical attributes; whereas industrialized countries have completed the demographic transition – moving from a largely rural agrarian society with high fertility and mortality rates to a predominantly urban industrial society with low

fertility and mortality rates<sup>13</sup> - many lower income countries currently have higher shares of population between 15-29 years of age. This presents opportunities for economic development due to the increase in labour force which grows more rapidly than the population depending on it,<sup>14</sup> something which can be harnessed in cities as engines of economic growth.

<sup>12</sup> *Cities of Youth, Cities of Prosperity* (UN-Habitat, 2011)

<sup>13</sup> *What is the Demographic Dividend?* (IMF, 2006)

<sup>14</sup> *Youth Bulge: A Demographic Dividend or a Demographic Bomb in Developing Countries?* (World Bank, 2012)

That cities are home to an increasing number of youth brings new issues to the forefront of economic, political and human development globally. The two trends of rapid urbanization and a demographic youth bulge can provide opportunities for socio-economic development in cities if planned and accounted for in local and national development strategies. Cities can for example provide youth with better access to education and employment, culture, diversity and knowledge, factors which fuel human development and continue to pull young people into urban areas.

However, in lieu of appropriate responses and opportunities for youth, the merging of these two trends may on the contrary contribute to expanding informal settlements and poverty, rising inequalities, new forms of marginalization and social exclusion. As such, cities often exhibit an intensification of exclusion and inequalities, denying the benefits of urban life to youth, especially in countries experiencing rapid and unplanned urbanization.<sup>15</sup> At the moment, urbanization does not guarantee youth the same rights to housing, tenure and land; there is no equal access to livelihoods and credits; youth lack equal access to clean water, sanitation and other basic services; and there are few opportunities for youth graduates to find meaningful employment.

<sup>15</sup> *State of the Urban Youth Report 2012-2013: Youth in the Prosperity of Cities* (UN-Habitat, 2012)

*Youth unemployment alone can lead to changes in family patterns, **increasing income disparities, crime,** and the virtual exclusion of large sections of youth who have to live in informal settlements or **stigmatized neighbourhoods** due to lack of income.*

Concerns over security and criminal gangs paradoxically translate into the exclusion of urban youth, especially those from low-income and minority groups. It also has a strong gender dimension with negative consequences for adolescent girls and young women. Young women can take on a lead role in their communities; however continue to face a multitude of challenges related to security and mobility, rights and access to land, freedom of expression, lack of sufficient basic services and economic resources. Sexual harassment is rampant in urban public spaces, creating invisible barriers which prevent young women from exercising their right to freedom of movement and fear.<sup>16</sup> For adolescent girls and young women, gender discrimination creates additional barriers where without a formal recognition of their key role in cities' economic, social and political life they are left even more exposed to the challenges arising from urbanization.

<sup>16</sup> *Stop Street Harassment: Statistics – Academic and Community Studies* (2013)



A number of cities have also experienced increased politicization of public space, especially where youth-led movements have taken to urban streets and squares in an expression of discontent with the status quo. A range of policing activities, such as surveillance, curfews, move-on and anti-congregation laws, have been deployed in response, perpetuating the exclusion of youth rather than fostering long-term sustainable solutions to incorporate and address their needs.<sup>17</sup>

The challenges faced by youth combined with the technological revolution, globalization and lack of attention to youth centred development are important aspects in analysing urban youth-led protest movements and unrest, spanning from cities

<sup>17</sup> *Youth Led Action Research on Land, Final Project Report (UN-Habitat, 2014)*

in the Middle East and North Africa, to Latin-America and Europe. Youth have gathered in public squares of Hong Kong, Cairo, Istanbul, Moscow, and Sao Paulo, calling for increased visibility and participation, demanding their voices be heard in issues affecting their lives and future. In many cases, the demonstrations may be regarded as manifestations of the multi-layered challenges youth face in urban settings. Urbanization is more often than not perceived and proved to be unequitable, reaping benefits only for those who are able to claim them with scores left at the margins of prosperity. Adding to the impediments of urban prosperity; poor governance, corruption and lack of adequate institutional infrastructure make benefits associated with productivity, infrastructure, quality of life, equity, social inclusion and environmental sustainability evaporate.<sup>18</sup>

A demographic youth bulge which contributes to continued expansion of informal settlements, rising youth unemployment globally, as well as demonstrations and unrest are dire symptoms of a development trajectory which is neither a stable nor a sustainable one. The issues at its core require new solutions that bring youth on-board as partners and assets to their communities, seeking legitimate and inclusive ways to enhance the sustainability and quality of life for all living in cities; ultimately reinforcing the realization of youth's universal claim to basic human rights.

<sup>18</sup> *State of the World 's Cities 2012/2013: Prosperity of Cities (UN-Habitat, 2012)*

## A NEW APPROACH TO YOUTH: FROM CHALLENGE TO RESOURCE



At the policy level, the past decade has witnessed a change of approach to youth. The perception of youth has moved from that of a vulnerable group of clients on the receiving end to one which is a resource to societies and has rights to participation and influence as equal stakeholders. To this effect, the Habitat Agenda, a global plan of action developed at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996, laid the foundation for the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships, to realize safer, healthier, cleaner and more equitable cities for all.<sup>19</sup> The Habitat

Agenda presented a new challenge to stakeholders, including youth and youth civil society, to reorganize themselves and build their institutional capacity towards participating in a more meaningful way in urban development. It thus contributed to a change of approach which considers the value of youth's contributions not solely as an investment in future adulthood, but rather a means to improved living standards and quality of life for youth as well as their communities at present.

<sup>19</sup> *The Habitat Agenda: Goals and Principles, Commitments and the Global Plan of Action, 1996*

Since 1996, there has been growing recognition of the possibilities for development inherent in a large youth population, **with several countries in the developing world creating mechanisms especially tailored to capitalize on the youth bulge.**<sup>20</sup>

This recognition was also a prerequisite for the General Assembly endorsement of the World Programme of Action on Youth (WPAY) passed in 1995, and subsequently supplemented in 2008. Together the 15 priority areas of the WPAY guide policies and actions in the area of youth empowerment.<sup>21</sup> In 2012, with the UN Secretary Generals' Five-Year Action Agenda emphasizing the urgency of addressing the needs of the largest generation of young people the world has ever known, the UN and other key development actors deepened the focus on youth in existing programs on employment, entrepreneurship, political inclusion, citizenship and protection of rights, education and reproductive health.

To help advance this agenda, the first ever UN Envoy on Youth was appointed by the Secretary General in 2013 to advocate for addressing the development needs and rights of young people, bringing "the work of the UN with and for youth closer to them".<sup>22</sup>

In light of these developments, amidst the Habitat III process and the Post-2015 development agenda, there is an increased interest in engaging youth at local, national and global levels as drivers for positive change to address the root causes of challenges and opportunities, also as they play out in the urban setting. However, significant gaps remain in understanding how to apply these ideas through policies and practices in the urban context, and ensure global and national policies and regulations apply to the level where people are finding themselves faced with the most pressing and dynamically evolving issues, namely in cities.

<sup>20</sup> Examples of this include Kenya's Uwezo Fund, The Promise Foundation in India, and the Schools of Tomorrow Program in Brazil, as well as UN-Habitat's Urban Youth Fund.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay2010.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> The Secretary General's Five-Year Action Agenda, 25 January 2012



## YOUTH AS THE POSITIVE CORRELATION BETWEEN URBANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT: INTEGRATING YOUTH INTO THE THREE PRONGED APPROACH





Understanding the multiple aspects of discrimination that may face youth in urban areas can help address the bottlenecks and potentials existing within and in-between these areas, allowing governments, youth and the development community alike to develop appropriate plans, policies and programmes for youth inclusion. As outlined above, left unaddressed these issues may have an immense negative impact on urbanization, with the exclusion of young women and men serving as a barrier in achieving collective productivity, prosperity and progress of cities and countries. It is also a lost opportunity to not engage youth as a resource for urban development. Allowing youth a voice in shaping their city creates a better city; one that is able to solve problems based on informed decision making through participatory and transparent processes.

Youth are at the intersection of the environmental, social and economic objectives and issues pertaining to the pillars of urbanization. As primary drivers and a critical resource for solving problems, urban youth are at the core of sustainability as one of the urban demographics disproportionately affected by climate change, unemployment and future development. In response to these challenges, an integrated perspective on urbanization facilitates addressing the reality of young people in cities, a reality which can include tenure insecurity impacting their opportunities for economic security; lack of participation

in urban governance and planning limiting their agency; often aggravated in combination with inequalities related to gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background. Inclusivity cannot be achieved while ignoring or excluding youth; they are a key demographic for any effort that claims to have a social dimension, and have area specific knowledge that can contribute to identifying viable urban solutions.

For these reasons, youth are - and must continue to be - incorporated into the integrated efforts to improve cities, encompassing urban planning, regulatory and legislative and financial-economic elements. Only by addressing youth as one of the dynamics which influence urbanization can cities become sustainable in the long term.

As a key component of urbanization, engaging youth in shaping the urban development trajectory - be it through meaningful participation in urban planning, informing legislation and regulations or economic policies - consequently enables them to take responsibility and ownership to support the realization of cities which are integrated, inclusive and sustainable. This approach utilizes youth as the positive correlation between urbanization and development, integrating several - if not all areas - of urban development, effectively placing people at the centre of urbanization to promote human rights, inclusiveness and sustainability in cities.

## Youth, Urban Legislation, Land and Governance

Urban legislation deals with existing regulations and implementation practices of land policies, the land tenure system and protection of land rights. It can also outline the relationship between the local, regional and national governments, and their respective responsibilities.<sup>23</sup> Urban legislation also provides the framework for regulations – supporting the implementation of legislation - such as for example protection of public space, building codes and plotting regulations.

Legislation is integral for sustainable urbanization, with local authorities at the core of legislative processes. Local authorities represent the closest level of governance for citizens, including youth. They deliver essential services to their citizens (health, education, transport, water, etc.), and have a key role in responding to crises and emergencies. They often also represent the first instance of governance youth interact with, be it for business permits, healthcare or access to schooling and education. Being able to interact directly with citizens, local authorities also have the opportunity to consult young people for better informed decision making, including on land, planning, housing, basic services and economic development.


While serving to promote the empowerment of civil society, expanding democratic participation and reinforcing collaboration, engaging youth can enhance the effectiveness of legislation through increased sense of ownership among citizens; ensuring real needs and priorities among youth are being addressed. It creates socially cohesive cities through the consolidation of democratic participation and practices, countering disengagement, supporting political stability, crime reduction and safety, while promoting equality in opportunity and prosperity.

The diversity among youth should be seen as an asset for urban dynamism and progress; with their needs and rights should be recognized in urban legislation on equal basis with that of all citizens. Harnessing this potential should be done through involving youth from different backgrounds based on age, gender, ethnicity, culture, religion, class, caste, education, social status, sexual orientation, as well as physical and intellectual abilities, ensuring urban legislation and regulations serve as non-discriminatory vehicles for the realization of human rights for all.

Expanding on the potential of ICT in the hands of youth for urban legislation and governance will allow for better data collection and evidence based regulations at national and local levels.

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<sup>23</sup> *National Urban Policies Framework and Rapid Diagnostic (UN-Habitat 2014)*



User generated data through social media and data-gathering apps can be used to promote opportunities which help local governments understand preferences of citizens, as well as to monitor service delivery and provide feedback from users to government.

Ensuring youth needs and rights are reflected in policy and decision making processes is an effective way to create outcomes which are relevant and legitimate at the local level, enhancing relevance of decision making and accountability of the local government, while promoting local ownership and legitimacy in partnership with civil society and communities. National urban policies have a key role to play in this regard, in that they present an opportunity for integrating youth issues specifically into urban development.

To bridge local and national priorities, national urban policies need to have a strong focus on youth and systematically address the needs of this demographic in order to be a successful instrument for inclusive, integrated and sustainable urban development. National urban policies should be linked to strategies or policies on youth at the national and local level in order to adequately inform demographic aspects of urbanization and allow for coordination of these at the national level.

## Youth, Urban Planning and Design

Urban planning and design can support cities achieve more compact, socially inclusive, better integrated and connected cities. It provides long-term strategies and implementation tools for the usage of resources, including land, water and energy.<sup>24</sup>

One of the key focus areas of urban planning and design is public space, an ever more critical issue in light of rapid and increasingly dense urbanization. Public space and urban mobility are key elements for young people to access education, health services and employment as well as leisure activities. This is an area where planning and legislation both have a role to play to ensure youth can access economic as well as recreational and social opportunities. As part of the remedy against unemployment, public space is particularly valuable to youth's economic empowerment due to the opportunities presented for political, social and cultural participation, as well as for innovation and entrepreneurship.

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<sup>24</sup> *Urban Solutions (UN-Habitat 2015)*

*Urban public spaces should be developed for youth to use for economic development, including **entrepreneurship** and **enterprises in support of social cohesion, urban prosperity, integration and inclusion.***

Young women and men need equal access to such spaces, with particular consideration to ensure freedom from fear and freedom of movement for young women.

To ensure issues such as these are taken into account, urban planning and design should be founded on the meaningful participation of young people and accommodating youth needs in its outcomes, with view to facilitating youth's transition from child- to adulthood in terms of mobility, safety, access to urban space and economic opportunity, democratic participation, health and education. Formalized mechanisms, requirements and guidelines for meaningful youth participation in the formulation, implementation and review of regional and metropolitan plans, planned city extensions and climate change action plans for cities should be in place to capture the knowledge that exists among youth as a tool for better planning.

Cities can benefit from planning that caters to the demographic dividends of an urban youth bulge, with view to fostering job creation and the development of social capital that is inclusive of youth. Creating plans that incorporate the urban demographic dividend is critical for increased productivity and prosperity in cities, and promotes equitable urban development and inclusive urban growth for all. Equality and non-discrimination considerations, including age and gender equality, should be at the core of urban planning.

## Youth and Urban Finance

Youth livelihoods and employment are key drivers of the urban economy, and are essential to the functioning of finance and implementation of sustainable urban growth, including revenue collection. Prosperous cities invest in youthful human capital and promote innovation, social mobility and diversity of opportunities. They create decent jobs and economic opportunities for youth, and establish conditions for harnessing their talent and skills towards decent, productive and gainful employment as part of the formal economy.

The inequalities affecting young people are putting obstacles in the way of the economic, social and political development of cities.

This has been particularly evident through increasing levels of unemployment globally, with youth three times more likely to be without employment compared to adults.<sup>25</sup> However, even if employed, youth are challenged with lower salaries and underemployment, as well as limited control over assets and property. This has a negative impact on urban financing strategies.

Developing a productive and inclusive urban economy supports national growth and financing mechanisms, with employment acting as the main gateway out of poverty for youth. It is the basis for wealth creation and the primary instrument for equitable redistribution of wealth. Increased decent employment of youth in the formal sector serves as a contribution to local revenue generation with individual and property taxes, increased sales, investments and entrepreneurship.

The barriers to effective economic participation of urban youth need to be addressed; taking into account these may differ depending on youth's socioeconomic and educational backgrounds as well as gender. Youth should have the opportunity to acquire appropriate skills for participation in the industrial, service or knowledge economy as a necessary condition to integrate productively into the urban economy and contributing to urban finance. Linkages between higher educational, vocational training programs and urban economic

growth potentials should be strengthened, ensuring youth have the opportunity to make informed educational choices and gain skills in economic sectors where they will be able to find gainful employment.

Partnerships between the private and public sectors should be formed specifically to facilitate an enabling environment for youth to enter the formal economic sector, aware of their rights and responsibilities as employees. Local governments and the private sector need to work in partnership with youth in a transparent and accountable manner, in order to tap the agglomeration effects of urbanization and for the city to benefit from youth's innovative capacity.

Effective and contextualized economic policies and reforms which take into account creativity, innovation, research, science and technology should be encouraged, all areas in which youth can play an important role. Economic regeneration plans and renewal programs which target urban economic growth need to be inclusive of youth needs and opportunities. When developing taxation structures, decision makers should create favourable conditions for youth entrepreneurship and employment as a long-term investment in economic growth and increased revenues at the local level.

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<sup>25</sup> ILO's Program on Youth Unemployment (ILO, 2015)

An illustration of a city skyline in shades of orange and brown. Several buildings are topped with wireless signal towers emitting concentric circles. Dashed lines connect these towers across the skyline. In the foreground, a bus is visible on the right side.

## THE WAY FORWARD

With urbanization at times materializing itself as a double-edged sword for youth, developing and implementing appropriate interventions and responses becomes critical to ensure opportunities attached to the urban youth bulge are funnelled towards inclusive, integrated and sustainable development. Just as cities encompass possibilities for young individuals; cities can enhance socio-economic development at the national level through the numerical strength and capabilities of youth if conditions are in place. Keeping in mind that young people are a resource and asset of any city, promoting youth as stakeholders in sustainable urban development outcomes can consolidate mechanisms and procedures based on human rights and democratic principles, bringing equality and non-discrimination considerations to the centre of urban development, underpinning equitable urban development and inclusive urban growth.

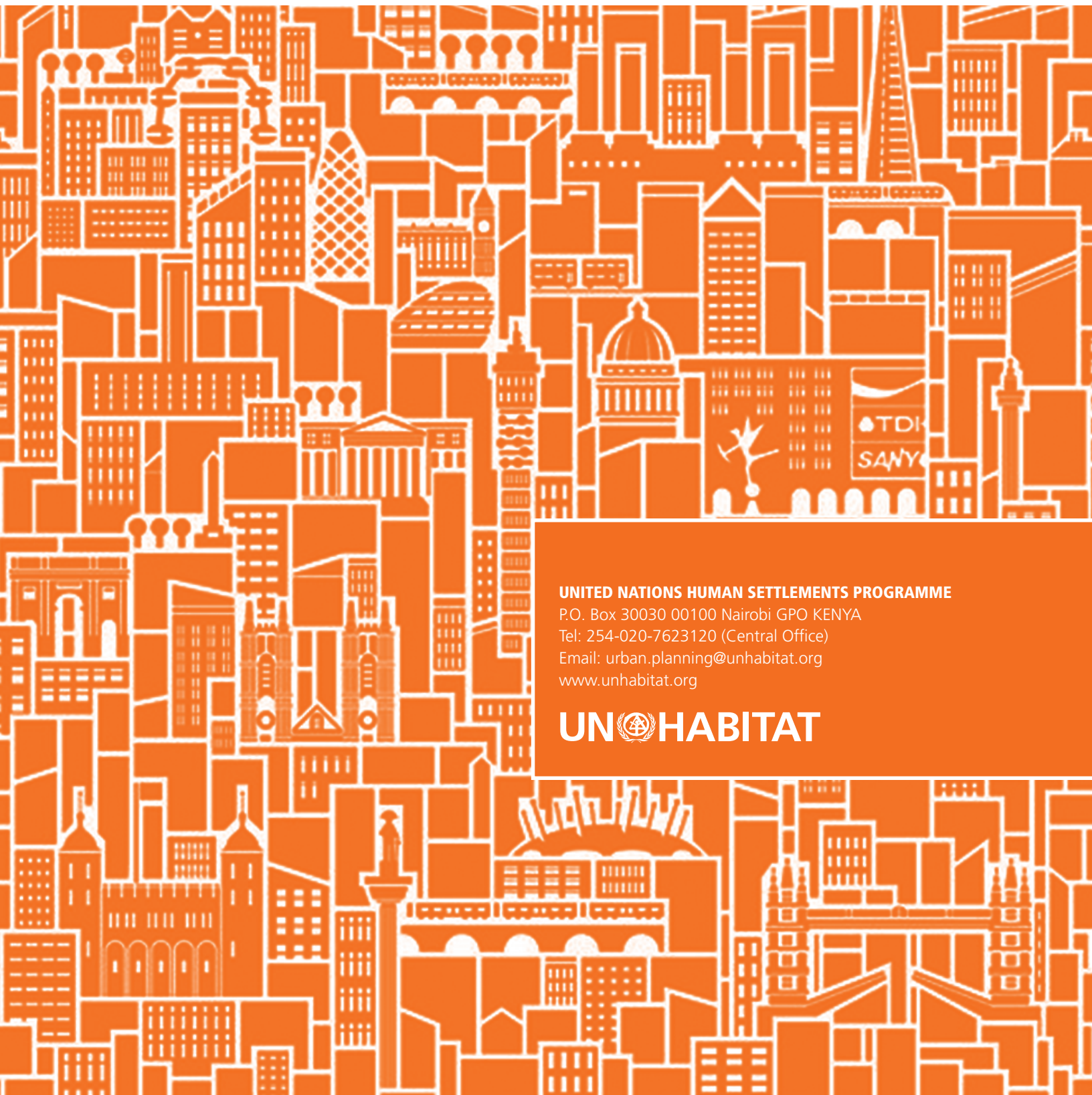
Furthermore, youth are demanding a role in urban development. Constituting the majority of the population in many cities, youth would like to see that their expertise, knowledge and experience are taken into account by policy makers and planners in working with and for youth. Given that the majority of youth are overall better connected, educated and informed than previous generations, new opportunities are emerging for enhanced economic growth as well as better governance in

cities. In order for the city to generate innovative ideas, create better urban spaces, revisit what works and what does not in a rapidly urbanizing context, youth need to be brought on-board as partners and assets rather than beneficiaries.

As such, with the Habitat Agenda being one of the strongest UN documents on the right of participation of youth groups, moving towards Habitat III UN-Habitat has the possibility and responsibility to ensure that policies and actions developed to inform urban development are equally strong. Urban development needs people to remain at the core of its attention - especially since an overwhelming number of city dwellers continue to face marginalization, often because they are deemed too young to be heard and seen.

Within the new developmental frameworks for urban development that are Habitat III and the Sustainable Development Goals, UN-Habitat will ensure continued emphasis and momentum is maintained for youth to be considered part and parcel of sustainable urban development. Building on the three pronged approach to sustainable urbanization, youth engagement and meaningful participation to create youth friendly legislative frameworks and urban plans while harnessing the demographic dividend into urban economic opportunity will be priorities for UN-Habitat to work towards more integrated, sustainable and inclusive cities.





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