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**Progress made by UN-Habitat in the implementation
of the United Nations development system reform**

**Implementation by the United Nations Human Settlements
Programme of the reform of the development system and
management of the United Nations**

Report of the Executive Director

I. Background

1. In 2016, Member States renewed their commitment to reform the development system and management of the United Nations. They determined that there was a need for the Secretariat to utilize the Sustainable Development Goals as a framework for integrated programming to increase coherence among the various United Nations entities, including across the humanitarian, development and peace operations. They were also keen to ensure country ownership, improve accountability and efficiency, leverage United Nations programming to enable countries to mobilize public and private resources to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and more effectively harness the various United Nations assets at the regional level.

2. On the basis of those and related objectives, the General Assembly adopted, on 21 December 2016, its resolution 71/243 on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, in which it expressed its desire for the entities of the United Nations development system to align their activities with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. To provide further instructions to the Secretariat, the General Assembly, in its resolution 72/279 of 31 May 2018, decided to create new coordination structures at the country, regional and global levels to support the integration of the United Nations development system in the context of the quadrennial review for the period 2017–2020.

3. In June 2020, the Economic and Social Council, at its operational activities for development segment, reviewed progress on the implementation of Assembly resolutions 71/243 and 72/279, welcoming efforts by the Secretariat to reform the development system and the management of the United Nations. Noting the successful introduction of the institutional arrangements called for by the General Assembly, Member States urged the Secretariat to translate the structural reforms into action. In December 2020, the General Assembly, in its resolution 75/233, on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, noted the observations of the Economic and Social Council and the efforts to reposition the United Nations development system.

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II. Engagement in the United Nations country teams and resident coordinator system

4. **Common country analysis.** Common country analysis is an important part of the reforms of the development system of the United Nations and is a key instrument of the United Nations country teams facilitated by the resident coordinator. It assesses in each country progress made towards the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and analyses underlying economic, social, environmental, governance and risk factors. United Nations country teams use the common country analysis as the basis for discussions with the host country to develop the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. Importantly, the common country analysis is not confined to a single report; it is an ongoing data and analytical tool, updated periodically, that the United Nations uses to ensure that its contributions to the country continue to be relevant and evidence-based. In 2019, UN-Habitat led the inter-agency team to develop guidance on the preparation of the common country analysis finalized in 2020. Subsequently, UN-Habitat senior human settlements officers and country focal points have contributed to 25 common country analyses covering 34 countries (inclusive of multi-country offices). In 2021, UN-Habitat plans to engage an additional 23 countries where resident coordinators plan to initiate common country analyses. UN-Habitat faces many challenges contributing to the development of common country analyses due to limited resources and the delayed roll-out of the regional component of the restructuring. That said, the organization is developing internal mechanisms to strengthen its efforts to provide United Nations country teams with relevant data and analysis of trends on all aspects of sustainable urban development.

5. **United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.** Perhaps the most significant element of the reforms of the development system of the United Nations, the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework is the instrument that the United Nations and host countries use to define how the United Nations will support the country to attain the Sustainable Development Goals. The Cooperation Framework includes four to five priority areas. Working in 34 countries over the past 24 months, UN-Habitat has engaged United Nations country teams and host Governments to position housing and urban development within the Cooperation Framework. In some cases, sustainable urban development emerges as a dedicated priority result area. More frequently, it appears as a means of implementation, ensuring the achievement of priority results areas on equality and poverty eradication, economic transformation, climate action and environmental sustainability, and crisis reduction and recovery. It should be noted that the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023, structured as it is according to the domains of change, akin to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, has radically strengthened the ability of UN-Habitat to contribute to the reforms of the development system and management of the United Nations. The planned pipeline for 2021 includes contributions to Cooperation Frameworks in an additional 23 countries. Working in this way, UN-Habitat is facilitating at the country level the implementation of the system-wide strategy for sustainable urban development.

III. Regional architecture

6. **Regional dimension of restructuring UN-Habitat.** Noting the importance that Member States attach to the reform of the development system and the management of the United Nations at the regional level, in January 2020, UN-Habitat introduced the position of regional representative as part of the restructuring of its organization. Since then, UN-Habitat regional representatives have played an active role in the emerging regional architecture of the United Nations.

7. **Regional collaborative platform.** Through its regional representatives, UN-Habitat has served as an active member of each of the five regional collaborative platforms that are chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, with the respective regional economic commission and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as vice-chairs and the Development Coordination Office as secretariat. In many regions, UN-Habitat has succeeded in elevating sustainable urban development in the instruments of the regional collaborative platform. Those include the issue-based coalitions and knowledge management hubs. Further, UN-Habitat will work with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the regional economic commissions and UNDP to include urbanization and the role of local government in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals as part of the annual regional workplan to be adopted at the annual sessions of the regional collaborative platforms.

8. **Regional Forum on Sustainable Development.** In each region, UN-Habitat is working closely with Member States and the leadership of the regional collaborative platform to prepare for the annual sessions of the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, to be held in each region in March 2021, back-to-back with the annual sessions of the regional collaborative platforms. In each

region, UN-Habitat is engaging with the regional ministerial conferences on housing and sustainable urban development to participate in their respective regional forums on sustainable development. That will enable Member States in each region, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 75/224, through the regional forums on sustainable development, to provide regional contributions to the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the review of the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, to be held at the seventy-sixth session of the Assembly, in 2022.

III. Global United Nations system-wide coordination

9. **Chief Executives Board for Coordination.** As the highest-level coordinating body of the Secretariat, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination is the primary vehicle through which the Secretary-General and United Nations principals provide strategic political guidance on the implementation of the reforms of the development system and management of the United Nations. The High-level Committee on Programmes, a policy organ of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which comprises senior representatives of United Nations entities, is tasked with drafting system-wide strategies to promote coherence across the United Nations system. In 2019, the Chief Executives Board for Coordination endorsed the system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development prepared by the High-level Committee on Programmes through an inter-agency process led by UN-Habitat. In 2021, the High-level Committee on Programmes will undertake a review of the strategy, led by UN-Habitat, to identify ways to accelerate implementation. Concurrently, UN-Habitat actively participates in the High-level Committee on Management, which comprises senior representatives of United Nations entities and is tasked with preparing guidance notes that can inform the reform of the management of the United Nations, covering the delegation of authority, the decentralization of administrative processes, integrated service delivery and the establishment of common back offices, among other matters.

10. **Senior Management Group.** The Senior Management Group, convened monthly by the Secretary-General, provides United Nations entities and departments of the Secretariat with a forum for the discussion of important topics of strategic interest and to determine the ways in which the United Nations system can address such topics in a coherent, integrated manner. In June 2018, the Senior Management Group held its meeting on the New Urban Agenda, during which the Secretary-General declared urbanization to be a “megatrend” and called for the development of a whole-of-system approach, a task taken up by the High-level Committee on Programmes and led by UN-Habitat, resulting in the United Nations system-wide strategy for sustainable urban development. The Senior Management Group held its August 2020 meeting on the future of cities, during which the Secretary-General emphasized the importance of cities in the response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), which should include building green, inclusive cities, and underscored the role of local governments in intergovernmental forums and national planning processes. In November 2020, on behalf of the Secretary-General, the Assistant Secretary-General for Strategic Coordination convened a meeting of the Executive Director of UN-Habitat and deputies of 17 United Nations entities at which it was agreed to establish a task force on the future of cities, led by UN-Habitat. In addition, the Secretary-General agreed to deliver a keynote address on the future of cities in 2021 and to support the preparations for the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

11. **Executive Committee and Deputies Committee meetings.** To enhance the work of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination and the Senior Management Group, the Secretary-General convenes weekly meetings of the Deputies Committee and of the Executive Committee to address key country-specific matters or recurring thematic issues that warrant political consideration and guidance. Participation in Executive Committee meetings is not confined to the Secretariat and includes principals from across the United Nations system on a by-invitation basis and is dedicated to integrating the humanitarian, development and peace operations as part of the United Nations reforms. In 2019, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN-Habitat and the Peacebuilding Support Office prepared for the Executive Committee the guidance note of the Secretary-General on the United Nations and land and conflict. These three representatives of the humanitarian, development and peace operations of the United Nations have since then commenced implementing that guidance note. In December 2020, the Executive Committee, as a further effort to promote integration across the United Nations system, considered the issue of internally displaced persons and agreed to prepare a guidance note on internally displaced persons under the leadership of UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, UNDP, the Peacebuilding Support Office and UN-Habitat.

12. **United Nations Sustainable Development Group.** Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/279, the Secretary-General established the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to coordinate support to the United Nations country teams and provide guidance to the United Nations resident coordinator system. The Group is chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, with UNDP as vice-chair and the Development Coordination Office as secretariat. It convenes twice yearly, prior to the meetings of the Chief Executives Board. In 2019, UN-Habitat utilized the United Nations Sustainable Development Group to implement the United Nations system-wide strategy for sustainable development as called for by the Chief Executives Board for Coordination. That involved anchoring the function areas of data, policy, finance and partnership strategy within the corresponding United Nations Sustainable Development Group task teams. UN-Habitat also played an active role in the development of the guidance note on the cooperation framework and led the preparation of the companion paper for the common country analysis. Further, UN-Habitat led the workstream on community resilience and social cohesion of the United Nations framework for the immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19, later established as a dedicated task team of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. Following a review of the Group, the Deputy Secretary-General called for the introduction of new arrangements with effect from March 2021 that will include a new set of task teams and quarterly meetings of the principals of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group. UN-Habitat will accelerate the implementation of the system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development, as called for in August 2020 by the Secretary-General, utilizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Group principals meetings and new task teams in March.

13. **Inter-Agency Standing Committee.** Convened by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee comprises United Nations entities and other humanitarian organizations and is tasked with coordinating the emergency response to humanitarian crises. To contribute to the United Nations reforms, the Committee and the United Nations Sustainable Development Group established a joint group to integrate the humanitarian emergency response with post-disaster/conflict reconstruction and development. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee maintains a system of humanitarian response clusters to organize its work. UN-Habitat is a member of the Global Shelter Cluster and the Global Protection Cluster (Housing, Land and Property Working Group). UN-Habitat anchored its COVID-19 response plan in the cluster system, offering the World Health Organization and UNHCR guidance on extending to informal settlements appropriate pandemic health directives and humanitarian assistance. UN-Habitat serves on the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Emergency Directors Group, addressing time-sensitive emergencies, and on the Committee's Operational Policy and Advocacy Group, notably the operational response results subgroup on localization. Importantly, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals have requested UN-Habitat to further its work with United Cities and Local Governments and with the Global Alliance for Urban Crises to develop a framework for the engagement of local governments and humanitarian actors.

14. **UN-Habitat collaboration frameworks with other United Nations entities.** UN-Habitat and the World Health Organization, and subsequently UNHCR, are drawing upon their joint engagements in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee to develop a memorandum of understanding and joint action plans. UN-Habitat has recently finalized a collaboration framework with UNDP through which the two organizations will pursue joint programming to integrate national urban policies with national economic planning and development and to support Governments in the formulation of their respective nationally determined commitments relating to urban climate actions, among other initiatives.
