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Summary of the twenty-third meeting of the ad-hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters of the Executive Board

Monday 14 February 2022 – 14:30 – 17:00 East Africa Time

Chair: H.E. Ms. Saqlain Syedah

Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to UN-Habitat

1. <u>Adoption of the Agenda</u>

The meeting of the ad hoc working group on programmatic, budgetary and administrative matters of the Executive Board was called to order at 14:35 EAT. The working group adopted the provisional agenda for its twenty-third meeting without any change as follows:

1.   Adoption of the provisional Agenda.
2.   Discussions on normative and operational activities.
3.   Any other matters.

After the adoption of the agenda, the meeting considered Agenda item 2, namely discussions on the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat.

2. <u>Discussion on normative and operational activities</u>

<u>Under this item, the Chair first gave the following background:</u>

i.   The Chair recalled that the Executive Board at its second session in 2021, in paragraph 9 of its Decision 2021/8 agreed that the provisional Agenda for the first session of the Executive Board for the year 2022 should include an item on the implementation of the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat.

ii.   The Chair recalled that the Secretariat shared with the ad hoc working group an Advance version of the report of the Executive Director entitled "Normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat, focusing on the people's process in Afghanistan, the global urban monitoring framework and work on climate change" as set out in document HSP/EB.2022/5. This document is expected to be considered by the Executive Board at its first session in March 2022 and can be accessed here.

Following the above background information, the Secretariat provided a briefing on the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat. **The full presentation can be accessed here.**

The briefing by the Secretariat highlighted the following:

i. The Secretariat presented three focus areas on the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat, namely:

a.   The "people's process" in Afghanistan

b.   The global urban monitoring framework to support the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (NUA)

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    c.   UN-Habitat's work on cities and climate change following the Innovate4Cities Conference held in 2021 and the twenty-sixth session of the Conference of Parties (COP26).

(a) The People's Process in Afghanistan

i.   The Secretariat outlined that the "people's process" mainly focusing on Afghanistan is a broader methodology developed by UN-Habitat over the past years. The "people's process" refers to an approach that places the affected people at the centre of the recovery process, by mobilizing the affected communities to take decisions on their recovery and supporting them in that respect. This approach is leading transition towards urban resilience and is particularly relevant in countries experiencing disaster, conflict, and other shocks. In such contexts, the "people's process" influences urbanization through a development and recovery paradigm that is led by communities, , as opposed to the conventional external authority-led paradigm. UN-Habitat has deployed the people's process in country-level projects across the Asia-Pacific region over the past three decades.

ii.   The Secretariat highlighted that the UN-Habitat country programme in Afghanistan has delivered programmes on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus worth $520 million since 2001. However, the fall of Kabul in August 2021 has resulted in the suspension and termination of larger numbers of ongoing UN-Habitat projects and the cancellation of new commitment projects that were in the pipeline. UN-Habitat also had to close field offices in eight provinces and reduce personnel from 1,446 in 2020 to 144 in 2021.

iii.   The Secretariat also noted that in the "people's process" approach, beneficiaries are empowered to become the key decision-makers for their own development. This is accomplished through the development of Community Development Councils (CDCs) and Gozar Assemblies (clusters of CDCs) which serve as key instruments of needs determination and solution design, prioritization, implementation, and monitoring. CDCs become instruments of community governance and an actively participating tool of civil society in country's socioeconomic fabric. As a result, these groups act as local governance structures at the community level actively engaging communities to build trust between the host government and beneficiary communities in Afghanistan.

iv.   Furthermore, the Secretariat recalled that the "people's process" includes five main steps to achieve stronger community resilience, crises recovery and development outcomes as follows:

    a.   **Community Mobilization**, whereby community members are brought together and introduced to local investment projects;

    b.   **Community Action Planning**, mobilizing communities for planning and decision-making on local investment projects, creating a strong sense of community cohesion and participation at all stages of development while improving service utilities;

    c.   **Community Contracting**, whereby to deliver sustainable solutions, the community council – registered as an enterprise – receives a block grant through a community contracting modality, either to be executed directly or by a third party under council supervision. Ensuring capacity-building and creation of employment throughout the implementation is in the core of this approach;

    d.   **Community Banking** which focuses on capitalizing on community banking and community contributions – such as revenues collected from, for example, land registration fees or utility services from local residents, or in-kind cash contributions by local communities;

    e.   **Community Monitoring,** ensuring ownership and sustainability of the development solution.

v. The Secretariat also presented two examples concerning projects running during 2020 and 2021 in Afghanistan on how the normative work leads to impact in countries by positively influencing the process of decision-making on urban development matters through approaches such as the "people's process":

a. **City for All programme :** Implemented between 2015 and 2021, the City for All programme capitalized on the existing potential for well-planned, well-governed and well-financed urbanization. It was implemented in 12 Afghan cities and had three main areas of action:

1. Effective land management:

Area of action : The programme supported Afghan municipalities in surveying and registering over 900,000 properties with the participation of local communities. It also assisted the Afghanistan Land Authority in the development of a new regulation on the issuance of occupancy certificates in informal settlements.

Outcome : Renewing the regulation on issuance of occupancy certificates in informal settlements enabled women's access to property rights and tenure security for millions of urban residents.

2. Strategic urban planning:

Area of action : Working together with urban communities the project developed total 36 city- or district-level *strategic action plans* that prioritized local infrastructure projects to improve the delivery of basic services.

Outcome : Improved access to better quality basic services for urban communities.

3. Improved municipal finance:

Area of action : Municipal authorities were assisted in automating their business licensing and municipal service charge management by improving tax invoicing and collection methods and related policies, and by participatory planning and budgeting with the municipal authority.

Outcome *:* The number of households paying services charges increased by 86 % and the municipal revenue income by up to 413 % in the best performing city.

b. **Afghanistan Urban Safety and Security programme**: this project was implemented between 2016 and 2021 and capitalized on improvements made in safety, security, accountability, and transparency by an earlier Afghanistan Urban Peacebuilding programme. As the 2nd phase intervention, the Urban Safety and Security programme approach focused on (i) improving government legitimacy and trust between citizens and municipal authorities to make cities safer and more secure, and (ii) further strengthening participatory governance mechanisms and demand-driven policy formulation by facilitating urban communities becoming active members of the governance and social systems. The programme achieved three principal outcomes as follows:

At the community level*:* The programme supported increased engagement of communities in municipal governance and urban safety services by introducing a bottom-up processes: Security and safety functions were introduced into existing CDCs, helping to legitimize them as formal development mechanisms. The requirement to include at least one female representative and one internally displaced

person has made CDCs a practical way for vulnerable groups to engage in decision-making.

At the municipal level: The programme both fostered demand-driven services and opportunities for citizen engagement in municipal planning and management, thus creating better inclusion of citizens' priorities in municipal decision-making;

At the national level: The programme helped enhance national framework for accountable municipal governance on safety and security matters. Amongst other urban interventions, it included the first public space audit in Kabul conducted for the purpose protecting public spaces and advocating for equal access to public spaces and other results.

    c. The Secretariat outlined that in 2019, UN-Habitat commissioned the collection of empirical evidence on the results of the implementation of the "people's process" in Asia and the Pacific. The evaluation included 7 in-depth interviews with the UN-Habitat teams working on the 'City for All' and the 'Urban Safety and Security' programmes in Afghanistan, and 3 focus group discussions with programme beneficiaries. The main results indicated some of the key strengths of the people's process approach, as follows:

- Relevance of the peoples' process - 95 % recognized that the implementation of people's process programmes empowered people, while- 5 % felt that decisions were still made by the authorities alone.

- Efficiency - 65 % reported that CDCs were more efficient in achieving results than conventional civil society or non-governmental organizations while 40 % believed that government support for CDCs led to greater efficiency in people's process programmes.

- Effectiveness - 75 % rated the effectiveness of community contracting programmes as very good in terms of livelihood generation. while- 40 % felt that, despite good level of effectiveness, revenue generation remained behind the target.

vii. The Secretariat noted that UN-Habitat will continue to respond to the multidimensional humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan through the "people's process" interventions using a resilience roadmap. Roadmap interventions are being deployed through the existing network of locally elected CDCs across 13 provinces. Collaboration is underway between UN-Habitat with UNDP, UNHCR, and OCHA to step up concerted efforts for integrated humanitarian and recovery actions within transitional frameworks and funds for Afghanistan. Additionally, UN-Habitat has mobilized $9.7 million for new projects in Kabul and Herat. In this way, interplay of normative and operational activities is increasing the delivery of basic services, infrastructure improvements, social cohesion, safety and security and livelihoods for displaced Afghan communities.

    b) **The Global Urban Monitoring Framework**

viii. The Secretariat recalled that in March 2019, the UN Statistical Commission welcomed a Secretary-General's report of UN-Habitat on human settlements statistics, which summarized the progress on global monitoring of the urban dimensions of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, including capacity development methodologies initiated to facilitate efficient collection of human settlements statistics(E/CN.3/2019/18). One of the actions recommended was the development of a harmonized Global Urban Monitoring Framework (the "Framework"). Since then, many actions have been taken to implement the recommendations set out in this UN-Habitat report to the Statistical Committee. UN-Habitat has led the process of developing the Framework in collaboration between UN entities,

city representatives and 25 partners from institutions representing the private sector, civil society, and academia. The Framework has been submitted for final endorsement by the United Nations Statistical Commission at its fifty-third session, to be held in New York from 1 to 4 March 2022. The Secretariat noted that Framework is designed to facilitate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals particularly Goal 11. To ensure a simple but effective approach to monitoring the performance of cities against the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement, the Global Urban Monitoring Framework identifies 72 indicators that are most relevant to cities and clusters them within 20 attributes. It is designed to be efficient, effective and harmonized.

ix.   The Secretariat emphasized that the framework is constructed on the basis of four City Objectives as captured in SDG 11 and reflected across several other SDGs, and five common domains of sustainable development: Society, Economy, Environment, Culture, Governance and Implementation. The tools and mechanisms are aligned with strategies for monitoring gender, age and human rights, as set out in the national and international monitoring guidance. With its core set of 72 urban indicators, the Framework is designed to be efficient, and effective, to assist cities in tracking their progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, fulfilling their commitments under the New Urban Agenda and informing local action. The Framework is also harmonized, to ensure that data is comparable.

x.   The Secretariat also presented the Framework wheel, which allows cities to represent their baseline and targets across all attributes graphically. A slide including some sample of indicators for the governance domain across the city objectives can be accessed here.

xi.   The Secretariat concluded by noting that the Framework has been piloted in cities that expressed interest. Results from pilots will be used by national teams working on New Urban Agenda reporting, local governments involved in voluntary local reviews, cities in the UN-Habitat SDG Cities flagship programme as well as UN Country Teams interested in undertaking urban analysis for the purposes of UN common country assessments.

xii. In the long run, the framework is expected to serve as a basis for the development of an urban/city development index that helps cities to measure their level of sustainability by theme or dimensions and their overall sustainability. Ultimately, the Framework can provide a way to compare the urban development levels in countries and regions and prioritize investments.

c)   UN-Habitat's work on Climate Change

xiii. The Secretariat informed that to accelerate the implementation of subprogramme 3 of the strategic plan, UN-Habitat established a Climate Action for Cities task team that focuses on the following five themes that aligned with the goals of COP 26 and in support of the Secretary-General's message on climate change. The priority areas include:

   a.   Support cities in entering pathways to net zero carbon emissions by 2050 to avoid catastrophic climate change;

   b.   Support cities in leading climate change adaptation to protect people, livelihoods and assets, as global temperatures will continue to rise;

   c.   Support national governments in facilitating urban climate actions to achieve national climate goals;

d. Help facilitate the delivery of climate finance to cities. Without significantly more climate finance – in support of adaptation in particular – the transformation needed cannot be achieved. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) recovery efforts provide an opportunity to invest in a net-zero and resilient future;

e. Support cities in ensuring that transition plans for a net-zero and resilient future are just, that no one is left behind and that social upheaval is not stalling climate action.

xiv. The Secretariat highlighted some of the activities that UN-Habitat has taken towards climate action for cities in 2021. It included internal mobilization to expand and intensify both normative and operational work. The Secretariat updated that UN-Habitat currently hosts some 50 technical cooperation projects under Subprogramme 3 or with strong linkages to climate action. Their project teams meet regularly with the normative leads in headquarters in an agency-wide community of practice on climate change. The *Innovate4Cities 2021* conference, on the theme *science and innovation partnerships driving inclusive, resilient and climate neutral cities*, was co-hosted by UN-Habitat and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy and co-sponsored by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change laying the foundation of the planned IPCC Special Report on Cities and Climate Change. It built on the first Cities and Climate Change Science Conference, held in 2018, and the *resultant Global Research and Action Agenda on Cities and Climate Change Science*, revised in the 2021 conference. The conference had 6,901 registered participants from 159 countries, 886 speakers and 191 sessions.

xv. Similarly, the Secretariat highlighted UN-Habitat's engagement at the COP 26 which focused on:

(a) Dissemination of knowledge and good practices generated in projects and UN-Habitat's normative work, including research on the urban content of the latest updates of the Nationally Determined Contributions and sharing outcomes of the Innovate4Cities Conference. It reflected the programme's spectrum of work on climate change mitigation, resource efficiency, protection of ecological assets and adaptation;

(b) Engagement with local governments and municipal authorities' constituency and other urban and local government stakeholders, as well as the provision of technical and policy advisory services to Member States.

(c)The hybrid format of the meeting allowed UN-Habitat to lead nine events and hold 23 speaking roles. In addition, the Executive Director provided opening remarks to 10 events held a successful meeting with 200 mayors at the Glasgow Council Chambers and the Secretary General's meeting with mayors and city networks .

xvi. The Secretariat updated that to achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement, cities, which are associated with approximately 70% of global carbon emissions and host some of the most vulnerable people and assets, must play a stronger role. The Secretariat highlighted that the opportunities in 2022 for UN-Habitat to advance local climate action include:

a) To advance the research, innovation and action agenda

Disseminate the updated Global Research and Action Agenda on Cities and Climate Change Science, global knowledge exchange, normative guidance and tools to Member States through further scaling up of the climate change and urban environment programme.

b) To support global urban climate change policy and action

Support the development of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on cities and climate change (planned for the next Assessment Cycle of the IPCC), support member states on urban climate action content in the high-level meeting of the GA and at

WUF11 and support the preparation for COP27, including the hosting of an urban ministerial dialogue, among other highlights.

xvii. The Secretariat concluded that local-level action has been placed at the center for intensified efforts to achieve the SDGs within the decade of action and delivery for sustainable development and in the 2021 report of the Secretary General entitled "Our Common Agenda". The Secretariat also emphasised that the normative and operational activities set out in the presentation highlight the versatility and applicability of UN-Habitat's urban expertise in terms of successes achieved in specific, complex crisis contexts – as is the case in Afghanistan – and in the face of global development challenges, such as action against climate change in cities. The normative work on urban indicators highlights the critical expertise that UN-Habitat provides for the global development agendas and for partners in tracking progress and results in the implementation of the NUA and the 2030 Agenda.

Following the presentation by the Secretariat, the discussions highlighted the following:

xviii. One Member State reiterated its support to the work of UN-Habitat and emphasized on the importance of the upcoming high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. This Member State also inquired whether the "people's process" approach is a result of best practices previously implemented by UN-Habitat and now being replicated in Afghanistan or if the example of Afghanistan is a best practice which is meant to be replicated in other countries.

xix. One Member State sought clarification on the location of the pilot project cities for the implementation of the Global Urban Monitoring Framework. The Member State also enquired if other methodology such as the Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) were being used.

In light of the views expressed by Member States, the Secretariat responded as follows:

xx. The Secretariat indicated that the "people's process" participatory approach is an old and conventional methodology incorporated in many cultures in the Asia-Pacific Region. UN-Habitat has further developed this approach which is a combination of the best practices implemented both in developmental and conflict contexts. UN-Habitat has previously applied the approach in different development programmes in countries such as Myanmar, Philippines, and some of the Pacific Islands with positive results. Over the years, the approach has been independently monitored and evaluated by community social audit mechanism. The Secretariat concluded that the "people's process" can be replicated in other contexts, specifically in Africa.

xxi. The Secretariat updated that the piloting the Global Urban Monitoring Framework stems from the implementation of the City Prosperity Index (CPI). At the time, the CPI was implemented in close to 400 cities and thus the Framework comes as an improvement of the CPI. However, given its modified structure, piloting is ongoing in new cities such as in Bolivia, Shanghai, Madrid, Kigali among others.

3. Any other matters

Under this item, the discussions highlighted the following:

i. One Member State inquired about the Global Cities Ranking draft report on the state of cities in the implementation of the SDGs and encouraged the Secretariat to set a date to present the report to Member States.

In light of the views expressed by Member States, the Secretariat responded as follows:

i. The Secretariat noted that the Global Cities Ranking draft report is expected to be officially released by the end of March 2022. The Secretariat welcomed the suggestion with respect to a presentation and launch of the report to Member States.

The Chair recalled that the next meeting of the working group is scheduled for Friday 11 March 2022 to discuss the draft work programme and budget of UN-Habitat for the year 2023 and adjourned the meeting at 15:30 East Africa Time.

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