



URBAN OCTOBER REPORT 2023





Contents

1

**Urban October 2023:
Key messages**

6

**Financing
sustainable cities**

2

**Promoting a better
urban future**

7

Recommendations

3

**Urban October
in numbers**

8

World Habitat Day

4

The future is urban

12

World Cities Day

5

**Creating resilient
urban economies**

16

**Urban October 2023
global events**



URBAN OCTOBER 2023

Key messages

- By 2050, an estimated **70 per cent of the world's population will live in cities**. Rapid urbanization is no longer happening in developed countries, but is a phenomenon of the developing world.
- Cities have long been **the engine of national and global economic growth**. They contribute to more than 80 per cent of global GDP and display higher levels of productivity than rural areas.
- Cities are also a **major source of global problems**. They are the biggest source of pollution in the world, contributing to 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.
- Most cities are unable to combine **economic productivity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability**.
- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, can only be achieved with **action at local and regional levels** – and achieving it will come at a cost.
- Cities need to **diversify funding sources** and develop innovative instruments to finance and deliver sustainable urban development.
- Cities need **Public-Private-People Partnerships** to create innovative and mutually beneficial opportunities for sustainable urban development. UN-Habitat has established the Cities Investment Facility to unlock private capital by guiding public authorities in the preparation of investment-ready and sustainable projects.
- We need to **localize and scale up green recovery frameworks** that advance private and public investments to finance the transition to a climate-neutral economy.
- **National Development Plans** should be used to drive local development in cities.
- Public investments can be used as **catalysts for financing sustainable urban development**, particularly for the provision of infrastructure.
- We need to support cities and make them more investable through **improved revenue generation and improved financial management** and project implementation capacities.
- Local governments can use UN-Habitat's Rapid Own Source Revenue Analysis tool to **optimize their own-source revenues**.

Promoting a better urban future

Urban October 2023 explored the theme of economic development as a vehicle for productive and sustainable urban futures. Urbanization is intertwined with several global challenges, including climate change.



Cities and subnational governments need urgently to adopt innovative approaches to foster an optimistic scenario of urban futures.

UN-Habitat is at the forefront of helping cities achieve the vision of sustainable and equitable urban futures for all by exploring innovative financing solutions, tackling climate action through waste management, and 'building back better' through urban planning in post-crisis urban recovery. This holistic framework that encourages the integration of all facets of sustainable development to promote equality, welfare, and shared prosperity is paved in the New Urban Agenda, which was adopted by the United Nations in 2016.

The United Nation's Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 – "to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" – identifies sustainable urbanization as one of the key priorities for global development. However, the realization of SDG 11 is dependent on stakeholders at all levels harnessing their resources to address the challenges posed by urbanization.

Urban October

Every October, UN-Habitat – the United Nations Human Settlements Programme – and partners organize a month of activities, events and discussions on urban sustainability. Urban October is an opportunity for people around the world to join the conversation around the challenges and opportunities created by the fast pace of change in our cities and towns. National and local governments, universities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), communities and other stakeholders in sustainable urbanization are encouraged to hold or participate in activities, events, and discussions.



Urban October was developed to raise awareness, promote participation, generate knowledge, and engage the international community in creating a better urban future.

Urban October begins with World Habitat Day at the start of the month and ends with World Cities Day on 31 October. Activities to mark Urban October take place around the world on these specific days and throughout the month. Different cities across the world host the global observances of World Habitat Day and World Cities Day each year.

In 2023, 138 cities around the world registered Urban October events, including those on World Habitat Day and World Cities Day.

Since 2020, the global observance events have been held in a hybrid virtual/in-person format, increasing the events' reach and exposure dramatically. Content from this year's global observances was viewed more than 8,600 times on UN WebTV and 14,750 times on social media, both live and on demand. These events were also inclusive and accessible, with full access for people with disabilities and translations into multiple languages. All UN WebTV broadcasts included International Sign Language interpretation and Zoom events featured real-time captioning.

World Habitat Day

The United Nations designated the first Monday of October every year as World Habitat Day to reflect on the state of our habitats and everyone's basic right to adequate shelter. World Habitat Day launches Urban October. The day centres around the global observance with keynote speakers and roundtable discussions on specific topics related to the overarching theme of the day.

World Habitat Day 2023 brought together various stakeholders to explore the different dimensions of economic slowdown and identify actions that cities can take to manage difficult global financial conditions and boost economic recovery.



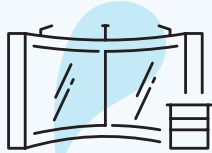
The global observance took place on 2 October in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan with more than 500 participants from 28 countries. World Habitat Day also celebrates people and organizations around the world who have made particularly notable contributions in the field of human settlements and sustainable urbanization through the presentation of the Scroll of Honour Awards.

World Cities Day

World Cities Day brings Urban October to an end on 31 October each year. As with World Habitat Day, a global observance is held in a different city each year and the day focuses on a specific theme, with roundtables exploring related topics. The event rounds off the month's activities by bringing together key partners and stakeholders to discuss the prevailing themes of Urban October and share ideas and recommendations for action and the implementation of the SDGs.

This year, World Cities Day explored the concrete tools and services available for cities to unlock investments for financing sustainable urban development, as well as the development of a local financial framework to support cities with economic recovery. The global observance took place in Istanbul, Türkiye with more than 570 participants in person and 600 participating virtually.

Urban October 2023 in numbers



354

Urban October events globally

258 events in the Americas, 28 in Africa, 39 in Asia, 28 in Europe and 1 in Oceania



30

World Habitat Day events



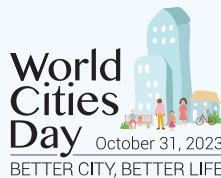
82

nominations and five winners of the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award 2023



138

cities hosted events



32

World Cities Day events



14,750

views of the Global Observances of World Cities Day and World Habitat Day on social media

The future is urban

The current urban population accounts for 56 per cent of the total global population and is expected to grow to 68 per cent by 2050.

In this urban future, 6.3 billion people will need access to a clean water supply, functional sanitation, and appropriate sewage and waste disposal systems. These 6.3 billion people will also need to be transported in a sustainable and efficient manner and housed in safe and healthy settlements. The cities they live in will need to be resilient against climate change, extreme weather events, and disease transmission.

Cities are centres for economic growth and development, but also face demographic, environmental, economic, and social challenges. Urbanization presents some of the most significant opportunities and challenges in the world today. Well-planned urban infrastructure is key to creating sustainable, successful cities, but this requires significant investment.

The higher the level of urbanization in a country, the higher its GDP per capita. However, cities are also the biggest contributor of pollution in the world, responsible for 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Rapid urbanization is no longer happening in

developed countries, but is a phenomenon of the developing world. It is estimated that 93 per cent of future urban population growth will occur in the developing world. About 60 per cent of the population in developing countries is expected to live in cities by 2030 – and over 90 per cent of future urban population growth will take place in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

A sustainable urban growth that focuses on a healthy concentration of economic activity could produce urban futures that unlock benefits such as increased economic productivity and more efficient management of resources. On the other hand, inefficient urbanization resulting from a lack of sustainable development financing could result in diseconomies of scale, exacerbating current issues such as poverty, climate change, and pollution, and decelerating current progress towards achieving the SDGs.

The majority of cities, wherever they are, have so far proved incapable of successfully combining economic productivity, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability. The realisation of SDG 11 on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable is key to achieving this balance. To achieve this, we need transformation in cities and communities.



Cities have long been the engine of national and global economic growth. They contribute to more than 80 per cent of global GDP and have higher levels of productivity than rural areas.



How the immense population growth in cities is managed will contribute to vastly contrasting future urban outcomes.



The realisation of the SDGs needs action at local and regional levels – and it will come at a cost.



Creating resilient urban economies

The year 2023 was particularly challenging for urban economies. Global economic growth has been in decline and reached its lowest rate since 2001, aside from the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 and the financial crisis of 2009.¹ The future of many countries will be determined by the productivity of their urban areas.²

At the same time, for economic growth and recovery to be equitable, cities need to align spatial, economic and environmental planning, employ evidence-based strategies, improve governance and revenue collection, and unlock private capital for investment.

Post-crisis urban recovery is an essential facet of sustainable development, encompassing efforts to rebuild, rehabilitate, and redevelop cities and communities that have been adversely affected by both conflicts and natural disasters. Whether stemming from armed conflicts or natural calamities, the aftermath of these events poses significant challenges to urban infrastructure, societal cohesion, and economic stability.

Own-source revenue is very low in many developing countries – less than 10% in some – but the actual revenue potential is often far larger. By optimizing their own-source revenues – taxes, levies, fees, and licenses that are controlled by local governments – cities can improve their creditworthiness, which is essential for attracting financing for sustainable urban development and long-term sustainability in urban infrastructure.

To improve revenue collection and generation, and increase financial resilience, cities can use tools such as

UN-Habitat’s Rapid Own Source Revenue Analysis tool to optimize their own-source revenues. The tool quantifies revenue loss and identifies root causes and entry points for reform.

.....
“One innovation is revenue-saving projects when cities can raise external capital not because a future project generates revenues but because it allows savings for the city budget.”

Dmitry Pozhidaev, Global Advisor, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)

.....
There is broad consensus on the urgent need to increase capital flows towards sustainable and local infrastructure, particularly given the rapid growth of cities in emerging and developing countries. Attracting funding for sustainable urban development cannot happen without enabling frameworks at local and regional levels, including sound regulatory and institutional systems with the right skills and capacity, and accurate city-level monitoring of spending levels, tax rates, and liabilities with respect to financing instruments.

The Global Partnership for Local Investment, where experiences are shared to build a local finance framework for cities and communities, can help distribute existing funding and finance to where it can deliver the greatest impact. World Habitat Day discussions also highlighted the need for transparency and mechanisms to mitigate corruption and for national governments to recognize the importance of working effectively with local governments and fiscal decentralization.



For economic growth and recovery to be sustainable, we need cities that can absorb, recover, and prepare for future economic shocks.³



A crucial pathway to increasing economic resilience in cities is enhancing their own-source revenue generation and collection.



By promoting inclusivity, sustainability, and economic resilience, cities can recover from disasters and withstand future challenges, contributing to a more stable and prosperous urban landscape.

1 International Monetary Fund, 2023

2 UN-Habitat, 2022

3 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2023

Financing sustainable cities

Rapid global urbanization together with the impacts of existential threats such as climate change are adding significant strain on existing infrastructure, creating an urgent need for considerable investment to realize a sustainable urban future.

The SDGs address these global challenges and offer guidelines around implementation. To achieve the SDGs, there is a need for financing at scale for sustainable urban development globally, especially in emerging markets and developing economies. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the global need for infrastructure investment will reach USD 30-40 trillion in the next two decades.

Developing economies are facing a finance divide that has diminished capacity to finance appropriate recovery initiatives from the pandemic and has the potential to translate into further reduced infrastructure development capacities, setting back progress towards the SDGs.

Traditionally, infrastructure construction within cities has predominantly been financed by the public sector, but this is rarely adequate. Private equity across the globe has access to levels of capital that are more than capable of closing this financing and infrastructure gap. Tapping into a fraction of the global private sector market will be sufficient to fund all investments needed to achieve the SDGs.

To unlock this capital, it is essential to shift the way sustainable development

efforts are implemented in low-to-middle income countries. A significant reduction in development grant funding and an increase in public investment is a clear signal that a change from a granting model to a financing model is crucial in keeping up the pace towards attaining the SDGs.⁴

Private capital is often reluctant to invest in less established markets due to the associated expense and inherent risks. Perceived risks such as political instability, currency fluctuations and poor institutional capacity translate into higher borrowing costs and shorter maturities, constraining the ability of governments to sustain large-scale public investments. Infrastructure investments from private equity predominantly flow into operational infrastructure projects within developed markets and, very rarely, the remains of these potential funds find their way into construction infrastructure projects in developing economies.

While there are many factors that contribute to the infrastructure funding gap, one of the primary obstacles centres around the lack of high-quality, prepared projects that are viable and appropriate for private sector investments. The Cities Investment Facility (CIF) can help unlock significant private capital flows to inclusive, sustainable urbanization projects by assisting in project identification, preparation, and financing. Alongside this, strategic reforms in the fiscal, regulation, and systemic environments will be essential factors towards securing private sector investments.



Closing the infrastructure financing gap is key to ensuring that cities can meet their urban development needs and drive growth.



Less than 20 per cent of the largest 500 cities in the developing world are deemed creditworthy. This calls for a diversification of funding sources and innovative financing instruments to finance and deliver sustainable urban development.



Multilateral interventions and incentives are needed more than ever to position sustainable urban development projects so that they are attractive and viable to the global private capital market.

⁴ CIF, 2023, About the Cities Investment Facility. Retrieved from: <https://citiesinvestmentfacility.org/about-us/general/>



Urban October 2023 recommendations

The following recommendations emerged out of the discussions, events and gatherings of Urban October 2023, highlighting approaches to accelerate the implementation of the SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, and build a more sustainable urban future for everyone.

1. Promote private-sector investment in sustainable urban infrastructure.

The global private sector market has the capacity to fund all investments needed to achieve the SDGs. To release this capital, there needs to be a fundamental diversification in the way sustainable development efforts are financed and implemented in low-to-middle income countries.

2. Make cities in developing countries more attractive to investment.

Attracting funding requires robust regulatory and institutional systems, including mechanisms to mitigate corruption. Strategic reforms in

fiscal and regulatory systems may be needed. The Cities Investment Facility (CIF) can help unlock private capital flows to urbanization projects by assisting in project identification, preparation, and financing.

3. Optimize own-source revenues.

By improving the collection and generation of own-source revenues – taxes, levies, fees, and licenses that are controlled by local governments – cities can increase their income and improve their financial resilience. UN-Habitat’s Rapid Own Source Revenue Analysis tool can help cities to do this by quantifying revenue loss and identifying root causes and entry points for reform.

4. Empower local and regional authorities.

National governments need to work more effectively with regional and local governments, recognizing their role in managing local economies and empowering them through fiscal decentralization. This will require capacity-building within local governments and ensuring robust systems and regulations are in place at regional and local levels.



World Habitat Day 2023

Resilient urban economies.

Cities as drivers of growth and recovery.

Key messages

- Cities must diversify funding sources and innovate financial instruments to support sustainable urban development.
- Public-Private-People Partnerships create innovative and mutually beneficial opportunities to drive sustainable urban development.
- Prioritizing sustainability, we need to localize and amplify green recovery frameworks to accelerate private and public investments and fuel the transition to a climate-neutral economy.
- National Development Plans should be harnessed as tools to steer local development effectively within our cities.
- Public investments can serve as catalysts, particularly in the realm of green and sustainable infrastructure, financing a brighter urban future.



“Let us recognize that resilient urban economies are not only about financing growth and competing to be at the top. It is also about nurturing the human spirit, embracing innovation, putting technology to serve human needs, and creating inclusive societies.”

*Maimunah Mohd Sharif,
UN-Habitat Executive Director*

“In our challenging times of conflicts, economic hardships, and climate disasters, cities have proven their resilience time and time again.”

*Maimunah Mohd Sharif,
UN-Habitat Executive Director*

Global Observance 2023

The year’s Global Observance of World Habitat Day was held on 2 October in Baku, Azerbaijan, in partnership with the State Committee on Urban Planning and Architecture of the Republic of Azerbaijan. There were 500 people at the event and 250 joined virtually, representing 26 countries from across the globe. The theme of the day explored how to promote cities’ economic resilience and the role of cities as drivers of economic growth and recovery, nationally and globally.

“Cities are vibrant ecosystems of human potential and innovation. They are our future.”

*Maimunah Mohd Sharif,
UN-Habitat Executive Director*

In her welcome remarks, Ms. Mohd highlighted the role of cities in creating vibrant communities with job opportunities, green spaces, and respect for diversity, and as drivers of inclusive, green, and sustainable growth. She acknowledged the multifaceted challenges facing urban areas, including economic shocks, climate emergencies, and escalating inequalities. She emphasized the role of the Local 2030 Coalition, uniting the United Nations system to tackle urban crises from the ground up, with a focus on circular economies, green spaces, and the transformation of food systems. Investments in sustainable infrastructure, early warning systems, and affordable housing were identified as critical for enhancing resilience and protecting vulnerable populations. She also underscored the importance of access to essential services and investments in education, digital innovation, and entrepreneurship.



“Building greater resilience and better protecting vulnerable populations requires far greater investments in sustainable infrastructure, early warning systems, and affordable, adequate housing for all.”

*Antonio Guterres,
United Nations Secretary-General*

In a virtual message, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres underlined the importance of cities in confronting a range of challenges from economic shocks and escalating climate emergencies to widening inequalities.

In his speech, Shahmar Movsumov, Assistant to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, noted the global importance of World Habitat Day, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other speakers included Anar Guliyev, Chairman of the State Committee on Urban Planning and Architecture of the Republic of Azerbaijan; Kubanychbek Omuraliev, Ambassador, Secretary-General of the Organization of Turkic States; and Enes Eminoğlu, Deputy Minister of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Türkiye. A message from Román Meyer Falcón, President of the UN-Habitat Assembly, was read by a representative of Mexico.

“In the post-COVID-19 era, cities are epicentres for recovery and SDG achievement. World Habitat Day urges collaboration to shape resilient, inclusive, and prosperous cities and communities.”

*Shahmar Movsumov,
Assistant to the President of the
Republic of Azerbaijan*

“Localization of the SDGs is crucial, translating global goals into local contexts. The Public-Private-People Partnership prioritizes people agendas during project implementation. Azerbaijan’s journey of urban renewal is a testament to resilience and commitment. We’ve transformed into an upper-middle-income country, focusing on sustainability and green growth.”

*Anar Guliyev, Chairman of the State Committee
on Urban Planning and Architecture of the
Republic of Azerbaijan*

World Habitat Day roundtables

World Habitat Day 2023 included two roundtables bringing key stakeholders together to discuss how cities can become more economically resilient. The ideas and messages emerging from these discussions are summarized below.

Roundtable 1: Cities as national and regional drivers of socio-economic resilience and growth

Cities face multiple and different challenges when trying to leverage financing for urban development projects. These challenges differ depending on the regulatory environment, city size, and the state of its economy. International partners need to provide a holistic framework of support including facilities to support project development and structuring; financial and non-financial mechanisms to de-risk urban investments; enabling regulations to attract private capital; and developed domestic capital markets. National governments need to recognize the role of local governments in managing local economies and empower them through fiscal decentralization.

The panellists were Le-Yin Zhang, Professor of Urban Economic Development at the Development Planning Unit, University College London; Dmitry

Pozhidaev, UNCDF Global Advisor for Local Government Finance, Head of UNCDF Office in Uganda; Rohey Malick Lowe, Mayor of Banjul, Gambia; and Neil Khor, Special Advisor to the UN-Habitat Executive Director.

“For economic growth to be equitable, cities need to align spatial, economic and environmental planning, employ evidence-based strategies, improve governance and revenue collection, and unlock private capital for investment.”

*Neil Khor, Special Advisor to the UN-Habitat
Executive Director*

“The biggest barrier for local governments is the lack of recognition of their importance in managing local economies and the role that fiscal autonomy plays in this. [The] solution: to educate the national governments of not only the benefits of working with local governments and fiscal decentralization, but also about effective ways of managing this relationship.”

*Le-Yin Zhang, Professor of Urban Economic
Development at the Development Planning Unit,
University College London*

“Transparency in public investment is a key condition for efficient allocation and use of resources. In the context of domestic capital markets, implementation of public investment projects via ‘special purpose vehicles’ (project companies) subject to market scrutiny and with ring-fenced revenues significantly reduces the scope for corruption.”

*Dmitry Pozhidaev, Global Advisor for Local
Government Finance, UNCDF*

Key points and recommendations that emerged from the discussion:

- Data collection is essential to improve municipal operations.
- National governments must recognize the importance of local governments and empower them.
- We need public systems that enable full public scrutiny to tackle corruption.
- National physical plans should be aligned with economic development plans.
- We need to strengthen local institutions by increasing capacity and skills.
- International development partners should work on establishing a holistic ecosystem to finance urban development, including facilities to support project development and structuring; financial and non-financial mechanisms to de-risk urban investments; enabling regulations to attract private capital; and developed domestic capital markets.

Roundtable 2: Post-crisis urban recovery

After a manmade or natural disaster, protecting vulnerable individuals and ensuring access to their basic rights are immediate priorities. By promoting inclusivity, sustainability, and resilience, cities can be rebuilt to not only recover from the immediate aftermath of a crisis but to thrive and withstand future challenges, contributing to a more stable and prosperous urban landscape.

The panellists were Luigi Cipolla, City planner and expert on resilient infrastructure; Hillary Murphy, Senior Social Affairs Officer, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE); Haris Piplas, Urban Design and Planning,

Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich; Emin Huseynov, Special Representative of Ağdam, Azerbaijan; Sadig Sadigov, Chairman, State Housing Construction Agency (MIDA), Azerbaijan; and Hayrettin Güngör, Mayor of Kahramanmaraş Municipality, Türkiye.

“Support of women in leadership is a leverage for post recovery.”

*Luigi Cipolla,
City planner and expert on
resilient infrastructure*

“Mayors as elected champions are the catalysers of post-crises efforts at the local level.”

*Hillary Murphy,
Senior Social Affairs Officer, UNECE*

“Small-scale interventions at the neighbourhood level can create the ownership and quick solutions.”

*Haris Piplas,
Urban Design and Planning,
Department of Architecture, ETH Zurich*

Key points and recommendations that emerged from the discussion:

- We need to empower the technical capacity of local government.
- The legislative framework is very important to an effective post-crisis recovery.
- Capital investment planning is key to prioritize recovery projects with the local administration.
- Identifying the urgent needs and priorities in the area affected by the crisis quickly is critical.
- Civil society has a key role to play in recovery and must be included as stakeholders in discussions and planning.

- A tailored approach is needed to find innovative technical solutions specific to the context in question.
- Identifying key stakeholders who are affected is the most important first step. We need to understand the issues they are facing and their expectations.
- Co-creation with stakeholders and capacity-building are key to recovery. Digital urban planning can bring evidence-based and transparent urban recovery and planning.



We need to strengthen local institutions by increasing capacity and skills.



Capital investment planning is key to prioritize recovery projects with the local administration.



Identifying key stakeholders who are affected is the most important first step. We need to understand the issues they are facing and their expectations.

Scroll of Honour Award 2023

The 82 nominations for the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award 2023 were judged based on their contribution to UN-Habitat's mandate to promote socially and environmentally sustainable cities and human settlements and to the implementation of the SDGs. The awards were presented during the World Habitat Day Global Observance. The 2023 winners of the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award are:

- **Pro-Employment Foundation (Fundación ProEmpleo Productivo, A.C.), Mexico**

For its employment creation model that has improved the economic productivity of Mexican cities through micro-enterprises and positively impacted the lives of more than 110,000 people over the last 30 years.
- **Dubai Municipality, United Arab Emirates**

For establishing and implementing a fat, oil and grease waste-recycling programme to deal with waste material from the hospitality industry. The programme transforms waste into valuable resources, promoting circular economy and environmental sustainability in a water-scarce context.
- **Community Real Estate Fund for Rent (FICA – Fundo Imobiliário Comunitário para Aluguel), Brazil**

For its action to fight housing speculation and gentrification in three major cities in Brazil and help cities to achieve housing for all. FICA's work is based on three main principles of action: developing models for acquiring and managing non-profit properties; learning through practice; and disseminating the models with other groups.

- **Assembly of Residents (Assembleia de Moradores), Portugal**

For achieving city-wide social, economic, and environmental development solutions by facilitating interactions between the city of Braga, the municipal housing company, and the social housing beneficiaries in the city.
- **Ecovironment, Sierra Leone**

For achieving green economy targets through the creation of employment opportunities for the most marginalized groups in a resource-poor environment faced with ongoing and future climate change-related disasters.

Case study: Ecovironment



“Changing the lives of slum dwellers in Sierra Leone, one plastic brick at a time.” This is the motto of Ecovironment, which won the Scroll of Honour Award at this year's World Habitat Day for its success in creating 'green' jobs for underprivileged young people and women and promoting sustainability in the construction sector. The organization was founded by Foday David Kamara who grew up in one of the slums around Freetown, Sierra Leone. Flooding in 2017 opened Foday's eyes to the environmental issues affecting his community. Population growth and rapid urbanization in Sierra Leone have driven up consumption, exerting pressure on the environment.

Foday founded Ecovironment in 2020 to tackle the issue of plastic pollution and its detrimental impact on urban environments. Ecovironment transforms plastic waste into eco-friendly bricks and paving tiles through its innovative, chemical-free, plastic-extrusion technology. The products created by Ecovironment act as an alternative to conventional construction materials, significantly reducing plastic pollution and promoting climate resilience in the construction sector in Sierra Leone. The initiative addresses environmental concerns and empowers underprivileged youth and women from under-served communities by providing more than 60 'green' job opportunities.

By promoting sustainable construction practices, reducing plastic pollution, and creating green job opportunities, Ecovironment helps build resilient and inclusive communities that enhance economic growth and recovery, in line with the theme of World Habitat Day 2023.

World Cities Day 2023

Financing sustainable urban future for all

Key messages

- Demand for infrastructure, affordable housing, efficient transport, and social services in cities is growing.
- Local governments will not be able to meet the need for urban infrastructure or realize the SDGs without significant investment.
- Efforts to close the infrastructure financing gap should be a global priority.
- Decentralization and empowering local governments to manage local economies are key to urban economic resilience.
- We need new and innovative financing models to ensure adequate investment and finance reaches urban local governments.

Global Observance 2023

This year's Global Observance of World Cities Day took place on 31 October in the Municipality of Üsküdar in Istanbul, Türkiye, under the theme, "Financing sustainable urban future for all". In recent years, local governments have faced increased difficulty in gaining access to external resources to fund their development. Yet closing the infrastructure financing gap is key to ensuring that cities can meet their urban infrastructure development needs. Discussions focused on how to unlock transformative investment in urban planning and achieve adequate fiscal decentralization. The global observance was held under the patronage of the First Lady of Türkiye Her Excellency Madame Emine Erdoğan. She attended the global celebration along with nine other 'first ladies' from countries in Europe, Africa and Asia. More than 1,000 participants representing 21 countries attended the event in person or virtually.

In her speech, UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif warned that progress towards achieving sustainable and just development and the 17 SDGs had stalled, adding:

.....
"Half of the world is now urban. There is no stopping this mega-trend. By adapting our cities and finding in them the resources and talent we need, we can upscale the solutions we need to ensure no one and no place is left behind."

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' message highlighted that cities are engines of economic growth and innovation, which hold the key to achieving the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. However, local authorities face the challenge of limited support and resources.

.....
"On this World Cities Day, it is time to consider the pivotal role cities play in sustainable development."

*Antonio Guterres,
United Nations Secretary-General*

.....
"We can unlock the opportunities cities and human settlements offer and create the conditions for growth and recovery."

*Maimunah Mohd Sharif,
UN-Habitat Executive Director*



.....
"Local authorities are struggling with limited support and resources, while demand for infrastructure, affordable housing, efficient transport, and social services is immense and growing. This year's theme, financing sustainable urban development, is a call to action."

*Antonio Guterres,
United Nations Secretary-General*



Global Observance of World Cities Day 2023 in Istanbul, Türkiye ©UN-Habitat/ Julius Mwelu

The keynote speech given by Her Excellency Emine Erdoğan was a rousing call to action..

“The importance of cities has grown, and with rapid urbanization comes challenges like climate change, which is transforming our world. We have the power to make a change, but we must do it now and turn our commitments into actions.”

*Her Excellency Madame Emine Erdoğan,
First Lady of Türkiye*

Other speakers included Hilmi Türkmen, Mayor of Üsküdar; Yücel Yılmaz, President of the Union of Municipalities of Türkiye; and Mehmet Özhasseki, Minister of Environment, Urbanization and Climate Change for the Government of Türkiye.

Recommendations and messages from the debates at the Global Observance of World Cities Day were shared at the ministerial session on urban action and climate change at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in December 2023.

“The future of our cities lies in the hands of local authorities. They shape the growth and development of the urban environment.”

*Mehmet Özhasseki,
Minister of Environment, Urbanization
and Climate Change, Türkiye*

“The theme of World Cities Day promises positive outcomes for all municipalities and cities. Let’s leverage this opportunity to advance sustainable urbanization.”

*Yücel Yılmaz,
President of the Union of
Municipalities of Türkiye*

World Cities Day roundtables

World Habitat Day 2023 included two roundtables bringing key stakeholders together to discuss how cities can become more economically resilient. The ideas and messages emerging from these discussions are summarized below:

Roundtable 1: Financing sustainable future for all

Rapid urbanization, along with the challenges of climate change and other global threats, is adding significant strain on existing urban infrastructure, demanding considerable investment to increase capacity. Cities are increasingly dependent on private capital to support the scale, finance and implementation of city development projects. Private equity across the globe has access to levels of capital that are more than capable of closing this financing and infrastructure gap. The roundtable explored how best to facilitate financing sustainable urban development.

The panellists were Hootan Yazhari, Chief Investment Officer, United World Infrastructure and EarthTag Technologies; Alice Charles, Director, Cities, Planning and Design, ARUP; Christian Kunz, Chief Strategy, Innovation & Ventures Officer, Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC); Güzhan Gülay, Assistant General Manager, Borsa İstanbul, Türkiye; Manuel de Araújo, Mayor of Quelimane, Mozambique; and Dinesh Nambiar, Chairman, Lendlease Malaysia.

Roundtable 2: From waste to wealth

Examples from across the world show that governments, businesses and people can work together to transition towards a circular economy and a shared and prosperous future for all. Türkiye's 'Zero Waste' initiative has provided an excellent example of this. Proactive efforts by governments can create policies and legislation to protect waste workers. Such actions can ensure access for this vulnerable group to basic services and social protection. Industry is currently attracted to the opportunity to transition to a circular economy where more resources are recycled, which provides excellent opportunities to create jobs for the poor and vulnerable.

The panellists were Christina Jäger, Co-founder and Managing Director Yunus Environment Hub; Murat Kurum, MP, Parliament of Türkiye; Rohey Malick Lowe, Mayor of Banjul, Gambia; Ebubekir Gizligider, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, Türkiye; Catalina Velasco, Minister of Housing, City and Territory of Colombia; Heidi Solba, President and Head

of Global Network, Let's Do It World; and Valentin Lavaill, Senior Project Manager, Middle East, Roland Berger Middle East, and member of the Waste to Zero, United Arab Emirates.

.....
"Türkiye has embraced the poor and vulnerable. Its 'Zero Waste' initiative has made impressive progress in the six years since its start. Türkiye cannot fight this war alone; international cooperation and peace are important."

*Murat Kurum, MP,
Parliament of Türkiye*

.....
"When we speak of 'waste to wealth', we must ask who is the wealth for? Recycling activities are the first step the vulnerable and poor take in the social ladder. In Colombia, constitutional courts have guaranteed human rights, access to basic services and social protection for this vulnerable group."

*Catalina Velasco,
Minister of Housing, City and
Territory of Colombia*

Key points and recommendations that emerged from the discussion:

- City mayors have a key role to play in waste reduction by adopting by-laws and anti-littering legislation at the city level.
- Leadership by women both in public leadership and policy-making roles and as mothers and homemakers is crucial.
- Waste reduction is based on cultural practices; food waste is a major issue. The role of families and the leadership of mothers is very important in tackling this.
- Legislation to protect the most vulnerable must be put in place to 'leave no one behind' – e.g. to give waste workers access to basic services and social security.
- We need to create a business case for waste reduction to encourage industries to invest in the waste and recycling economy.
- We must pursue actions that target zero emissions together with job creation.



World Cities' Day Mayor's forum for road safety in Istanbul, Türkiye © UN-Habitat/ Julius Mwelu



City mayors have a key role to play in waste reduction by adopting by-laws and anti-littering legislation at the city level.



Photo grid: Global Observance of World Cities Day 2023 in Istanbul, Türkiye ©UN-Habitat/ Julius Mwelu

Urban October 2023 global events

Events in Africa

Cameroon

Archi Talk by Chorus Architecture: World Habitat Day – Cities as engines of economic growth

Yaoundé, 2 October

The opening Archi Talk conference explored the pivotal role of cities in African economic growth. It included presentations and discussions on urban development and sustainability. The event began with an address from a representative of Cameroon’s Minister of Housing and Urban Development highlighting cities’ importance for economic growth. Sessions covered topics such as urban economic growth, city development strategies, sustainability, and the role of architects. The conference emphasized the need for sustainable urban development and architectural innovation. It concluded with an exhibition showcasing the fusion of heritage and innovation in furniture design.

Lessons from the event:

- Prioritize sustainable urbanization and AI-driven planning for efficient, eco-friendly, and economically viable cities.
- Consider the benefits of agglomeration economies and invest in urban mobility to boost Cameroon’s economy.
- Promote local, sustainable building materials and back local industries for economic growth.
- Engage architects in the urban development process for efficiency and sustainability.

- Foster collaboration between architects, policymakers, and stakeholders for architectural insights in urban development decisions.

Climate Chance Conference Africa 2023: Sustainable habitats and climate change in Africa

Yaoundé, 23 October

This conference, organized by the Climate Chance Association and part of UN-Habitat’s World Urban Campaign, brought together a wide range of actors from across the African continent to explore the theme of sustainable, accessible and inclusive living, a key topic at the heart of local climate action in Africa.

The in-person event was attended by 800 people from 40 countries representing a broad spectrum of organizations, including state and non-state actors, educational and research establishments and environmental organizations. Following discussions in 20 preparatory workshops and video conferences, the Yaoundé Roadmap for Sustainable Habitats in Africa, the first of its kind, was adopted at the event, with concrete proposals for public action. The roadmap is a summary and advocacy document based on the analyses of the Observatory for Climate Action in Africa. It has already received the support of the main African local government networks, major civil society organizations and others specialising in habitat issues.

Lessons from the event:

- Climate Chance will work actively to strengthen the continuity between two major gatherings, COP28 and the twelfth World Urban Forum (WUF) in

November 2024, to amplify the scope of the advocacy messages and the concrete recommendations of the Yaoundé Roadmap.

- Local authorities have an essential role to play in addressing climate change. It is vital to strengthen their means of action.
- Planning and land governance tools need to be developed as part of sustainable housing strategies.



“No sustainable solutions are conceivable unless the architect intervenes at all stages of the process; holistic architectural thinking must be integrated into both the development of terms of reference and the formulation of responses related to the various contexts that need to be considered in this period of crisis and socio-environmental urgency.”

*Cedrix Tsambang,
CEO, Chorus Architecture*

“Sustainable architecture serving urban economic growth: let’s stop talking, take action, and sell the earth (compressed earth brick).”

*Thomas Epoune,
CEO, CAE/EDRAC*



Cabo Verde

Cabo Verde World Habitat Day celebration

Praia, 2 October

Multiple city stakeholders convened at the event, organized by UN-Habitat and the Ministry of Infrastructure, Territorial Planning and Housing, to discuss ways in which cities can be prepared for recovery following the intersecting global negative economic shocks of COVID-19 and conflict. The event provided a forum to discuss with young community leaders and entrepreneurs the opportunities for young people to contribute to the post-COVID-19 economic recovery of communities and cities in Cabo Verde. Different cities shared their experiences on how young entrepreneurs are positioning themselves to face inflationary pressures and other financial conditions caused by global crises.

Lessons from the event:

- Youth plays an important role in the economic transformation of cities in Cabo Verde, which is a country with a very young population.
- Leaders and decision makers must continue to promote education and professional training for adolescents and young people, publicize entrepreneurship opportunities in order to mobilize youth and reduce the percentage of young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training).

Ghana

Africa real estate conference and expo: Sustainability and 'proptech' solutions

Accra, 16 October

Proptech (short for 'property technology') is a rapidly growing industry in Africa, with a range of innovative solutions being

developed to address the continent's unique real estate challenges. From digital platforms and mobile apps that streamline the rental process, to blockchain-based solutions that make it easier to track and manage property ownership, African proptech companies are creating new opportunities for investors, developers, and tenants. The conference brought together real estate professionals, investors, developers and other stakeholders to discuss the latest sustainability trends and technologies in the industry.

Lessons from the event:

- Real estate touches all 17 SDGs and can be a driver of change.
- Proptech solutions can be used to take the friction out of real estate transactions, but more data needs to be shared.
- The government is moving away from the direct provision of housing to providing land and infrastructure to private developers.
- Companies need to be aware that environmental social governance (ESG) goals will become more and more a part of value reporting.

.....
"I can certainly say that Ghana's real estate sector is ready for a digital transformation and there is increasing enthusiasm for the adoption of new digital solutions, with the purpose of streamlining all verticals and building a more sustainable future."

*Alina Aeby,
Global Coordinator for Eastern Europe, Middle East and Africa, National Association of Realtors*

.....
"The Women Inspire Panel was just amazing... The challenges of women in the industry are great, but so are the opportunities."

*Odette Nyame-Kumi,
President, Ghana Real Estate Professionals Association*

Egypt

Kick-off meeting for bus rapid transit (BRT) corridor at 6th of October City/Giza: Public Transportation Industry Transition Strategy

Cairo

The New Urban Communities Authority, in partnership with Swedfund, UN-Habitat and the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, is planning a BRT system between the 6th of October City and Giza. This event launched the project, which seeks to identify interventions to enhance walking and cycling access to major stops on the BRT corridor. The project will assess existing non-motorised transport facilities and produce maps outlining the quality of existing infrastructure, user behaviour etc. This will help inform the design of access along the corridor and the outcome will be a set of interventions that improve road safety along the BRT, including cycling infrastructure.

Lessons from the event:

- The event emphasised the need for strong public transport networks and their positive influence on urban development.
- Well-planned BRT lines are crucial to improve urban mobility.
- Key elements to develop a comprehensive and sustainable public transport network in the 6th of October-Giza corridor are establishing cooperatives for successful operation, increasing last-mile access, and reviewing and upgrading non-motorized transport infrastructure.

Nigeria

Financing development of sustainable cities in Nigeria

Abuja, 31 October

The Association of City Managers in Nigeria (ACMAN) organized a webinar entitled 'Financing development of sustainable cities in Nigeria' to celebrate World Cities Day 2023. The webinar provided insights into unlocking the full potential of all financial flows from private and public organizations (domestic and international) for stakeholders towards promoting sustainable cities in Nigeria. The event was held online via Zoom.

Lessons from the event:

- Sustainable cities need planning, inclusiveness, management and finance.
- Financing sustainable housing requires a multistakeholder approach.
- Nigeria requires about USD 15.3 billion (NGN 21 trillion) to close the housing gap. The country is yet to deal with conventional housing finance, which makes it more difficult to finance sustainable housing.
- Ways forward are: diversification of financing sources, land-based financing, creditworthiness, grants, loans, bonds, blended finance and direct execution, alongside creating city regions and mainstreaming organized labour.

International Virtual Climate Change Education Summit 2023

Awka, 16 November

The International Virtual Climate Change Education Summit 2023 opened with a welcome address and poetry recitation by Benjamin Anabaraonye (CEO, Benjy Poetry and Global Concepts). This was followed by a keynote presentation on the role of agripreneurship in enhancing climate resilience for sustainable economic growth

in Nigeria by Professor Ifeanyi Wilfred Okonkwo of the University of Nigeria. The summit also featured presentations from notable speakers from all around the world on various themes including socio-hydrology management and the impact of plastic pollution on climate change.

Lessons from the event

- Green technology can be harnessed to:
 - create an environment free of pollution
 - reduce the negative impact of greenhouse gas emissions caused by offices on the environment
 - promote the use of renewable energy sources across campuses, communities and companies
 - implement effective waste management practices
 - advocate for urban green spaces.

Rwanda

Walk21 Kigali: Action for walking – Affordable, essential steps to improve walkability

Kigali, 16-19 October

The first Walk21 conference on the African continent was hosted by the University of Rwanda, in partnership with the City of Kigali, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Walk21 Foundation, with 462 attendees including 150 speakers from 42 different countries. The conference explored four themes: improving road safety for pedestrians; planning for walking in low-income neighbourhoods; building walking policy actions to reach the SDGs and climate goals; and financing and governance models for supporting walking infrastructure. For the first time, 54% of the speakers were from the African continent. Walk21 also promoted gender equality with 50% of



Real estate touches all 17 SDGs and can be a driver of change.

Sustainable cities need planning, inclusiveness, management and finance.

Financing sustainable housing requires a multistakeholder approach.

the speakers being women, including Prudence Rubingisa, Mayor of Kigali. The conference brought together experts, policymakers, researchers, and leaders to exchange knowledge, share best practice, and discuss innovative approaches on how to develop and implement walking policies and programmes to deliver walkable communities and safer, more inclusive streets, and broader community participation.

Lessons from the event:

- Investment in institutional and individual capacity for walking is needed.
- One hundred and eight countries now have a walking policy and we need to support the other 90 to steer investment in walking as a quick, affordable and reliable mobility solution.
- We can all be leaders; our job is also to provide a voice to our communities.
- Walking offers a solution to many of our planetary burdens.



Events in the Americas

Brazil

How can urban development agencies support sustainable urban development?

Virtual

Part of the Urban October GIZ series, this virtual event discussed opportunities for urban development agencies (UDAs) to foster the management of sustainable urban development. It highlighted current examples from Brazil, where not only do UDAs support local urban management, but a national network of Brazilian municipal UDAs (InREDE) has also recently been established.

Lessons from the event:

- UDAs can play a crucial role in developing cities and implementing plans.
- UDAs should not compete with municipalities but support and complement them.
- UDAs are often used for implementing integrated approaches; they are great at engaging various stakeholders and trying out new methods.
- UDAs can work as one-stop shops for investors.
- Brazil has a successfully established network of municipal UDAs.

Canada

Influencing positive urban change

Toronto, 30 October

Urban World Matters organized this event to generate discussion around how we can influence positive urban change with a panel of experts from diverse professional backgrounds and nationalities. The discussion covered the impact and disruption caused by rapid urbanization; the pressure on stakeholders and communities to act; challenges

and opportunities for a green and decarbonized urban future; and the need to address resistance to change. The event showcased the Kanyen'kéha Language and Culture Centre and the discussion closed with the importance of technology and innovation in collaboration, engagement and participation to influence urban transitions.

Lessons from the event:

- Finding the right balance between the public and private sector is something that cities can successfully drive forward for positive urban change.
- Investing in new types of economic activities that support communities and engaging underrepresented groups are important moves to heal relationships between governments and communities and to build trust in the city-making process.
- Bridging conversations across all stakeholders and communities with data and artificial intelligence is the 'gold' in future city making.



“Empowering and investing in youth to participate in civic engagement is key to design sustainable communities. By providing training, tools and giving the space and time to imagine and experiment, we can help them to represent and present their ideas.”

*Andrew Davies,
Executive Director, No. 9 Canada*

“Communicating the case for doing something differently in order to trigger behaviour changes is absolutely fundamental in urban transitions success.”

*Jim Coleman,
Head of Economics, WSP UK*

Colombia

World Habitat Day – Habitat Fest: Our city, the best home

Bogotá

Habitat Fest was organized by the Secretary of Habitat of Bogotá and UN-Habitat Andean Countries Hub as part of the World Habitat Day celebrations. The festival featured national and international guests sharing lessons learnt and good practice developed through innovative, high-impact projects improving the environment and quality of life for the most vulnerable communities. The festival included conferences, talks, workshops and tours.

Lessons from the event:

- Bogotá is taking important steps as an example for Latin America and the world through the implementation of public policies around caring for and improving the environment so that it is sustainable and resilient for the benefit of the most vulnerable.
- There are many challenges ahead, but the city has advanced in the realisation of many of the SDGs, especially goals 1, 5, 8, 11, 13 and 17.

“I am excited to accompany the Mayor’s Office of Bogotá on days like today, seeing that in recent years it has become an international example with its sustainable urban innovation initiatives. With them we have worked together on [...] the launch of a concept called Bioblitz, to map the city’s biodiversity.”

*Helena Storm,
Ambassador of Sweden in Colombia*

“I want to confirm that in 2030 there will be a podium of the cities that have most fulfilled the SDGs and Bogotá will be there.”

*Claudia López,
Mayor of Bogotá*



Mexico

Draw a better SAMAO competition

Santa María del Oro

The 'Draw a better SAMAO' competition aimed to promote citizen participation in mobility and urban design planning in Santa María del Oro, Nayarit, in collaboration with the University of Nayarit and the Municipality of Santa María del Oro through IMPLAN SAMAO. The competition complemented activities carried out for the participatory diagnosis of mobility and urban design issues. Through consultations, workshops, interviews, and surveys, the residents' ideas were gathered and proposals were developed to design sustainable mobility strategies in the municipal capital. There were 500 participants, of whom 200 were students and 300 were residents.

Lessons from the event:

- Young people were interested in participating in these spaces to generate proposals to improve their community. In this case, mobility and tree planting were the main concerns.
- The main means of transportation of the population is pedestrian, therefore sidewalks are a priority. The municipality has incorporated these proposals in its urban development programme.
- Programmes to ensure the cleanliness of the roads are fundamental.

.....
"This is a space to propose and design in a participatory manner a better SAMAO where mobility and urban design allow inhabitants to enjoy better spaces."

*Reyes Robledo Suárez,
Director of Municipal Institute of
Planning of SAMAO*

Citizen-powered resilience: Youth participation in climate change adaptation

Virtual, 5 October

Part of the Urban October GIZ series, this session showcased the importance of involving urban residents, especially young people, in addressing climate change and urban adaptation. The CitiesAdapt and BIOCITIS projects presented their platform for Mexican youth to share their views on climate change and adaptation. Finalists from a student competition presented ideas for adaptation measures in a public space in Mérida and the 'EcoChavos' initiative, which aims to promote environmental education for young people in Veracruz, Mexico.

Lessons from the event:

- The presentations by the student finalists highlighted various approaches to integrating adaptation into urban planning near ecological reserves and proposed innovative solutions for climate-proofing a health clinic in a disadvantaged area.
- The story of a young EcoChavos participant demonstrated the power of environmental education in raising awareness and inspiring action against climate change through simple, yet ingenious activities.

Peru

Times of change: Urban recovery and economic challenges

Lima, 26 October

This event, attended by architecture students, addressed the challenges of inequality in Peru through the analysis of the cultural and social dynamics of the neighbourhoods in the city of Lima and the altitudinal levels of various cities. The exhibition presented a comprehensive approach to land and resource use, using mapping and models to analyse natural, socio-cultural and economic aspects of cities. The need to integrate economic

systems with local culture for effective public management was highlighted. The students presented panels and models, closing the event with in-depth reflections drawn from the discussions.

Lessons from the event:

- It is important to consider culture in economic development strategies.
- The integration of culture in urban interventions involves promoting multifunctional spaces that reflect local identity, promoting economic activities based on traditions, art and cultural tourism, and designing policies that respect and enhance cultural practices, generating social cohesion and sustainable economic growth.

.....
"The post-COVID impact on Lima's slums has been challenging, affecting the local informal economy. Strategies that promote economic resilience, supporting local entrepreneurship and strengthening infrastructure are needed to ensure sustainable recovery."

*Sayuri Susuki,
Universidad Peruana Unión*

United States of America

Havre de Grace Maritime Museum and Environmental Center art exhibition for Urban October

New York

The Havre de Grace Maritime Museum is situated where the Susquehanna River meets Chesapeake Bay. The exhibition by award-winning environmental artists tells the story of this region's rich maritime heritage. Teeming with numerous species of flora and fauna and having highly navigable waters, the unique environmental setting of Chesapeake Bay is a national treasure. The bay's 64,000-square-mile watershed encompasses one of the most economically significant regions of the United States. The art show by Gunsu



Saracoglu and Fatma Kadir focused on migratory birds; Chesapeake Bay is a water bird sanctuary. The works of Mehmet Kuran and Ilhan Sayin focused on the importance of biodiversity in the bay and Selva Ozelli’s works celebrated the Darter fish, which is unique to Maryland.

Lessons from the event:

- Art is a powerful tool for conveying environmental messages.
- Water and wetlands are crucial for migratory birds.
- Biodiversity is essential to the existence and proper functioning of all ecosystems.

Spotlight: Urban Circuit initiative in Brazil

The Urban Circuit is an initiative created by UN-Habitat’s regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean in Brazil to raise awareness of Urban October. In 2023, its sixth year, the initiative expanded to countries in Latin America and lusophone Africa through a new partnership between UN-Habitat and the Cooperation Agency of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Brazil. The theme of this year’s Urban Circuit was ‘Investing in urban futures: Cooperation for Global South resilience’, which was aligned with the global focus of this year’s Urban October on financing sustainable development in cities. The Urban Circuit 2023 had a record-breaking 203 events from six counties and 72 cities, generating the highest number of events and viewers ever recorded. In total, the events garnered 29,000 views on YouTube and 450 hours of content during Urban October.



Events in Asia

Cambodia

Youth participation in promoting green space and sustainable lifestyle in cities and communities

Phnom Penh, 21 October

A one-month digital campaign promoting sustainable living practices culminated in a one-day educational field trip in October 2023 to Cambodia’s Wat Phnom, a Buddhist temple and green space in Phnom Penh, in celebration of World Cities Day. The visit enabled 10 youth leaders to learn and share their knowledge about the ecology, culture, biodiversity, economy and the value of green spaces in urban settings during this study visit. During the month of October, educational posters

on environmentally friendly living and the benefits of green space were published to Sustainable Design 11’s Facebook and Instagram accounts on a weekly basis generating more than 20,000 views on social media.

Lessons from the event:

- We need more youth action in making sustainable cities and communities in our society.

.....
“We need more grassroots efforts from the diverse group of youths to accelerate positive changes in making our cities and communities sustainable, inclusive, and resilient.”

*Vathanak Soeun,
Founder, Sustainable Design 11*
.....



The integration of culture in urban interventions involves promoting multifunctional spaces that reflect local identity, promoting economic activities based on traditions, art and cultural tourism, and designing policies that respect and enhance cultural practices, generating social cohesion and sustainable economic growth.



China

The power of nature in metropolitan areas

Shanghai, 9-10 October

This hybrid international conference was held as part of World Metropolitan Day and the Shanghai Urban Space Art Season 2023. The event was the first of four seminars under the theme 'Urban heritage' and was a prelude to the WUF in 2024 and the Global Solutions Conference for Large Cities in Barcelona in 2025. The first day of the conference explored the power of nature, the relationship between nature and culture, and how to manage nature in metropolitan futures. The second day of the conference included a visit to the Shanghai Chongming Dongtan National Nature Reserve for Birds and a roundtable discussion. The Shanghai Initiative aims to optimize the urban ecosystems of metropolises for maintenance, sustainable development, and socio-economic transformations.

Lessons from the event:

- It is important to reconnect nature and culture in urban environments.
- The event provided an opportunity to discuss ways of thinking, identifying new approaches that go beyond the nature-culture dichotomy and provide an important platform for new heritage models.
- The initiative calls on more cities to join its comparative research in reflecting on the very urgent challenges and opportunities today and exploring innovative methodologies.
- Natural and cultural heritage resources can provide for metropolitan resilience and sustainability. Nature-based solutions can enhance research in mitigation and adaptative and transformative actions for responding to climate change from a metropolitan perspective.

- It is useful to consider sustainable environments and participatory management in the context of disputes and conflicts.

India

World Cities Day Connect

Chennai, 31 October

World Cities Day Connect, organized by the Sustainable Development Council in collaboration with UN-Habitat, marked World Cities Day and celebrated a resounding commitment to 'Building sustainable and inclusive cities for all'. The conference explored the development of smart cities in India with a strong emphasis on sustainability and inclusivity. The event aligned with India's ambitious Smart Cities Mission and showcased India's commitment to addressing urban challenges in a holistic manner. During the event, the 'Youth Leads Sustainability' online journal was launched, a global platform designed to empower young people and engage them in the global discourse on building sustainable and inclusive cities. It will provide a space for young people to share their research, experiences, and visionary perspectives on urban development. The event was attended by 200 people.

Lessons from the event:

- The discussions emphasized the importance of bolstering local businesses, agriculture, and sustainable practices within India's urban centres.
- The event highlighted the pressing global challenges associated with rapid urbanization and the imperative for sustainable habitat development.
- Inequality remains a persistent problem in various regions of India. Individuals continue to experience differential treatment based on their caste, economic status and religion. The discussions fervently

emphasized the unacceptability of such discrimination and its exacerbation of urban challenges.

.....
"Urban development and sustainability never end."

*Beena Philip,
Honourable Mayor,
Kozhikode Municipal Corporation*

.....
"A sustainable shelter for all means for all: no one left behind."

*Dr Datchanamoorthy Ramu, Founder President,
Sustainable Development Council*

Disasters, development and community-led housing recovery

Kerala, 3 October

The Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Calicut marked World Habitat Day with a series of lectures by Dr John Harrison and Dr Mittul Vahanavati. The audience comprised students and professionals from Indian and international universities, as well as planning and architectural professionals. Dr Vahanavati delivered an interactive session about disaster-development linkage, the history of development, climate change and disaster impact, the concept of resilience, post-disaster recovery to resilience, and the process of housing recovery. Dr Harrison from Loughborough University in the UK delved into the intriguing link between regions and planning, dissected the components of regional planning, and shared his vision for the future of urban and regional planning.

Lessons from the event:

- There is an interconnection between disasters and development. Historical development practices have influenced vulnerability to disasters.
- Community participation is critical to recovering from a disaster situation. The role of the community is often undermined in the process of rehabilitation and rebuilding.



Indonesia

Suatu Hari Yang Baik 2045 exhibition

Jakarta, 2-18 October

The 'Suatu Hari Yang Baik 2045' ('One Good Day 2045') exhibition was intended to showcase, optimistically, the "window of hope" for achieving liveable and sustainable settlements in 2045. With the swift development of Indonesia, we have seen various improvements: improved public transportation, a growing economy, increasingly fair access to resources, and more affordable houses. This exhibition asked, in light of such rapid development, what the next two decades hold for Indonesia. The year 2045 was chosen because it marks 100 years of Indonesia's independence and links with Indonesia's 2045 Golden Vision. Visualizations were presented in the form of comic art, graphic art, and software imagery created with artificial intelligence. The exhibition also showcased the evolution of settlements and cities over the years.

Lessons from the event:

- To achieve Indonesia's 2045 Golden Vision, all stakeholders with various expertise need to collaborate for the greater good.
- All elements of society should be encouraged to take part in real action to change cities in Indonesia for the better. Even the smallest actions matter and should start as soon as possible.
- Utilizing technologies while maintaining aesthetic elements are necessary to build a better city.
- Young people have a key part to play in Indonesia's development.

.....
"We have to realize that we have to change. 2045 is not a long time to go. If it [action] doesn't start now, when will it be? It has to start now with youth who determine what the future will be like."

.....
Basuki Hadimuljono,
Minister of Public Works and Housing, Indonesia
.....

Fun walk and clean-up parade

Jakarta

As part of Indonesia's Urban October events, the fun walk and clean-up parade was intended to promote awareness about environmental cleanliness, the health benefits of walking, public spaces and local roads to accommodate non-motorized vehicles as an arena for social activities. This event was held simultaneously at each Province of Settlement Infrastructure Agency in Indonesia to support the circular economy by carrying out large-scale operations to clean up the surrounding environment. Throughout Indonesia, 4,073 people participated. During the event, a total of 17,254kg of waste were collected.

Lessons from the event:

- All groups in society have to take action to help preserve the environment. This can start with the smallest actions such as picking up litter, sorting waste, and even planting trees.
- This action will promote a circular economy that can help develop resilient cities as engines of growth and recovery

Japan

Shizuoka City SDGs Youth Summit 2023

Shizuoka, 7 October

The Shizuoka City SDGs Youth Summit aimed to promote co-creation and collaboration between young people and businesses. Young people involved in cutting-edge initiatives took to the stage to present their results and seek support from companies. The summit connected young people with each other and businesses to provide opportunities for action and expand initiatives. The summit was featured on television to communicate the efforts of young people to a wide range of citizens and companies.

Lessons from the event:

- By facilitating communication, young people's efforts were communicated to businesses and citizens, and technical and financial support were made possible.
- When companies showed interest in the initiatives of young people, this led to the expansion of those initiatives and the education of the next generation of young people.

Pakistan

World Cities Day

Islamabad, 31 October

Shehersaaz (meaning 'city maker') is an organization dedicated to undertaking research and development in human settlements of Pakistan. Shehersaaz celebrated World Cities Day with a vibrant and thought-provoking event hosted at the Earth Sciences Auditorium of Quaid-e-Azam University. Representatives from UN-Habitat Pakistan, the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, the National Agricultural Research Council and Shehersaaz shared their expertise and explored the World Cities Day theme, 'Financing a sustainable urban future for all'. Topics discussed included urban economies and how a sustainable lifestyle can contribute to financial stability. Another highlight were the conceptions of ideal cities envisioned by young artists, who transformed their ideas into paintings around the theme 'How I see my city in 2030'. The event also featured a street music performance.

Lessons from the event:

- It is crucial to invest in human resources to build capacity.
- Provincial finance commissions need strengthening and district finance commissions should be established based on the model of the National Finance Commission.



- Local governments should be empowered to collect and utilize property tax and motor vehicle tax to meet their administrative and development budgets.
- Reliable data is essential. The Federal and Provincial Bureaux of Statistics should be made administratively and financially autonomous entities so that they can generate reliable data.

.....
“The local government assets need to be made vibrant so that they can be turned from liabilities into assets. [The] culture of free lunch should be abolished and citizens should be made to pay for services.”

*Jawed Ali Khan,
Country Programme Manager, UN-Habitat*

.....
“A developed and sustainable city is one which every citizen could relate to, that is a city that serves the needs of women, children, youth, elderly, people with disability and transgender people.”

*Almas Shakoor,
Executive Director, Shehersaaz*

Philippines

Philippine Urban Forum 2023

Pasay City, 5-6 October

Designed to mirror the WUF, the Philippine Urban Forum 2023 was a multi-stakeholder platform for policy dialogues, knowledge exchange, and sectoral partnerships and collaboration among various urban actors to promote sustainable urbanization in the Philippines. The various sessions and activities showcased innovations, new technologies, and best practice around sustainable human settlements and urban development. The highlight of the forum was the crafting of the Manila Urban Declaration of Commitment and Support

to Sustainable and Inclusive Organization, which integrated the commitment of all sectors towards sustainable urbanization. Under the theme, ‘Transforming our cities and building resilient communities’, the forum promoted a participatory and whole-of-nation approach towards the implementation of the Philippine New Urban Agenda and other global commitments such as the SDGs, in particular SDG 11. The forum was the first large-scale convention of urban actors in the Philippines. The agreements and report will serve as input for the preparation of technical sessions to be delivered by the Philippine delegation at the WUF in 2024.

Lessons from the event:

- There has been significant progress in terms of innovation and best practice in sustainable urban development in the Philippines.
- It is essential to share, replicate, and fast track actions to achieve the SDGs, while increasing the capacities of institutions and local government units.

.....
“We are here, representatives from the government, civil society, and private sector, to ensure that our urban development programmes are people centred, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and priorities of our communities.”

*Jose Rizalino Acuzar,
Secretary, Department of Human Settlements
and Urban Development of the Philippines*

.....
“We have been doing a lot to solve urban challenges, but now is the time to accelerate our actions to further work together to achieve a better urban future that includes everybody and every place.”

*Christopher Rollo,
Country Programme Manager,
UN-Habitat Philippines*

South Korea

Resilience campaign for semi-basement residents amid the climate crisis

Seoul, 1 October

A team of South Korean college students dedicated to advocating UN-Habitat’s mission have been addressing the pressing issue of semi-basement housing in Korea, which is vulnerable to flooding during heavy rains. Their campaign advocates for the adoption of smart street inlets as a solution. The team conducted a survey using Google Forms and created and uploaded content to spread the word about the campaign. The content was translated and distributed in English, French and Portuguese, and 50 participants completed the survey. Their report explored the effectiveness of street inlet systems, based on insights from existing installations in selected areas of Seoul.

Lessons from the event:

- Extensive research is critical to address the challenges faced by people living in cities.
- Urban problems can be solved better through incremental rather than radical solutions.
- The research team identified the need to build urban safety nets by promoting government policies that respond to disasters and to actively engage citizens in addressing future climate change.



Events in Europe

Germany

For the sixth year, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) contributed a programme of events – under the banner ‘Urban October at GIZ’ – organized by several GIZ projects and external partners. The series included a diverse range of formats and topics, including insights into the work of GIZ in the field of urban development.

Unequal scenes and a just transition towards liveable cities for all

Virtual, 5 October

In this opening ceremony for the Urban October at GIZ series, Dr Heike Litzinger, Head of the Division for Energy, Urban Development, Mobility and Infrastructure at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), outlined the strategic relevance of sustainable urban development in German development cooperation. Photographer and multimedia storyteller Johnny Miller spoke about his project ‘Unequal Scenes’, in which he visualizes inequality, and Head of GIZ Sector Programme Cities, Martina Liebermann, gave some insights on GIZ urban projects and Urban October.

Lessons from the event:

- Cities are relevant players in the implementation of a just transition.
- Cities offer the opportunity to rethink social inequality.
- Photography is a powerful tool to visualize inequality.
- Climate change exacerbates inequality.
- The way forward is to reduce inequalities in cities while advancing climate- and environment-friendly urban development.

Perceptions and systems of urban waste: Changing behaviours towards circularity beyond awareness campaigns

Virtual, 11 October

Part of the Urban October at GIZ series, this webinar explored perceptions and systems of urban waste and its prevention through circular approaches on different levels – individual, societal, municipal, economical, commercial and governmental. The webinar presented lessons from the global project ‘Environmental protection worldwide’, specifically management of organic waste in India; the certification programme for Zero Waste Europe; experiences of becoming a zero-waste city from the city of Kiel; and research perspectives about systemic and practical opportunities and limitations of circular economy in cities, specifically Phnom Phen, Cambodia.

Lessons from the event:

- A sustainable strategic approach to behaviour change at city/municipal level requires: intensity, continuity, policy interventions, innovation, locally adapted, tailored and solution-oriented communication, human capacity-building (training, education), implementation support, monitoring and evaluation, and strategy adaptation, as necessary.
- It is indispensable to pay attention to local conditions and to design approaches in an inclusive, integrative and holistically strategic way.
- An inclusive, integrative and holistic system aims to integrate the informal sector.

GIZ Urban Climate Resilience Toolbox pre-launch

Virtual, 19 October

This session provided an overview of the GIZ Urban Climate Resilience Toolbox, which is a resource aimed at empowering policymakers, practitioners, and enthusiasts in the field. It contains information on up to 100 urban climate resilience approaches from 30 countries.

The pre-launch event explored the context of the toolbox and the Urban Climate Resilience Taskforce, what the toolbox looks like and how it works, and invited participants to give feedback and exchange experiences in the thematic area of resilience. The toolbox will soon be made available at the AC.net website.

Lessons from the event:

- The tool was perceived as useful to showcase experiences with partners, to connect with colleagues on the theme, and as a reference and inspiration during the project and for workshops.

Digitally supported adaptation: Urban heat

Virtual, 24 October

Climate change escalates extreme weather and ecosystem disruption, while urban growth heightens resource use, emissions, and land-use shifts, worsening the climate crisis. Urban heat, one pressing consequence of these changes, requires innovative solutions and data-driven policies, often powered by digital tools. This webinar discussed the global challenge of urban heat resulting from climate change and urbanization. It featured a specialist providing a theoretical framework and international references, introduced an open-source tool for processing satellite data, and included a presentation from a city official from Mérida, Mexico, who discussed the local impacts of urban heat and the use of remote sensing tools for policy-making and urban planning. The user-friendly, open-source tool can quickly visualize and analyse satellite data, supporting practitioners working with urban planning and heat island assessments, environmental monitoring, outreach, and policy-making.

Lessons from the event:

- Participants gained insights into urban heat and adaptation measures implemented in different countries.
- The Mexican city official highlighted the importance of engaging local partners effectively.

PractiCITY x Thematic Forum Urbanization: Sharing urban expertise

Virtual, 25 October

Dorothea Strüber, Deputy Regional Director for Germany, Austria, and Switzerland at ClimateView, presented how ClimateView assists cities in digitalizing their climate action plans and finding solutions to reducing urban emissions in different sectors (e.g. transport, waste, buildings). A central feature of ClimateView's support to cities is the digital tool ClimateOS. It visualizes cities' efforts to reach net zero as shown in their respective climate action plans and the most recent greenhouse gas emission data available. Every city develops a uniquely adapted platform, which considers, for example, the geography or cultural contexts of the city.

Lessons from the event:

- Strikingly, even cities making great efforts will fail to reach their targets for climate neutrality, according to ClimateOS. This knowledge is crucial to further adapt urban climate action plans.
- While ClimateView currently only operates in Europe and North America, the company is open to increasing its geographical scope towards the Global South.

Ireland

Clean Air Together: Ryan Hanley's participation in the initiative

Galway, 31 October

As part of its sustainability strategy and its commitment to a sustainable future through innovative engineering and environmental solutions, Ryan Hanley is part of the Clean Air Together initiative. As part of this process, the company participated in World Cities Day, an opportunity to be part of the conversation about the fast rate of change in our cities and towns. The event included a short presentation about Ryan Hanley's participation in the Clear Air Together

initiative in Galway, including an outline of the expected results. It was also an opportunity to share ideas and experiences around action to build a more climate-resilient community through the company's work and projects. The Clean Air Together initiative involves members of the public and the business community measuring Galway's air quality. It is a citizen science project with approximately 400 participants recording levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) pollution in their local area. The project will give Ryan Hanley and the community a better understanding of air pollution across various areas in Galway and help to develop initiatives to improve air quality in the future.

Lessons from the event:

- Sharing knowledge is always key to promoting sustainability and the development of new initiatives.
- Presentations showing the work the company is doing towards realizing the SDG goals and its sustainability vision raise awareness and generate interest, which are the first steps towards finding the answers to a more resilient and sustainable community.

Moldova

Building impact in Moldova: Improving lives through construction

Virtual, 12 October

Part of the Urban October at GIZ series, this session took Moldova as an example of the aim to 'build impact', showing how Moldovans profit from energy-efficient renovations of existing buildings as well as infrastructure measures. Adrian Stranzenbach, civil engineer at GIZ Moldova, presented photos from his personal photo album and spoke about his experiences at 20 construction sites in Moldova. Patricia Hofmann, Head of GIZ's Construction Section, gave an insight into the bigger picture of construction internationally, looking beyond the Moldovan border.

Lessons from the event:

- Capacity-building is crucial for the sustainability of buildings and infrastructure post-completion.
- The world is becoming more and more fragile due to wars and natural disasters. We need to be flexible and quick in the implementation of projects.
- Experiences from Moldova can be applied to the reconstruction of Ukraine, which is now beginning, because the conditions are similar in many respects.

Montenegro

Socially responsible business for young entrepreneurs – benefits and challenges

Podgorica, 25 October

This event provided entrepreneurs with the opportunity to get acquainted with the basic principles of socially responsible business, examples of projects and companies that have successfully implemented corporate social responsibility (CSR), tools and strategies for implementing CSR in their own entrepreneurial ventures, and an analysis of the challenges and advantages that arise in this context.

Lessons from the event:

- Young entrepreneurs in Montenegro care about how their businesses affect society and want to run responsible companies; however, they lack knowledge in this area.
- They need more educational activities to raise awareness, building on their existing interest, as well as training on the best ways to achieve this in the Montenegrin context.
- Small, online businesses can still incorporate CSR practices on a smaller scale, such as involving the local community and planting trees.



Spain

Inclusive housing with social organizations

Barcelona, 2 October

This conference explored the work of 2019 World Habitat Day award winner, Fundació Hàbitat3, a collaborative and innovative approach to housing provided through a network of alliances in the public sector, social organizations and private partners. The discussions at the event reflected on challenges and opportunities, showcasing the impact of the programme, the importance of both housing and social support in the development of inclusive housing projects for vulnerable people and the pressing need for decent, affordable housing.

Lessons from the event:

- Alliances among public, social and private actors are key to develop inclusive housing projects that address the needs of people in vulnerable situations.
- Housing is essential, as is social support, to enable people to develop their own path to inclusion.
- Consensus has to be built around middle and long-term strategies to increase inclusive housing stock and to finance support schemes.



“When we talk about the right to housing, we talk about the lives of people, their stability, security, health, dignity, empowerment, independence, their future.”

*Lourdes Borrell,
Social Strategy, Fundació Hàbitat3*

Ukraine

HOUSING +5 in host communities for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Ukraine

Kyiv, 31 October

A hybrid press conference took place in Kyiv with representatives from Austria, Ukraine, Sweden, Poland, Italy, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, Finland, Belgium and the Netherlands on the topic of attracting investments for projects focused on solving the problem of IDPs in Ukraine. The ‘HOUSING +5’ programme promotes cross-border economic cooperation between host communities of Ukraine and host municipalities of the EU. The speaker was Dr. O. Zatolokin, Chairman of the National Coordination Council of UN-Habitat in Ukraine, which initiated the Housing +5 programme in March 2022 to address the issues of accommodation, employment, healthcare and social support for Ukrainian IDPs. The purpose of the programme is to provide communities hosting IDPs with practical assistance in real investment attraction and pre-investment training, with a focus on restoration of the local economy, creation of jobs, construction of housing and social infrastructure for IDPs with the participation of local entrepreneurs and farms, international financial organizations, private investors and international donor organizations of UN member countries.

Lessons from the event:

- Investment from the public, private and social/third sector is essential to fund services for IDPs from Ukraine in their host cities and countries across Europe.

Events in Oceania

New Zealand

Informal housing in Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan

Auckland, 31 October

To mark World Cities Day, this seminar explored pressing issues related to informal rented housing. These included Taiwan’s disadvantaged groups in the black-market, rental housing market and the effectiveness of social housing agencies in providing alternative leasing agency services to tenants of subdivided units in Hong Kong, as well as the situation of inappropriate housing in Macau. The seminar provided an update on the current situations and analysed the factors influencing the rental market of informal housing, and highlighted strategies to promote fair rental practices. The seminar shared knowledge and initiatives in informal housing markets to explore sustainable solutions in the rental housing sector.

Lessons from the event:

- Government policies were found to be critical in solving problems around informal housing.
- Social enterprises play an important role in helping low-income renters of informal housing.
- Innovative schemes, such as social housing agencies, are being tested as approaches to matching renters and landlords in informal housing markets.

For a full list of all the events that took place during Urban October 2023, use the QR code.







Connect to UN-Habitat social media; [@unhabitat](#)



For more information on Urban October, please visit our website on: urbanoctober.unhabitat.org, or send us an email on: unhabitat-events@un.org for Urban October, unhabitat-whd@un.org for World Habitat Day, and unhabitat-wcd@un.org for World Cities Day.



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