



Habitat III Expectations







Civil society's expectations and needs from the Habitat III process
NE 144: Friday, 11 April 2014, 14:00–16:00, Yellow Pavilion - Room 6

organized by

HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS NETWORK
Habitat International Coalition

Civic participation in, and the normative framework of global urban policy have evolved since the first world Habitat Conference in 1976, but not always progressively.

-  **How has civil society contributed to the Habitat Agenda process and content?**
-  **Is this dynamic advancing or regressing since 1976 ...since 1996?**
-  **How do civil organizations perceive this dynamic unfolding toward Habitat III in 2016?**
-  **What does civil society hope to contribute to, and take from Habitat III in 2016?**

This World Urban Forum 7 networking event reflected on that dynamic and channeled civil society perspectives on procedure and content issues toward Habitat III. A panel traced the evolution of civil society relations with the serial Habitat Agendas, first, with a view from HIC president emeritus and veteran of Habitats I and II Enrique Ortíz. Then panelists presented current Habitat III expectations as they related to the post-2015 Development process, including a forward-looking prospective from engaged youth.

The inclusive participant discussion that ensued reflects civil society visions and demands for Habitat III, in order to optimize the constructive engagement and norms established through previous Habitat Agendas. Participants presented their expectations and proposals, including proposals for mechanisms of CSO engagement in, and optimal outcomes from the Habitat III process. These proposals covered some of the most important choices facing Habitat III partners to ensure a progressive Habitat III that improves—not diminishes—the Habitat Agenda in 2016 and forms a common ground for maintaining socially equitable and environmentally sound habitats over the coming decades.

Presenters:

- [Enrique Ortíz](#) Habitat International Coalition–America Latina (Mexico)
- [Matthew Boms](#) *Communitas* Coalition for Sustainable Cities & Regions in the New UN Development Agenda
- [Majed Thabet](#) Youth Development Organization (Yemen)

Moderator:

- [Joseph Schechla](#) Housing and Land Rights Network – Habitat International Coalition (Egypt)

Background documents:

- [HIC's-pectations of Habitat III](#) (summary)
- [1, 2, 3, Habitat!](#) (full version)
- Enrique Ortíz, [“From Vancouver 1976 to Vancouver 2006”](#) (Sept. 2008)



The Dialogue

In the run-up to the next all-UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in 2016, concerned civil society organization, and especially Members of HIC, are reflecting on how civil society has contributed to the current Habitat Agenda process and content. In considering the process since the first Habitat Conference at Vancouver in 1976 through promising Habitat II at Istanbul in 1996, has the dynamic of civic engagement advanced or regressed, how does concerned civil society perceive this dynamic unfolding toward 2016? On matters of substance and content of the new Habitat Agenda, what does civil society hope to contribute to, and take from Habitat III in 2016?

These were the questions on the table during the recent World Urban Forum 7 (WUF) in Medellín, Colombia, where HIC-HLRN organized a networking event under the forward-looking title “Habitat III Expectations.” The purpose of this event was precisely to review the past processes and content of the past Habitat Agendas over the past 40 years, and to collect civil society perspectives on type of engagement and content issues they seek in the months leading to Habitat III.



Enrique Ortíz reflecting on the Habitat Agenda process, 1976-present. Photo: Marie Bailloux/HIC-GS

The event, moderated by HIC-HLRN coordinator Joseph Schechla, began with three presentations: Enrique Ortíz, president emeritus of HIC, who reflected on the evolving political dynamics and struggles over content since 1976; Majed Thabet, Youth Development Organization (Yemen), added a vision of what to expect from his region and generation’s perspective. Matthew Boms, of *Communitas* Coalition, informed the 59 participants of the current dynamics and issues involved in determining the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals, which will precede and necessarily link to the more-specific outcomes of Habitat III.

This consultative session on the last day of WUF 7 echoed the opening-day presentation of HIC President Lorena Zárata in emphasizing three basic prerequisites that the Habitat III process:

1. Address the profound causes of urbanization and habitat in its integrity, not fragmenting habitat or focusing exclusively on cities, but respecting the rural-urban symbiosis;
2. Ensure that human rights and corresponding obligations remain at the core of the new agenda, recognizing the right to the city and ensuring accountability to human rights norms in habitat development; and
3. Provide for the widest and most-substantive civil society participation in preparation and implementation of the new Habitat Agenda.

That message formed a common ground for expectations that Habitat III learn from the past and usher in socially equitable and environmentally sound habitat policy at the global level for the coming decades. In order to ensure that optimal outcome of the deliberative process and ultimate outcomes document, participants in the networking event proffered an inventory of values and issues that they considered to be indispensable.

Expectations of Habitat III Content

Cities for all

Several speakers variously emphasized that the Habitat III process promote and enshrine the principle that cities and built environments should spaces of inclusion and social justice. Thus, they argued, the social function of habitat and the city must be emphasized, and be a core component to urban assessments and future planning projects. The new Habitat Agenda should call for adequate space to be allocated for social use, including ample green space, and space for arts, culture and self-expression, open to all inhabitants. More specifically, Habitat III and the new Habitat Agenda should explicitly acknowledge and remedy material discrimination and spatial segregation and set out affirmative action for marginalized groups to ensure their equal enjoyment of urban spaces and services.

Meaningful Sustainability

In the Habitat III discourse, some urged that the concept and term “sustainability” not be a guise for the continuation of current practices, especially the further commodification of the commons. In this connection, speakers noted the lesson learned from the distortion of the “green economy” narrative via

Rio +20, which pursued “converting nature into capital.” Habitat sustainability should be oriented toward improving living conditions through responsible production and consumption that protect the environment and advance social justice, for the present and future generations. Sustainability, in any case, must include discussion of both urban and rural needs and how they affect and relate to each other. In this respect, the Habitat III Agenda should emphasize the norm that both central and local governments’ primary duties and functions are to serve and protect people and communities, along with maintaining safe and healthy environment for them and respecting the rights of Mother Earth.



Participants gathered in the Habitat III Expectations Networking Event. Photo: Marie Bailloux/HIC-GS

Urban-rural symbiosis

Through this event it is clear that we can no longer discuss “urban” issues in isolation from rural areas, or in hierarchical terms. Speakers considered that the trend to “deproblematize” urbanization has exceeded its usefulness, given way to promotional language that has become divisive. Instead participants pointed to the dominant reality of the “rural-urban continuum,” or rather “rural-urban symbiosis,” to ensure that Habitat III and the new Agenda that it produces reflect this reality and habitat diversity. For that, it is imperative that the Habitat III process and content address “habitat” in a holistic sense, considering that the right to the city will only be possible if we do not protect and support the right to live with dignity for *campesin@s*, indigenous people and inhabitants of rural towns.

Human Rights

Prominent was the view that the Habitat III summit and preparatory processes must have human rights norms and corresponding obligations “at the center” or “comprise the normative framework.” This includes process human rights participation and full exercise of citizenship within the built environments, right to freedom of movement, right to resources (energy, water, etc.), among others. Habitat III deliberations and outcomes should embody the understanding that those human rights enable the realization of other human rights such as the human right to adequate housing, water and sanitation, etc.

For those advocating the “right to the city,” it was important that Habitat III recognize their claim, as such, but also as expressed in constituent right-to-the-city terms: social function of the land, the property and the city, , democratic participation and full exercise of citizenship, the right to produce our habitat and to an economy for the people and for life, not just for profit, the responsible and sustainable management of the commons within the city and its surrounding territory, and the right to enjoy the public spaces. For those advocates invoking the World Charter on the Right to the City, this means rights not yet codified in international law:

- o Right to land (both urban and rural) and its social function;
- o Right to freedom of movement (interpreted as transport and migration to fulfill needs and rights in a sustainable habitat);
- o Right to energy (as element of housing, food, health).

A core component to rights in the content of Habitat III is the issue of housing and land tenure security, recognizing the rights to land and property within their social function. Upholding the human right to housing, as in the Habitat II Agenda, now should also uphold the ban on forced evictions.

The human rights framework for Habitat III debates would mean the application of new guidelines norms, such the [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Land, Fisheries and Forests](#), and the outgoing Special Rapporteur Raquel Rolnik’s basic [principles/guidelines on security of tenure](#), provide groundwork and clarification of standards for a dialogue on tenure in both urban and rural areas. This raises the expectation that the new Habitat Agenda recognize the full range of tenure options, respecting

the principle of habitat's social function, explicitly including the social production of habitat (including nonmarket, self-produced housing and neighborhoods¹).

Participants variously expressed how incorporating and integrating these normative developments were crucial, in light of mounting violations. These include forced evictions and displacements, speculative processes and land confiscations, self-interested development projects affecting marginalized groups already living under vulnerable conditions. Participants supported a review of how these norms have been applied in practice.

Concerning the review of states' implementation of Habitat II, some participants found human rights treaty norms to be an indispensable Habitat-III reporting criterion. That emerged as especially necessary in light of the fact that the foregoing Habitat II and Millennium Development Goal processes evaded setting structural, process and outcome indicators for implementing MDG 7 (ensure environmental sustainability).

Diagnosing and Solving Problems

Respondents expressed the position that Habitat III should not be another lost opportunity to address causes of hazards, problems and violations under economic systems and development models. In so doing, the deliberations and agreed text have to break from the past exercises of avoiding critical inquiry and, thus, failing to address crippling debt, irresponsible production and consumption, indulging profit and self-enrichment, and exalting private ownership (which some call freehold fetishism) over other forms of tenure.

Participants urged that the new Habitat Agenda address causes of shortcomings and failures to implement previously agreed-upon and treaty-bound obligations related to habitat rights and governance. In so doing, the Habitat III process and outcome should recognize that "growth [as an economic indicator] does not bring equity," as more than one participant put it.² Other development notions that demand to be updated include the updating of public-private partnership (PPP) models that exclude the popular sector. This suggested the explicit promotion of fuller development-partnership options to include the popular sector (PPPPs).

Another recommendation for habitat development proposed be included in Habitat III was the notion of responsible investment. In this sense, it is not sufficient for private-sector actors to "do no harm," but rather uphold their obligation to fulfill their social function. In this track came the recommendation that Habitat III embody the standard that public and private investment be prioritized to generate decent work, especially for youth (as Majed Thabet also expressed in his opening remarks), and social protection for all.

In addressing deprivation, poverty and other human rights abuses, participants asserted that Habitat III debates and outcomes require governments to serve and protect inhabitants as primary duties and functions. For this, some expressed that a rights-based Habitat III should create mechanisms of accountability for [states'] violations of habitat rights.

Among the specific problem-solving issues that CSOs proposed to include in the new Habitat Agenda are (1) reparations for victims of violations and (2) support for alternative planning and social production, based on people's processes and recognized human rights.

Participatory local democracy

Among the concepts that CSOs proposed was local government, as distinct from the executive-dominated "local administration," which prevails in many countries. While this is a domestic issue for states, the operational questions arise from the human rights to freedom of expression and participation in public life, aligning with the Charter on the Right to the City. Participants also hinted at a CSO alliance with local authorities, which is another distinct constituency in the Habitat III process and a field already sown with good examples of social dialogue and cross-sectoral agreement.

¹ Social production; that is, all nonmarket processes carried out under inhabitants' initiative, management and control that generate and/or improve adequate living spaces, housing and other elements of physical and social development, preferably without—and often despite—impediments posed by the State or other formal structure or authority. (For more information and cases, go to [HIC general website](#) and [HIC-HLRN website](#).)

² This intervention was consistent with the "Joint Declaration of Habitat International Coalition (HIC), the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG,[1] the Forum of Peripheral Local Authorities (FALP) and Mercociudades regarding the 7th World Urban Forum," 4 April 2014, at: <http://www.hlrn.org/news.php?id=pXFtbA==#.U5zJyWeKBpw>.

Resilience

Resilience needs to be redefined to reduce the burden on the victims, and emphasize both accountability and liability for crises and causal factors necessitating “resilience.” Resilience should also explicitly recognize that people and communities have the right to resist and obtain remedy for hazards, problems, losses, costs, damages and violations that plunge them into crises. This recognition reaffirms the right to reparations as an entitlement defined in international instruments. It is also important that we not just discuss “resilient cities,” but also specifically focus on the human dimension of resilience, throughout the rural-urban continuum. Crises do not cease at urban edges.

Expectations of Habitat III Process:

In his moderating role, Joseph Schechla summarized the potential mechanisms for participation in Habitat III. Those options included a self-organized International Facilitating Group (as in Habitat II) for civil society that runs parallel to other state-formed and constituent groups. In addition, participants proposed to revive Habitat II official processes such as the formation of a Partnership Committee for state and major group consultations, in which civil society actively participated. These models remain precedents for civil society and UN offices to replicate and improve for the Habitat III process.

Among the proposals was a process by which CSOs prepare and present parallel reports (in addition to participation in the National Habitat III Report). This proposal envisions both reports forming integral parts of a procedure in which state performance under the Habitat II Agenda and related criteria is critically evaluated.

Innovations of CSO self-organization in the Habitat II process included the development of thematic “treaties” of agreed-upon principles relating to topics and social groups. This remains a possible model for sectoral “articulation,” as well as cross-sectoral convergence around thematic issues.

Since Habitat II, other UN agencies such as FAO and UNEP, have developed—and now proffer—models for substantive and meaningful CSO engagement to enrich the deliberation process. These have become standards mechanisms, and the potential exists to replicate them for CSO engagement in preparation for, and follow-up to Habitat III. Recently, as Matthew Boms explained, the post-2015 SDG process has supported an Open Working Group practice for all concerned constituencies. However, the Habitat III organizers, including CSOs, should review and improve upon that precedent to ensure the widest and most-effective input and innovations of affected communities. Such mechanisms should reach beyond the PrepCom meeting places (e.g., NYC, Nairobi) that most concerned civil society cannot attend.

Overall, the event participants committed effective and meaningful participation as essential to their expectations of the Habitat III process and outcomes. Some argued that people’s processes need to be especially empowered in the Habitat III preparations, because of the particularly brutal trends against people’s processes in urban development, as well as because of the alternative lessons of people’s innovation in production and consumption of habitat.

Interventions reflected the need for civil society to carry out united, well-organized advocacy and mobilization efforts directed at Habitat III and its preparatory processes. Some expressed that civil society engagement should be facilitated through the technical and communication support of the UN system, and ensure an autonomous mechanism for the organization and expression of civil society inputs.

The minimum expectation and demand of those present sought to realize at least the same level of civil society participation as in the Habitat II process, but taking advantage of procedural and technical advances of the ensuing 20 years. For this, the memory of Habitat II veterans and, especially, Enrique Ortíz’ [opening presentation](#) were insightful and instructive.

In response, participants called for a clear participation structure. Some proposed *regional-level* processes for civil society, especially for formulating joint positions and having input where travel to PrepComs is prohibitively expensive and/or administratively difficult.

Some input from participants pointed out the need also for multisector spaces to deliberate and formulate contributions on issues of common interest (e.g., social movements and local authorities, as exemplified in

the referenced joint statement to WUF).³ This would facilitate the forging of lateral alliances across some of the 13 Habitat III partner groups.

Participants also expressed the need for technical support to ensure optimum civil society engagement. However, speakers expressed the need also for civil society control over its engagement process in self-organizing Habitat III inputs. However, some participants referred to the need for a pedagogical process and for greater information on entry points and other strategy advice. Repeated, too, was the need to ensure cross-generational and equal gender roles and representation in drafting, decision making and implementation

For clarity of communication and to ensure a level field (equal opportunity) for all civil society actors in the Habitat III processes, it would be useful also to have clear definition of terms (terminology). (One participant proposed to produce a new and critical definition of “urbanization.”) This round of formulating the Habitat Agenda, it is possible to utilize multiple forms of communication to connect with communities.

As clarified in Matthew Boms’ introductory presentation, participants expressed the hope that the process relate the new SDGs to Habitat III, somehow synergizing the two processes in the 1st Habitat III PrepCom.

Lucia Kiwala, chief of UN-Habitat’s CSO Unit, took the floor to provide some practical information for the participants. Ms. Kiwala explained the process now ongoing to establish National Habitat Committees in each country, whose primary task involves preparing the National Habitat III Reports. However, the process needs many more country-level inputs.

She advised also that CSO participants identify and work with “champions” among the states that support particular issues of importance to civil society partners. In reviewing the background documents, it is important to look for the gaps in issues and concepts that need to be included in the process and content. In addition to the PrepComs, the Habitat III preparations will involve ministerial-level meetings organized through regional UN Economic Commissions, as Lucia explained. The UN-Habitat Governing Council resolutions will determine procedures. Other decision-making instruments and information will be available in. The [UN Non-governmental Liaison Service](#) (UNGLS) will be playing a supportive role for civil society actors throughout the process.

Miriam Yunusa, chief of UN-Habitat’s Partners and Inter-agency Coordination Branch took the floor. She shared the view from UN-Habitat’s perspective as facilitating civil society participation among 13 partner groups in the Habitat III process. Others include local governments, indigenous peoples;⁴ all are competing for priority. Her office is committed to facilitating all partner groups, and she explained that, as far as procedures are being prepared at present, CSO and other participants soon will be able soon to register for accreditation on line.

In wrapping up, Joseph Schechla reminded that, while Habitat III is being planned on the official level by states, the principal constituency of states and the Habitat III process is the people, and it is the common task of this session’s participants to ensure that the people be effectively represented. He thanked all participants for their valuable input and spoke on behalf of HIC in the hope that the outcomes from this networking event would contribute to a broad united CSO platform toward an improved Habitat Agenda in 2016 and its follow-up mechanisms.

³ Ibid.

⁴ These include: Local authorities, NGOs and CBOs, trade unions, professionals, academics and researchers, human solidarity groups, indigenous people, parliamentarians, private sector, foundations, financial institutions, youth and women.

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