

Community-centred urban development: A paradigm of inclusive growth

World Cities Day 2020

30 October 2020

CONCEPT NOTE

By 2050, nearly 7 out of 10 people in the world will live in cities. Cities have become the point of confluence where, economic, social, cultural and environmental factors converge and interact not just to tread the path of urban development, but also support the implementation and achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in particular Goal 11, 'Making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'.

While discussing about the paradigm of inclusive urban growth, the main debate focuses on how to make cities better to create better lives for inhabitants. The key actors and beneficiaries of this particular debate are communities - the drivers of city development, providers of economic, social, cultural and environmental values, but also benefactors of innovative and creative actions, amongst others. The 2020 World Cities Day themed '**Valuing our communities and cities**' continues to underline the importance of communities who are at the heart of building sustainable cities.

Cities are the resource bank for innovative, creative, and resilient solutions, knowledge bearers, promoters of inclusivity and participation, preservers and restorers of the environment and the backbone of economy for many countries. The COVID-19 pandemic has further solidified the core importance of communities in the city's action response, recovery and beyond. While the pandemic has transformed the global and local economies substantially, local communities have continued to support this transition thereby sustaining local lives. Community engagement has become an integral part of this continuous and re-interactive cycle and should further be strengthened using participatory policy frameworks and action plans. This ushers in collective generation of ideas and solutions for people-centered and place-based urban development. Indeed, people are what sustainable development is all about.

The **UN-Policy Brief on COVID-19 in an Urban World**¹ also calls upon for ensuring the involvement and participation of communities and individuals in leadership roles for immediate response, design and planning efforts for COVID-19 response, as well as in the broader framework of building sustainable, resilient and future-proof cities. Through its Cities Platform, UNESCO concurs with the central role of communities in urban development and aims to utilize its various city networks and programmes in supporting communities via education, culture, social and natural science, communication and information to enhance their capacities to be able to

¹ The UN Secretary-General launched the [UN Comprehensive Response to COVID-19](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sq_policy_brief_covid_urban_world_july_2020.pdf) to save lives, protect societies, and recover better. As part of this response, the UN Secretary-General is issuing policy briefs to provide ideas to governments on how to address the consequences of this crisis. You can read the full policy brief dedicated on cities here: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sq_policy_brief_covid_urban_world_july_2020.pdf

better engage in deploying important socio-economic capital for multifaceted transformations of our urban spaces, while maintaining access to crucial basic services.

On the occasion of the World Cities Day 2020, the UNESCO Cities Platform aims to continue this reflection by organizing an online 'Urban Dialogue' bringing together speakers from academia, the public and private sectors, and civil society to discuss and consolidate the integral components of community participation as well as how UNESCO's work with cities could support in furthering sustainable urban development through community centered approaches. This dialogue will be accompanied by video messages from city representatives, communities and stakeholders to bring forth key ideas and expectations of communities and how by supporting them, we would be able to develop better cities that, in turn, would provide better lives to their inhabitants.

UNESCO will also use the opportunity of World Cities Day to showcase the Organization's full range of activities in the urban context, contributing to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda, and notably SDG11 on sustainable cities and communities. Various flagship publications of the city Networks and Programmes² on the Platform will be launched on this occasion.

The UNESCO Cities Platform covers more than 1500 cities across the globe. To raise further awareness of the importance of the local dimension in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development amongst the Member States and other stakeholders, a research project on Mexico City across these UNESCO city Networks and Programmes concerned has been initiated. Mexico City is uniquely positioned thanks to its membership to or its close collaboration with six of the Networks and Programmes on the Platform. The celebration will provide an opportunity to further demonstrate the objectives of the Platform through such a pilot research project as well as the comparative advantage of a city membership with multiple UNESCO city networks and programmes. As in the previous years, on World Cities Day, UNESCO will further advocate the importance of people-centered approaches for urban development to **build better cities for better lives**.

² UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN), UNESCO/Netexplo Observatory, Megacities Alliance for Water and Climate, UNESCO Global Network of Learning Cities (GNLC), World Heritage Cities Programme, Disaster Risk Reduction and Resilience, the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable cities (ICCAR), and the Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Cities.