

# Proposal for a UN Habitat Stakeholder-engagement Mechanism

Summary, 24 November 2022

This summary of inputs to the UN Habitat Executive Board's Ad Hoc Working Group on Stakeholder Policy (AHWG) combines input from the more-comprehensive "Proposal for a UN Habitat Stakeholder-engagement Mechanism"<sup>1</sup> presented by Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and related submissions and recommendations presented subsequently to the AHWG, as well as a review of 43 years of UN Habitat stakeholder engagement,<sup>2</sup> the HIC-HLRN review of stakeholder engagement across the UN System,<sup>3</sup> two sessions dedicated to the subject at each of World Urban Forums 10 (2020)<sup>4</sup> and 11 (2022),<sup>5</sup> the Partnerships and Local Governments Unit (PaLGU) "Modalities" paper<sup>6</sup> and the AHWG "proposed structure" paper.<sup>7</sup>

To be clear, none of the inputs from HIC represents a proposal for HIC to implement or manage the eventual stakeholder-engagement mechanism (SEM), but serve as principles and recommendations for an autonomous SEM awaiting decision of the AHWG and Executive Board (EB). Rather, these compile the lessons of long experience at engagement with UN Habitat since its origins in 1976, as well as those arising from good practices across the UN System.

HIC proposes to express the intention and purpose of the SEM and stakeholder-engagement policy (SEP) more broadly to be to:

Enrich and improve policy inputs and outcomes, as well as ensure greater buy-in/up-take and legitimacy of UN-Habitat policies implemented throughout the agency; i.e., at headquarters and through country offices with needed partners. Means toward these ends include stakeholder engagement and participation in policy processes with UN-Habitat governance processes, in line with best contemporary UN System-wide practices,

The envisioned SEM's specific objectives are summarized as:

- Learn from past and present
- Provide specificity of inputs from community of practice for policy decisions
- Improve policy relevance (not engage in projects or programs)
- Adhere to Rules of Procedure
- Ensure stakeholder diversity/plurality – 3 sub-mechanisms
- Illustrate the self-organizing principle in operation
- Create a new remit, not duplicating or supplanting other or former fixtures
- Order and channel policy inputs through democratic processes (internal and in relation to UN-Habitat governance)

For these purposes, “stakeholder” means any legal or natural person such as an employee, customer, citizen or participant who is involved with an organization, society, program or project, etc. and, therefore, has responsibilities toward it and an interest in its success. Stakeholders can affect, or be affected by the organization's society's, program's or project's actions, objectives and policies.

Not all stakeholders are equal or homogenous. They may differ in relations to the number or weight of their constituency, or investment of effort or resources and interests at stake. In a multistakeholder structure, for example, stakeholders may have private interests (e.g., private-sector representatives). Others may have plural or public interests<sup>8</sup> (e.g., civil society organizations),<sup>9</sup> or public duties (i.e., central and local governments, and other organs of the state). A set of SEM democratic-operation principles seek to minimize disparities and ensure evidence-informed advice.

“Engagement” can be any means or mode of interaction. The term is neutral and ambiguous and encompasses various and more-specific types of interaction. The act of exclusion could be such a mode of engagement at one end of the engagement spectrum that may culminate at the other end as ‘democratic control.’ However, this summary of principles and experience aims at stakeholder participation, which is a stable and ongoing relationship in which stakeholders are able to negotiate with decision makers and have real influence on planning, policies and programs.<sup>10</sup>

The term ‘governance bodies’ and ‘governance organs’ encompasses the Habitat Assembly (UNHA) and its subsidiaries, including the EB, working groups or other policy-level structures created for UN-Habitat governance.

The full HIC proposal compiles the lessons of experience and principles of engagement compiled from experience and inquiry organized as follows:

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|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| I. Introduction                                | 5. HSAB Secretariat                             |
| II. Acronyms                                   | C. Operating within the Rules of Procedure      |
| III. Background                                | D. Activities                                   |
| IV. Perspectives and understandings            | IX. Implications for EB processes and structure |
| V. Hazards and dilemmas                        | A. Overall process and structure                |
| VI. Organizing principles                      | B. The EB Plenary                               |
| VII. Adapting to UN Habitat specificity        | C. Linkages with regional and country spheres   |
| VIII. Proposal                                 | D. EB Secretariat                               |
| A. Composition and modalities of participation | X. Expectations of UN Habitat                   |
| B. Internal structure and organization         | XI. Costs and funding                           |
| 1. Global Stakeholder Forum                    | XII. Next steps                                 |
| 2. Gender balance                              | XIII. References                                |
| 3. Regional balance                            | XIV. Endnotes                                   |
| 4. Working groups                              |                                                 |

Following an inventory of lessons and principles from experience across the UN System, the proposal that UN Habitat operationalize them as recommendations outlines to reflect the following vision:

1. The SEM would be non-legislative and serve in an advisory capacity, without voting rights, but with all other rights and responsibilities under parliamentary procedure.
2. On questions of accreditation and right to speak in governance-body sessions, the current Rules of Procedures apply.
3. The SEM would be autonomous and self-organized with internal modalities to be determined by the stakeholders.
4. The SEM and its secretariat would not be the property or project of any stakeholder organization, or other separately incorporated entity, and would not assume the name of any already-existing entity, or operate on its behalf.
5. The SEM's purpose is to operate in UN Habitat's policy sphere, rather than programme or project implementation (although some overlap of these spheres may occur in general debate or certain agenda items). Thereby, the SEM does not supplant, or compete with entities or structures engaged in project implementation or campaigns, or holding the right to speak or otherwise intervene in governance meetings.
6. It would form (three) distinct sub-mechanisms, each dedicated to channeling inputs to the UN Habitat Assembly (UNHA) and constituent bodies from the private sector,<sup>11</sup> local and regional governments and authorities,<sup>12</sup> and civil society,<sup>13</sup> respectively.
7. Each stakeholder sub-group may establish working groups for specific purposes.
8. These sub-groups form no hierarchy; however, UN Habitat governance organs should prioritize the public interest.
9. The mechanisms functions include:
  - Establishing its internal democratic governance;
  - Managing broad and regular exchange of information, analysis and experience;
  - Developing common positions, as appropriate;
  - Communicating to the governance structures, as appropriate;
  - Convene a Global Stakeholder Forum as a preparatory event before EB sessions;
  - Constituting a combined Habitat Stakeholder Advisory Board in meetings with UN-Habitat governance bodies;
  - Conducting regular monitoring and evaluation of its internal and external performance.
10. Meeting together with the UN Habitat governing bodies, the composite of the three stakeholder sub-groups is referred to here as the Habitat Stakeholder Advisory Board (HSAB), reflecting the distinct function as proffering policy advice vis-à-vis the governing bodies.
11. Meeting together in advance of UN-Habitat governance meetings, the collective would be responsible for organizing Global Stakeholder Forum (GSF), retaining the established title.

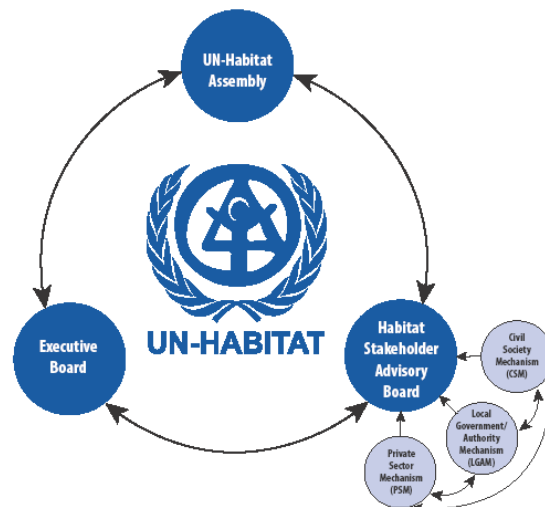
12. Each stakeholder, respective sub-groups and secretariat would pledge to apply the principles of the UN Charter and the New Urban Agenda as normative frameworks for their deliberations and advice to the governance bodies.
13. Each stakeholder sub-group would determine its own internal modes of operation and code of conduct, but would uphold the principles of inclusivity, democratic processes, transparency, gender equality and equity, regional balance, efficient use of resources, and non-discrimination.
14. The HSAB and GSF would share a secretariat operating only within, or in close proximity to UN Habitat Headquarters in Nairobi. No regional branch operations or entities are envisaged.
15. The secretariat's roles would be to
  - Facilitate meetings,
  - Provide documentary and other information necessary to the HSAB and GSF functions,
  - Lead fundraising,
  - Manage SEM finances,
  - Advise stakeholders on procedural matters related to the UN Habitat governance bodies, as well as
  - Establish and maintain relations with other SEMs within the UN system for coordination and knowledge and experience exchange purposes.
16. Staff of the secretariat would remain neutral and not assume partisan positions, speak or otherwise issue statements on behalf of the stakeholders in governance meetings.
17. UN Habitat would facilitate all registered and otherwise accredited stakeholders' access to UN Habitat premises for purposes of meeting as the HSAB and its stakeholder sub-groups, or as GSF.
18. UN Habitat would facilitate written submissions to meetings of UN Habitat governance organs with the established criteria provided in Consultative relationship between the United Nations and non-governmental organizations ECOSOC resolution 1886/31
19. UN Habitat would facilitate the stakeholder secretariat's access to relevant information, including documents related to the work of the HSAB and its stakeholder sub-groups, or GSF.
20. UN Habitat would facilitate the fundraising efforts for the functioning of HSAB, GSF and its stakeholder sub-groups. This may include extending UN Habitat auspices to fundraising proposals and initiatives for the purposes of stakeholder engagement.

These principles and functions are proposed here as advice and input to the AHWG are considered as a guide for decision making. They may be subject to debate, improvement and/or convergence with other proposals and recommendations. HIC has shared all relevant inputs, but, despite several attempts, HIC has not yet discussed these proposals senior UN Habitat management.

Crucial questions remain to be worked out in greater detail, including:

- Accreditation: To be settled within the existing Rule of Procedure, meaning only already accredited representatives and those invited by the Chair of the session will have the right to speak;
- Relations with existing stakeholder structures: Each accredited or invited structure would retain its programme-related functions and address the UNHA and subsidiaries under existing Rules of Procedure;
- The SEM's internal structure: While this outline proposes three sub-groups, that structure and respective internal operations would be specified through stakeholder consultation on the basis of autonomy and democratic principles outlines above; and
- Budget: While additional resources would be needed, the models considered in HIC's previous review has found that a fully functioning SEM, with ample travel provision, could range between US\$800,00 and US\$1,000,000. However, operations would be subject to whatever seed funds and in-kind contributions to be raised within the coming year to support a coordinator and administrative assistant to staff a secretariat.

A graphic rendering of the SEM structure and its relation to the governance bodies is below:



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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Available on the UN Habitat website, [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/09/stakeholder-engagement\\_mechanism-hic\\_proposal\\_final.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/09/stakeholder-engagement_mechanism-hic_proposal_final.pdf).
- <sup>2</sup> As observed in Habitat International Coalition (HIC), “Charting UN Habitat-Stakeholder Engagement,” May 2019, at: <http://www.hic-gs.org/content/Media/PDF/HIC%20Milestones.pdf>.
- <sup>3</sup> HIC-HLRN, “Toward an Institutional Mechanism for Stakeholder Engagement in the New UN-Habitat Governance” [http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/UN-Habitat\\_Stakeholder\\_mechanism\\_final.pdf](http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/UN-Habitat_Stakeholder_mechanism_final.pdf). This survey does not review the temporary arrangements set up for the two UN Conferences on Human Settlements: The Habitat Forum at Vancouver (1976), or the self-organized Joint Steering Committee, channeling civil society inputs into the Habitat II process (1994–96). Nor does it review the General Assembly of Partners (GAP), which the former executive director of UN-Habitat set up and guided through the Habitat III process. Nonetheless, these temporary structures they also yield important lessons for their specific time and purpose.
- <sup>4</sup> “New Ways to Work with UN Habitat,” *Land Times/أحوال الأرض* (April 2020), <http://landtimes.landpedia.org/newsdes.php?id=p2po&catid=pQ==&edition=pGg=>.
- <sup>5</sup> HIC-HLRN, Report of “Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism for Sustainable Development” Networking Event, WUF11, Katowice, Poland, 28 June 2022, <http://www.hlrn.org/img/documents/Stakeholder%20Engagement%20Event.pdf>.
- <sup>6</sup> PaLGU, “Background paper on Modalities for stakeholder engagement in intergovernmental processes UN-Habitat current practice,” Second Meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Stakeholder Engagement Policy, UN Complex, Gigiri, Conference Room, 15 June 2022, [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/modalities\\_for\\_stakeholder\\_engagement\\_un-habitat.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/modalities_for_stakeholder_engagement_un-habitat.pdf).
- <sup>7</sup> AHWG, “Proposed structure for UN-Habitat Stakeholder Engagement Policy,” Second Meeting of the Ad hoc Working Group on Stakeholder Engagement Policy, UN Complex, Gigiri, Conference Room, Wednesday 15 June 2022, [https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/proposed\\_structure\\_for\\_un-habitat\\_stakeholder\\_engagement\\_policy\\_1.pdf](https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/proposed_structure_for_un-habitat_stakeholder_engagement_policy_1.pdf).
  
- <sup>8</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *Rebalancing Society: Radical Renewal beyond Left, Right, and Center* (Oakland CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2015); see <https://rebalancingsociety.org/>.
- <sup>9</sup> For a more-detailed discussion, see Stephen Keith McGrath and Stephen Jonathan Whitty, “Stakeholder defined,” *International Journal of Managing Projects in Business*, Vol. 10, Issue 4 (July 2017), [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318505331\\_Stakeholder\\_defined/](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/318505331_Stakeholder_defined/).
- <sup>10</sup> Sherry Arnstein, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (July 1969), pp. 216–24, at: [http://www.participatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/Arnstein\\_ladder\\_1969.pdf](http://www.participatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/Arnstein_ladder_1969.pdf)
- <sup>11</sup> Potentially including business and industry, women entrepreneurs, foundations and philanthropy, private utilities (private sector and privatized water, sanitation, transport, energy or other service providers), and professionals (private-sector planners, surveyors, legal practitioners, etc.)
- <sup>12</sup> Potentially including local and sub-national authorities (among them, rural, intermediate cities, megalopolis cities), public service providers (representing technocratic specializations), women in local government and parliamentarians.
- <sup>13</sup> Potentially including research and academia, civil society organizations, nongovernmental organizations, grassroots groups/organizations, women, children and youth, trade unions and workers, small-scale and family farmers, cooperatives, Indigenous People, media, persons with disability, older persons and sexual minorities.