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**Implementation of the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat, including reporting on the programmatic activities of UN-Habitat in 2020 and the implementation of subprogrammes, flagship programmes and technical cooperation activities, and update on the UN-Habitat response to the coronavirus disease pandemic**

## **Normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat: focus on the Prosperity Fund Global Future Cities Programme, the project entitled “Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19” and the Lebanon country programme**

### **Report of the Executive Director**

#### **I. Introduction**

1. The present report highlights three distinct entry points to exploring the normative and operational activities of UN-Habitat. It first reviews the Prosperity Fund Global Future Cities Programme. It then discusses the initiative entitled “Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19”. It also describes the evolution of the UN-Habitat country programme in Lebanon, with a focus on neighbourhood profiling and an area-based approach to sustainable urbanization; tailored urban responses to three major crises; and an urban response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

2. The report thus offers an opportunity for the Executive Board of UN-Habitat to discuss UN-Habitat activities through a variety of thematic and geographic lenses. It describes how normative and operational activities are integrated to build prosperity and achieve a better quality of life for all, towards the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals. The report also reflects on how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting and influencing the work of UN-Habitat in the thematic areas examined.

#### **II. Prosperity Fund Global Future Cities Programme**

##### **A. Introduction**

3. The present section showcases how UN-Habitat combines normative and operational activities in delivering the Prosperity Fund Global Future Cities Programme. The report also explains how the activities of the Programme relate to the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 and how the Programme has been adapted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The report draws particular attention to the role of UN-Habitat role in the Programme as a strategic and capacity-building partner. The Programme has been developed and is managed by the Urban Planning and Design Lab, within the Planning Finance and Economy Section, Urban Practices Branch, Global Solutions Division of

\* HSP/EB.2021/1.

UN-Habitat. A multidisciplinary team is anchored in the Lab, collaborating with different offices. The Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland is the Programme donor.

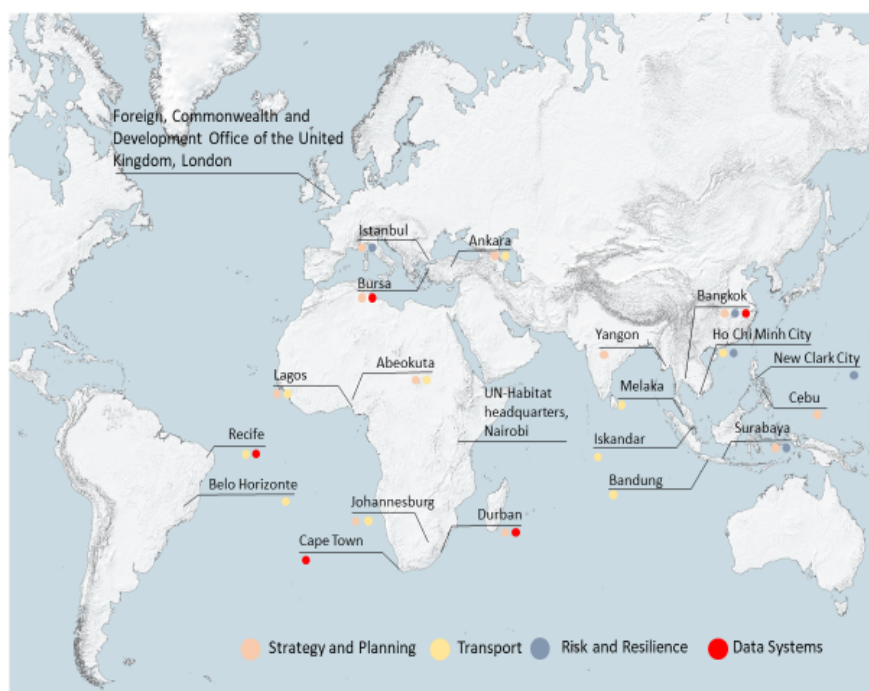
## B. Global Future Cities Programme: objectives and approach

4. The Prosperity Fund was established by the Government of the United Kingdom in 2015 to help promote inclusive economic growth in developing countries. Its broad priorities include improving the business climate and the competitiveness and operation of markets, reforming the energy and financial sectors and increasing the ability of Governments to tackle corruption. Although increasing numbers of developing countries and cities are able to finance their own development, many still face considerable challenges caused by rapid urbanization, climate change and high and persistent inequality, which can lower long-term growth prospects, in particular impacting on the urban poor. The Global Future Cities Programme is a specific component of the Prosperity Fund aimed at carrying out technical assistance for a set of targeted interventions to encourage sustainable development and increase prosperity while alleviating high levels of urban poverty, in particular on the basis of three thematic pillars: urban planning, transport and resilience.

5. The Programme includes 19 cities across 10 countries, namely, Brazil (Recife, Belo Horizonte), Indonesia (Bandung, Surabaya), Malaysia (Iskandar, Melaka), Myanmar (Yangon), Nigeria (Abeokuta, Lagos), the Philippines (Cebu, New Clark City), South Africa (Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg), Thailand (Bangkok), Turkey (Ankara, Bursa, Istanbul) and Viet Nam (Ho Chi Minh City). A total of 30 transformative urban projects have been identified and are being implemented in these cities.

Figure 1

### Global Future Cities Programme: participating cities and main thematic areas



6. The Programme, valued at £80 million (equivalent to approximately \$100 million in 2019), is implemented by private sector partners, in collaboration with UN-Habitat as a strategic and capacity-building partner. The agreements between the donor and UN-Habitat provide for support amounting to a total of approximately \$13 million.

7. The Programme is organized in three interlinked phases:

(a) The strategic development phase (April–December 2018), during which UN-Habitat assisted in the identification and definition of the 30 impact-oriented projects by preparing city context reports, terms of reference, policy papers and normative outputs, and also by undertaking charrettes and workshops with the city authorities to ensure the necessary understanding and buy-in;

(b) The transition phase (January–September 2019), during which UN-Habitat assisted in the technical evaluation of the private sector partners to be engaged, collected and shared data, and developed draft governance structures for the 30 projects. The first two phases, implemented in collaboration with one professional partner and one academic partner, helped to inform and shape the implementation phase;

(c) The implementation phase (September 2019–March 2022), during which UN-Habitat provides strategic advice and technical recommendations to ensure quality in the projects under development, while also aligning them to the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. Through normative work and capacity-building activities, UN-Habitat fosters increased ownership and stewardship among the cities. As a strategic and capacity-building partner to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, UN-Habitat provides strategic and technical advice to Programme partners, including the 19 city authorities (beneficiaries) and five private sector partners (procured by the Office), and to the Office as Programme owner.

8. The primary objective of the Global Future Cities Programme is to promote sustainable urban environments that enhance inclusive economic growth, reduce poverty and gender inequality and increase mobility, and that are safer and more resilient to disasters. Its secondary objective is to ensure that opportunities and mutually beneficial economic relationships are sustained in sectors where the United Kingdom has a comparative advantage, leading to an increase in exports from the United Kingdom to cities included the Programme.

9. The overall objective of UN-Habitat for the Programme is to establish improved planning and management approaches to ensure that the projects contribute to inclusive and sustainable urbanization. The objective is informed and guided by a theory of change, establishing intermediate outcomes whereby city authorities assume ownership and stewardship of the identified projects, and strategies are developed to sustain the projects beyond the Programme time frame. The desired overall impact is anticipated to be visible only several years after the Programme has been concluded.

10. The role and responsibilities of UN-Habitat include providing to the Strategic Programme Board of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office advice on alignment of the Programme to the overall aims of UN-Habitat and the Sustainable Development Goals, on alignment of project outputs to outcomes, including expert advice on programme risks, and on quality assurance standards; providing the Office with strategic, policy and technical advice at the local level; and enabling cities to be informed clients and developing their overall capacity for the programme. From this perspective, UN-Habitat mainly contributes to fulfilling the primary objective of the Programme.

11. Within the Programme, UN-Habitat contributes to the following three interlinked expected outcomes:

(a) Strategic advice and technical recommendations, including for the quality control of 30 transformative projects and the application of the Sustainable Development Goal Project Assessment Tool;

(b) A programme-level capacity-building component aimed at increasing awareness and knowledge of inclusive and sustainable urbanization, including through thematic sessions, tailored in-country events, exchanges and other learning opportunities, in collaboration with the implementation partner, the UK Built Environment Advisory Group;

(c) Knowledge management, including expert group meetings, normative products, a knowledge management platform and a global visibility and communications strategy;

The three areas of support focus on interventions in the areas of urban planning, transport and resilience.

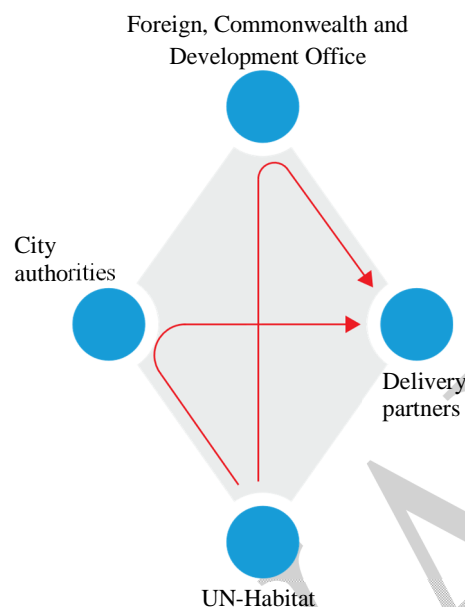
12. UN-Habitat supports the Programme to spur development locally while exploring new, alternative ways to address emerging global issues. For example, by making global technical norms and standards locally accessible through the Sustainable Development Goal Project Assessment Tool, participating local authorities can adopt global frameworks such as the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals in an action-oriented context. Strengthened capacity among local authorities as clients can enhance the effectiveness of private sector partners and increase the potential impact of the projects. Through exchange and learning, development opportunities and synergies can be harnessed and utilized to drive development and change. Knowledge creation and exchange between stakeholders at the local and global levels can help to enable the scalability and replicability of best practices.

13. The Urban Planning and Design Lab of UN-Habitat has taken an integrated, interdisciplinary and impact-oriented approach in order to enhance inclusive and sustainable urban development at different scales: local, regional and international. City authorities are provided with strategic advice and capacity-building based on evidence-based global knowledge.

14. The composition and organization of the Programme allows UN-Habitat to combine normative and operational work streams. Through collaboration and engagement with private sector partners, UN-Habitat is able to capitalize on the collective expertise within the Programme and reach out to a broader audience to share lessons learned.

Figure 2

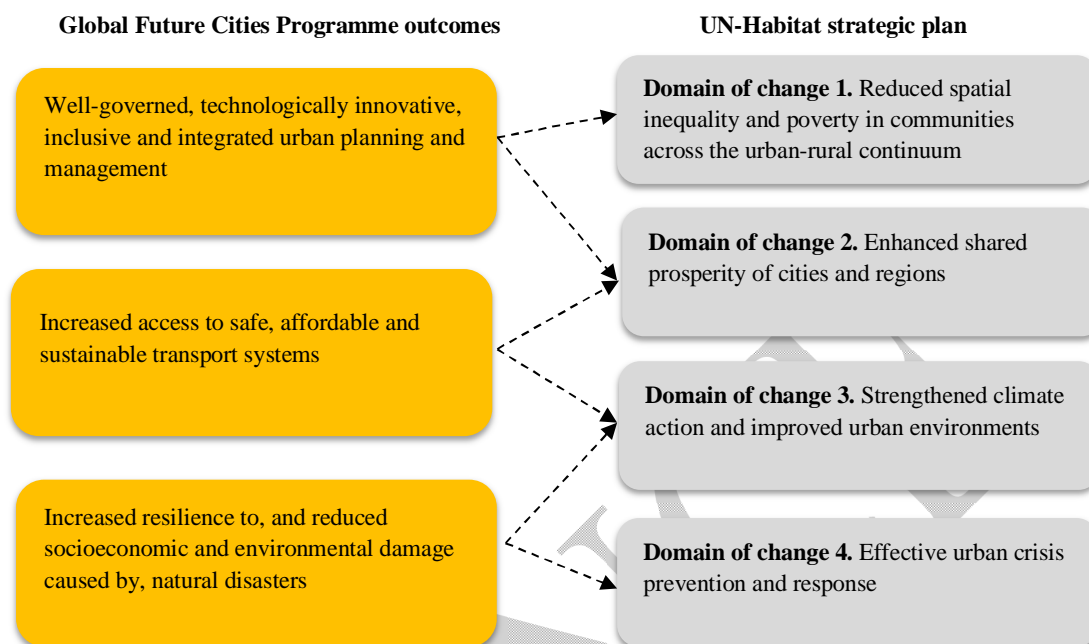
**UN-Habitat approach in providing strategic advice to the donor and technical and policy advice to city authorities to inform the projects being developed by private sector partners**



15. In line with the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023, the Programme mainly contributes to reducing spatial inequalities and poverty in communities across the urban-rural continuum (subprogramme 1). Several of the 30 projects address increased and equal access to sustainable mobility and the provision of public space, but also effective settlement growth and regeneration. However, the Programme also has clear linkages to enhanced shared prosperity (subprogramme 2) and strengthened climate action and improved urban environments (subprogramme 3).

Figure 3

**Relationship between the anticipated outcomes of the Global Future Cities Programme and the domains of change of the UN-Habitat strategic plan for the period 2020–2023**



16. The UN-Habitat approach builds upon efforts to interlink operational work streams at the local level with activities at the Programme level, as well as with the global discourse on sustainable urbanization. Experiences and lessons learned at the local level (in 19 cities, involving 30 projects in three thematic areas) inform the development of normative outputs, and conversely, normative products coupled with existing global knowledge inform the processes on the ground.

17. The Programme is managed by an interdisciplinary team based at the Urban Planning and Design Lab. To ensure effective and efficient delivery, the Lab has engaged local strategic advisers within each of the countries involved in the Programme to ensure direct access to and engagement with local authorities and private sector partners. Furthermore, the Programme collaborates with UN-Habitat regional and country offices, as well as with experts from headquarters, in the areas of capacity-building, basic services, land and housing, and communications and media, where applicable.

18. UN-Habitat has deployed the Urban Planning and Design Lab to bring together expertise to flexibly respond to service delivery needs and emerging matters over time. The Lab works with the donor, beneficiaries and private sector partners, and brings in additional in-house expertise as required, leveraging both technical capacity and country knowledge to nimbly respond to emerging issues.

### C. Achievements of the Global Future Cities Programme

19. During the strategic development phase (April–December 2018), 30 transformative urban projects were identified across 19 cities in 10 countries. In order to inform, shape and provide further evidence for the Implementation Phase, UN-Habitat delivered the following outputs:

- (a) Thirty terms-of-reference documents for urban projects on urban planning, mobility, resilience and data systems, supported by 19 city context reports;
- (b) Nineteen technical viability assessments providing an initial overview of the feasibility and potential impact of the projects in the local context;
- (c) Eight thematic cluster papers, five policy papers and two normative reports to provide input and form the basis for the implementation phase, including project viability assessments, and assessments of the professional capacity and market maturity of cities;<sup>1</sup>
- (d) One Programme-level training week for city officials representing the 19 cities, building upon an assessment of the professional capacity and market maturity in each of the 19 cities;

<sup>1</sup> These outputs, together with other resources, are available at [www.globalfuturecities.org/knowledge](http://www.globalfuturecities.org/knowledge).

(e) Stakeholder mapping and engagement activities, including the delivery of 20 charrettes and 19 validation workshops with city officials and local representatives of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

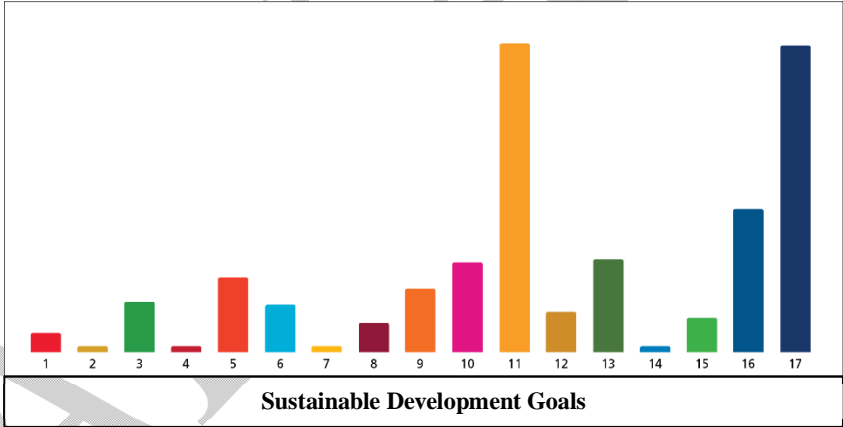
20. An internal evaluation was conducted in 2019 to assess the relevance and progress of UN-Habitat support to the Programme. Key findings highlighted the relevance for UN-Habitat of engaging in this and similar programmes, while also recognizing the need for an effective and flexible approach to the delivery of such a complex programme in a short time frame. The findings suggest that adopting a theory of change as a guiding mechanism is instrumental and that engaging key local stakeholders early in the process will help to ensure buy-in and commitment to the Programme, and will also contribute to mitigating potential risks and barriers to increased impact.

Figure 4  
**Overview of the scope of engagement, activities and participation during the strategic development phase**



21. During the transition phase (January–September 2019), UN-Habitat helped to prepare the key local stakeholders for implementation and facilitate the smooth entry of the private sector partners into the Programme. UN-Habitat also provided technical advice to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office in the assessment of bids for the selection of private sector partners, and prepared a governance structure for each of the 30 projects, and data sets and other key information to be handed over to implementing partners.

Figure 5  
**Example of how the Sustainable Development Goal Project Assessment Tool can generate a unique “Sustainable Development Goal profile” for each project: profile for the Healthy Streets project in Cankaya, Ankara, Turkey**



22. The main outputs of the implementation phase since its launch in September 2019 have included the following:

- (a) A framework and methodology were developed and delivered to ensure the quality of the urban projects and increase the alignment of the projects to the urban dimensions of the Sustainable Development Goals. The framework is referred to as the Sustainable Development Goal Project Assessment Tool;<sup>2</sup>
- (b) The capacities of officials from 19 city governments were enhanced, enabling them to undertake qualitative assessments against the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals during the project development phase;
- (c) Technical deliverables from private sector partners for 30 urban projects were reviewed by UN-Habitat against the indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals, resulting in the identification of potential future impacts;

<sup>2</sup> Available at: <https://www.globalfuturecities.org/sdg-project-assesment-tool> .



(d) Five international private sector partners received technical recommendations on how to increase the quality of the 30 urban projects, towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level;

(e) A knowledge management platform was developed and established to facilitate exchange among Programme partners, as well as for outreach and the dissemination of relevant information and documents also targeting a broader, public audience. The platform ([www.globalfuturecities.org/](http://www.globalfuturecities.org/)) includes a direct link to the UN-Habitat urban agenda platform ([www.urbanagendaplatform.org/](http://www.urbanagendaplatform.org/)), with a view to building engagement with a broader, global audience;

(f) A concept note capturing potential normative outputs based on the Programme was developed. Alternative formats for the normative outputs have also been explored, for example, digital platforms, apps, podcasts, handbooks and interactive online tools;

(g) A Programme-level capacity-building component targeting Programme partners, including local authorities, has been developed in collaboration with the implementing partner, the UK Built Environment Advisory Group, and is to be launched in January 2021.

23. Examples of the UN-Habitat contribution to the 30 projects include the following:

(a) In Cankaya, Ankara, Turkey, a strategic plan for the Healthy Streets project has been developed to improve the inclusiveness of public spaces, in particular streets. The plan was developed by the private sector partner (Arup) and guided by the UN-Habitat Sustainable Development Goal Project Assessment Tool. Arup was later awarded the Europe Region Excellence Award for that accomplishment. Through application of the Project Assessment Tool, awareness was raised among partners in the Philippines (in Cebu and New Clark City), on the importance of adopting an inclusive and human rights-based approach in the provision of housing;

(b) In Lagos, Nigeria, through technical reviews and the application of the Sustainable Development Goal Project Assessment Tool, UN-Habitat supports the delivery of a water transport project involving ferry services, which is aimed at contributing to a multimodal transport system, thereby reducing traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. The project is expected to have a positive impact in particular on persons living in informal settlements, and informal boat operators, providing them with safer and more secure mobility options, as well as employment opportunities;

(c) In Durban, South Africa, the Sustainable Development Goal Project Assessment Tool helped the city to integrate aspects of social inclusion, sustainability and effectiveness into an urban data project.

24. The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the Programme throughout 2020. While all the participating countries and cities have continued their engagement in the Programme, albeit with disruptions, most activities and work streams have been redesigned to make use of online modalities. UN-Habitat prepared an initial risk assessment of potential impacts of the pandemic, and, in addition, provided the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office with strategic advice and recommendations in the brief entitled “COVID-19: opportunities and learnings”. The risk assessment highlighted the importance of accessing and securing socioeconomic data at the local level and establishing that data sets are inclusive and representative of all citizens. Furthermore, advice was provided on how the Programme could potentially be adapted to help in responding to the pandemic. For example, the Programme has supported the city of Cape Town in expanding its work on urban data in order to enhance its COVID-19 response.

25. Owing to the negative impact of the pandemic on the gross national income of the United Kingdom, the country’s official development assistance was subject to a budget reprioritization process in 2020. In view of that process, the Global Future Cities Programme, including its private sector partners, have been requested to review certain Programme components. This has affected in-country work, as projects in some countries will be concluded early as a result. At the request of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, UN-Habitat has undertaken a similar review process. It has been proposed that two thirds of the planned normative components be reduced or eliminated in 2021.

## **D. Prospects of the Global Future Cities Programme**

26. UN-Habitat expects to increase the Programme’s impact on the Sustainable Development Goals by providing continuous assessment of technical deliverables from private sector partners, and by providing technical and strategic recommendations during the project development. UN-Habitat will produce normative outputs to document knowledge and capture lessons learned from Programme

partners relating to prevalent themes of the 19 cities in the Programme, such as localization of the Sustainable Development Goals, urban planning, transportation, resilience and smart cities. Capacity-building and learning activities targeting city officials will continue. UN-Habitat foresees an increased use of the knowledge platform, and enhanced knowledge exchange and city-to-city peer learning opportunities. UN-Habitat continues to apply an agile approach to the delivery of the Programme in order to adapt to changing circumstances resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on the participating countries and cities.

27. The long-term impact of the Programme is anticipated to contribute to inclusive economic development and an improved quality of life for the citizens of the participating countries and cities. It is expected that poverty will be reduced and access to services and economic opportunities will increase. While advancing the achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Programme will potentially also foster the establishment of business relationships among private and public actors, including those based in the United Kingdom. Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals Project Assessment Tool is anticipated to be useful for projects beyond the Global Future Cities Programme, for example, as part of the UN-Habitat “Sustainable Development Goals Cities” flagship programme. In line with the communication strategy developed for the Global Future Cities Programme, UN-Habitat plans to continue its outreach and advocacy efforts related to sustainable urbanization, including as a means to provide the beneficiaries with opportunities to network and communicate with each other.

28. Owing to its design, organization and interdisciplinary scope, the Global Future Cities Programme has demonstrated significant value in advancing the global urbanization agenda. UN-Habitat has shown how it can bridge different interests and agendas, increase capacity among local actors and beneficiaries, build local ownership of proposed interventions and, at the same time, encourage partners to work towards realizing the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda. It is expected that the outcomes of the Programme, delivered with the support of UN-Habitat, will contribute to advancing the global debate on sustainable urbanization and showcase the impact that strategic urban interventions have on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

### **III. Project entitled “Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19”**

#### **A. Introduction**

29. The present section focuses on the work of the global joint initiative “Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19” under the UN-Habitat City Resilience Global Programme. The initiative is a response to the grave socioeconomic and health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and is aimed at ensuring a sustainable, inclusive and green recovery from the crisis and strengthening the capacity of local governments to withstand similar shocks in the future. This section describes the background, achievements and prospects of the initiative.

#### **B. “Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19”: objectives and approach**

30. Urban areas produce over 80 per cent of global economic output, yet, as over 95 per cent of COVID-19 cases have occurred such areas, much of the economic activity there has been halted owing to measures put in place to control the pandemic. This situation has resulted in severe economic and financial impacts in urban areas, such as massive job loss and unemployment, dwindling local government revenues and enormous losses in productivity and business activity. The crisis has set back the progress in the fight against poverty, pushing an estimated 71 to 100 million people below the extreme poverty line in 2020, as well as increasing inequality, particularly in developing countries.

31. To address the crisis and ensure a sustainable, inclusive and green recovery, as well as to strengthen the capacity of local governments to withstand similar shocks in the future, the United Nations regional commissions (the Economic Commission for Europe, the Economic Commission for Africa, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific), together with the United Nations Capital Development Fund and UN-Habitat, through its City Resilience Global Programme, are implementing the project “Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19”; the project timeline is from July 2020 to December 2021.



32. The project draws on the Secretary-General's policy brief on COVID-19 in an urban world, which highlights the need to empower local governments and scale up community and city-level resilience as core components for recovery, as well as the report on the United Nations framework for an immediate socioeconomic response to COVID-19, and promotes the "building back better" principle adopted by the United Nations, developing measures in support of planning and building more resilient cities. The joint initiative advocates for an approach that is multi-hazard, multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder, with a view to encouraging a green and circular economy, overcoming inequalities and assisting the most vulnerable groups.

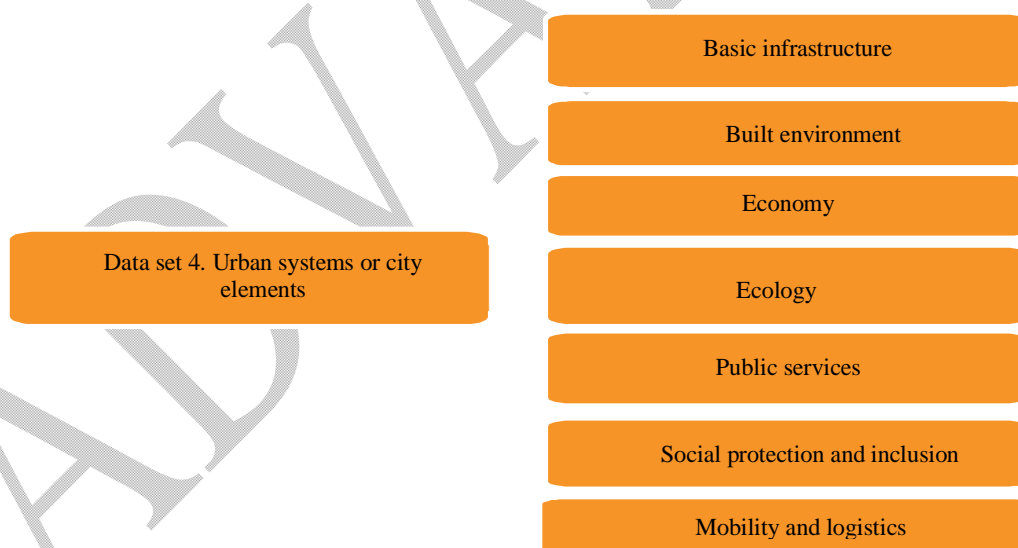
33. The UN-Habitat City Resilience Global Programme acts as a technical partner in the project, leveraging its capacity as a centre of knowledge and advocacy of urban resilience, its experience in supporting local governments in building resilience and its wide network of cities.

34. The City Resilience Global Programme was created in 2014 to institutionalize and mainstream urban resilience and risk reduction concepts into analysis and planning aimed at fostering greater resilience of cities and other human settlements. Its mission is to build resilience together with partners by sharing vision and resources to design, develop and implement inclusive and green measures for resilience and sustainability, and to improve living conditions for all by prioritizing adaptive mitigation measures focused on people in vulnerable situations in urban settings. The Programme represents the technical cooperation pillar of UN-Habitat work in the area of urban resilience and focuses on making cities resilient by supporting local governments, including by building their capacity to prepare for, respond to and recover from shocks and stresses and leading them towards sustainability.

35. The Programme uses a comprehensive and evidence-based approach, generating graphical profiles modelled on data, and recommendations for action to promote resilience and sustainability. The methodology and accompanying guidance assist local governments in delivering on targets set out in globally agreed intergovernmental frameworks.

Figure 6

**Urban resilience elements of data set 4 of the City Resilience Global Programme\***



\* Data for these seven urban systems are gathered in order to provide a cross-cutting diagnostic for resilience-based urban development.

36. Since 2014, the Global Programme has developed complete city resilience profiles at various scales in Brazil, Mozambique, Paraguay, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain and Vanuatu. The Programme has also conducted various activities related to advocacy and training in Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico, Norway, the Philippines, Portugal, Romania and the United Kingdom, and has hosted Barcelona Resilience Week on several occasions. At present, the Programme is actively involved in various dynamic multi-stakeholder alliances and networks, involving more than 100 institutions at the local, national, regional and international levels, including administrative and decision-making bodies, research centres, academia and civil society organizations.

### C. Achievements of UN-Habitat and partners in building urban economic resilience

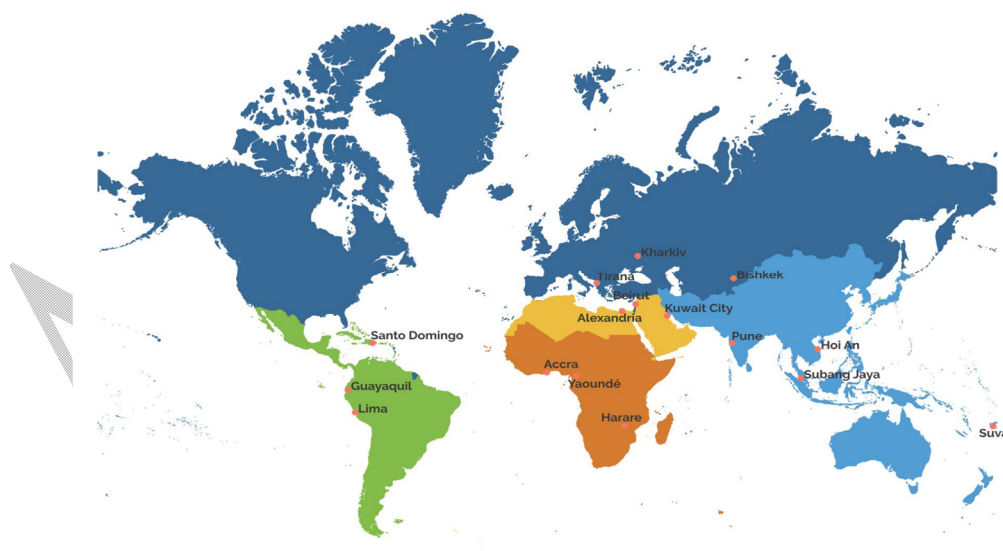
37. Through the work of the City Resilience Global Programme and its partners in building urban economic resilience, in particular by training local government officials on urban resilience concepts and diagnosis and supporting them in designing and implementing sustainable and inclusive economic and financial recovery plans, the lives of approximately 44 million people in 16 implementing cities and their respective metropolitan areas have been indirectly improved.

38. COVID-19 has posed unprecedented economic challenges for cities around the world. While cities have been affected in different ways, depending on their economic structure, exposure to global markets and financial health, practically all of them have experienced a decline in economic output, reduced employment, shrinking fiscal space and growing pressure on public finances. However, analysis has confirmed that cities that are more resilient are able to better mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic and prepare for recovery. Key characteristics of these resilient cities include effective, inclusive and participatory governance (Barcelona, Spain; and Subang Jaya, Malaysia); partnerships with central and regional governments (Accra, Lima and Suva); reliable service delivery capacity to quickly adapt service delivery modalities (Barcelona, Spain; and Teresina, Brazil); resilient quality infrastructure (Barcelona, Spain; Beirut; and Teresina, Brazil); robust public financial management systems (Barcelona, Spain; and Tirana); and close engagement with the private sector, both formal and informal (Accra; Alexandria, Egypt; Beirut; Lima; Tirana; and Subang Jaya, Malaysia). A “leaving no one behind” approach is another characteristic of resilient cities, which demonstrate systematic efforts to extend services to all population groups, including the vulnerable and disadvantaged.

39. More than 70 participants from the 16 cities implementing the project have received technical training and support in the form of materials developed by the City Resilience Global Programme and the United Nations Capital Development Fund for use in urban economic resilience diagnosis, analysis and planning, aimed at enabling them to make informed decisions on how to recover from the socioeconomic and health crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic using green and inclusive strategies focused on people in vulnerable situations.

Figure 7

**Map showing the 16 cities implementing the project “Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19”**



40. At the regional level, various stakeholder platforms for capacity development and the sharing of knowledge about the socioeconomic aspects of urban resilience were being established in the period 2020–2021 in the regions served by the United Nations regional commissions.

41. At the local level, experiences, practices and innovations of cities in economic and financial response to the COVID-19 pandemic have been collected and synthesized by the City Resilience Global Programme in the publication entitled *Global Compendium of Practices on Local Economic and Financial Recovery*, which features case studies on the 16 cities implementing the project, as well as other participating cities (available at <https://urbanresiliencehub.org/urban-economic-resilience-covid-19/#gcp>).

42. Through a series of four global workshops attended by more than 500 participants, UN-Habitat helped to raise the awareness of local government stakeholders about resilience, knowledge-sharing and knowledge management, and technical capacity-building. The workshops provided city officials and other local government stakeholders with the opportunity to engage and learn from peers through dialogue with other local authorities in their regions and globally.

#### **D. Prospects for the future work of UN-Habitat on urban economic resilience**

43. The UN-Habitat City Resilience Global Programme strategy for the period 2020–2030 provides direction for implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 and the Paris Agreement. The COVID-19 crisis has exposed certain socioeconomic weaknesses in cities. The emphasis on a multi-hazards approach has been proved to be valid. Before the pandemic crisis, the Global Programme did not analyse economic effects as rigorously as it has during the crisis. The urban resilience model has thus gained strength in the area of economic resilience.

44. Another important aspect arising from this current pandemic crisis is the conceptualization of urban resilience-building. The traditional divide between humanitarian and developmental interventions has become obsolete, as demonstrated in the COVID-19 crisis. Building sustainable and resilient cities demonstrates the nexus between humanitarian-oriented and development-oriented disciplines in urban areas. The UN-Habitat approach to building resilient cities, which considers all potential shocks and stresses, has been demonstrated to be an effective approach to support any urbanization process.

45. In the next phase, UN-Habitat intends to focus on the following:

(a) *Completing and complementing the cities' resilience profiles.* Beyond the initial work on economic resilience, the City Resilience Global Programme intends to continue working with cities implementing the project “Building Urban Economic Resilience during and after COVID-19” to complete and complement their resilience profiles through a comprehensive analysis that is integrated into the approach of the Global Programme;

(b) *Reaching out to more cities.* The Global Programme intends to increase its support to cities in different social, spatial and governance contexts, with a view to broader implementation. This will be accomplished by transforming the online training materials into classroom training course materials in several official languages of the United Nations in order to reach a wider audience, in close collaboration with UN-Habitat regional and country offices, and in partnership with other United Nations entities;

(c) *Strengthening collaboration within the United Nations system, including with the regional economic commissions.* This will be achieved by continuing to develop a hub for knowledge and advocacy relating to urban resilience. On the basis of its extensive experience supporting local governments in building resilience and vast network of and connections with cities, UN-Habitat, through its City Resilience Global Programme, will expand its partnerships at the regional level, in particular with the United Nations regional economic commissions and other United Nations entities, with a view to implementing the United Nations system-wide strategy on sustainable urban development.

### **IV. Lebanon country programme**

#### **A. Background**

46. The present section discusses the activities of the UN-Habitat Lebanon country programme, with particular focus on how normative and operational activities are integrated into the UN-Habitat approach to complement the wider efforts of the United Nations country team in Lebanon in assisting Lebanon tackle the multitude of crises the country continues to face.

47. Given that the population of Lebanon is close to 90 per cent urban,<sup>3</sup> the future of the country will be manifested in large part in its cities, which account for the majority share of each of the several nationality cohorts present in the country, including both host and non-host communities. The total number of inhabitants is estimated at 5.9 million, spread over an area of 10,452 km<sup>2</sup>. The overall

<sup>3</sup> This figure represents the urban population as a percentage of the total population in 2018. See United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision* (2019), as cited by the World Bank at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL.in.zs>.

population includes 1.5 million displaced Syrians who are mainly concentrated in urban areas<sup>4</sup> and a sizeable community of Palestinian refugees, as well as economic migrants from Ethiopia, the Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and ethnic minorities. Lebanon hosts the highest number of displaced persons per capita in the world.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, 87 per cent of the country's total population live in urban areas, with the majority – estimated at 64 per cent – residing in large agglomerations, mostly in the metropolitan areas of Beirut and Tripoli.<sup>6</sup> The lack of a national urban policy in the context of rapid urbanization, weak governance and spatial transformation – coupled with the repercussions of the Syrian refugee crisis and deep-rooted political challenges – has further increased the prevailing socioeconomic inequality and the strain on the provision of and access to public services.

48. Since UN-Habitat established its presence in Lebanon in late 2006, its operations in the country have primarily focused on responding to successive crises that the country has witnessed, including by integrating normative tools into operational implementation. Those crises have included the war of July 2006, the Syrian refugee crisis, now entering its tenth year, and, more recently, the explosion at the port of Beirut, which left the capital city devastated in the midst of a continuing deepening socioeconomic and political crisis. Responses to these crises have been undertaken in the context of a country that has been experiencing exceptionally rapid and uncontrolled urbanization owing to the absence of spatial and planning frameworks and weak governance. UN-Habitat has also focused on laying the foundations for good urban planning frameworks and practices that can guide the country to more sustainable urban practices. To implement its mandate, the country programme has partnered with a wide range of national and local partners, including line ministries, municipalities and unions of municipalities, and subnational authorities and civil society organizations, including academia and the private sector, as well as United Nations sister entities, namely, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Resources were mobilized for the interventions through the generous support of international donors, namely, the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, the European Union's Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian crisis (the Madad Fund) and the Governments of Cyprus, Finland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (through the British Council), as well as international agencies such as Cities Alliance and the Ford Foundation.

## **B. Evolution and rationale for UN-Habitat intervention**

49. What started as a focused crisis response following the war of July 2006, placing specific attention on housing reconstruction, has developed into a solid country programme that promotes and urges municipalities and national and subnational authorities to develop and achieve adequate urban planning. Evolving strong partnerships among the United Nations system and governmental and non-governmental partners, as well as growing investments from the donor community, have played a crucial and central role in the country programme's continued growth, and the recognition of its relevance, in Lebanon. The tools and instruments advanced by the programme, such as community-led approaches, the establishment of technical offices and the development of training materials, toolkits and city and neighbourhood profiles have contributed to holistic responses to various challenges at the local and national levels. The extensive operational work has led to further normative work that is reflected in the large number of toolkits, studies, reports and publications produced by the programme over the past years and utilized by a wide audience. The UN-Habitat Country Programme Document for Lebanon<sup>7</sup> not only represents the UN-Habitat global strategic plan for the period 2020–2023 and its

<sup>4</sup> Based on estimates for 2020 made in the joint Government of Lebanon-United Nations Lebanon Crisis Response Plan for the period 2017–2020 (as updated in 2020). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/lebanon-crisis-response-plan-2017-2020-2020-update>.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Fact sheet: Lebanon" (January 2019). Available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR-Lebanon-Operational-fact-sheet-January-2019.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See UN-Habitat, *Lebanon Urban Profile: A Desk Review Report* (October 2011). Available at <https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/Lebanon%20Urban%20Profile.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Currently, the United Nations Lebanon country team operates under two key strategic frameworks: the United Nations Strategic Framework for Lebanon for the period 2017–2020 and the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan for the period 2017–2020 (the latter responding to the Syrian refugee crisis). Owing to successive recent crises in the country since 2019, the common country analysis and the formulation of a new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework have been placed on hold, and the use of existing frameworks has been extended, with a view to finalizing the common country analysis and the Cooperation Framework by the end of 2022. UN-Habitat is fully engaged in both preparatory processes, aiming to leverage the opportunities presented by good urbanization, thereby contributing to the attainment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

four domains of change, but also demonstrates the relevance of and urgent need for enhanced focus on those domains., adapted to the country context. It will further align to the multiple other frameworks in the country, including the United Nations Strategic Framework for Lebanon for the period 2017–2020 (extended to 2022), the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan for the period 2017–2020 (extended to 2021), the Lebanon Emergency Appeal responding to COVID-19, and other frameworks being developed following the Beirut port explosion, such as the reform, recovery and reconstruction Framework.

50. The country programme has addressed reduced spatial inequality and poverty through successive projects aimed at comprehensive neighbourhood upgrading, the development of a national urban policy focusing on housing and transport as key entry points to enhancing the quality of urban life in Lebanon and addressing the housing, land and property rights of both refugee and Lebanese communities. To enhance the prosperity of Lebanese cities and regions, the programme pioneered urban profiling in 28 of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods across the country, aimed at informing policy- and decision-making processes that use as their starting point the integrated needs of particular places in a multisectoral manner (constituting an area-based approach), rather than the segregated needs of particular population groups or specific sectors. This approach has the potential to improve conditions for all residents while supporting social cohesion for economic prosperity. The programme has ensured the mainstreaming of the domains of change relating to climate action and an improved urban environment in all relevant endeavours, by applying green thinking at both the normative and the operational levels. While successive and ongoing crises in Lebanon have necessitated urban crisis prevention and response efforts, the country programme continues to dedicate efforts to enhancing the lives of displaced persons and host communities through multisectoral upgrading interventions, also tackling social cohesion challenges, as well as supporting local authorities in coping with the enormous stress placed on already overburdened services and infrastructure.

51. Underpinning the evolved multisectoral, area-based approach of the country programme are two additional key normative practices that should be noted. The first is the establishment of regional technical offices that support the enhancement of local governance and the capacity-building of local authorities, channelling UN-Habitat normative expertise to local authorities through strategic partnerships established with municipalities. Regional technical offices are provided with the necessary financial, human and technical support to enable them to play a leading role in addressing the various urban needs of host and refugee communities in their respective areas. Since 2013, regional technical offices have been engaged in addressing the impact of the influx of Syrian refugees at the municipal and metropolitan levels. Projects on the provision of shelter and the upgrading of basic urban services have been implemented, reaching vulnerable communities in the country. To date, out of 14 regional technical offices established since 2007, 8 are still operational, 5 of which are completely funded by municipalities. Over the last 12 years, local engineers, architects, surveyors, social workers and community mobilizers have provided technical assistance to more than 300 municipalities, ensuring the enhanced quality of basic and social services to more than 2 million people, 25 per cent of whom were refugees and migrants. The second normative practice is the development of a national urban policy, aimed at responding to the dire need for relevant spatial planning frameworks, instruments and practices, the absence of which has led to severe inequalities, mainly in the urban areas of the country. The debate around the national urban policy for Lebanon has witnessed increased interest in and support for such a policy from a wide range of government and civil society actors at the local and national levels. In 2019, the publication entitled *National Urban Policies Programme in Lebanon: Diagnosis Report (2018)* was launched, highlighting key urban challenges the country is facing at the institutional, legal and operational levels. The report recommended the prioritization of two key sectors: housing and transport. In 2020, mainstreaming guides on each of those two sectors, as well as a synthesis report on the linkages of those sectors, were developed. These reports are expected to contribute to the development of future national plans and strategies.

52. The UN-Habitat country programme in Lebanon has evolved in response to successive crises. In doing so, UN-Habitat has ensured the carrying out of intensive efforts to localize global norms and best practices, spearheaded by the Programme, with the technical guidance of specialized sections and expertise available at its headquarters, while mainstreaming cross-cutting issues of gender, youth, human rights, disability and climate change. This includes, for example, applying tools such as the Social Tenure Domain Model developed by the Global Land Tool Network, which relates to the documentation of housing, land and property rights claims of Syrian refugees who have settled in Lebanon. Other examples include the implementation of country projects in line with global programmes such as the National Urban Policy Programme, the Global Public Space Programme and the Safer Cities Programme. In addition, the city and neighbourhood profiling undertaken by the Lebanon country programme, in line with the UN-Habitat City Resilience Profiling Programme and

Urban Resilience Hub, has positioned the country programme since 2017 as a reference for other UN-Habitat programmes in the Arab region.

### **C. Neighbourhood profiling as part of an area-based approach to sustainable urbanization**

53. The UN-Habitat city profiles and the UN-Habitat-UNICEF neighbourhood profiles offer a springboard for moving towards sustainable urban development, shedding light on how relatively fixed built environments and relatively mobile social dimensions interface with each other in specific contexts.

54. Neighbourhood profiles are assessments of the living conditions of Lebanese and non-Lebanese residents of selected neighbourhoods. They contain original multisectoral, spatialized data and analysis, generated within an area-based framework, and synthesized to respond to the evidence needs of sector specialists, multisector practitioners and local authorities. These profiles offer an integrated place-based analysis covering multiple sectors and issues, including governance, population, safety and security, health, education, child protection, youth, local economy and livelihoods, buildings and housing, basic urban services, and access and open spaces. Profile findings are prefaced by a contextualization that covers the neighbourhood's history.

55. The data on 28 profiled disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Lebanon are publicly available on an online portal (<https://lebanonportal.unhabitat.org/>). The portal includes an overview of the profiling project (including a video and details about the methodology), individual profiles for each neighbourhood, an interactive geoportal presenting the mapped data of all neighbourhoods and a database of comparable indicators for all neighbourhoods. The findings of the UN-Habitat-UNICEF neighbourhood profiles have informed many projects implemented by UN-Habitat and its partners in the most disadvantaged communities within the main coastal cities.

56. To further promote the use of the profiles for evidence-based decision-making and coordination among actors, UN-Habitat and UNICEF have also been organizing workshops for municipalities and other local stakeholders, producing capacity-development products such as a bilingual toolkit and video tutorials and implementing a social media campaign, among other activities. UN-Habitat has recently moved towards promoting plans to institutionalize urban profiling within existing structures such as the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities and instilling a culture of evidence-based planning, in an effort to strengthen systems, promote transparent and accountable governance, and build the resilience of institutions and urban communities to crises.

### **D. Urban crisis response**

#### **1. War of July 2006**

57. Following the war of July 2006, some 35,000 housing units were either completely or partially destroyed across many villages and towns in southern Lebanon, in addition to some 400 residential buildings that were completely destroyed in the southern suburbs of Beirut. The reconstruction process was massive and required enormous coordination efforts at all levels. In September 2007, UN-Habitat initiated a housing reconstruction project that aimed to support municipalities in southern Lebanon in managing the overwhelming process. Engineers and architects operating under the established regional technical offices in three unions of municipalities were responsible for providing affected families with efficient designs, drawings and adequate technical specifications, as well as monitoring of the implementation of the reconstruction work. Meanwhile, the concerned households were in charge of recruiting contractors and covering the costs of reconstruction from the funds allocated by the Government of Lebanon. In one year, the project, through the regional technical offices, was able to accelerate the reconstruction process, and emphasis was shifted to municipal services that had also been severely damaged. The project, which was successfully concluded in September 2009, opened the doors for new projects and additional funding. From 2010 to 2012, UN-Habitat, in partnership with the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, implemented a project that aimed to promote strategic planning at the level of unions of municipalities. The project identified the gaps within the planning frameworks in Lebanon and recommended the reform of urban planning systems. This positioned UN-Habitat as a key player in leading the discussions on urban planning issues and challenges in the country. However, the outbreak of the war in the Syrian Arab Republic and the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees forced the Lebanon country programme to shift its activities to respond to the implications of the refugee crisis.



## 2. Syrian refugee crisis

58. The programme entered a new phase in 2013 and witnessed a significant increase in its budget, staffing and operations. In 2013, nearly 50,000 refugees were crossing the borders on a daily basis. This rapid increase in the population size imposed enormous pressure on the housing sector and on the already-strained basic services. On the basis of its experience working with and through municipalities, UN-Habitat was able to implement many projects that directly supported refugee and host populations while at the same time building the capacities of municipalities to manage such crises. The country programme contributed to the rehabilitation of shelters and the upgrading of basic services, mainly those related to water and sanitation. Since 2015, UN-Habitat has argued that the refugee crisis is urban in nature and hence requires innovative tools and means to respond to a more complex situation. During a regional conference held in 2016, UN-Habitat promoted an urban crisis response methodology in the main cities in Lebanon as the relevant area-based approach and instrument to address urban vulnerabilities. This enabled the Lebanon country programme to be positioned at a strategic level among the United Nations country team and led to many donors being interested in responding to the urban crisis.

## 3. Explosion in the port of Beirut

59. On 4 August 2020, a massive explosion rocked the port of Beirut, destroying much of the port and severely damaging the dense residential and commercial areas within five kilometres of the site of the explosion. The disaster left more than 200 people dead, over 6,000 injured and many homeless. A number of neighbourhoods in Greater Beirut were severely affected, many of which are home to vulnerable Lebanese citizens, poor migrant workers and refugee communities. Many people lost homes and businesses, with more than 300,000 persons affected, and many displaced. UN-Habitat immediately responded to the devastating explosion by deploying teams in two of the most impacted municipalities, Beirut and Bourj Hammoud, supporting them in conducting rapid damage assessments of buildings and schools, combined with a tangible on-the-ground response that provided immediate support within the housing and public facilities sectors. UN-Habitat worked with the United Nations country team, the European Union, the World Bank and donors to ensure that urban complexities, such as housing, land and property rights, would be addressed immediately and in the longer term. Emergency funding received from UN-Habitat headquarters soon after the explosion was instrumental in helping the country programme launch its response to the explosion.

60. UN-Habitat played an important role in the immediate aftermath of the explosion and continues to advocate for a multisector and area-based approach as the response moves to the next phase: recovery and reconstruction. The following are examples of the UN-Habitat role to date:

(a) *Assessing damage to building infrastructure, shelter and educational facilities.*

UN-Habitat supported the municipalities of Beirut and Bourj Hammoud in assessing damaged buildings and facilities. Through collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, UN-Habitat also undertook a detailed assessment of 150 private schools affected by the explosion, and is currently overseeing the holistic rehabilitation of about 33 of those schools in need of significant repair;

(b) *Debris management.* UN-Habitat co-launched and is leading the “Rubble to Mountains” initiative, a collaboration between the United Nations, the private sector and non-governmental organizations aimed at preventing an environmental waste crisis similar to that which followed the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990). The initiative collects, sorts and reuses the debris left by the explosion, transforming it into a material to fill and reinforce mountains severely eroded by quarrying and to build furniture for Beirut’s public spaces;<sup>8</sup>

(c) *Cash-for-rent assistance and shelter repairs.* This intervention is providing 800 eligible households with safe shelter options for a minimum of three months, helping families to get back on their feet. In neighbourhoods heavily affected by the blast, UN-Habitat is undertaking repairs to more than 100 damaged homes;

<sup>8</sup> The “Rubble to Mountains” initiative aims to have a long-term and tangible impact on efforts to mitigate the impacts of climate change. It is co-led by UN-Habitat, Development Inc., the Lebanon Reforestation Initiative and the American University of Beirut and supported by, inter alia, UNICEF and private sector entities. To date, the initiative has collected 8,000 tons of recyclable rubble, 140 tons of mixed rubble and 20,000 tons of mixed glass, and has a long-term, three-pronged action plan for their use and disposal.

(d) *Coordination at the level of the United Nations and the humanitarian community.* UN-Habitat is working to ensure that its expertise is contributing to the overall coordination of the response of the shelter sector by co-leading the sector and ensuring that urban complexities, such as housing, land and property rights, are addressed both immediately and in the longer term;

(e) *Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework (3RF).* UN-Habitat led or co-led the iteration of three chapters in the 3RF report: housing, culture and municipal services. In doing so, UN-Habitat ensured that urban complexities and solutions were at the heart of the suggested road map, placing immediate focus on recovery and reconstruction.

61. The ongoing development of an urban recovery framework, while aligning with, complementing, localizing and operationalizing the Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework, is aimed at promoting long-term and sustainable area-based recovery. It is also aimed at providing an institutional and policy framework that supports resilient urban recovery at scale by renewing the social contract that provides for the strengthening of institutional arrangements.

## **E. Urban response to COVID-19**

62. Already in a challenging situation from a socioeconomic, environmental and political perspective, Lebanon was ill-prepared for the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which placed even the most infrastructurally and economically sound countries under duress. Challenges related to rapid urbanization, including inadequate, overcrowded and inaccessible housing and public transportation, compounded by insufficient basic services, including the lack of access to clean water and sanitation, electricity and proper solid waste management and disposal, have enabled the active transmission of COVID-19 in Lebanon. The majority of vulnerable Lebanese and refugee communities live in poor, densely populated urban neighbourhoods and experience challenges similar to those repeatedly highlighted across the world as being faced by populations living in slum-like conditions, thus presenting a severe challenge to observing universal precautionary measures, such as physical distancing and extensive water, sanitation and hygiene measures.

63. In an effort to understand the specific COVID-19 challenges faced by local authorities in Lebanon, UN-Habitat undertook an assessment and published its findings in the report entitled “Unions of municipalities’ COVID-19 rapid assessment report”.<sup>9</sup> The report outlines the challenges facing local authorities in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and identifies the most critical support they require. It also recommends mitigating measures, ranging from the most urgent measures to long-term measures.

64. Through seed funding from its headquarters, UN-Habitat designed, produced and installed the first public handwashing stations in Lebanon. The stations, placed in some of the most densely populated and vulnerable urban communities in the Governorates of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, form a major line of defence against the spread of COVID-19. In addition, the project promoted the significance of water use and proper sanitation in reducing COVID-19 risk and exposure by holding awareness sessions targeting vulnerable Lebanese citizens, refugees and migrants residing in specific urban areas in Lebanon. In parallel, about 4,500 residents of Beirut, comprising Syrian and Palestinian refugees and vulnerable Lebanese citizens, received hygiene protection kits as protection against COVID-19.

65. The Abjad Centre, a sociocultural community centre established by UN-Habitat, UN-Women and UNICEF for the neighbourhoods of Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli, Lebanon, has contributed to enhancing the safety and security of vulnerable communities through a multitude of services related to skills, livelihoods, protection, legal issues and health. Since 2020, and in response to the socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre has been instrumental in supporting families at risk of eviction by providing legal protection and assisting in the negotiation of flexible rental agreements, as well as by providing rental subsidies and referrals in extreme cases.

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<sup>9</sup> Thirty-four unions of municipalities and five individual municipalities were assessed, covering 52 per cent of all municipalities in Lebanon, representing more than 3 million Lebanese citizens, as well as 700,000 Syrian refugees and 180,000 Palestinian refugees hosted in Lebanon.