

**Habitat Partner Universities: Strengthening Urban Research through Centres of Excellence  
and an International Urban Research Network**

**Call for Expression of Interest (EOI)**

**A. Background: Habitat Partner University (HPU) Initiative**

The 21st century is the urban century. Over half of the world's population lives in cities, and the world continues to rapidly urbanize. 90 percent of this growth is taking place in the developing world. Many of these cities lack the capacity to harness their potential for economic growth and to manage and direct urbanization on a sustainable path. They suffer the negative effects of rapid urbanization, and become vulnerable to global phenomena such as economic instability, food insecurity, resource depletion and climate change. If cities are to come to terms with these challenges, they require leaders, managers and staff capable of adopting innovative and robust approaches to planning, developing, managing and financing sustainable urban development for all citizens.

Universities have the human capital and knowledge resources to contribute to positive change towards sustainable urban development. There are many good examples of what universities can do in helping cities solve their complex problems and realize their development potential. There are a range of innovations such as industry-university links, local knowledge arenas involving universities, curricula development responding to new and complex issues of sustainability, university networks to pool resources around common research themes, etc. However these are still emerging practices. In many countries, the research and training priorities of universities are not in line with the emerging priorities for sustainable urban development. At the same time, the findings of university research are not being mainstreamed amongst practitioners, and the knowledge acquired by university staff is often not being mainstreamed in the university curricula, and thus future urban practitioners are not sufficiently exposed to these key issues.

In response, UN-HABITAT has embarked on strengthening links with universities through its Habitat Partner University (HPU) initiative. The Habitat Partner University initiative focuses on three components of the Sustainable Urban Development Network (SUD-Net) - Education, Training and Research. It aims at enlarging cooperation between UN-HABITAT and institutions of higher education, as well as facilitating exchange and cooperation between universities in developing and developed nations.

**B. Current Status of the HPU Initiative**

The HPU initiative is in its infancy and is expected to grow within the next 2- 3 years. Further investigation into a proposed HPU networking framework and operationalization is currently underway. It is envisaged that the consultant/institution elaborating the feasibility study for the urban research network would work with the consultant engaged in the networking framework to avoid overlap and create synergies between the two studies. In addition, over 25 universities have expressed an interest to join the HPU network. Among those, ten universities are already engaged in concrete initiatives, some of which are of bilateral nature with UN-HABITAT (e.g. The University of British Columbia developing a global digital library on human settlements knowledge resources), others partnering with other universities around innovative educational and research projects expected to benefit participating cities and communities and to advance sustainable urban development (e.g. NTNU working with East African Universities on ecological urban planning

approached that link city planning practice with post graduate study and research), and others partnering with leading regional universities to model, test and sustain professional courses which combine theory, state of the art tools and case studies to generate cutting edge continuing professional training which responds to the current challenges of sustainable urbanization.

### **C. A Proposed Urban Research Network**

Under the SUD-Net umbrella and within the HPU initiative, UN-HABITAT proposes to support the building of an international urban research network bringing together Habitat Partner University members and other interested parties. The network may draw on existing centres of excellence and may be modelled after successful networks such as those in agriculture and health.

Current urban research tends to focus on cities and urban development in the North rather than the South. The proposed research network would expand the existing urban research agenda by creating an international research network extending beyond one region and linking multi-sectoral research in both the North and South. It tends to analyze existing and usually bigger cities and not the small, medium-size or future cities that will absorb most of the urban growth. It is envisaged that the research agenda be multi-sectoral and cover cross cutting issues. Urban governance, management and planning would provide the entry point. It is also envisaged as a source to feed into key thematic areas of UN-HABITAT including gender, urban environment, water and sanitation, youth, housing, land and urban planning; and also assist in strengthening UN-HABITAT flagship reports and the urban campaign.

The urban research network is envisaged as a bridge between the North and South universities providing a platform for original and innovative action research with links to existing networks such as Cities Alliance, the World Bank and existing UN-HABITAT networks including HS-Net.

There is a need to invest in processes that bring education, teaching, research, practice and policy together through a framework of interaction, funding, and knowledge management, so that agendas for both research and development interventions can be complementary. The urban research network is envisaged as the opportunity to make the knowledge products and resources of universities, tertiary and research institutions accessible to policy makers, practitioners and communities and at the same time the interaction between universities and cities inform their education programme and research agenda.

UN-HABITAT is seeking a network that is sustainable in the long term. Initially one full time UN-HABITAT staff member would assist in the operation of the HPU initiative including the network.

### **D. Objectives**

#### ***i. Overall objective of the Urban Research Network***

The overall objective of the urban research network is to enable universities and tertiary institutions to conduct further and more relevant research in collaboration with one another; and to provide research which can be better absorbed by local governments, urban practitioners and mainstreamed into university education.

#### ***ii. Objective of the Proposed Feasibility Study***

The proposed feasibility study is to explore the potential role, operation and benefits of the development of an international urban research network.

## E. Feasibility Study

UN-HABITAT calls for a university, research institution, organization or individual to investigate a strategy for the development of an international urban research network. A feasibility study will therefore be undertaken to analyze how to set up such a network. The study would further propose a governance structure and its possible impact and sustainability.

The key areas of investigation outlined in the feasibility study would include but are not limited to:

- 1. Identifying Stakeholders:* Provide an overview of key urban research institutes and networks (giving particular attention to those in developing countries) and an overview of the current research agenda and ongoing research partnerships such as those coordinated by the World Bank, Cities Alliance, UNU and others. Assess how UN-HABITAT's ongoing collaboration with research networks could contribute to a wider network. Explore universities/ research institutions that could partner in and/or lead the research network and institutions that lend themselves as global/regional/sub-regional hubs for an urban research network.
- 2. Proposed Governance Structure and Mechanisms of the Research Network:* Provide a suggested design and membership criteria for the research network including a proposed governance structure. Explore the strengths and weaknesses from existing research networks including those in other fields such as agriculture and health. This includes lessons learned from earlier and existing urban research networks including the Global Urban Research Initiative (GURI) of the 1990s and smaller networks such as N-AERUS. Investigate how the network can involve more than one region and successfully partner with various regions in the North and South. Explore how the urban research partners interact, who will determine the research agenda and how the research will be made available to all stakeholders. Provide suggestions of how UN-HABITAT could consolidate its engagement with existing research/ academic networks.
- 3. Assessment of the Impact and Sustainability of the Research Network:* Explore the proposed funding of the network and look at different scenarios for financial backing including potential funding partners. Identify potential expectations and contributions of the different stakeholders. Identify what makes a successful network, especially successful networks that are multi-sectoral, and identify specific risks of research networks. Identify activities and events to keep the network continuously engaged beyond the boundaries of an e-network.
- 4. Suggestions for Proposed Research Agenda:* Suggest and specify key research issues that the proposed research network could investigate and effectively disseminate to the relevant stakeholders that involve action research of cross-cutting urban issues and also focus on original and innovative research that can feed back into UN-HABITAT flagship reports, campaigns and activities.

The overall supervision of the study will be provided by the Training and Capacity Building Branch of the Global Division in cooperation with the Policy Analysis Branch of the Monitoring and Research Division.

## F. Outputs and Timeframe

The feasibility study will be submitted within 8 months of engagement. Initial ideas may be presented to the Habitat Partner Universities and other relevant stakeholders at the fifth session of the World Urban Forum in Rio De Janeiro on 22- 26 March 2010.

**G. Required qualifications and experience*****i. Individual***

- Advanced university degrees (preferably PhD) in Urban Planning, Economics, Development Studies, Public and Business Administration, Communications, Training and Education or another field deemed relevant to the subject areas covered in the Expression of Interest.
- More than 15 years of relevant experience (with at least 10 years at the international level or with international partners).
- Demonstrated and documented experience in research and knowledge networks especially involving academic institutions, and international organizations both in the North and South.
- Capacity to develop, package and promote practical and global strategic plans for programme implementation.

***ii. University, Research Institution or Organization***

In addition to the above criteria for individuals, the following criteria are applicable to universities, research institutions or organizations:

- Demonstrated ongoing partnership between institutions in the North and South;
- Demonstrated multi-sectoral research and partnerships particularly universities with relevant disciplines that apply to the urban research agenda.

**H. Application and Deadline**

Interested university institutions, organizations or individuals should send applications (email preferred) to address specified below due 24 February 2010. Applications need to include the following:

- Substantive proposal (including draft outline and timeline) of less than 10 pages presented in English, demonstrating an understanding of the proposed feasibility study.
- CV(s)
- References
- Financial proposal (e.g. consultation fees and expenses)

**Contact information**

All correspondence should be directed to:

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