WUF10 Highlights

WUF10 continued on Tuesday, with two dialogues taking place in the morning.

Dialogues

**DIALOGUE 3: Tradition and Modernity: a creative convergence for sustainable cities:** The dialogue comprised two sections, each with keynote speeches and a panel moderated by Joan Erakit, American writer and journalist.

Laila Robledo, Municipality of Malvinas Argentinas, noted the importance of sharing knowledge through intergenerational dialogues and warned that urban sprawl can lead to fragmentation and inequality. Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance, United Arab Emirates (UAE), said Abu Dhabi’s 2030 strategy reflects a vision for a knowledge-based economy, infrastructure development, expanded manufacturing, reduced oil dependence, and environmental sustainability. He called for cities to enhance tradition while also innovating to create growth and prosperity.

In the panel discussion, Katherine Kline, General Assembly of Partners (GAP) Older Persons, emphasized that accessibility and inclusivity solutions can be found by reaching out to older residents. Joyati Das, University of Melbourne, highlighted that young people are not a homogenous group and said cities that meaningfully include them can benefit from their skills as “digital natives.” Reda Ismail Thabet and Namet Ismail Thabet, students at Al Amal School for the Deaf, shared their experiences of participating in a ‘Minecraft’ video game course that allowed them to help design accessibility solutions for public parks. Tatu Gatere, BUILDHER, shared her work to overcome barriers to women receiving technical training, noting the importance of working with partners comfortable...
with listening to local voices. Ahmad Zaki Sarfaraz, Mayor of Kabul, underscored the value of neighborhood-level planning and consulting with communities when designing projects.

In a keynote address, Sandra Piesik, architect, said that, to ensure harmony between the built environment and the climate, architects should emulate indigenous peoples’ capacity to listen and collaborate with nature.

Andrea Carmen, Executive Director, International Indian Treaty Council, noted successful partnerships between modern cities such as Vallejo, California, and nearby indigenous tribes.

Jitendra Bothara, Miyamoto New Zealand, noted several issues with merging tradition and modernity in the engineering field, including a bias against traditional knowledge.

Julianne Polanco, California Office for Historic Preservation, said storytelling celebrates cultural diversity, and recounted that her organization documents the history of immigrant communities in California.

Ege Yildirim, International Council on Monuments and Sites, called for a long-term perspective to cultural heritage, noting that “the creative genius of today is the heritage of tomorrow.”

The panel then responded to questions from the audience on how to tackle historical preservation with limited financial resources, and why modern architecture incorporates traditional aesthetics and knowledge in some countries more than in others.

In closing remarks, Mahmoud Sharawi, Minister for Local Development, Egypt, said years of internal conflict has negatively impacted the country’s heritage, and described policies aimed at combining Egypt’s millenary culture with modernization.

DIALOGUE 4: Frontier Technologies and Innovation for Inclusive, Sustainable and Resilient Smart Cities: Jasmine Pang, Shanghai Branding Agency, moderated the session.

Francesca Bria, University College of London, suggested the digital transition will require “deep thinking” to avoid new monopolies of power that require new taxation regimes and trade regulations, and mass unemployment. She referred to a “black box society” where data is aggregated and mined by a few players, and called for governance that is built on public engagement, ethical digital standards and transparency.

Khalid bin Abdul Samad, Minister for Federal Territories, Malaysia, detailing smart-city blueprints and strategies in Malaysian cities, suggested being “smart” means utilizing cutting-edge technologies that include governing the way smart cities are developed.

Marta Eugenia Juárez Ruiz, Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN Environment Programme and UN-Habitat, describing progress in her country towards cleaner, safer and more sustainable cities, said it required the adoption of appropriate policies that eliminate inequalities with tailor made local solutions.

Ernest Nsabimana, City of Kigali, described his city’s efforts to become more sustainable and resilient through developing a smart-city masterplan with UN-Habitat, saying the objective is to use technology to support people and not conversely, including through e-government portals and a new smart phone developed in Rwanda in 2019.

In a follow-up segment, Fabrizio Hochschild Drummond, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the UN’s 75th Anniversary, warned that the world faces a “fundamental and tragic paradox,” where some governments are no longer pursuing global solutions to predicaments such as climate change and mass migration, describing now as a defining moment to avoid far-reaching consequences.

Haoliang Xu, UN Development Programme, describing a smart city project in the Maldives, said the immediate challenge is to include countries at different stages of development into the global smart-city narrative.

During a panel, Meera Al Shaikh, Smart Dubai, presented on her office’s work, including the citizen-centric Dubai Happiness Agenda, digital inclusion guidelines, and ethical artificial intelligence principles. She invited cities to join the Smart Cities Global Framework.

UN-Habitat Executive Director Maimunah Mohd Sharif lamented that many smart-city concepts tend to focus more on technology than outcomes for people, and she called for a redefinition based on good-quality neighborhoods, nature-based solutions, and traditional approaches to resource management.
Martine Abel-Williamson, World Blind Union, highlighted that people with disabilities represent 15% of the world’s population, and 80% of them live in poverty and face barriers to participation.

Noting that 1.8 billion people lack formal identification and are therefore excluded from the democratic process and digital economy, Alby Bocanegra, Mastercard, urged understanding connectivity as a right.

Calling for ensuring that technologies introduced maximize benefit for all, John Paul Farmer, City of New York, outlined his city’s vision for achieving this, based on: universal broadband access; good technology policy; innovation; and high-quality digital services.

Reminding of the digital divide, Ayona Datta, University College London, called for providing access to technology in resource-poor neighborhoods to enable equal participation in the urban public sphere.

In the discussion, panelists touched on: involving blind people in technology design; ensuring representativeness in teams delivering technologies; understanding technology as a power relationship; incentivizing technological interoperability; drawing on communities of practice worldwide for solutions; ensuring affordability for a more equitable adoption; and public information transparency as a tool to counter misinformation.

**Sustainable Urban Development Now**

**RISE UP: resilient settlements for the urban poor:** This event, moderated by Patricia Peiró Aso, El País, marked the launch of a new UN-Habitat flagship programme aimed at mobilizing and coordinating large-scale investments in climate change adaptation and resilience for the urban poor. Victor Kisob, UN-Habitat, opened by highlighting the prevailing funding gap for adaptation among countries.

Frank Bainimarama, Prime Minister of Fiji, provided a keynote speech before officially launching the programme in a ribbon-cutting ceremony with Kisob. Bainimarama said leaders should step back and see the bigger picture, namely where people will live in the future, what they will need, and what strategic investments can be made now to support them. He also called for all people to fight the stigmatization of the urban poor.

Various stakeholders made interventions in support of the programme, including the World Resources Institute, Poland, the Adaptation Fund, and Slum Dwellers International (SDI).

**Roundtables**

**Civil Society Organizations and Grassroots Roundtable:** In opening remarks, Jane Katz, Habitat for Humanity, urged panelists to share solutions towards healthy and inclusive urban communities.

Talib Ahmed Bensouda, Mayor of Kanifing, said his municipality empowers communities by ensuring its budget is participatory and by encouraging private investment in community organizations.

Violet Shivutse, Huairou Commission, said grassroots communities are not passive, but instead develop fast solutions based on the struggles they are going through.

Monica Ramirez, Habitat for Humanity, said the growing housing deficit in Latin America and the Caribbean could be addressed by “recycling” vacant properties in city centers.

In a keynote speech, Jane Nyakairu, UN-Habitat, said the agency was launching five programmes that target grassroots communities, including one on climate resilience for the urban poor.

Erik Berg, Habitat Norway, explained that urban theatre can be a transformative and healing force for those in areas in crisis such as slums.

Mary Wong Lai Lin, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Malaysia, said social housing programmes are best implemented by engaging beneficiaries on a daily basis.

Yamila Castro, Cities Alliance, stressed the importance of acknowledging that most urban growth is informal, and recognizing informal settlements as an integral part of the city.

Manal El Shahat, Ezbet Community Center, described the efforts of an interdisciplinary group of academics to promote sustainable development in informal settlements in Cairo.

Luis Bettencourt, University of Chicago, said cities are best understood as interconnected systems, and through a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods.
Larry O’Brien, Compass Housing Services, said he decided to co-organize the first conference on the New Urban Agenda in Australia after listening to grassroots speakers during the 2016 Habitat III Conference.

Amy Betancourt, Cadasta Foundation, outlined the work done by her organization in helping communities secure land rights.

Sara Nandudu, SDI, said the implementation of international agreements is slow due to the lack of meaningful community engagement.

Smruti Jukur and Rose Molokoane, SDI, welcomed the shared roundtable between civil society and grassroots organizations, as the latter needs the former’s support.

Shain Shapiro, Sound Diplomacy, said music is an untapped revenue source for communities in countries where it is not recognized as a formal industry.

Sulayman Abdulmumuni Ujah, Joint Association of Persons with Disabilities, Nigeria, said persons with disabilities are disproportionately affected during natural disasters.

Jane Akinyi, Kenya Association of the Intellectually Handicapped, called for further political participation for persons with disabilities.

George Wasonga, Civil Society Urban Development Platform, said that, to organize effectively, communities should first gather data about themselves.

Parliamentarians Roundtable: Describing the Inter-Parliamentary Union co-sponsored event as the start of a long conversation, moderator Robert Lewis-Lettington, UN-Habitat, invited speakers to reflect on how UN-Habitat can help parliamentarians, and how work by parliaments and the agency connect.

Wafa Bani Mustafa, Jordanian Parliament, and IPU Standing Committee on Sustainable Development, presented on the role of parliamentarians in supporting implementation of the SDGs and NUA, including a set of proposed ‘best practices,’ stressing that strong engagement in this regard is key to realizing accountability and “our common success.”

Jean-Marie Bockel, French Senate, presented on ways to improve engagement with the NUA by parliamentarians and the judiciary, calling for parliamentarians to help restore citizens’ trust in new technologies.

Nancy Lung’ahi Abisai, East African Legislative Assembly, stressed the need for citizen participation at all levels, including policy making, lawmaking, implementation, and budget allocation, to ensure responsiveness to people’s needs.

Stein Erik Lauvås, Norwegian Parliament, said cooperation with regional and local-level stakeholders is key to implementing the NUA.

Abdoulaye Diop, National Assembly of Senegal, shared how his parliament has worked with various stakeholders to improve the country’s urban areas, including through socioeconomic data gathering, work on a cultural heritage fund, and promoting territorial equity in planning and resource allocation to ensure basic services for all by 2030.

Zione Ntaba, High Court Judge, Malawi, discussed the role of, and challenges faced by, judiciaries in engaging with parliaments, emphasizing judiciaries’ constitutional role in the policy process. She stressed the importance of regulatory impact assessments by parliaments to ensure constitutional compatibility and compliance with issues such as human rights to avoid litigation.

Describing her city’s efforts to accelerate SDG implementation through local engagement, Penny Abeywardena, New York City, issued a call for local and regional governments to sign the Voluntary Local Review Declaration, noting 20 new cities had already done so at WUF10.

David Pkosing, Kenyan National Assembly, drew attention to different models of democratic systems, expressing hope for closer engagement between UN agencies and parliaments to enable faster project implementation. He also suggested partnering with UN-Habitat on a sustainable model for increasing affordable housing in Kenya by tapping into provident funds to finance mortgages.

In discussions, speakers and participants drew attention to: Senegal’s experience in using industrial taxes to subsidize housing programmes and creating dedicated housing funds; Jordan’s model of distributing land and houses at affordable prices; the need to reinforce parliaments’ authority over budgets; and the importance of improved integration of food and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) into work on urban issues.