

A publication of the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)

Thursday, 7 November 2024 | Online at: [enb.iisd.org/world-urban-forum-wuf12](https://enb.iisd.org/world-urban-forum-wuf12)

## WUF12 Highlights: Wednesday, 6 November 2024

Participants at WUF12 delved into the “how” of implementing commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate action, and the New Urban Agenda throughout the Forum’s third day. In the morning, they discussed partnerships for social inclusion in urban planning and infrastructure provision, and ways to bring much-needed financing to local governments. In the afternoon, special sessions further explored financing for urban development, the role of G7 countries in creating sustainable cities, and what’s left behind for cities that host large events such as the Olympics once the crowds have gone home.

A special event with past Executive Directors of UN-Habitat brought a long-term perspective to addressing the scale of challenges faced by cities in global North and South countries. Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat, summed up the conundrum of how to access financing for needs that can only be met through deep, transformative change in governance systems, public accountability and good urban planning, stating that, “not everything is predictable—it’s important to have a long-term time frame so we can evaluate progress.”

### Dialogue 3: Stronger Together

Dialogue convenor Rafael Tuts, Director, Global Solutions Division, UN-Habitat, stated that the road to resilience is through partnerships. In opening remarks, Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director UN-Habitat, urged coordinating stakeholders to integrate development of green, social and



Manal Awad, Minister of Local Development, Egypt

physical infrastructures and to connect the sustainable development, climate, and urban agendas. She concluded that global coalitions are vital to leveraging action from shared success stories.

Cruz García, Director of WAI Architecture Think Tank called for listening to the voices of marginalized ethnic, Indigenous, disabled and LGBTQI communities because ensuring their access to dignified housing, clean water and health services would ensure access for all.

Ander Cabellero, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Basque Government, outlined how his government has fully integrated the SDGs into its planning processes since 2018.

**Panel on Strengthening Multilevel Governance:** Speakers from Namibia, Italy, Japan and the World Health Organization (WHO), advocated collaboration across all levels of government, with multistakeholder inclusion and community engagement, including on infrastructure development and budgeting. They described successful partnerships on tackling water leakage, building community technical and financial capacity, and funding community waste management. One panelist reported a successful whole-of-government approach for community efforts to address COVID-19 and called for fostering competency for sustainable urban health and development. Final remarks noted the need to put real people at the center of public policy.

**Panel on Innovative Localization Efforts to Ensure Inclusivity and Equity:** Speakers from Mexico, Colombia, Germany and the International Olympic Committee called for embedding gender and disability issues in all public policies and urged empowering women to participate in policymaking on rebuilding of urban environments. One panelist advocated



Cruz García, WAI Architecture Think Tank and LOUDREADERS



**Eva Granados**, Secretary of State for International Cooperation, Spain

for empowering local governments to advance urban renewal by providing for multipurpose social infrastructure and noted the need to improve opportunities for women and older people through upskilling and reskilling programs. Another speaker concluded that efforts to encourage public-private investment in sports infrastructure would improve communities' sport participation rates.

#### ***Dialogue 4: Financing Localization and Localizing Finance***

Moderator and independent journalist Shahira Amin outlined challenges for cities across the globe, including poverty and inequality. Through interactive quizzes, she highlighted that the annual financing and investment gap for the SDGs stands at USD 2.5 to 4 trillion/year, and that only 4% of local government authorities in global South countries can access financing on international capital markets.

Manal Awad, Minister of Local Development, Egypt, opened the session alongside Haoliang Xu, UNDP. She noted Egypt is supporting the sustainable development journeys of local governments, prioritizing efficient planning and equitable distribution of finance. Xu recommended: new revenue streams to boost fiscal space for cities to invest in sustainable development, including enhanced access to international development, climate



**Noraini Roslan**, Mayor of Klang Royal City, Malaysia

and blended finance; and the development of integrated local financing frameworks which include a mix of public and private capital.

Eva Granados, Secretary of State for International Cooperation, Spain, noted her country's role in hosting the Fourth Financing for Development (FfD4) conference in 2025 and the opening of the UN Local 2030 Coalition Secretariat in Bilbao, with the mission of localizing the SDGs. She called on all parties to support Spain's proposal to support a strong FfD4 outcome, including proposals to mobilize finance and develop capital markets to achieve the SDGs.

Ming Zhang, Global Director, Urban, Resilience and Land Global Department, World Bank, urged policy reforms to improve "infrastructure investment readiness" through improving the quality of cities' financial data and accounting practices.

Panelists from local governments, financial institutions, civil society, and academia focused on how to unlock additional finance for sustainable development at the local level. Panelists argued for:

- cities to lead with a collective vision and evidence-based decision-making;
- considering the role of education for women and children in educating the broader public;
- having solid plans and a paper trail of financial discipline to assure banks of their low risk;
- expanding the use of property taxes globally as a sustainable source of revenue, but ensuring revenue is invested in habitable and buildable land; and
- considering the built environment as a key platform for improving quality of life and the economy

Responding to participants' questions, panelists noted universities can act as a check and balance to ensure accuracy of data put out by finance ministries, and stressed government accountability as a basis for incentivizing taxpayers to pay their dues.

#### ***Special Session: Financing Urban Development***

Rania Hedaya, UN-Habitat Regional Representative, moderated this session, hosted by Egypt.

Panelists shared ideas on financing for action at the local level. Egypt's Decent Life Initiative for developing rural infrastructure to attract private investment was cited, including,



View of the room during Dialogue 4 session



Ahmed Kouchouk, Minister of Finance, Egypt

for example, micro- and medium finance, loans to young people and women for SMEs, and services for industrial sites in rural areas. Maximizing the private sector's role was emphasized, including for creating new financial resources, such as green bonds and blended finance, and influencing government with the ultimate aim of leading the development process because of its comparative efficiency, knowledge, and sustainability.

Ana Claudia Rossbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat described UN-Habitat's roles in working with governments, convening knowledge-sharing initiatives, and supporting cities in: economic planning; physical, social, and green infrastructure; enabling public-private partnerships for housing; and improving rights and services in informal settlements. She also stressed its role in working for global financial architecture reform.

Speakers from the World Bank and the government of Egypt discussed their experiences with blended finance models, public-private partnerships, and developing projects that are low risk to attract investors like international development banks.

Featuring high-level Egyptian government officials, a major general from Egypt's armed forces, and a real estate executive, the second panel covered investment success stories, such as Egypt's efforts to formalize informal settlements to address the housing crisis and develop new cities by working with partners to secure diverse sources of financing including concessional loans from multilateral development banks and foreign investment. Numerous speakers pointed to benefits for the private sector in Egyptian urbanization endeavors. The role of military in intervening in the face of natural and industrial disasters, maintaining national security and societal cohesion, eradicating terrorism while contributing to Egypt's development, and complementing the private sector's role, was also highlighted.

### ***Special Session: G7 Economies Shaping Urban Futures***

Shipra Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch, UN-Habitat convened the special session, highlighting the release, on 4 November in Rome, of the G7 Sustainable Urban Development Ministers' Communiqué.

Anacláudia Rossbach praised the Communiqué and its ambitious focus on advancing environmental, social and digital transitions in cities' development, in response to G7 Leaders' June 2024 request that G7 Ministers consider "concrete actions to reduce spatial inequalities, protect the environment, the climate, and promote smart and innovative economies in urban areas."

Sandra Gizdulich, Senior Urban Expert, Presidency of Council of Ministers, Italy, noted that the Communiqué aims to

systematically address cities' ecological, demographic and digital challenges, and recalled that its development stemmed from previous efforts by Germany and Japan. She looked forward to Canada taking implementation forward during its presidency in 2025.

Alessandro Ghinelli, Mayor of Arezzo, Italy, urged formal linkages between the U7 group (of G7 countries' mayors), encouraging links between G7 national and city administrations. Suri also urged deep engagement with cities and regions, and highlighted that the upcoming global stocktake of localization efforts would assess real world progress on relevant SDGs targets.

A panel of speakers from South Africa, Egypt, Brazil and India discussed developing-country perspectives on the transitions highlighted by the G7 communique. In particular they addressed: mainstreaming climate change considerations into urban planning; promoting job creation through green industries; viewing housing challenges in a broad, structured way; acknowledging the benefits of digitalization enabling moving beyond cash; and the ongoing challenges of securing investment, technical cooperation and skills transfer.

A second panel of speakers from France, the US and Japan discussed G7 perspectives. They suggested challenges remain for the construction sector in digitalizing, and some countries are taking holistic approaches to redeveloping neighborhoods through extensive community input. They discussed the constraints around replicating G7 country solutions in developing countries, and the value of using imaging technologies to support urban planning.

### ***Special Session: The Legacy of Mega Events***

Javier Torner, UN-Habitat, moderated this session, which included three panels that focused on the experiences of organizing World Expo events, the Olympics, and the World Urban Forums, respectively.

In a keynote address, Prince Faisal bin Abdulaziz bin Ayyaf, Saudi Arabia, introduced Riyadh's transformation to an international city, through hosting of many international events that have brought in 20 million visitors. He highlighted the value of proactive planning and of ensuring infrastructure being built for events is suitable for multiple purposes, and benefits all residents. Executive Director Rossbach noted that mega events



Faisal bin Abdul Aziz bin Ayyaf, Mayor of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

are opportunities for transformation of the host cities, but that they bring challenges of increased pressures on housing and infrastructure.

Speakers who led planning for the 2020 Dubai Expo and the 2024 Shanghai Expo stressed the importance of keeping sustainability principles at the core, treating Expo events as educational opportunities, and investing in infrastructure that people can continue to use, such as what occurred with Shanghai's metro lines.

Speakers involved in managing the Olympics and Paralympics highlighted sustainability and social inclusion efforts; for example, the Paris Olympics held 25% of the games in existing venues to reduce the Games' carbon footprint; reduced the amount of meat offered to participants; and used 100% clean energy to power the events. The Games also created many jobs, and provided training opportunities for more than 2,000 people.

Mayors of Cairo, Egypt, and Katowice, Poland, highlighted the opportunities that hosting the World Urban Forum had provided; for example, the previous WUF in Katowice had provided impetus for transformation of an industrial area into a cultural precinct with a museum and theatre facilities.

### **One UN: Implementing the New Urban Agenda**

Ana Claudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, and two former Executive Directors, Maimunah Mohd Sharif and Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, explored UN-Habitat and the genesis of the World Urban Forum and the New Urban Agenda. They also discussed the future of the organization and the Forum. Ana Claudia Rossbach congratulated the former directors on their achievements in raising awareness about rapid urbanization, elevating the urbanization agenda and solidifying the role of UN-Habitat in the broader UN system.

Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka noted that "urbanization" is dynamic, but the UN-Habitat's lasting mandate is to pursue adequate shelter for all, especially vulnerable groups. She recalled challenges in defining "adequate shelter" and noted success in: building awareness of growing migration from rural areas to cities; creating the WUF platform for exchanging ideas;



and increasing cities' capacities in planning and partnering with multiple stakeholders. She called for promoting balanced territorial development and holding regional planning meetings to coordinate with donors. She also urged clear urban indicators for measuring success.

Maimunah Mohd Sharif spoke about her recently-ended term as Executive Director (in January 2024), and how her tenure was complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. She explained that the pandemic showed that cities and local government are really on the frontlines, supporting communities including women and girls. She noted that the pandemic also demonstrated the possibility for local governments to disburse funding and move with speed to tackle issues. She recalled that during her tenure, local and regional governments reached unprecedented levels of importance within the UN system, referencing the UN Advisory Committee of Local Authorities.

Looking to the future, Rossbach noted the importance of the UN General Assembly's adoption of the Pact for the Future at the recent Summit, which recognizes the New Urban Agenda. She explained that the New Urban Agenda is crucial for sustainable development and urbanization, given its fundamental principles of inclusion, leaving no one behind, and centering people in their work. She resolved to strengthen the role of UN-Habitat in the UN system and remarked at how WUF has acted as an anchor for the organization through the times.



**Maimunah Mohd Sharif**, Mayor of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and former Executive Director, UN-Habitat, **Anacláudia Rossbach**, Executive Director, UN-Habitat, and **Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka**, former Executive Director, UN-Habitat