

Looking Back to Look Forward: Evolution of the Habitat Agenda and Prospects for Implementation of the New Urban Agenda

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Abstract

Followed by two previous conferences 20 and 40 years earlier, the Habitat III conference convened in Quito in 2016 to tackle global urban challenges. With cities experiencing ever-increasing levels of poverty, inequality, and vulnerability to climate change, Habitat's New Urban Agenda outlines its priorities for sustainable urban development considering current urban realities. This paper aims to assess the changing dynamics that have paved the road towards Habitat III and to evaluate the ongoing prospects for its effective policy implementation by analyzing: 1) the changing development paradigms that have informed the three meetings, and 2) the nature, adequacy and influence of Habitat policy frameworks. Our analysis elucidates the weak commitment of nations at framing and implementing policies that help advance past Habitat's agendas. This leads us to conclude that local governments may be better suited to promote just and sustainable development. Promising policymaking may occur if governments can intersect the principles of the New Urban Agenda with other global agendas, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Yet, it is relatively clear four years after Habitat III, that local commitment to these principles is not uniform either and that only certain world regions are actively participating in their implementation.

Keywords

UN-Habitat, New Urban Agenda, Social Justice, Civic Engagement, Sustainable Development

1. Introduction: From Habitat I to Habitat III

In 1976, UN-Habitat met in Vancouver to address the challenges of rapid urba-

nization, most notably the widespread growth of low-income informal settlements in the Global South. The conference's final declaration called for similar meetings to be held every 20 years to review progress and establish new goals. Thus, UN-Habitat II convened in Istanbul in 1996 with a remit of ensuring adequate shelter for all and an agenda to support sustainable communities. Most recently, in 2016, UN-Habitat III met in Quito with the goal of delineating and agreeing upon a "New Urban Agenda" to make cities more inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

At first sight, a twenty-year interregnum between summits might seem unusual. However, given that the Habitat conferences complete a major review and redirection of urban and housing policymaking, and the nature and extent of demographic change, urbanization rates, regional disparities, governance capacities, among other factors, this is arguably an appropriate period. Today's world is a very different place to that of 1976: many former authoritarian states have become democracies, economies are more globalized, urban populations are much larger, as is the size of low- and very-low-income populations. Moreover, many challenges have intensified in recent years, including poverty and inequality levels, which lead to the disproportionate exposure of the urban poor to pollution, extreme climate events, communicable diseases, different types of insecurity, displacement, and other serious challenges. Yet, the higher population densities found in cities place them on the frontline against these threats (Steele et al., 2012; Parnell, 2016; While and Whitehead, 2013).

Since the 1990s, there has been increasing recognition of the extent, nature, and pace of urban change which, as shown in **Figure 1**, prompted a series of other major conferences such as the Rio Earth Summit (1992), which delineated for the first time sustainable development goals through the Local Agenda 21; the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015)¹; and now the endorsement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030)². Most recently, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (2016) offered a meaningful baseline opportunity for policy formulations and implementation arising from

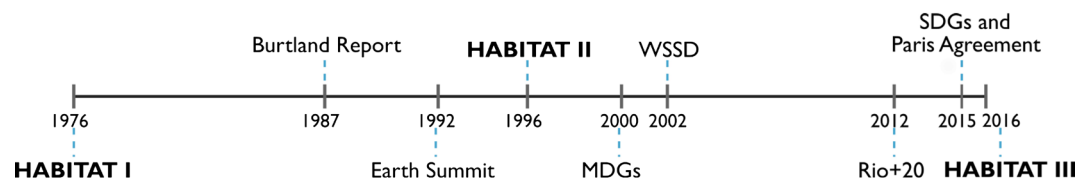


Figure 1. The Timeline of UN Habitat and Sustainable Development Conferences (1976-2016).

¹The MDGs included largely broad-brush goals such as the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the promotion of gender equality, and the protection of environmental sustainability. Although many families in consolidated informal settlements improved self-built homes in the Global South, 30% of the world's population still live in communities that may be considered as slums because they lack access to basic services, such as sanitation systems (Satterthwaite, 2016b).

²Expanded across 13 goals one of which, Goal 11, is to "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable". These goals are now accompanied by specific targets and sub-programs and actions, which together largely underpin the UN-Habitat III preparatory materials and agenda.

UN-Habitat III. For instance, numerous cities have developed climate action policies in response to the decision of the U.S. federal government to cancel its inclusion in the Paris Agreement (Pattison & Kawall, 2018). This reflects the increasingly critical role of local governments as drivers of global agendas (Valencia et al., 2019; Whitehead, 2013).

One feature of these many thematic meetings across the last two decades has been the growing “intersectionality” between target populations and sectoral actions, which is closer to the realities of policy problems that need to be addressed within a more holistic framework. Notwithstanding, many observers argue that too little has been achieved across Habitat meetings, largely due to a failure to establish specific and measurable targets and an incapacity or unwillingness to make the necessary commitments to implement policies (Cohen, 2015; Parnell, 2016). Another issue has been the insufficient engagement of civil society and grassroots social movements to advocate for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (Satterthwaite, 2016a; Cohen, 2015). Habitat I and II both focused primarily on specific actions to reduce inequality by upgrading human settlements (Ward et al., 2015).

Yet, participants worked in silos, whereas today there is a greater appreciation of the need to analyze and address various challenges across a range of intersecting policy arenas to formulate a more comprehensive framework to deal with urban development issues that are global in scale but local in nature (Parnell, 2016). Because cities are complex urban systems, the New Urban Agenda calls for multidisciplinary collaborations among sectors including housing, transportation, sustainability, and civic engagement, among others, that help integrate urban challenges (Valencia et al., 2019; Cohen, 2015; Parnell, 2016). Equity, welfare, and shared prosperity, for instance, are incorporated as core components of this “new” development agenda targeted action arenas, all of which are central to the successful implementation of the New Urban Agenda³. In bringing together UN member states, multilateral organizations, local governments, the private sector, and civil society, Habitat III sought to align the socioeconomic and environmental goals of rural communities, cities, and nations alike (Valencia et al., 2019).

This paper aims to explore the changing dynamics that paved the road towards Habitat III and to offer an evaluation of the potential to achieve greater success in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda. Specifically, our examination of each UN-Habitat conference analyzes: 1) the changing development paradigms that have informed the three meetings; and 2) the nature, adequacy and influence of the policy frameworks espoused by the Habitat conferences. Our analysis moves first thematically, and then chronologically. We close with an evaluation of the 2016 New Urban Agenda, endorsed by the UN General

³The four target areas are: 1) the proper implementation of urban rules and regulations, 2) the promotion of an efficient and livable city layout through urban planning and design, 3) redistribution and land value capture mechanisms to support redistribution and sustainable local finances, and 4) national urban policies that link urbanization and development.

Assembly, which provides a vision statement, transformative commitments, and proposals for implementation, considering its historical context.

2. Research Design

For each of the three UN-Habitat meetings, we revised the relevant academic and non-academic literature that informed the conception of the challenges that human settlements and cities faced, as well as the policy debates and approaches used to address those challenges. This systematic review allowed us to identify the chief theoretical frameworks which influenced each conference and the resulting policy prescriptions. We documented the preparation, participation and conduct of the meetings, including points of consensus and conflict, along with the final declarations and policy outcomes. Thereafter, we evaluated the evidence for implementation and effectiveness of those policies and the extent to which the Habitat resolutions fed into programs of institutions such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), as well as into other international fora, particularly the biennial World Urban Forum (WUF) series from 2002 onward. The WUF meetings were not constrained by UN resolutions, thus offering greater opportunities for the engagement of new and diverse stakeholders. They also provided comparative experiences and vehicles for the exchange of information across different regional contexts.

From the outset, we recognized that there is enormous diversity in housing and urban development trajectories and challenges both between the regions of the world as well as between countries within those regions. While there are increasingly high-quality and standardized databases available at a global level that can help characterize the observable variations of urban parameters between regions (population densities, access to transportation networks, contribution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and the exposure to extreme climate events), there are also important disparities in the challenges and expectations for sustainable development among nations of the North and the Global South (Parnell, 2016). Urban data is not spatially specific at the city and community level and it is hard to compare parameters, such as improved sanitation and building quality, especially in disadvantaged and informal communities of the Global South (Arfvidsson et al., 2017 and Simon et al., 2016). Thus, the attempt to interpret comparisons among regions and indicators to examine the progress of the implementation of policy frameworks requires consideration.

We have incorporated into our analysis peer-reviewed articles, policy reports, agency publications (especially those of the United Nations Center for Human Settlements), civil society concerns, and Habitat platforms offering urban data and information on specific meetings. Furthermore, we closely monitored Habitat III preparations and incorporated into our analysis our participant observations during policy unit and regional meetings in Mexico City, Toluca, and New York, and the actual Habitat III event in Quito, which provided us with an insider view of ongoing debates. At Habitat III, we attended different special ses-

sions and parallel events according to our areas of research expertise, and organized reflection meetings after the conference's conclusion to identify main takeaways. The first research stage took place in Spring 2016, in advance of the Quito meeting, centered on examining the evolution of past conferences and preparation proceedings for Habitat III. More recently, we have examined the ongoing implementation and monitoring achievements and challenges.

3. Major Paradigm Shifts: 40 Years of Reformulating Urban Development Approaches

Our analysis starts in the 1970s, with an exploration of how the overarching broad development paradigms came to shape the assumptions that informed each Habitat meeting, together with the policies that were proposed and the resulting implementation of those policies. The principal development paradigms we identified within the academic literature began with state-led modernization theory in the 1960s; followed by a shift to structuralism and (sometimes) Marxist theory in the 1970s; structural adjustment and the downsizing of centralized state intervention in the 1980s (especially in Latin America); neoliberalism and globalization in the 1990s, and what many would call post-neoliberalism today (Ward, 2005; Roy, 2006). Where this latter paradigm exists, it is associated with both a resurgence of the central state's role in development and welfare provision, and the emergence of the local state as a stronger actor retaining some elements of the neoliberal export-oriented growth model, but with greater attention to public participation, expanded social spending, and a new frame for market-based interventions and investments (Grugel and Riggirozzi, 2012; Mazzucato, 2015).

Paradigm shifts may also be identified given the changing ways of thinking about chief policy issues, such as inequality, informality, participation and engagement, and institutional coordination, among others. One sees multiple references to "paradigm" shifts within the ten policy unit reports that informed Habitat III, and these are often called out in the discussion that follows. In this paper, it is important to note the distinction between overarching macro-level development paradigms (dependency theory, neoliberalism, etc.), and the more specific paradigm shifts related to the shifting nature of urban challenges and policies over time. As we trace the evolution of some of these latter "micro-level" paradigms which have shaped urban agendas through the years, we will argue that rights-based and social justice frameworks are gaining increasing prominence and traction, enabling them to challenge previous hegemonic development frameworks based predominantly on economic considerations. **Table 1** summarizes the development paradigms and theoretical debates that informed discussions at Habitat conferences along with the evolution of social justice, sustainability, and participatory frameworks.

3.1. Struggling with Modernity

The first major set of paradigms in our analysis deals with the constructions of

Table 1. Development paradigms, theoretical and practical debates of habitat conferences.

Conference	Development paradigms	Theoretical debates	Civic participation	Social justice policies	Sustainability policies
Habitat I, 1976	Modernization (1960s) and structuralism (1970s).	Dualistic perceptions of informal housing in the Global South.	Top-down policy approaches leading activists to demand the participation of the civil society.	Upgrading and regularization of informal settlements and services.	The conference overlooked environmental sustainability.
Habitat II, 1996	Neoliberalism, globalization and sustainable human settlements.	Despite recognizing housing as a human right, the conference supported neoliberal housing policies.	Participation of civil society (NGOS) in the conference and the NGO forum.	Cities without slums, land rights to prevent evictions, poverty alleviation, public participation, and human rights a disregard of inequality considerations.	Nexus between human settlements and the environment (sustainable human settlements).
Habitat III, 2016	Post-neoliberalism, sustainable cities and the Right to the City.	The Right to the City, poverty alleviation, inclusion, equity, and a gender approach.	Encouraged multi-stakeholder partnerships between civil society and the private sector to enable smart city management.	The Right to the City, participatory planning, slum upgrading, equitable access to services and the environment.	Cities are interconnected urban systems, supports compact development, sustainable and resilient development and climate change considerations.

Sources: Adapted by authors from Parnell, 2016; Cohen, 2015; Satterthwaite, 2016a; Smets and van Lindert, 2016; While and Whitehead, 2013.

poverty, which were first embedded in modernization theory in the 1960s and merged into structuralism by the 1970s. This framework shaped the debate at the first Habitat conference. In that era, import substitution industrialization (ISI) jobs were successfully promoted across Latin America to take advantage of post-WWII industrial growth. However, the labor that these jobs demanded catalyzed massive migrations from rural areas to the un-serviced fringes of cities, notably in Latin America. This massive migration spurred the growth of a new social class in various regions of the Global South: the urban poor. Scholars, such as Oscar Lewis, depicted dwellers of informal settlements as bringing a “culture of poverty” in their traditions and living habits (Lewis, 1966). Others saw marginality in more structuralist terms, understanding the marginalized masses as a reserve army of labor (Obregón, 1974; Nun, 1969), while still others perceived migrants as marginal and exploited, yet integrated into the urban economy (Perlman, 1976). Many policymakers perceived informal settlements as symptoms of dysfunctional and rapid urbanization that posed major obstacles in the transition of cities and countries towards modernity (de la Rocha et al., 2004; Gilbert, 2007).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, however, dependency theory confronted modernization theory which highlighted the structural economic relations of power that determined labor patterns. Structuralist scholars defined urban poverty as structurally, rather than generationally, determined. The imbalanced nature of the industrialization process and its resulting asymmetric class relations, rooted in colonization, was emphasized over Lewis’ argument of determinism (Ward, 2012). Perlman (1976) also challenged modernization theory and demonstrated

that social networks in low-income settlements provide for both social mobility and survival. Moreover, informal settlements were described as rational and viable responses to rapid urbanization that should be perceived as solutions for self-help improvement rather than urban problems (Mangin, 1967; Turner, 1977; Ward, 1976). This paradigm shift strongly influenced Habitat I discussions, which sought to identify a place for these new, short-term intervention-based solutions, such as slum upgrading and sites and services interventions (Ward, 2012; Peattie, 1982). Moving into Habitat II, however, paradigms of decentralization and neoliberalism replaced the state-led approach and reframed urban development practice along new lines.

3.2. Towards a Post-Neoliberal Framework

Although the post-Habitat I lack of consensus surrounding unilinear development principles began to destabilize the top-down character of highly centralized governments, debt and economic crises are what ultimately broke down the strength of many nation-states. The 1982 debt crisis led to the establishment of the “Washington Consensus”, which used a series of neoliberal principles to guide “Third World” countries through development challenges. As a result, several developing countries, particularly in Latin America, shifted toward market-oriented development and private as opposed to public consumption. This neoliberal paradigm, marked by the opening of markets, the privatization of state enterprises, the reduction of the state’s directive role in the economy, was pursued with strong guidance from institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Coulomb & Scheingart, 2006).

The seemingly global expansion of market capitalism similarly gave way to the era of *globalization*, neoliberalism’s catalyzing agent. Within this paradigm, as a powerful and centralized global entity involved in policymaking, UN agencies have aided in the global spread urban development and planning ideals. The 1996 Habitat II conference accordingly marked the formal adoption of global principles for sustainable development (UN, 1996). A number of strategies were also promoted to help propel cities to compete in the global economy, but this goal also forced local governments to confront the challenge of balancing their facilitation of global linkages while simultaneously attempting to manage the negative social and environmental impacts of global capitalism and rapid urbanization. Furthermore, at the time of Habitat II there was not enough recognition that distinct political and institutional realities would make certain policy approaches only benefit some countries, exposing others to extraordinary damage. Some nations were doing quite well, in particular the highly interventionist nation-states in Asia, but their increasingly important role on the global economic stage was largely ignored because it did not fit neoliberal principles (Leaf & Pammuk, 1997). Valuing private-sector development and individual initiatives over state-led programs, the largely absent governments of the neoliberal paradigm thus failed to recognize the role of public institutions in urban development.

More recently, other frameworks have also been incorporated to inform Habitat III's New Urban Agenda. With the reformulation of policy principles, two core tenets have been pushed to the forefront of urban development discussions: urban sustainability and social justice. These paradigms have been gradually highlighted throughout the biennial World Urban Forum conference series. Vancouver's World Urban Forum (WUF) discussed environmental sustainability considerations, whereas Rio de Janeiro and Medellin WUF participants began to set the stage for a new urban agenda, acknowledging, "that when equity is an integral part of the sustainable development agenda, the deep structural problems and challenges of cities can be better addressed". These considerations have been paramount given that the contribution of cities to GHG emissions and pollution are unequally distributed between the Global North and Global South (Steele et al., 2012) and that within cities, the urban poor often live in precarious human settlements that are disproportionately sensitive to extreme climate events, such as droughts and sea level rise (Adger, 2006; Adelekan, 2010).

Notwithstanding, the inclusion of social equity and sustainability considerations has created new tensions in development priorities on a global scale: the "equity vs. environment" debate, particularly in the field of urban planning, illustrates the degree to which these micro-level paradigms have remained relatively siloed from each other. These new considerations have also engendered conflicting priorities with the still predominant neoliberal economic policy approaches of many countries. Some governments, however, attempted to establish equilibrium between the State, civil society, and the market, and globalized social democracies such as Chile and Brazil, sought to make corrections to neoliberal excess through invigorated social policies (Cardoso, 2009; Grugel & Ruggirozzi, 2012). This, however, has evidently changed with the establishment of extremely conservative governments, such as in the context of Brazil. Yet, in response to the austerity measures propelled by the Washington Consensus, the post-neoliberal paradigm emerged as a resurgence of state involvement in the market economy as well as the expansion of social services and redistribution of wealth in an effort to address equity concerns. In essence, post-neoliberalism is defined by a "...call for a new kind of politics, rooted in and responsive to local traditions and communities, and an attempt to forge a new pact between society and the state" (Grugel & Ruggirozzi, 2012: p. 3). In a post-neoliberal framework, this invigorated state presence should arguably now focus on strategic investment in key areas such as research and development and education in a proactive effort to shape markets rather than a passive attempt at "fixing" them (Mazzucato 2015).

Early Habitat III policy papers presented countries like Brazil as an exemplar for the implementation of participatory policies that have resulted in greater equality and access to services and opportunities⁴. Indeed, social and urban justice considerations have been actively incorporated into Brazil's policy frame-

⁴<https://www.habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/knowledge>.

works since 2001, when the City Statute was introduced as a reform to the constitution in an effort to recognize urban space as a collective right while also laying the legal groundwork to strengthen social and democratic participation within municipal management practices (Brown, 2013; Fernandes, 2007; Friendly, 2013). Representing a new departure from the neoliberal paradigm, these policy frameworks emerged due to invigorated calls for the right to collectively appropriate urban life and its social production, what has come to be known as the *right to the city*. The right to the city framework, rooted in the work of Henri Lefebvre (1996), has become a central aspect of critical urban theory in recent years, embodying many elements of a post-neoliberal state and civil society construct. Scholars have continued to rework Lefebvre's concepts and argue that all citizens should be able to contribute to decision-making processes that shape urban space, as well as to access, inhabit, and occupy it (Purcell, 2002; Harvey, 2003). David Harvey (2008) envisions the right to the city as a radical transformation of capitalist and neoliberal societies to achieve a democratic and redistributive management of cities, as does Marcuse (2009).

In many countries, and within UN-Habitat, the right to the city is hotly contested, and equity and right-based considerations have led to significant debate during Habitat conferences. The explicit right to housing, for instance, was left out of the Habitat II final declaration due to the opposition of some countries (most notably the U.S.) to such a binding policy framework (Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 1996), reflecting the influence of free-market or neoliberal notions. In the run into Habitat III, a few other countries continued to voice opposition to these rights-based frameworks, despite the fact that they have been explicitly incorporated in the dialogue since the first WUF meeting in Nairobi (United Nations, 2002; Cohen, 2015), and especially in Medellín's WUF meeting. Furthermore, the right to the city was listed as Habitat III's first policy unit to guide sustainable urban development, and described as the heart of the New Urban Agenda (UN, 2015a & 2016). The Zero Draft document expertly eschews UN-Habitat's seemingly indecisive stance on this issue by establishing (paragraph 4):

“...a commitment to the realization of the concept of cities for all, which in some countries is defined as Right to the City... seeking to ensure that all inhabitants, of present and future generations, are able to inhabit, use, and produce just, inclusive, and sustainable cities...”

This policy framework aims to build cities for people, not for profit, and pays special attention to vulnerable and marginalized groups traditionally excluded by urban policies (UN, 2015a & 2016). As Paul Jones puts it, “The Right to the City idea challenges us first and foremost as individuals to decide what basic human rights—such as land, housing, water and sanitation—are “non-negotiable” and “must haves” in city development”. In deciding on those rights and devising strategies for their protection and assurance, UN-Habitat is in a position to fun-

damentally transform the status quo of urban development politics, though such transformation will be largely dependent on a “monumental shift in social attitudes” (Jones, 2016).

3.3. Socially Just and Sustainable Development

In contrast with equity and social justice considerations which entered the debate more recently, sustainability has been a central aspect of discussions since Habitat II and also a much less contentious issue, although the two could certainly be compatible. From the 1987 Brundtland report and the 1992 Rio Earth Summit that informed Habitat II, to the more recent development of the MDGs and now the SDGs, sustainability has risen to the forefront as the most central, albeit nebulous, policy paradigm in current UN-Habitat thinking. The sustainability policy discourse recognizes that environmental challenges are global and that it is in the interest of all nations to implement policies (e.g. mass transit and green infrastructure) that support sustainable development (Escobar, 1996).

Since Brundtland, sustainable development has been defined as a “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland, 1987). It is increasingly recognized that marginalized communities are often precluded from the benefits of sustainable development policy, and that top-down policy responses that overly favor technological innovations alone do not address social injustices (Agyeman, 2005). The environmental justice paradigm has thus been coupled with sustainability to support local, grassroots community-based organizations that empower marginalized communities to address the social and environmental inequalities that disproportionately affect them (Agyeman, 2005).

Discussions leading to Habitat III also underscored that climate change may exacerbate social, economic, and health inequalities and deteriorate the precarious living conditions of the urban poor given their high exposure to extreme climate events (Adger, 2006; Agyeman, 2005; Shrestha et al., 2014). Climate change is a global justice issue that demands redistributive policies that support local adaptation capacities to climate risks (Adger, 2006; Steele et al., 2012; While and Whitehead, 2013). The concept of “urban resilience” complements sustainability policy aiming to promote a comprehensive understanding of the interconnected nature of urban risks and their impact upon cities (UN-Habitat, 2015). The Paris Accords on Climate Change and the SDGs constituted significant steps to advance coordinated actions and international agreements on sustainable development targets, especially from countries in the Global North that produce most of the GHG emissions (Adger, 2006; Steele, Maccallum, Byrne, & Houston, 2012).

Habitat III supports sustainable, compact, inclusive, and resilient forms of urbanization to improve environmental quality, mitigate GHG emissions, and reduce the impact of natural disasters in increasingly vulnerable cities. This emphasis on compact and “green” development is also echoed in the Smart Growth

movement, which is primarily driven by corporate tech interests and often silent to issues of equity, whereas the narrative of urban resilience is more holistic in that it places emphasis on the social dimensions of sustainability. Tied to the right to the city framework, it is argued that sustainable forms of urbanization should allow the urban poor to exercise their right to live in a resilient and climate-just city (Steele et al., 2012). The New Urban Agenda incorporates principles of sustainable development and environmental justice in its language, but the involvement of those most directly affected by these paradigms is necessary for the language to be translated into action. In the following section, we turn to a discussion on changing dynamics of participation over the past 40 years of UN-Habitat, and we explore how these are embedded both within the overarching paradigms described above as well as in the engagement of civil society in housing and urban planning praxis.

4. Partnerships & Participants: Moving towards Inclusive Agenda Setting

UN-Habitat thought has undergone a significant evolution in its approach to the involvement of participants in conferences and the sort of partnerships it advocates. In this section, we assess how the often-changing nature of state-society relations have impacted upon UN-Habitat's role and relative success in engaging with civil society and promoting participatory governance. Tracing the rhetoric around participation through the first two Habitat conferences, the WUF meetings, and Habitat III, we show that while Habitat I largely represented a classic "top-down" approach to participation born out of modernization theory, Habitat II set a new precedent by emphasizing roles for non-State actors within the neoliberal paradigm. From 2002 onwards, the biennial WUF meetings have sought to further the Habitat II agenda, though not without problematizing the nature of participation both conceptually (e.g rights to the city), and politically (between and within nations). In its preparatory stages and throughout the conference, Habitat III responded to this conversation in new ways, though it remains to be seen whether or not this response will effectively leverage participation and critical partnerships to catalyze on-the-ground action.

4.1. Official vs. Parallel Participation: Habitat I

At the first Habitat conference in 1976, national delegates gathered to explore solutions that would improve living conditions in rapidly urbanizing developing cities. As this was the first major time the UN considered "human settlements" in an international context, there was no common working definition of what "adequate" human settlement policy looked like. While a lack of institutional capacity and structure inevitably reduced the immediate impact of improved policy approaches, Habitat I was a milestone moment for the field, not least because it set a precedent for determining which actors were seen as crucial participants for urban agenda-setting on a global scale. The conference was primar-

ily concerned with national action and international cooperation between governments, as reflected in its goal of producing “recommendations for an international program in the human settlements field which will assist governments” (*Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements, 1976*).

Despite this top down approach, Habitat I did spur the mobilization of the NGO sector through a parallel set of meetings for NGO representatives in Vancouver, which drew more than 5000 participants from 90 countries. The NGO forum posited participation as a necessary ingredient for community empowerment and improved local democracy, and its participants offered daily conclusions of their discussions to the conference members. Yet, because participants at the conference and the NGO forum had different and sometimes opposing perceptions and understandings regarding human settlements, informality and migration, Habitat I was unique in hosting meaningful and contested debates (*Cohen, 2015*). While a major proposal from the NGO forum was to enhance cooperation between the UN and non-governmental actors through the institutionalization of new communicative channels, top-down solutions ultimately prevailed in Habitat I. National governments accepted “participation” in theory, yet preferred a sort of participation that did not challenge state autonomy and “expertise”. However, this largely unanticipated mobilization of the NGO sector marked an important moment for civic participation, even though it took over a decade before it gained serious traction.

4.2. Breaking Tradition and Building Coalitions: Habitat II

The top-down focus of Habitat I was contested twenty years later in Habitat II, where more constituencies were represented in the decision-making process. Habitat II was understood as the culmination of a decades-long shift from consultative arrangements to partnerships between the UN and NGOs (*Willets, 2000*). This was and continues to be unprecedented, allowing NGOs to be not only participants but members (with voting privileges) with the ability to contribute amendments to the final Habitat Agenda. As a product of the decentralization policies of the 1990s, Habitat II delegated a more significant role to local governments and NGOs, fostering the shift from vertical, top-down relationships to an increasing reliance on horizontal linkages in the pursuit of an effective framework for addressing urban development (*Leaf and Pamuk, 1997*).

In the months leading up to Habitat II, the UN invited delegations to produce reports regarding the state of urban development challenges and best practices in their countries. These reports were very informative and put forth solutions in different contexts (*You, 2015*). In the process, national delegations had to partner with regional and local governments, NGOs and other actors to collect data. A strategic coalition of NGOs called the International Facilitating Group was also formed around Habitat II to organize actors and gain a place at the negotiating table for stakeholders outside national governments. Widening the conversation to include these key stakeholders is one of the most celebrated practices to

be accommodated at Habitat II, although the conference's rules of procedure did not initially allow direct participation from NGO actors. Habitat II thus marked the first time in UN history that NGOs were granted a prominent voice in the deliberation process, setting a precedent for Habitat III (Scruggs, 2016). In Quito, the presence of NGOs and civil society organizations was undeniable. Yet, interactions largely remained isolated within sectors. Thus, while there was horizontal interaction between actors, few opportunities for collaborative and meaningful engagement with government representatives took place.

4.3. Making Participation Work On-the-Ground: The WUF Meetings and Habitat III

Following on the heels of Habitat II, the WUF meetings set yet a new, and more critical, tone for participation. A general review of WUF I-III shows a focus on results-based measurement, normative programming, and increased attention to the strengthening of effective collaborations between stakeholders. The structure of WUF meetings has geared towards involving diverse participants through a solutions-based and dialogue-focused series, albeit without legislation and formal rules of procedure related to decision-making. Yet, this flexibility has allowed for more nuanced discussions on participation at WUF meetings. Particularly in Nairobi (2002), this discussion exposed a recurring tension between civil society and governments. Much of the dialogue in Nairobi centered on questions about the logistics of implementing the 1996 Habitat Agenda, problematizing its over-simplified rhetoric of decentralization, NGO integration and expanded participation in urban development initiatives.

Importantly, the “who” and “how” of conference participation have also changed due to advances in technology. From 1976 to 2016, information technology experienced unprecedented growth. While the first two UN-Habitat meetings boasted little in the way of innovative technology, each of the subsequent WUF meetings, and most recently Habitat III, have been able to rely heavily on virtual mass communication to disseminate information. The very existence of <http://www.habitat3.org/> pays testament to this evolution of participation by integrating new actors through new avenues. The technological capacity of Habitat III contrasts dramatically with that of the first conference, which was hardly documented in a way that made the proceedings accessible to researchers, much less the general public.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) play an important role in knowledge production, and their expansion has been central to the global exchange of ideas, especially within international institutions such as the UN. UN-Habitat's media center⁵ has gathered information in the field of human settlements since 1982, providing open access to urban data⁶. Furthermore, UN-Habitat meetings can now be followed online through UN-Web TV. Social media platforms, (e.g. Facebook and Twitter), likewise facilitate dialogues and interactions

⁵<http://unhabitat.org/media-centre/>.

⁶<http://unhabitat.org/urban-knowledge/>.

about key issues among important stakeholders. In 2016, ICTs represented new avenues in which Habitat III reached “momentum” around the globe, although many users of ICTs developed by UN-Habitat are already engaged stakeholders, such as government officials and researchers. There is still room for ICTs to reach and involve a more representative sample of civil society, especially those with limited access to technology.

Technological advances facilitated more coordinated planning efforts for Habitat III. Numerous issue reports, consultative sessions, and regional meetings went into its preparation, all of which were made possible through vast interconnected networks and rapid information exchange. Moreover, Habitat III boasted a wide range of conference participants, including civil society, parliamentarians, grassroots organizations, regional and local government representatives, professionals and researchers, foundations, women and youth groups, private sector representatives, indigenous groups, the media, UN system organizations, NGOs, IGOs, and trade unions. Thus, in comparison to previous conferences, Habitat III purposefully sought to be more streamlined, inclusive, and impactful, not least in the number of days (four) set aside for the conference, which compares with the 10 to 14 days of previous Habitat meetings. The inter-sessional processes and preparatory meetings included working groups (policy units) charged with the preparation of white papers and regional consultative meetings that ultimately led to the endorsed New Urban Agenda. Under this structure, the New Urban Agenda was thus “in the making”, and arguably nearly finalized, before even reaching day one of Habitat III.

Yet while the ICT revolution has facilitated this more efficient interchange of ideas through a global network of communication, it has also introduced a new caveat into the policy implementation process: deepened accountability. As some scholars have pointed out, ICT’s play a central role in combating political corruption and paving the road towards good governance, as increased accessibility to government information can yield a more informed citizenry (Carlo Bertot et al., 2012). With a vast array of conference participants and stakeholders around the world now able to review the Habitat III recommendations and proceedings, UN-Habitat now finds itself more accountable than ever to follow through on the conference’s agreed upon New Urban Agenda.

The historical analysis of civic engagement and participation at Habitat conferences reveals a gradual improvement in the inclusion of more stakeholders in the formulation of policy frameworks. Increasingly, NGOs, academia, and local stakeholders have partaken on Habitat conferences and conversations, although the input and voices of the most marginalized global communities are still largely absent. Yet, the inclusion of a more diverse array of stakeholders, no longer limited to national governments, has helped reshape some policy frameworks and objectives. The following section analyzes such restructuring. In conjunction, this and the following section highlight the influence of shifting participants, and the evolving and increasing challenges of human settlements and ci-

ties across the globe, in reformulating policy frameworks.

5. Policy Frameworks: Current State and Evolution

Understanding the history of key policy frameworks and their evolution within UN-Habitat thought allows for an appreciation of what one author (Huxley, 2013) calls the “conditions of possibility” of policies and the specific contexts in which policy approaches to urban development are rooted. From governance and legislation to housing and participation, the histories of these policy frameworks funnel into the New Urban Agenda in particular ways, shaping Habitat III’s “new” approach to very “old” and quite nuanced issues. In this section, we will review the evolution of some of Habitat’s main policy frameworks and paradigms over the last half-century in order to put forth a historically informed analysis of the New Urban Agenda.

5.1. Urban Governance and Finance

Habitat II placed attention to legislative and institutional imperatives to tackle global housing and urban issues. Since the 1980s debt crises constrained investment in poverty alleviation, the streamlining of government expenditures and management of debt were similarly highlighted. As more countries started to compete for international financial assistance and capital, they were also encouraged to accelerate the liberalization of their markets and diminish centralized State power. Governments came to be regarded as institutional enablers rather than direct providers of low-cost housing, among other goods and services, and the bureaucratic constraints of government institutions were targeted as a major issue for reform and strengthening. In Latin America, many countries had also moved from authoritarian regimes to democracies, changing the institutional and political landscapes in which UN-Habitat policies would take effect.

Decentralization was a chief strategy to transform local governance and increase competitiveness and efficiency. Yet, even the most avid supporters of decentralization have pointed out many of the unmet challenges, such as the lack of adequate intergovernmental coordination, poor policy drafting and implementation, and limited accountability, among others. Furthermore, many decentralization policies and reforms were never consolidated through follow-up actions and support, and strategies were often characterized by uncoordinated financial and political reforms or only administrative, and not fiscal, subsidiarity (Campbell, 2003).

In the first WUF meeting in Nairobi these and other central themes were problematized, causing institutional and legal structures to be reworked in subsequent WUF summits. Habitat III documents continue to reframe these concepts and policy frameworks. The importance of linking local governance and fiscal autonomy to national urban policy and multi-level governance, for instance, has been increasingly highlighted in the lead up to Quito. In addition to

ensuring the decentralization of resources as well as responsibilities, there is growing recognition that local revenue mechanisms should be enhanced to ensure fiscal sustainability and an adequate redistribution of resources (e.g. through land value capture mechanisms). Finally, the proper implementation and monitoring of urban rules and regulations—the establishment of the rule of law—was also recognized as a central aspect to the success of the New Urban Agenda. Importantly enough, these policy criteria imply the involvement of a reinvigorated State and a strong partnership with civic society to encourage more democratic and equitable development processes (UN, 2015b, 2015c).

5.2. Public Participation & Social Inclusion

Policy frameworks around public participation and social inclusion have similarly evolved over the past 40 years. While Habitat I called for national action plans and international cooperation, Habitat II began to reframe the agenda-setting process by bringing more participants to the table. Democratization processes also pushed these changes while decentralization policies have brought a new understanding of the role of public participation in enhancing local governance.

Participatory planning was formally advocated in the 21st century as a means for the advancement of the Habitat Agenda, most notably in Fred Fisher's (2001) *Building Bridges Through Participatory Planning* manual. Fisher provides a toolkit of best practices specifically designed for NGO & CBO (Community Based Organizations) leaders and local government officials, aiming to recognize the “symbiotic relationship that often exists between local government institutions and the collective NGO and CBO networks at the community level” (p. 6). The manual is a culmination of the growth of participatory planning during the 1990s and Habitat II, outlining a practical approach to stakeholder engagement and participatory agenda setting at the local level.

Among others, Joe Foweraker examines the rise of community-based organizations across Latin America and their resulting influences on national social policy recommendations and implementation (Foweraker, 2005). His study highlights the importance of the political impact of social mobilizations while exploring the nuances of CBO-state relationships in the region during its age of democratic transitions. Furthermore, he cautions against an important dark side of the NGO-State partnership in the form of what he terms the “*clientization* of democratic citizens” (Foweraker, 2005), which may become an obstacle for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda through effective social mobilization to accomplish and monitor its goals.

An additional example of inclusion was also seen in the 1995 Beijing women's conference, when advocates and grassroots organizations from across the globe came together in the suburb of Huairou to discuss how to involve women in UN and other international conferences. This birthed the Huairou Commission, a grassroots organization focused on integrating women into the development

agenda⁷. The commission had an active voice at Habitat II, and continued advocating on behalf of women during the first WUF meeting. In preparing for Habitat III, concerns of women's experiences in urban spaces remained central, and the Huairou Commission had a presence during the preparatory meetings as well as in the conference proceedings. Moreover, a women's assembly was one of Quito's first events (Huairou Commission, 2010).

5.3. Housing and Land

The first generation of UN-Habitat housing policies emphasized the central role of governments in housing upgrading through material and technical assistance and basic service and infrastructure provision in informal settlements. A second solution was to implement regularization policies to integrate informal communities into their cities (Ward et al., 2015). Yet, as families were granted ownership, community organizing was undermined as there was an emphasis on improving homes rather communities (Newton, 2013). A third approach was to relocate dwellers in state-planned sites to enable gradual self-help housing. However, these sites were placed in isolated locations in the cities' fringes and did not offer easy access to city services (Smets & van Lindert, 2016; Peattie, 1982).

Furthermore, economic crisis in the 1980s undermined the capacity of governments to provide assistance to informal communities, and diminished the capacity of low-income residents to enact self-help housing efforts (Ward, 2012). By 1996, Habitat II housing policies had long since moved away from state-led interventionist projects to more market-oriented approaches. As a result, some governments in Latin America began to finance the construction of affordable housing, on a massive scale, for moderate-income workers, disregarding the poorest families. These affordable housing developments have also been built in peri-urban areas and do not offer easy access to transportation and services (de Duren, 2018; Smets & van Lindert, 2016).

Currently, around 30% of the world's urban population still live in a community that can be classified as informal, and numbers are expected to grow in the poorest regions of the planet, especially in Africa (Croese, Cirolia, & Graham, 2016). Considering the global challenges of informal communities, the U.N. has supported more participatory approaches to housing policy assistance, including launching the Participatory Slum Upgrading Program (PSUP) in 2008 as a central component of the MDGs. The PSUP assists city governments in assessing the housing needs of informal settlements and has helped launch pilot projects in these communities to expand wider improvement policies at the national level. PSUP also fosters the inclusion of all stakeholders, particularly residents, community-based organizations, and local governments to envision, implement, and sustain comprehensive and participatory upgrading projects over time.

Central to the discussions on housing at Habitat III was the issue of urban

⁷(<http://www.huairou.org/>).

sprawl, its implications for commuting patterns and GHG emissions (Simon et al., 2005). The New Urban Agenda posits well-located low-income housing as central to facilitate the compact, just, and sustainable development of cities not only in the Global South but also in the North (Pattison and Kwall, 2018; Smets & van Lindert, 2016). For urban affordable housing to be attainable, however, housing policies need to include many different mechanisms, including: low-income housing microfinance, rental programs, housing rehabilitation with technological innovations to support energy efficiency, legal assistance that protects residents from displacement, community land trust organization, and community engagement (Steele et al., 2012; Ward et al., 2015; Smets & van Lindert, 2016).

In response to the Habitat III issue paper on housing, an international coalition of participants at the 2016 European Regional Meeting of the Global Platform for the Right to the City expressed skepticism of the New Urban Agenda's ability to effectively address the urban housing crisis⁸. Arguing that the issue paper presents rising housing prices "as a natural and uncontested process" (Lima, 2016), members of the Global Platform critique the New Urban Agenda's failure to interrogate the *why* behind those rising prices and to acknowledge the decisions that are actively made to impact the real-estate market. The New Urban Agenda may therefore be implicitly placing its focus on "...the individual requirements needed to access housing, and not on structural factors and the institutions responsible for shaping access to housing".

6. The New Urban Agenda: Renewed Prospects for Implementation

Our analysis suggests that UN-Habitat has historically failed in guiding nations to implement effective on-the-ground changes through its policy prescriptions. Yet, multiple voices contributed to the framing of the New Urban Agenda (NUA). Habitat III participants raised the issue of the poor record of implementation of previous agendas and resolutions. There is thus recognition of the need to move beyond technical solutions to incorporate political realities. It is now more widely acknowledged that technocratic policies do not necessarily lead to democratic outcomes, and that more than public-private partnerships, widely espoused in the 1990s, it is the participation and mobilization of civil society, especially grassroots local organizations and social movements, that may help advocate for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda (Satterthwaite, 2016a; Cohen, 2015). One main obstacle for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda, however, is that U.N. Habitat does not have a comprehensive monitoring framework (Marsal-Llacuna, 2019; Valencia et al., 2019; Schindler et al., 2017). Furthermore, although several governments endorsed the vision of the New Urban Agenda in 2016, the implementation of policymaking remains voluntary (Marsal-Llacuna, 2019).

⁸<http://www.hic-gs.org/news.php?pid=6625>.

The implementation of the New Urban Agenda may be an avenue for city governments to align, formulate, and implement coherent policymaking. Recent studies support an informal synergy between the NUA and the SDGs, which already have a monitoring framework as a means to address the unmet goals of past Habitat agendas and, at the same time, support more inclusive approaches to city policymaking. Such synergy requires a careful examination of the potential tensions between the diverse goals of sustainable urban development (Schindler et al., 2017; Valencia et al., 2019; Marsal-Llacuna, 2019; Diaz-Sarachaga et al., 2018; Satterthwaite, 2016c). For example, the NUA and the SDGs promote compact urban development to enable, among other things, efficient commuting patterns. However, urban densification may enable private-led development in central cities, where low-income families already reside, and thus it may exacerbate the displacement of low-income families to the cities' fringes. Urban densification may be beneficial only when low-income families are able to live and remain in the city (de Duren, 2018). A systematic assessment of the interactions among the various targets promoted by the NUA and the SDGs may serve to reveal tensions, and the tradeoffs between the goals of the NUA and the potential impacts on local stakeholders (Marsal-Llacuna, 2019; Valencia et al., 2019; Schindler et al., 2017).

In Quito, participants noted that indicators such as the SDGs do not always provide accurate metrics for urban issues (Valencia et al., 2019; Schindler et al., 2017; Satterthwaite, 2016c). Past research also warns about the deficiencies of data. Urban data is not always available at the community or household levels, particularly for low-income informal communities, making it untenable to evaluate the access of these residents to services, transportation systems or adequate shelter (Arfvidsson et al., 2017; Simon et al., 2016; Satterthwaite, 2016b). One potential avenue to improve data is to use mix-method approaches for data collection, which combine both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in isolated communities. Community-based organizations, residents, and local NGOs may use, for instance, participatory mapping and ethnographic approaches to collectively gather data in informal settlements (Wong, 2015; Simon et al., 2016; Diaz-Sarachaga et al., 2018).

Successful implementation of the New Urban Agenda will also be dependent on the flexibility of its policy proposals to fit in varying contexts. An examination of UN-Habitat's five regional reports, written between 2008 and 2014, reveals the extent to which urban density, transportation infrastructure, and a host of other urban development challenges differ markedly between regions. Regions that contribute relatively little to GHG emissions, such as Africa, are ironically more vulnerable to extreme climate events (Adger, 2006). Although Latin America and Asia concentrate the largest populations of people living in informal settlements, there are significant variations in the way people interact with the state in these two regions. Grassroots movements have enabled people in Latin America to negotiate with governments, but similarly politicized gras-

roots organizing has been largely absent in Asia (Bayat, 2000). In sum, differences matter, and they must be thoughtfully considered to effectively address the unique urban challenges that face every nation, region, and city around the world.

Four Years Later: The Piecemeal Adoption of the NUA and the City Prosperity Initiative

The adoption of the New Urban Agenda in 2016 meant to set a global standard for sustainable and inclusive urban development and enhance the contribution of cities to such goal. A concrete step to achieve this has been the City Prosperity Initiative (CPI), which aims to aid local and national governments in monitoring their development progress, articulating regional and policy responses, and promoting informed decision-making. The NUA's monitoring platform, the CPI, has gathered the participation of over 400 cities in 46 countries. The main tool of this initiative is an index composed of six dimensions and 72 indicators related to how cities are governed and how they create and distribute socio-economic benefits. Such metrics are meant to offer decision-makers a systematic tool to evaluate policy and formulate adequate and evidence-based policies and long-term action plans using strategic and reliable data. They also mean to provide diagnoses, strengthen the monitoring capacities of local governments, exemplify best practices, and incentivize a policy dialogue. In comparison to previous UN Habitat Agendas, the CPI also aims to improve the prospects of adequate implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the 2030 Development Agenda.

CPI dimensions are assessed through quantitative methodologies, such as statistical and spatial analyses, to analyze key correlations among different indicators affected by urban policy. The first dimension, productivity, measures a city's ability for creating and equitably distributing wealth. The infrastructure development dimension measures a city's ability to provide adequate infrastructure and services (from clean water to communication technology) that improve living standards and enhance productivity. Thirdly, the quality of life dimension measures a city's ability in ensuring the wellbeing of its citizens. The equity and inclusion dimension measures a city's achievement in reducing poverty, protecting the rights of minority and vulnerable groups, enhancing gender equality, and ensuring equal participation in the socioeconomic, political, and cultural spheres. The environmental sustainability dimension measures a city's achievements in protecting natural assets, pursuing energy efficiency, reducing pressure on land and natural resources, and reducing environmental losses. Lastly, the urban governance dimension measures the capacity of local governments to catalyze prosperity and regulate urbanization processes. CPI indicators, however, informed by quantitative urban data, are unevenly available (in the central city, suburbs, and peripheries), thus leading to deficiencies in the measurement of prosperity (Wong, 2015).

To complement these quantitative metrics, qualitative surveys have also been

carried out to assess people's feedback on their perceived city's prosperity and sustainability with the aim of providing governments with a way to connect with their citizens and promote public engagement. To use these tools, CPI⁹ has created a city profile briefing and the state of the city report to provide policy recommendations, establishing targets to be measured for progress in the future. The latter, however, considers local needs and priorities to offer a more detailed assessment of each city. Finally, the city action plan provides a detailed account of the implementation of policy plans and interventions and provides the possibility of linking policy decisions to impact assessments. All are designed based on the main components of the New Urban Agenda. Given the relative improvement in the availability of data globally, these new efforts constitute a notable addition to increase the prospects for implementation of the New Urban Agenda. The implementation of a global policy agenda, however, is arguably an unreachable ideal. Nonetheless, it is providing several willing governments with tools to better guide their development in more equitable and sustainable ways.

The levels of involvement, however, have been varied. We have entire world regions—notably the European Union—adopting a cohesive commitment to advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Latin America is another region in which several cities and countries have actively participated in the drafting of CPI reports and action plans. This has happened at different levels. At the city level, active participants include Bogotá, Quito, and Panama City, among others, and at the country level Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico have been fairly involved. The latter presents an interesting example. Jalisco, at the regional and state level, has been particularly active and innovative in its drafting of land use and connectivity plans and indexes. Yet, at the national level, Mexico has been the national government to make the most use of the NUA and CPI directives, leading to the drafting of a national and city reports for several of its cities in all of its states, including Mexico City. Apart from these cases, Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia at the national level, and New York City at the local level, have also participated in the drafting of CPI reports.

Pending the further drafting of action plans and their implementation, the effect of the NUA will likely constitute a patchwork of piecemeal efforts around the globe which will move certain regions closer to advancing the SDGs but hardly act as a cohesive instrument for global change. While increased data availability with respect to previous UN Habitats is certainly exciting, one of the recurring faults is the prescriptive and one-size-fits-all nature that efforts in the last 4 years have taken. Implementation of the NUA will inevitably require the commitment and political will of governments at different levels and this is evidently absent in several contexts.

7. Conclusion

Over the last forty years, issues and policy directions related to housing and ur-

⁹For more information about the City Prosperity Index: <https://cpi.unhabitat.org/>.

ban development have evolved significantly, although perhaps not as rapidly as one might have imagined given the visibility of these UN conferences. There have been important game changers that have either halted or accelerated policy responses. Rapid urbanization, economic crises, and more recently the risks associated with climate change, have been instrumental in shaping UN-Habitat conferences and outcomes. Global frameworks for sustainable development, for instance, have gained prominence since the 1990s, following on the heels of the Brundtland Report. Arguably, UN-Habitat's aim since then has also been to promote not only environmental, but socioeconomic sustainability as well. But the change and evolution of policy frameworks have lagged given the time required to adequately implement and assess urban policies.

It does seem, however, that Habitat III's New Urban Agenda is beginning to incorporate a variety of different policy frameworks and gaining a more nuanced understanding of both issues and the policy directions necessary to address them. The now more comprehensive and inclusive urban agenda is no longer just about housing policy and human settlements, but about the multitude of strategies that must come together to ensure global environmental sustainability. As we have outlined throughout this paper, policy frameworks have been substantially reworked with these intersectional aims in mind. Furthermore, given the partial implementation of past Habitat Agendas, there is now a notable recognition that the New Urban Agenda needs to move beyond technical and technocratic recommendations and acknowledge the importance of political considerations for the successful implementation of Habitat goals. In this regard, public engagement and mobilization are vital to ensure institutional accountability and, in turn, greater equality and access. Civic societies around the world have mobilized in moments of crisis or extreme violence and insecurity, but it will be crucial for them to more actively do so in development matters as well.

Renewed civic mobilization will be determined in large part by the policy frameworks that facilitate or hinder popular engagement, as well as the extent to which social movements eschew or yield to "*clientization*," as described earlier (Foweraker, 2005; Friendly, 2016). Regarding the former, as our historical analysis indicates, the disconnect between policies on paper and problems on the ground has proven to be a major challenge for UN-Habitat over the years. As the WUF meetings and the 2008-2014 regional reports reveal, an ability to think regionally and adapt to the pressure for change will be imperative as UN-Habitat continues to address challenges facing the world's cities. Perhaps a critical component of the "New" Urban Agenda is its reassessment of the nature of its global reach; although Habitat I initially framed urbanization as a global crisis, efforts to implement Habitat III's New Urban Agenda now must recognize the need for highly contextualized and locally-grounded policy responses.

By tracing the evolution of UN-Habitat thought, we are better able to understand the history of this institution and the particular paradigms, participants, and policy frameworks that have been involved in determining the urban agenda

of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. By 2016 and the Habitat III conference, it became apparent that many urban challenges continue to afflict the world's population, and the necessity of innovative, action-oriented policies has never been as pressing. Inevitably, the past failures and incapacities of UN-Habitat meetings have been woven into the fabric and lessons of Habitat III. A cornerstone of the New Urban Agenda's success will be its capacity to act and the changes that it catalyzes outside of the formal UN proceedings that took place in Quito. Effective action will be complicated by the multidimensional nature of the world's urban challenges. Yet, the New Urban agenda and the SDGs are promising in their intersectional approach, and the WUF meetings and regional reports have set a new tone for the appreciation of context in policy responses. Ultimately, this new agenda may very well be regional or local, rather than global, in nature, but it is arguably within such a structure that radical change may most effectively be realized.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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