WUF11 SESSION CONCEPT NOTE

PEOPLE-CENTRED AND GREEN TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION
Digital innovations for inclusive and greener cities

1. **Key Words:**

   Smart cities, people-centered smart cities, digital transformation, green cities

2. **Objectives of the Session:**

   The objective of this session is to outline an action-oriented roadmap towards people-centered and green smart cities. There is a growing international consensus around the importance of making urban digital transformation inclusive. The urban digital transformation shall also not hamper climate action and contribute it.

   What is needed to put this into practice? This session will discuss the financing, technology, capacity, governance and collaboration that is needed to make people-centered and green smart cities a reality on the ground.

3. **Summary:**

   As outlined in the WUF11 Background Paper, smart cities have the potential to use digital technologies and data to guide better decision-making with respect to prosperity, sustainability, resilience, emergency management or effective and equitable service delivery.

   This session takes stock of recent initiatives such as on inclusive smart cities. The urban digital transformation needs to be more aligned with national and local priorities, people's needs, inclusion and human rights considerations, environmental sustainability, resilience and climate action – as set out in the New Urban Agenda, the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and other development agendas.

   Cities as varied as London, Barcelona, Warsaw, Johannesburg, Buenos Aires, Sao Paolo, Singapore and Seoul are taking a more human-centric approach to smart city transition.

   This trend responds to the fact that many smart city projects have been taken a top-down, surveillance-based approach, which raise serious issues related to digital rights and inclusion. Moreover, access and affordability are uneven, as urban digital solutions require scale and digital solutions flourish in metropolitan economies, leaving many behind in the urban-rural continuum.

There is also a rising concern about the environmental impact of digital technologies. The applications in the sharing economy are often not contributing to greener behaviours. Furthermore, the digital economy has an increasing greenhouse footprint often not accounted for.

There is a need for financing to overcome the digital divide, investments in technology, strengthening of capacity, improved governance and effective multi-stakeholder collaboration, including with the private sector.

In response, UN-Habitat's People-Centered Smart Cities Programme was launched in 2020 at WUF10 in Abu Dhabi. Since then, including at the HLM in New York (April 2022), the people-centric approach to smart cities have become firmly established among Member States, local governments and the private sector partners. This is aligned with the SG's call for digital cooperation and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

4. **Guiding Questions for Discussions:**

- How do we ensure that the full potential of urban technology and innovation is realized, especially when it comes to reducing the environmental impact of cities?
- Voices are increasingly being raised calling for international guidelines or principles on people-centered smart cities to support interoperability, co-operation and the application of smart cities to achieve globally agreed sustainability goals. What should such guidelines include?
- What **financing** is needed to bridge the digital divide, ensure that the potential of smart cities are shared among all urban residents and reduce environmental impact?
- What kinds of **technologies** are needed to put people-centered smart cities into practice? What are the technology financing gaps and how technology transfer be financed? How can technologies help achieve the needed ecological transitions.
- What **multi-level governance** framework, regulations, policies and practices are needed for people-centered smart cities?
- How can we put in place the appropriate **multi-stakeholder collaborations** for people-centered smart cities. What in particular is the role of the private sector and public-private partnerships?
- How do we move away from the top-down, surveillance-based smart city approach, towards one that is more grounded in the **needs of cities** and urban residents?
- How can smart city projects better align with the **ambitions** in the New Urban Agenda and the SDGs, for example providing affordable and green housing, sustainable transport, green public spaces and reduced environmental impact of cities?

5. **Expected Outcomes and Impact:**

Roadmap towards people-centred smart cities.

6. Session Format:

1. Opening remarks.
2. Panel discussion: financing, technology, governance and capacity needs of people-centered smart cities and the ecological transition.
3. Panel discussion: working towards international guidelines on people-centered smart cities.
4. Interactive discussion on roadmap, including with audience.
5. Closing remarks and presentation of people-centered smart cities roadmap.