IISD Earth Negotiations Bulletin

Issue #1

WUF Bulletin

WORLD URBAN FORUM
TWELFTH SESSION
CAIRO, EGYPT | 4–8 NOVEMBER 2024

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

Tuesday, 5 November 2024 | Online at: enb.iisd.org/world-urban-forum-wuf12

WUF12 Highlights:
Monday, 4 November 2024

The twelfth session of the World Urban Forum (WUF12) opened with meetings of WUF's five Assemblies, representing stakeholders from local and regional governments; grassroots; business; women; and children and youth.

Mostafa Madbouly, Prime Minister of Egypt, Manal Awad, Minister of Local Development, Egypt, and Sherif El-Sherbiny, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities, Egypt, spoke to the press ahead of the WUF12 formal opening in the afternoon.

Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat, also addressed the press conference. She highlighted the unique opportunity of WUF12 to shape the future of our cities and communities. She noted that the conference is especially meaningful as it marks the return of WUF to the African continent after more than 20 years, and is also the largest WUF ever, with more than 37,000 registered participants from 182 countries.

WUF12 is organized on the theme "It all starts at home: Local action for sustainable cities and communities."

This report covers the Joint Opening of the WUF Assemblies, two Assembly meetings that took place during the day, and the formal opening of WUF12 in the late afternoon.

Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director, UN-Habitat

Flag rising ceremony

Joint Opening of WUF Assemblies

The five WUF Assemblies held a joint opening in the morning. Hosts Shipra Narang Suri, Chief, Urban Practices Branch of UN-Habitat, and Sarah Syed, UN-Habitat Youth Advisory Board, urged participants to imagine a future where equality is not just a policy but a fulfilled promise. Manal Awad, Minister of Local Development, Egypt, highlighted WUF12 as an opportunity for all sectors to convene. She emphasized the need to start locally to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sherif El-Sherbiny, Minister of Housing, Utilities and Urban Communities, Egypt, noted the forum's various Assemblies cover many important topics surrounding human and economic development. He stated that gender equality, particularly the elimination of obstacles facing women, is paramount to achieving the SDGs at the local level.

Kalpana Viswanath, Founder and CEO of Safetipin, said strong, violence-free homes support communities and cities that are resilient and inclusive, noting women carry most of the burden of caring for the young and the elderly.

Ann Wanjiru Mbuthia, Coordinator, Mathare Legal Aid and Human Rights Advocacy, stressed the importance of empowering grassroots organizations to influence policy-making at the local and national levels. She stated that affordable accommodation helps enable livelihoods and build resilient communities.

Nasra Nanda, Nairobi City County Assembly

Hisham ElHelbawy, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Local Development, Egypt

Fatimetou Abdel Malick, President, Nouakchott region, Mauritania, said local governments play an integral role in WUF12's commitment to developing localized solutions to advance the New Urban Agenda (NUA), including through multi-level cooperation to build more resilient communities.

Nasra Nanda, Chair, Africa Regional Network, World Green Building Council, said businesses are important partners on the journey towards sustainable cities. She also considered the unlocking of private sector finance, as well as private sector contributions to skills development, as being vital to achieving the SDGs.

In closing, Executive Director Rossbach emphasized WUF12's purpose to provide input to Member States of UN-Habitat and feed into the Strategic Plan 2026-2029 to be adopted at the United Nations Habitat Assembly in May 2025. Noting that housing for almost three billion people is affected by conflicts, disasters, and various shortages, she called for collective action to influence policy change and create an enabling environment for sustainable urban development.

View of the Panel during Dialogue 1

World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments
Emilia Sáiz, Secretary-General of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) and UN-Habitat Executive Director Rossbach kicked off the World Assembly of Local and Regional Governments by recalling that 70% of the global population is forecast to live in urban areas by 2050. Rossbach stated that with the Pact for the Future and the NUA there is a clear roadmap to achieve the SDGs at the local level, and that it must include the integration of local governments into national and international decision-making processes.

Jan van Zanen, President of UCL, stated that the Quito Declaration on Sustainable Cities and Human Settlements for All is more important than ever in the face of the climate crisis.

Hisham El Helbawy, Egypt's Assistant Minister of Local Development, announced that Egypt will launch its National Strategy for Decentralization on the fourth day of WUF12, which he expects will help local governments develop ambitious plans to tackle their challenges.

Panel 1 on local SDG action plans: Speakers discussed approaches to achieving the SDGs, noting two-thirds of SDG targets require local government action. They highlighted that: it is in households and neighborhoods where human rights, equal opportunity and sustainable development are delivered; the NUA is a vital framework for integrating sustainability into urban planning; partnerships with water utilities are critical for achieving broad sustainability benefits; knowledge sharing between local governments from across the globe is highly beneficial; and consultation with municipal governments is particularly effective if linked to national budget processes.

Panel 2 on multistakeholder multilateralism and the outcomes of the Summit of the Future: Panelists explored the role of multilateralism and partnerships to develop strategies for achieving the SDGs, building on discussions at the recent Summit of the Future. They discussed needs

View of the Panel during Dialogue 3

such as more resources and capacity-building for the local level to achieve decarbonization; good leadership with the ability to balance listening to local needs and acting with vision for the benefit of the general public; development finance reform to reduce crippling debt burdens; data-driven decision-making using data systems capturing community needs; and a unified, whole-of-society response.

Panel 3 on financing the territories of today for future generations: Speakers noted the importance of improving both the quantity and quality of finance being made available. They called for making finance more accessible to youth and to startup companies that can advance sustainable urban development at the local level. They also called for partnerships to involve active listening to identify innovative solutions, not only addressing immediate issues, but also medium-term problems. They favored the use of green bonds in financing solutions for interlinked climate and biodiversity challenges. They also supported information-sharing to open new approaches and action to remedy the unequal distribution of resources.

Grassroots Assembly

The Assembly convened three separate panels.

Panel 1 on land, climate change, housing and livelihoods: Noting that slum dwellers are greatly affected by climate change, speakers bemoaned the failure of governments to upscale community-led pilot projects. They emphasized the need for trust-building and transparency when co-creating projects with local communities—as was done, for example, at Qursaya Island near Giza, where a community of 1,500 farmers and fishers now collect 30-40 tons of rubbish from the Nile every month to recycle or upcycle into new products. A panelist from Slum Dwellers International recommended prioritizing security of land tenure as the basis for building resilience.

Panel 2 on policy change, financing, partnerships and scaling up: Speakers drew on examples of local-

level actions in Madagascar, Mexico, Kenya, and Jamaica and called for institutionalizing budget allocations for local needs such as water and sanitation. They noted that, "without budget, there are no rights," and urged development partners and multilateral programmes to ensure their funding devolves to local governments and communities. They argued for grassroot communities to be present at all stages of delivery and to drive action at the other levels, not only advocating for better housing but also safeguarding the quality and supply of housing so that it benefits the intended communities.

Panel 3 on the role of the city: Speakers focused on implementing policy and research through local community action. They noted the need for financing, translating academic research into action, and collaborating to lobby governments to scale up local actions. Other speakers highlighted social models of housing delivery, dialogue among different governance bodies and marginalized people, and support for poor children in urban areas. They called for institutionalizing engagement between the grass roots and local government, and transferring ownership of programmes to local communities to ensure sustainability and achieve human security. One speaker urged developing community capacity for managing financing.

Obiga Kania Mario, State Minister of Internal Affairs, Uganda, reported on innovative approaches in Uganda, including enhancing community economic welfare for informed decision-making.

Rossbach reminded participants that WUF was created to be "the mechanism of participation" for stakeholders. She expressed commitment to incorporating their views into documentation for discussion with member states.

She highlighted UN-Habitat's work in participatory slum upgrading, and its mapping and monitoring of progress

Obiga Kania Mario, State Minister of Internal Affairs, Uganda

on implementing Sustainable Development Goal 11 on sustainable cities.

Opening Ceremony

Via video message, UN Secretary General António Guterres reaffirmed the importance of local and regional authorities, highlighting the new UN Advisory Group on Local and Regional Governments.

Jan van Zanen, President of the UCLG World Council, recalled that the last two years since the previous WUF have been some of the most difficult globally. He called on international actors to honor and implement the outcomes of the Summit of the Future.

Anacláudia Rossbach, Executive Director of UN-Habitat, noted the Pact for the Future recognizes the importance of housing, cities, regional and local governments, and the NUA. She expressed her hopes that WUF12 will present a unified message from urban stakeholders, including through the planned outcome of a "Cairo Call to Action."Rashad al-Alimi, Chairman of the Yemen Presidential Leadership Council, identified WUF as a unique platform for countries to expose the impacts of armed conflicts, as well as the challenges arising from climate change.

Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, President of the Transitional Sovereign Council of Sudan, congratulated Egypt's leadership on advancing sustainable urban development significantly and expressed appreciation for UN-Habitat's urban development programs, including its strategies to take forward urban elements of the SDGs. He noted Sudan would withstand the damage from its current domestic strife and would seek support to rebuild its damaged urban infrastructure. He welcomed WUF12 convening at this time to consider progress on urban development.

Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine, noted that advancing sustainable urban development in Palestine

Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt

would require building international partnerships to secure the future for coming generations, including by creating green jobs and driving forward digitialization. He highlighted that Palestinians' participation in WUF12 came in the context of ongoing Israeli attacks against Palestinians. He called on the international community to enforce a number of UN General Assembly resolutions on the Palestinian situation and to allow Palestine to participate as a full member of the United Nations. He concluded by praising Egypt's achievements on sustainable urban development.

Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, noting that WUF12 comes at a time of crises and wars, called for mobilizing political will and intensifying efforts to provide an immediate response, halt the destruction, renovate slums and unplanned cities, support poor communities, develop new projects to provide housing for all, and achieve the local goals of the 2030 Agenda. He called for all stakeholders to help make WUF12 an important step towards implementing the New Urban Agenda. UN-Habitat Executive Director Rossbach then formally declared WUF12 open.

Mahmoud Abbas, President of the State of Palestine

View of the room during the Opening Ceremony