Our urban approach

Habitat for Humanity®

The urban paradigm

In 2010, for the first time in human history, the majority of the world's population was classified as urban. By 2014, that percentage had increased to 54 percent, and current projections estimate that 70 percent of the world's inhabitants will be living in cities by 2050.

Impact of urbanization

Urbanization is not a new phenomenon and has been a key driver of development and poverty reduction over the past century. However, the current rapid rate of urbanization has resulted in huge unplanned urban growth, which has contributed toward the mushrooming of informal housing settlements, a lack of basic services for the poor, and the deterioration and overburdening of existing housing and infrastructure.

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Complexity of cities

Cities are dynamic social, cultural and economic hubs of activity that are interconnected and continually evolving. They consist of various political, social, economic and environmental layers that are interdependent and have to be effectively managed by the relevant public, private and community actors to support sustainable and resilient urban development.

Cities are able to sustainably grow and function when the demand for goods and services is matched by supply, including the availability of labor to support these systems: both informal labor (street vendors, waste pickers, home cleaners, shoe shiners, etc.) and essential workers (city service workers, teachers, police officers, firefighters, paramedics, nurses, hospital staff, etc.)

Lack of adequate and affordable housing

Rapid rates of urbanization, coupled with unfavorable political, economic, social and environmental conditions, affect the ability of public- and private-sector actors to meet the demand for basic services and affordable housing among low-income households. As a consequence, low-income households mainly try to secure affordable rental housing or build their own housing incrementally. They rely heavily on their own resources, community networks and informal markets because of their low income levels, the lack of access to finance and the lack of capacity among government institutions to provide any support. In most developing countries, simply finding housing with adequate access to water, sanitation, education and livelihood opportunities is a daunting challenge. Consequently, many households gravitate toward living in

informal settlements, where they have better access to community networks and where the housing itself is more affordable – but mostly inadequate and lacking in basic services and security of tenure.

Helping to deliver adequate and affordable housing and to upgrade informal settlements is a fundamental component of achieving inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements. This work needs to be addressed in a comprehensive manner that contributes to the overall sustainable and resilient development of urban areas.

Inclusion of the poor

The urban poor have a huge impact on the social, environmental and economic landscape of cities; contribute to the growing informal economy; and provide the driving labor force of cities.

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However, they are largely excluded from the benefits associated with living in cities: political influence, infrastructure, housing and services. All sectors – community, public, private and civic – need to work together to meet the challenges faced by our cities today and improve our collective futures.

Habitat for Humanity's urban approach

Habitat for Humanity has adopted a comprehensive and collaborative approach toward urban development. It is based on the premise that there are eight non-negotiable principles that are universal and essential to promoting sustainable and resilient urban and housing development, which can be implemented through various contextually adapted practices and models. To effectively implement the urban approach, Habitat works closely with actors from the community, public, private and development sectors, helping to create an enabling environment that supports sustainable and integrated urban development. This includes enabling policies and legislation, functional land markets, adequate infrastructure, access to livelihoods, capacitated local government, private-sector participation, and community organization in support of upgrading informal settlements and increasing access to affordable and adequate housing.

The urban approach also aims to create a platform to share and leverage the wealth of experience that exists within Habitat and to align to Habitat's global vision of ensuring everyone has a decent place to live while creating inclusive, safe, sustainable and resilient cities and human settlements, as advocated for in

the 2030 Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals, the Habitat III Housing Policy Paper, and the New Urban Agenda.

Key objectives:

1) Improve the integration and coordination of Habitat's programs and partners as they work in urban areas.
2) Increase access to adequate and affordable shelter among the urban poor through engagement with the public, private and community sectors.
3) Contribute toward the creation of safe, resilient, inclusive and sustainable cities and human settlements.

Habitat's eight urban principles

Habitat has identified eight urban principles that reflect our non-negotiable values and guide our work in urban areas:

- **People-centered approach:**

  Supporting families and communities to be at the center of the development process, with decision-making authority and access to information and resources.

- **Secure tenure:**

  Promoting the protection of citizens against forceful evictions, supporting the development of inclusive housing and urban policies, and advocating for a continuum of tenure rights.

- **Housing as an integrating platform:**

  Promoting the role of housing as a platform that facilitates improved quality of life and increased access to water, sanitation, safety, livelihoods, health, education, and other social and cultural services.

- **Partnerships (people, public, private):**

  Building partnerships, coalitions and networks to support improved access to services and shelter for people living in poor conditions, including leveraging capacity and resources.

- **Resilience:**

  Supporting communities and cities to be better prepared to absorb, cope, adapt, respond and recover from multiple and varies hazards, stresses and shocks.

- **Placemaking:**

  Promoting urban design that creates healthy, safe, resilient, vibrant communities and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older people and people with disabilities.

- ## Territorial/citywide planning:

Taking a territorial view of social, environmental and economic city systems, including the inclusion of vulnerable communities into the broader urban fabric to support more balanced sustainable development that reduces social, environmental, economic and geographic inequalities.

- ## Economic and social inclusion:

Supporting the inclusion of both the informal and formal financial and housing sectors in urban development by working with the demand and supply sides of housing to enhance housing market systems.

Implementation of the urban approach

Habitat for Humanity has a long history implementing a diverse set of interventions to work with families and communities in need of adequate and affordable housing. The urban approach builds on and leverages the valuable experience the organization has gained globally through the implementation of its housing and settlement programs across the rural-to-urban continuum.

To successfully implement the urban approach, Habitat will need to work in partnership with communities and the public and private sectors to identify all the requirements for facilitating better access to adequate and affordable housing. This will include developing more inclusive markets and innovative, sustainable and scalable slum upgrading approaches that consider the vulnerabilities, hazards and complexities on the ground, including social, environmental and economic contextual conditions, along with the existing condition of the housing stock.