

United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

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Raf Tuts is the Director of the Global Solutions Division at UN-Habitat, based in Nairobi, Kenya. With over 25 years of experience, he has held various key positions within UN-Habitat, contributing significantly to the organization's initiatives. Raf has been instrumental in shaping normative guidelines for sustainable urbanization and has led efforts

to study city responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. He played a vital role in formulating the Sustainable Development Goals and was honored with the title of Honorary Professor by the University of Leuven, Belgium, in recognition of his dedication to urban development.

A Collective Call to Unite for Global Urban Resilience in the Face of Climate Change, by Raf Tuts, UN-Habitat

In an era defined by climate uncertainty, the stage is set for cities to take center stage in the battle for a sustainable future. Recent catastrophes such as heatwaves, raging wildfires, destructive floods and landslides, and devastating cyclones serve as a stark reminder that the impacts of climate change are far-reaching, underscoring the urgent need for global cooperation. This is not merely a regional issue; it's a global crisis that requires a collaborative effort that transcends borders. As we stand at this crossroads, Sustainable Development Goal 11 comes into sharp focus, guiding us toward making our cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

A Global Challenge: The Nexus of Urbanization and Climate Change

The aftermath of Cyclone Freddy in Malawi and Mozambique, along with the trail of destruction left by Cyclone Mocha in Myanmar and parts of Bangladesh, bears testimony to the global consequences of extreme weather events. Over 2 million lives were disrupted, 600 lives were lost, and the economic toll exceeded \$140 million. There is also a considerable financial toll; for instance, the United States has experienced 15 extreme weather events in 2023 alone, collectively costing over \$1 billion. The message is clear: this isn't a localized issue, but a global and persistent problem.

Urbanization is an irreversible global phenomenon. More than half of the world's population currently resides in urban areas, and this trend is set to continue. By 2050, an additional 2.5 billion people are expected to call cities home, raising the urban population



share to 68%. Yet, these urban centers, accounting for only 2% of the Earth's landmass, consume nearly three-quarter of energy, contributing to 70% of greenhouse gas emissions. With 70% of urban areas being impacted by climate change, the vulnerability of cities to flooding, storms, and extreme temperatures cannot be ignored. The reality is stark: the urban poor, often residing in informal settlements, bear the brunt of climate impacts.

Embracing Sustainable Development Goal 11: Resilient and Inclusive Cities

Sustainable Development Goal 11 beckons us to rethink our approach to urbanization. It calls for cities that prioritize resilience, sustainability, and inclusivity. Urbanization is growing at a quick rate in Africa where I am based. The urban population is projected to reach 50% of the total by 2035, so the urgency to build resilient cities that are ready for the future cannot be overstated. Astonishingly, despite African cities being home to over 600 million people, they receive less attention in global climate discourse.

In the face of this challenge, the UN-Habitat Assembly held in June 2023, passed key resolutions reaffirming UN-Habitat's role as focal point for sustainable urbanization and human settlements, including resolutions the interlinkages between urbanization and climate change, smart cities, informal settlements, and biodiversity, among others. The resolutions underscore the importance of multilevel climate action, and the pivotal role of cities and local government in achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. In addition, it highlights the urgent need for multilevel climate action. As such, UN-Habitat serves as a unifying force, harnessing the collective will to address urban resilience in the face of climate change.

Partnerships, like the collaboration between UN-Habitat, UNDP and the African Union Commission (AUC) highlight the path to resilient urban development and paves the way to effectively implement the Africa Urban Resilience Programme (AURP) of the African Union. In addition, Kenya is leading an initiative on Building Climate Resilience for the Urban Poor (BCRUP) to support the resilience perspective for the more than 54% of urban population living in informal settlements in Africa. Such efforts, and others being implemented by a wider community of UN, academic and civil society partners, are supporting the implementation of SDG 11 with a focus on climate action in cities, and in turn also contributing to achieving SDG 13.

Roadmap to COP28: Converging Conversations for Global Resilience

The events leading up to COP28, including the Africa Climate Summit and Africa Climate Week, Bridge for Cities, and the United Nations General Assembly serve as pivotal junctures on the journey toward achieving global climate goals. These gatherings are more than meetings; they are hubs of innovation and knowledge exchange, facilitating connections and the sharing of solutions to enhance urban resilience. These platforms

bring together local and regional stakeholders, fostering a united global approach to the global climate crisis.

COP28, taking place this year in Dubai, serves as a pivotal platform where urgent climate conversations worldwide converge. December 6 assumes a special significance as a day dedicated to Multilevel Action, Urbanization, Built Environment, and Transport. On this day, the COP28 Presidency, supported by UN-Habitat is co-convening the second Ministerial Meeting on Urbanization and Climate Change. Building on the successful outcomes of the first-ever meeting at COP27, the upcoming Ministerial Meeting will focus on how to accelerate local climate finance by facilitating a dialogue between Ministers of Housing, Urban Development, Environment and Finance as well as local and regional governments, multilateral banks, and other non-state actors. The objective of the meeting is twofold: Firstly, to reinforce the importance of multi-level climate action to achieve the targets of the Paris Agreement. Secondly, to discuss how we can accelerate local climate finance to facilitate and how local governments can be better equipped to respond to the climate crisis.

This meeting seeks to both inspire and accelerate local climate action by showcasing concrete examples, while also reinforcing the importance of multi-level climate action to achieve the targets of the Paris Agreement.

Uniting for a Resilient Future

In conclusion, as we embark on the journey toward global urban resilience, collaboration must take centre stage. This is not the time for individual efforts; it's a moment for collective progress. The focus must be on scaling up climate action through strategic partnerships, innovative solutions, and shared goals. The resilience of cities, particularly for the urban poor, hinges on our ability to turn commitments into tangible outcomes.

In the call for urban resilience, the challenge is daunting, yet the path forward is clear. Let us unite as a global community, transcending boundaries, to shape a future where cities stand strong against the climate crisis. The urgency of this moment cannot be understated—our shared destiny rests on our collective actions today.ⁱ

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