

THE HABITAT PARTNER UNIVERSITY NETWORK

THE CHALLENGE OF SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The 21st century is the urban century. Over half of the world's population lives in cities, and the world is rapidly urbanizing. 90 percent of this growth is taking place in the developing world. Many of these countries lack the capacity to harness the potential of cities for economic growth and to manage and direct urbanization on a sustainable path. They suffer from the negative effects of rapid urbanization, and become vulnerable to global phenomena such as economic instability, food insecurity, resource depletion and climate change. If cities are to efficiently deal with these challenges, they require leaders, managers and staff capable of adopting innovative and robust approaches to planning, developing, managing and financing growth for all citizens.

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

Universities have the human capital and knowledge resources to contribute to change toward sustainable urban development. There are many good examples of how universities can help cities solve their complex problems and realize their development potential. There are a range of innovations, including industry-university links, local urban knowledge arenas involving universities, curricula development responding to new and complex issues of sustainability as well as university networks to pool resources around common research themes. However these are still emerging practices. In many countries, the research and training priorities of universities are not in line with the emerging priorities for sustainable urban development. Concurrently, the findings from university research are not being mainstreamed amongst practitioners, while the knowledge acquired by university staff is often not being integrated into the university curricula, and thus future urban practitioners are not sufficiently exposed to these key issues.



VALUE ADDED FOR

Cities: Access to cutting edge research and training on sustainable urban development, professionally and relevantly trained future practitioners.

Universities: International exposure, support with access to city managers, United Nations endorsement of education programmes; enhanced credibility of training and research offerings; laboratories for student and Doctor of Philosophy work.

UN-HABITAT: Enhanced quantity and quality of research and training in sustainable urban development to underpin the implementation of the agency's vision, and access to networks through partner universities.





RESPONSE

The Habitat Partner University initiative is inspired by the awareness of the acute importance of the role of knowledge in addressing the challenges of sustainable urbanization, the promise of good practices championed by some universities, and UN-HABITAT's catalytic ability to scale up such practices by leveraging its mandate and strategic role in international development cooperation. The Habitat Partner University initiative operationalizes the Education, Training and Research component of the Sustainable Urban Development Network (SUD-Net). It aims at enlarging cooperation between UN-HABITAT and institutions of higher education, as well as facilitating exchange and cooperation between universities in developing and developed nations. UN-HABITAT works with Habitat Partner Universities in building the teaching and research capacity of tertiary institutions in the field of sustainable urban development. The network offers a critical vehicle to ensure the

knowledge products and resources of universities are accessible to policy makers, practitioners and communities, while maintaining interaction between universities and cities towards informing their education programmes and research agendas.

HABITAT PARTNER UNIVERSITIES: REQUIREMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Habitat Partner Universities are institutions willing to promote the socially and environmentally sustainable development of towns and cities in accordance with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. They encourage interaction and cooperation between institutions of higher education based on the principles of reciprocity and mutual benefit, as well as promoting an integrated approach to the ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions of the sustainable development of human settlements.

ENVISIONED ACHIEVEMENTS

In the long-term:

- The principles of sustainable urban development are integrated into the curricula of relevant university departments
- Active platforms for dialogue and collaboration between universities, local government, civil society, communities and the private sector on sustainable urban development challenges and opportunities are created and maintained
- Universities' capacity to produce highly qualified urban practitioners well-versed in contemporary urban challenges and innovative solutions is enhanced

In the medium-term:

- Key university and professional association staff and practitioners become more confident, committed and knowledgeable about sustainable urban development approaches
- More research on urban development challenges is pioneered by universities, also in response to city demands for knowledge

In the short-term:

- The development of flexible, inter-disciplinary professional degree programmes, and other innovative teaching/research/practice partnerships.
- New programmes are executed in partnership between different universities, also across regions



For further information

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