

TEMPLATE – SIDE EVENTS SUMMARIES

Summary of Side Event : How can measuring quality of life enhance inclusive decision-making and accelerate the implementation of the Agenda 2030?

30 Jan 2024, 8:15 - 9:30 AM (EST, New York time)

Background on the event

UN-Habitat and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) co-hosted a virtual side-event on the margins of the ECOSOC Partnership Forum. The side event aimed at discussing the importance of human-centric development for participatory planning and for the implementation of global agendas, particularly in cities. Cities indeed critically need to collect and use more data, including people-centered data, to deliver more evidence-based and targeted actions for sustainable urban development. The Quality of Life initiative, launched last year by UN-Habitat, specifically aims at supporting cities on that path. Through the development of an index and a network of academia and other stakeholders, the initiative aims at enhancing knowledge about people's wellbeing in cities to support inclusive local actions. Panelists, from academia, Regional Economic Commissions and cities discussed the benefits of such an approach, in terms of participatory planning and impacts for global agendas' targets.

Key Issues discussed

The discussion explored how innovative measures of quality of life in cities could contribute to more inclusive urban development and to the localization of the SDGs. It also provided examples of cities that have developed new ways of consulting cities' inhabitants to enhance targeted actions. More specifically, the discussion explored the following:

- The opportunities to use official and non-official data to better understand social functions, people's concerns, needs and patterns; to ultimately guide smarter and more targeted planning, for instance through socio-spatial planning strategies. Digital and technological innovations, if used carefully, are key enablers to improve human-centered actions;
- How the notion of quality-of-life for all can reinvent the purpose of data, especially by disaggregating indicators to be able to focus on vulnerable groups and leave no-one behind – for instance: halt transgenerational poverty traps, make cities safer for women, better include displaced populations, etc.;
- The critical need to enhance urban data collection, but also to be able to convert this data into action, through capacity building, appropriate governance structures in cities (such as the creation of monitoring units) and targeted public investments;
- The major role played by stakeholder engagement mechanisms in cities that are producing Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs), which, in some post-conflict cities, have strongly contributed to peace and security by increasing dialog and trust;

- The urge to focus on proximities to identify gaps in people’s wellbeing and ultimately better deliver on global agendas’ targets;
- The importance of enhancing bottom-up approaches to align reporting mechanisms on the SDGs, starting from the people.

Key recommendations for action

1. ***Promote human-centric metrics and approaches to development that complement SDG indicators.*** Placing human well-being at the core of development planning is critical to leave no-one behind and to link SDG targets with the challenges faced by people in their environment. Ultimately, the identification of gaps in people’s satisfaction regarding social cohesion, economic, education and housing opportunities, relationship to their environment, or to their options for commuting in their cities can inform the prioritization of actions by local governments and support the localization of the SDGs.
2. ***Develop new urban integrated data.*** The lack of data for urban SDG targets and indicators is alarming. Integrated data solutions for cities need to be improved to allow cities (i) to produce disaggregated data that can identify challenges for specific vulnerable groups; and (ii) to identify responses that contribute to the achievement of the SDGs in an integrated manner. The proximity scale is essential to ensure stakeholder engagement for data production and monitoring and to provide data on social functions and human patterns related to basic needs and wellbeing.
3. ***Enhance integrated local responses through innovation.*** Beyond the lack of data, there are critical gaps to transform the information provided by urban data into action. Once information about “what is needed” is collected, local governments often lack means of identifying *how* these needs can be addressed. Inclusive planning, through regular stakeholder group consultations and subjective indicators for monitoring; the development of data visualization and monitoring platforms; and the use of technological improvements, such as satellite images for socio-spatial planning or language learning models to provide recommendations, are key to fill the implementation gap of the SDGs.
4. ***Strengthen local governments capacities, institutions and financing plans.*** Local governments need adequate financial and human resources to identify, implement and monitor urban actions. Capacity building is key to make an adequate use of urban data. Governance mechanisms, to ensure proper coordination between monitoring and delivery services are also of great importance. Lastly, adequate planning and identification of prioritized public investments need to be systematized and evidence-based.