



HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS NETWORK Habitat International Coalition

The Habitat Agenda Commitments related to the Rural Habitat

This reference paper reviews the **specific principles and commitments** that States adopted in the Habitat Agenda¹ at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul in 1996, to assist in their reconsideration before adoption of the new Agenda at the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat III), to be held in Quito in October 2016.

For the Habitat III process and outcomes to be credible, it is crucial to assess implementation of the commitments of Habitat II, as promised in Habitat Agenda's section "G. Assessing Progress." Many of those commitments also remain the essential core for any new global agenda.

At the heart of the Habitat II achievements were: (1) an affirmation of the centrality of human rights, in particular the progressive realization of the human right to adequate housing in human settlements and (2) recognition of the principles of good governance in balanced rural and urban development. Those two pillars of the Habitat II Agenda are reflected in the Istanbul Declaration and Habitat II Agenda.

The commitments related to governance are to be understood within the concept of human habitat, a concept the two relevant bi-decennial global policies established, first at Vancouver in 1976 (Habitat I) and, secondly, at Istanbul (Habitat II) in 1996. The concept of habitat is both urban and rural, involving a "regional and cross-sectoral approach to human settlements planning, which places emphasis on rural/urban linkages and treats villages and cities as two ends [points] of a human settlements continuum in a common ecosystem" (H2, para. 104).

At Habitat II (1996), states, including their various spheres of government, committed to principles and actions over the ensuing 20 years. Concerning rural habitat, the Habitat Agenda recognizes in the preamble that:

"The growth of cities and towns causes social, economic and environmental changes that go beyond city boundaries. Habitat II deals with all settlements - large, medium and small - and reaffirms the need for universal improvements in living and working conditions"; (H2:7)

"In the process of globalization and growing interdependence, rural settlements represent a great challenge and opportunity for renewed developmental initiatives at all levels and in all fields. Many rural settlements, however, are facing a lack or an inadequacy of economic opportunities, especially employment, and of infrastructure and services, particularly those related to water, sanitation, health, education, communication, transportation and energy. Appropriate efforts and technologies for rural development can help to reduce, inter alia,

¹ United Nations, Report of the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), Istanbul (Turkey) 3-14 June 1996, Consulted on March 2016 [on line]: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G96/025/00/PDF/G9602500.pdf?OpenElement>

imbalances, unsustainable practices, poverty, isolation, environmental pollution and insecure land tenure. Such efforts can contribute to improving the linkage of rural settlements with the mainstream of economic, social and cultural life, to assuring sustainable communities and safe environments, and to reducing pressures on urban growth”; (H2:9)

and:

“Cities, towns and rural settlements are linked through the movements of goods, resources and people. Urban-rural linkages are of crucial importance for the sustainability of human settlements. As rural population growth has outpaced the generation of employment and economic opportunities, rural-to-urban migration has steadily increased, particularly in developing countries, which has put enormous pressure on urban infrastructure and services already under serious stress. It is urgent to eradicate rural poverty and to improve the quality of living conditions, as well as to create employment and educational opportunities in rural settlements, regional centres and secondary cities. Full advantage must be taken of the complementary contributions and linkages of rural and urban areas by balancing their different economic, social and environmental requirements”; (H2:10)

The Habitat II principles, commitments and action strategies concerning **rural habitat** are reproduced in the following sections. As mentioned above, these form criteria for the indispensable evaluation of Habitat II’s implementation by governments and development agencies, in particular, UN-Habitat. These reminders serve further as the minimum elements upon which to build a new Habitat Agenda, which we expect to address the new challenges facing human settlements in the 21st Century, with States and development actors committing to more-progressive development and far more-diligent implementation.

The document provides as well a list of the relevant obligations for governance that States have assumed in the Habitat agenda and the intervening period since Habitat II, jointly with other relevant documents forming part of the current minimum norms for human settlements development, administration and governance concerning rural development.

Habitat II Goals and Principles

Rural and urban development are interdependent. In addition to improving the urban habitat, we must also work to extend adequate infrastructure, public services and employment opportunities to rural areas in order to enhance their attractiveness, develop an integrated network of settlements and minimize rural-to-urban migration. Small- and medium-sized towns need special focus; (ID:6)

We shall promote the conservation, rehabilitation and maintenance of buildings, monuments, open spaces, landscapes and settlement patterns of historical, cultural, architectural, natural, religious and spiritual value; (ID:11)

Equitable human settlements are those in which all people, without discrimination of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, have equal access to housing, infrastructure, health services, adequate food and water, education and open spaces. In addition, such human settlements provide equal opportunity for a productive and freely chosen livelihood; equal opportunity for personal, spiritual, religious, cultural and social development; equal rights and obligations with regard to the conservation and use of natural and cultural resources; and equal access to mechanisms to ensure that rights are not violated. The

empowerment of women and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, whether rural or urban, are fundamental to sustainable human settlements development; (H2:27)

The diversity of types of human settlements is a key component to creating just and sustainable societies. The living and working conditions in all human settlements, including regional urban centres, rural service centres, rural hamlets, rural communities, market towns and villages, must be improved, with particular emphasis on shelter, social and physical infrastructure, and services. The maintenance and the development of rural settlements require sustainable agriculture and forestry activities and improved agricultural technologies, economic diversification, and expanded employment opportunities created by encouraging appropriate and environmentally sustainable investment in industry and related economic production and service activities; (H2:106)

Bringing the development of urban areas into harmony with the natural environment and the overall system of settlements is one of the basic tasks to be undertaken in achieving a sustainable urbanized world. (...) National, subnational and local policies and programmes need to be integrated. In this regard, the principle of the precautionary approach, stipulated in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, should be widely applied by Governments according to their capabilities, and the use of environmental and social impact assessments is desirable; (H2:109)

Urban and rural areas are interdependent economically, socially and environmentally. At the turn of the century, a substantial proportion of the world's population will continue to live in rural settlements, particularly in developing countries. In order to achieve a more sustainable future for the Earth, these rural settlements need to be valued and supported. (...) Policies and programmes for the sustainable development of rural areas that integrate rural regions into the national economy require strong local and national institutions for the planning and management of human settlements that place emphasis on rural-urban linkages and treat villages and cities as two ends of a human settlements continuum; (H2:163)

In many countries, rural populations, including indigenous people, play an important role in ensuring food security and in sustaining the social and ecological balance over large tracts of land and thus contribute significantly to the task of protecting biodiversity and fragile ecosystems and to the sustainable use of biological resources; (H2:164)

Habitat II Commitments and actions

Rural habitat protection

Promoting changes in unsustainable production and consumption patterns, particularly in industrialized countries, population policies and settlement structures that are more sustainable, reduce environmental stress, promote the efficient and rational use of natural resources - including water, air, biodiversity, forests, energy sources and land - and meet basic needs, thereby providing a healthy living and working environment for all and reducing the ecological footprint of human settlements; (43j)

Promoting optimal use of productive land in urban and rural areas and protecting fragile ecosystems and environmentally vulnerable areas from the negative impacts of human settlements, inter alia, through developing and supporting the implementation of improved land management practices that deal comprehensively with potentially competing land requirements for agriculture, industry, transport, urban development, green space, protected areas and other vital needs; (43p) (109)

Protecting and maintaining the historical, cultural and natural heritage, including traditional shelter and settlement patterns, as appropriate, of indigenous and other people, as well as landscapes and urban flora and fauna in open and green spaces; (43r) (120g) (152)

Promoting the redevelopment and reuse of already serviced but poorly utilized commercial and residential land in urban centres in order to revitalize them and reduce development pressures on productive agricultural lands on the periphery; (43t)

Formulating and implementing programmes that contribute to maintaining and strengthening the vitality of rural areas; (43x)

Preventing man-made disasters, including major technological disasters, by ensuring adequate regulatory and other measures to avoid their occurrence, and reducing the impacts of natural disasters and other emergencies on human settlements (...); (43z) (57)

Facilitate the efforts of trade unions, farmers', women's and consumers' organizations, organizations of people with disabilities and other associations of the populations concerned to set up their own cooperatively organized or local financial institutions and mechanisms; (82e)

The use of a variety of planning mechanisms that provide for meaningful participation to reduce the negative impacts on biological resources, such as prime agricultural land and forests, that may arise from human settlements activities; (85j)

Promote the use of tools for disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness in order to reduce the vulnerability of populations to natural, man-made and technological disasters; (98h)

Ensure that children have access to the natural world on a daily basis through free play outdoors, and establish education programmes to help children investigate their community environments, including natural ecosystems; (139e)

[I]mproving natural and human-made disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation and response (...); Ensure the participation in disaster planning and management of all interested parties, including women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities, in recognition of their particular vulnerability to human-made and natural disasters; (172b)

Healthy and environmentally sound agricultural activities and the provision of common land should be integrated into the planning of urban and peri-urban areas; (112)

Encourage, where appropriate, the establishment of productive and recreational green belts around urban and rural agglomerations in order to protect their environment and contribute to the provision of food products; Reduce significantly the degradation of the marine environment emanating from land-based activities, including municipal, industrial and agricultural wastes and run-off, which have a pernicious impact on the productive areas of the marine environment and coastal areas; (139 a and d)

To promote the utilization of new and improved technologies and appropriate traditional practices in rural settlements development, Governments at the appropriate levels, including local authorities, in cooperation with the private sector, should: (a) Improve access to information on agricultural production, marketing and pricing in rural and remote areas by using, inter alia, advanced and accessible communication technologies; (b) In cooperation with farmers' organizations, women's groups and other interested parties, promote research and the dissemination of research findings in traditional, new and improved technologies for, inter alia, agriculture, aquaculture, forestry and agro-forestry; (166)

Sustainable rural development

Facilitating participation by tenants in the management of public and community-based housing and by women and those belonging to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the planning and implementation of urban and rural development; (45m)

Integrating a gender perspective in the design and implementation of environmentally sound and sustainable resource management mechanisms, production techniques and infrastructure development in rural and urban areas; (46d)

Formulate and implement policies that promote the enablement approach to the development, maintenance and rehabilitation of shelter (...); (a) Consider establishing priorities for the allocation of natural, human, technical and financial resources; (68) (70a) (204d) (70c)

Coordinate and integrate shelter and human settlements policies with other related policies, such as population and human resource development policies, environment, cultural, land and infrastructure policies, and urban and rural planning, as well as private and/or public employment initiatives; (69a)

Integrate and regularize self-built housing, especially through appropriate land registration programmes, as a holistic part of the overall housing and infrastructure system in urban and rural areas, subject to a comprehensive land-use policy; (74b)

Decentralize, as appropriate, the lending operations of mortgage markets and encourage the private sector to do the same in order to provide greater physical access to credit, especially in rural areas; (81h)

Promote comprehensive rural development through such measures as equal access to land, land improvement, economic diversification, the development of small and medium-scale cities in rural areas and, where appropriate, indigenous land settlements; (76m) (40b) Ensure equal access to housing, land and public services (...); (119l)

Establish programmes that address the absolute poverty found among rural women, focusing on their need for adequate shelter and employment; (119i)

Provide equal access to basic education, paying special attention to people living in poverty and to youth living in rural areas and addressing constraints created by distance, lack of educational facilities and social or economic barriers; (120c)

Dispose as soon as possible, within both rural and urban areas, of sewage, waste waters and solid wastes, including hazardous wastes, in a manner that conforms with national or international environmental quality guidelines; (138d) (105)

Develop strategies to reduce the demand for limited water resources by increasing efficiencies in the agricultural and industrial sectors; (141h)

Encourage the use of safe industrial and agricultural waste products and other types of low-energy and recycled building materials in construction; (145k)

Promote urban and rural planning and design solutions that are conducive to the efficient use of energy and that pay due attention to end users and their attitudes and practices; (146a)

To strengthen sustainable development and employment opportunities in impoverished rural areas, Governments at the appropriate levels, including local authorities, should: (a) Stimulate rural development by enhancing employment opportunities, providing educational and health facilities and services, improving housing, strengthening technical infrastructure and encouraging rural enterprises and sustainable agriculture; (b) Establish priorities for regional infrastructure investments based on opportunities for economic return, social equity and environmental quality; (c) Encourage the private sector to develop and strengthen contract-based wholesale markets and marketing intermediaries for rural products so as to improve and/or establish a cash-flow and futures contract economy in rural areas; (d) Promote equitable and efficient access to markets as well as, where appropriate, pricing and payment systems for rural products, especially of food items consumed in urban areas; (e) Promote products from rural areas in urban markets and rural service centres by improving access to market information and distribution centres and networks; (f) Reduce significantly or eliminate environmentally harmful subsidies and other programmes, such as those that stimulate the excessive use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, and price control or subsidy systems that perpetuate unsustainable practices and production systems in rural and agricultural economies; (168)

Balanced territorial development

Promoting the development of more balanced and sustainable human settlements by encouraging productive investments, job creation and social infrastructure development in small and medium-sized cities, towns and villages; (43i)

Consider the need to plan, design and build sustainable new human settlements, taking into account the environmental impact, to relieve present and obviate future population and development pressures on urban and rural areas; (127d)

[S]pecific actions also need to be taken to develop and maintain efficient and affordable transport, information and communications systems and linkages with other urban centres and with rural areas and to seek reasonably balanced patterns of development, both geographically and economically; (156)

To promote the sustainable development of rural settlements and to reduce rural-to-urban migration, Governments at the appropriate levels, including local authorities, should: (a) Promote the active participation of all interested parties, including those in isolated and remote communities, in ensuring the integrated consideration of the environmental, social and economic objectives of rural development efforts; (b) Take appropriate measures to improve the living and working conditions in regional urban centres, small towns and rural service centres; (c) Foster a sustainable and diversified agricultural system in order to have vibrant rural communities; (d) Provide infrastructure, services and incentives for investment in rural areas; (e) Promote education and training in rural areas to facilitate employment and the use of appropriate technology; (165) (54)

In establishing policies for sustainable regional development and management, Governments at the appropriate levels, including local authorities, should: (a) Promote education and training programmes and establish procedures for the full participation of rural and indigenous people in the setting of priorities for balanced and ecologically viable regional development; (b) Make full use of geographic information systems and environmental assessment methods for the preparation of environmentally sound regional development policies; (c) Implement regional and rural development plans and programmes based on needs and economic viability; (d) Establish an efficient and transparent system for the allocation of resources to rural areas based on people's needs; (167)

To achieve (balanced and mutually supportive urban-rural development), Governments at the appropriate levels, including local authorities, with the support of the relevant international and regional institutions, should: (a) Provide an appropriate legal, fiscal and organizational framework that is suitable for strengthening the networks of small and medium-sized settlements in rural areas; (b) Facilitate the development of an efficient communication and distribution infrastructure for the exchange of information, labour, goods, services and capital between urban and rural areas; (c) Promote broad cooperation among local communities to find integrated solutions for land-use, transport and environmental problems in an urban-rural context; (d) Pursue a participatory approach to balanced and mutually supportive urban-rural development, based on a continuous dialogue among the interested parties involved in urban-rural development; (169)

International Norms related to Rural Habitat

The International normative frameworks cited in the Habitat Agenda:

- United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), [Charter of the United Nations](#), (1945)*;
- UNGA, [The Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#), A/RES/3/217A, (1948)*;
- UNGA, [International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination](#), A/RES/51/80, (1965)**;

- UNGA, [International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), A/res/21/2200, (1966)**;
- UNGA, [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), A/res/21/2200A (1966)**;
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), [Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage](#), Paris, (1972)**;
- UNGA, [International Year of Shelter for the Homeless](#), A/res/37/221, (1987)†;
- UNGA, [Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000](#), A/res/43/181, (1988)†;
- [United Nations Conference on Environment & Development](#), Rio de Janeiro (Brasil), 3–14 June 1992:
 - [Agenda 21](#)†
 - [Rio Declaration on Environment and Development](#)†
 - [Statement of Forest Principles](#)†
 - [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change](#)**
 - [United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity](#)**
- [International Conference on Population and Development](#), Cairo (Egypt), 5–13 September 1994:
 - [Programme of Action](#)†
- [World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction](#), Yokohama (Japan) 23–27 May 1994:
 - [Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World](#)†
- Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Bridgetown (Barbados), 25 April – 6 May 1994:
 - [Barbados Declaration and Programme of Action](#)†

Key to symbols:

* = binding on all States; ** = binding on all States party to the relevant treaty; † = declaratory law as guidance for States and their governments to comply with general principles of international law and certain treaty–law requirements.

The international normative documents developed after the adoption of Habitat Agenda or not mentioned in the Habitat Agenda²:

- UNGA, [International Framework of Action for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction](#), A/RES/44/236, (1989) †;
- CESCR, [General Comment No. 4](#) on the right to adequate housing, (1992)**;
- CESCR, [General Comment No. 12](#) on the right to adequate food, (1999)**;
- Third United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Brussels (Belgium), 14-20 May 2001:

² This is an illustrative non-exhaustive compilation of international norms.

- [Brussels Declaration](#)[†]
- CESCR, [General Comment No. 15](#) on the right to water, (2002)**;
- [World Summit on Sustainable Development](#), Johannesburg (South Africa), 26 August–4 September 2002:
 - [Johannesburg Declaration](#)[†]
 - [Plan of Implementation](#)[†]
- International Ministerial Conference of Landlocked and Transit Developing Countries,
 - [Conference report](#): Almaty Declaration and Almaty Programme of Action[†]
- United Nations Development Program (UNDP), [Decentralised Governance for Development: A Combined Practice Note on Decentralisation, Local Governance and Urban/Rural Development](#), (2004) [†];
- International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, Port Louis (Mauritius), 10-14 January 2005:
 - [Report of the International Meeting](#): Mauritius Declaration and Mauritius Strategy[†]
- UN World Conference on Disaster Reduction, Hyogo (Japan), 18-22 January 2005:
 - [Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters](#)[†]
- International Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ICARRD), Porto Alegre (Brazil), 7–10 March 2006:
 - [ICARRD Final Declaration](#)[†]
- ILC, [Draft Principles on the Allocation of Loss in the Case of Transboundary Harm arising out of Hazardous Activities](#), (2006)[†];
- UNGA, [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#), A/RES/61/295, (2007)[†];
- ILC, [Draft Articles of a Transboundary Aquifers Convention](#), (2008)[†];
- UNGA, [The Human Right to Water and Sanitation](#), A/RES/64/292, (2010)[†];
- Conference of Parties of the Convention to Combat Desertification (COP–UNCCD), [10–year Strategic Plan and Framework to Enhance the Implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification](#), Decision 3/COP.8, (2011)**;
- Fourth UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries, Istanbul (Turkey), 9-13 May 2011:
 - [Istanbul Declaration](#)**
 - [Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2011-2020](#)**
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests](#), Rome, (2012)[†];
- UNGA, [The Future We Want](#), A/RES/66/288, (2012)[†];
- ETO Consortium, [Maastricht Principles on Extraterritorial Obligation of States in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#), Germany, (2013)[†];

- [Second UN Conference on Landlocked Developing Countries](#), Vienna (Austria), 3-5 November 2014:
 - [Vienna Programme of Action](#)**
 - [Vienna Declaration](#)**
- Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States, Apia (Samoa), 1 - 4 September 2014:
 - [SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action \(SAMOA\) Pathway](#)†
- Conference of Parties on Climate Change, [The Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#), FCCC/CP/2015/L.9, (2015)**;
- CFS, [Framework for Action for Food Security and Nutrition in Protracted Crises](#), (2015)†;
- UN-Habitat, [International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning](#), Nairobi (2015)†;
- UNGA, [Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), A/RES/70/1, (2015)†;
- UNGA, Resolution on the Right to Food, [S/RES/70/154](#) (2015)*;
- UNGA, Resolution on the Human Rights to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation, [S/RES/70/169](#) (2015)*;
- UNGA, Resolution on Towards Comprehensive Cooperation among All Modes of Transport for Promoting Sustainable Multimodal Transit Corridors, [S/RES/70/197](#) (2015)*;
- UNGA, Resolution on Agriculture Development, Food Security and Nutrition, [S/RES/70/223](#) (2015)*;
- Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction, Sendai (Japan), 14 -18 March 2015:
 - [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030](#) †
- CEDaW, [General Recommendation No. 34](#) on the rights of rural women (2016)**;

Key to symbols:

* = binding on all States; ** = binding on all States party to the relevant treaty; † = declaratory law as guidance for States and their governments to comply with general principles of international law and certain treaty-law requirements.