



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



برنامج جودة الحياة
QUALITY OF LIFE PROGRAM

The Quality of Life Initiative: At the heart of the SDG Rescue Plan for People and Planet Concept note for the Side event at the HLPF in New York on 14 July 2023

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that, by 2030, all people enjoy peace and prosperity. If achieved, nearly all 169 targets will contribute to improving the quality of life of people and communities. It is in this context, that UN-Habitat has launched the Quality of Life Initiative. With the support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and other Member States the Initiative will help local governments and other policy-makers to make clear, informed decisions for the well-being of people and the implementation of the SDGs.

SDGs off track

Halfway towards the 2030 deadline, many countries are falling behind their global commitments. The slow progress has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts, rising food and energy prices and climate-related disasters. Some successes have been recorded, such as the reduction of extreme poverty and child mortality, improvements in gender equality and access to electricity. However, many others are off track or have even gone backwards. Only 12 per cent of the 140 SDG targets with data are on track; close to half are moderately or severely off track, and around 30 per cent have seen no movement or regression below the 2015 baseline.

Cities hold the key to achieving the SDGs

The theme of this HLPF is *Accelerating the recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels*. The UN-Secretary-General has called for a rescue plan for the SDGs and clearly, any such plan needs to put cities and towns at the front. Today more than half the world's population live in cities, and by 2050, seven of every 10 people will reside in urban areas. As host to most of the world's population, cities have a significant impact on the realization of SDGs and nearly two-thirds of the SDGs targets have urban components.

Notably, countries are also failing to reach the SDG 11 on inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities. Only 10 per cent of the targets are on track to be fully met. This is reflected in growing informal settlement populations, the fact that only half of urban residents have convenient access to public transport, and a fifth have no municipal solid waste collection. More than three-quarters of cities have less than 20 per cent of their area dedicated to open public spaces and streets. This poor delivery compromises the quality of life of people. Clearly the well-being of over half the world's population depends on achieving SDG11 and the other urban-centric goals.

Quality of Life Initiative – a tool for rescuing Cities and the SDGs

Clearly local governments, communities and development partners must implement sustainable community-based actions in support of people's well-being. The questions are – how do they know which are the most important, cost effective, transformative actions, and how can they monitor progress?

Based on the Urban Monitoring Framework, the Quality of Life Initiative is a powerful tool to realize SDG implementation at a local level. The Initiative will be used as an evidence base for stakeholders in urban settlements to optimise policies and investments to make cities and towns safer, more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable.

A Rescue Plan for People and Planet and the Quality of Life Project

The UN Secretary-General's Rescue Plan proposes major recommendations that are necessary breakthroughs for SDGs to play an important role in the remaining seven years of implementation. Many of these recommendations are strongly connected to the Quality of Life Initiative, including:

- **Delivering promises based on a new people-centric approach**
The UN Secretary-General has called for a global alliance for SDG action between local authorities, business, civil society and other development partners, including national governments, to deliver the Rescue Plan for People and Planet. The Quality of Life Initiative will contribute to this, using a data-driven approach that puts people in its focus.
- **Bridging the data gap**
The advancement of data for many targets and goals has had a direct impact on the formulation of evidence-based policies and the quality of life of people. Unfortunately, this is not the case for Goal 11, which, at 60 percent, has the highest proportion of insufficient data, with significant gaps in geographic coverage, timeliness, and disaggregation.
The Quality of Life Initiative will redress this by drawing on new and established data, analysis, visualization and dissemination of information. Data from the Initiative will help close the information gap and, in doing so, help improve quality of life.
- **Accelerating, and sustaining transformative action to deliver on the SDG promise**
The UN Secretary-General calls for the strengthening of social cohesion to secure dignity, opportunity and rights for all. The inclusion of individual and community views, concerns and preferences in decision-making is a fundamental component of the Quality of Life Initiative. The Quality of Life Initiative can make sustainable development more responsive and relevant to local needs and ensure no one is left behind.
- **Advancing concrete, integrated and targeted policies and actions to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality and end the war on nature**
This recommendation calls for the expansion of social protection floors and access to essential services, creating job opportunities, responding to education and the advancement of gender equality, as well as leveraging digital technologies to close divides. These are all critical aspects of quality of life. The adoption of a territorial approach to SDG policies can help to prioritize the Goals through integrated responses and better management of budgets at local level.
Local authorities, the communities they serve and by other tiers of government and partners, will be able to leverage the Initiative to redefine their policies and actions, and ensure promises are delivered.
- **Strengthen national and sub-national capacity, accountability and public institutions to deliver accelerated SDG progress**
Local and sub-national governments must be empowered and supported to bring SDG implementation to the local level. Localization, anchored on the principle of multilevel governance, and multistakeholder collaboration and supported through national urban

policies, is recognized as a key approach to collectively propel the world towards greater inclusion and sustainability.

The Quality of Life Initiative will contribute to increasing the autonomy of local governments, reinforcing multi-stakeholder consultation processes about the society, the economy and the physical environment, and identifying challenges and opportunities for local implementation. It will help accelerate SDG delivery and positively reshape multi-level governance arrangements.

The Quality of Life Initiative side event

The side event will examine many of these recommendations in the context of the Quality of Life Initiative, including:

1. Promoting quality of life as lens through which SDG goals will be addressed
2. Tackling data gaps in understanding how our cities are sustainably servicing the needs of people.
3. Balancing the needs of people with the planet
4. Leveraging the power of all tiers of government and all scales of business and the community to succeed with Agenda 2030.

Speakers

- **Hon. Zacharia Mwangi Njeru**, Cabinet Secretary, The Ministry of Lands, Public Works, Housing and Urban Development, Kenya
- **Ambassador Giovanna Valverde Stark**, Ambassador of Costa Rica in Kenya and PR to UN agencies, UNEP and UN-Habitat
- **Ms. Norah Alyusuf**, Senior Advisor, Quality of Life Program Center, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
- **Mr. Mauricio Rodas**, Former Mayor of Quito, Ecuador
- **Ms. Norlizah Hashim**, Chief Executive, Urbanice Malaysia, Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Malaysia
- **Dr. Sukaina Abdul Ilah Al-Nasrawi**, Social Affairs Officer, Sustainable Urban Development Lead, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
- **Mr. Mihir Prakash**, Technical Team, The Quality of Life Initiative, UN-Habitat

Moderator

- **Dr. Ayman Elhefnawi**, Team leader for the UN-Habitat Office in Saudi Arabia

The Quality of Life Initiative (2023-2025) is strategically defined and governed by a joint team from UN-Habitat and the Quality of Life Program Center, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and supported by various other countries. This initiative is implemented by UN-Habitat, which is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities.

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