

Interfaith Dialogue in Line with the High-Level Meeting on the New Urban
Agenda
Multi-Religious and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration for the Advancement of
New Urban Agenda: How Far Have We Come? Where to Next?

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Many thanks to the organizers *Religions for Peace*, UN Habitat and the World Evangelic Alliance (WEA) for making this dialogue and journey possible.

As indigenous peoples we always speak strongly about the fact that we as human beings are interdependent with all that exist on the face of Mother Earth. This is part of our philosophy, cosmovision and faith. We have always been and will continue to be the guardians of mother earth.

From the moment we are conceived our lives depend on our mother or some other family member that will take care of us to survive. And so, we go on in life and throughout the years we continue to depend on others till we grow up. Sometimes we tend to forget that even as grown-ups we depend on immediate relatives, members of the community, people that grow food and provide services etc.

As communities, cities and nation states we also depend on our neighbours, hopefully good ones. But we must never forget that first and foremost we depend on all that mother earth provides, that enables us to produce everything we need to build and live in cities or anywhere else.

It is said that Urbanisation is the major force in the 21st century but to become a meaningful force it must be developed in such a manner to provide equally for all people living within an urban area and not leave anyone behind.

SDG 11 aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. But here again, SDGs are interdependent as well. Goal 11 cannot become a reality without goal 6 clean water, goal 7 clean energy or goal 15 life on land which for us is everything.

I never understood why at decision making levels there is this tendency to put everything in separate boxes while everything is connected.

Cities may incorporate the best and most advanced technologies, but they will depend on their immediate surroundings that are the rural areas.

Thinking that cities can exist separate from the rural areas does not make sense.

Therefore, it seems that to develop sustainable cities the development of sustainable rural areas cannot be avoided. The development of both urban and rural areas needs to have a common vision to foresee a sustainable and common future. It is also crucial to eliminate poverty.

The flow of people that for different reasons are forced to move into cities is not sustainable and increases the numbers of people in extreme poverty.

According to the World Bank by 2050 7 of 10 people will be living in a city. This is rather worrying and unless urgent attention is given to the interdependency of urban and rural development, cities will never be able to eliminate poverty.

Most of the people that move to the cities are doing it because they are looking for a better future for themselves and their families. But then, as we can see in many cities including those that are the most advanced sustainable cities, models of tourist attraction and economic prosperity cannot hide the harsh reality of wealth inequality.

To become sustainable cities that have the capacity to take care of everyone, policies that only favour the more privileged ones need to be reviewed. More focus should be given to policies that aim at reducing inequalities. The appearance of cities of wealth is not valid when there is a systematic neglect of the poor.

Finally, I would like to mention that the trend to make cities green is certainly a good idea mainly when all citizens can be part of such efforts. In Brazil unemployed people found interest and pleasure in planting vegetables in free areas provided by the city. The production is for their own consumption, to provide others in need and for distribution. Such initiatives in addition of contributing to the food security in the areas they live, they help to improve the physical and psychological well-being of people in particular if they belong to the less privileged sectors of society.

In other cities the planting outside of buildings, in pots and on the roofs make cities look much more pleasant.

As a person that lived in cities but now is living in a rural area again, I strongly believe that the New Urban Agenda needs to take into consideration the parallel development of urban and rural areas.