

ABSTRACT

The world is rapidly urbanising. In 1950, only 30 per cent of the world's population lived in urban areas. That proportion has increased to 55 per cent in 2018 (United Nations 2018a) and is predicted to reach 68 per cent by 2050 (United Nations 2018b). Governments are struggling to cope with the pace of urbanisation as well as maximising the opportunities urban centres can offer. In Australia, urbanisation has created issues including economic, environmental, social infrastructure, waste disposal, energy and natural resources. The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat-III), held in October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador, generated the *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations 2016a) that is a shared vision of the global community and a global framework for sustainable urban development and urbanisation for the next 20 years. This paper discusses the main features of the *New Urban Agenda*, its development, key elements and relationships. The paper highlights Australia's role in implementing the *New Urban Agenda* and considers how Australian cities are preparing for sustainable and equitable growth.

Habitat-III and the New Urban Agenda: implications for Australia

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Introduction

Urban centres offer the economic opportunity and prospects of higher living standards. But unplanned urbanisation exposes populations to social, physical, environmental and political risks. Cities that are growing fast in mid-low-income countries are experiencing increased concentrations of poverty and lower quality of life. The cost of living, especially of housing, has pushed the poor to settle in hazardous areas, areas exposed to flood and fire risks and in slums or in informal settlements.

In recognition of poor living conditions and the growing need for improved human settlements, especially in developing countries, the first United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat-I, was held in Vancouver, Canada in 1976. Since then, Habitat conferences have been held every 20 years; Habitat-II in 1996 in Istanbul Turkey and Habitat-III in Quito, Ecuador in 2016. Habitat-IV is planned for 2036.

Habitat-III adopted the *New Urban Agenda*, which was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2016. The agenda is an expression of the global realisation that, if well-planned and well-managed, urbanisation can be a powerful tool for sustainable growth for developing and developed countries. The *New Urban Agenda* is closely linked with many other global frameworks and goals, especially the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015) and the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015).

The internationally respected *The Sphere Handbook* (Sphere Association 2018) defines common principles and incorporates the Core Humanitarian Standards (Core Humanitarian Standard 2014) that reflect the quality and effectiveness of humanitarian responses. In late 2016, a companion publication, *Using the Sphere Standards in Urban Settings*, was released. This responds to the realisation that:

...humanitarian response in urban situations is substantially different from what it is in rural situations, and that the number and scale of urban humanitarian responses will continue to grow as more of the world's population move to towns and cities.

(Mountfield 2016)

The Habitat process and the content of the *New Urban Agenda* seem under-discussed in the Australian context. This paper aims to:

- build an understanding of the *New Urban Agenda* to guide the urbanisation process in Australia, as well as Australia's international engagement
- identify the development of the Habitat process and the key elements and commitments of the *New Urban Agenda* and discuss the global

relationships in development practices, especially in managing urbanisation

- consider three specific influences of Habitat-III and the *New Urban Agenda* in the Australian context, namely Australian cities design policy and planning, Australian Government aid to developing countries and the international development activities of Australian institutions and companies.

Urbanisation

There is no standard definition of city or urban area. The criteria used by countries to define a place as 'urban' includes population size, population density, type of economic activity, physical characteristics, level of infrastructure or a combination of these and other criteria (Deuskar 2015). The 'city' is generally characterised by large human settlements with infrastructure, communication, transportation, industries, businesses, utilities and other services. 'Urban' is the expression of life in the city.

Urbanisation is a process whereby a society changes from a rural to an urban way of life. It refers also to the gradual increase in the proportion of people living in urban areas. Urbanisation is a process where people and society move from a traditional and rural way of living to a modern way of living by accessing market services and facilities in cities (Pawan 2016).

Urbanisation and urban centres offer hope for a better life, education, health and access to modern services and facilities. When urbanisation goes wrong, it can create many economic and environmental problems and social tensions and makes the population vulnerable to a variety of hazards.

Additionally, the poorer and socially disadvantaged communities are disproportionately adversely affected by disasters. As many cities are situated in flood plains, on coastal zones or sitting on tectonic fault lines, a greater number of vulnerable people are exposed to the risks of disasters. Former United States Federal Emergency Management Agency administrator, Craig Fugate, suggested that, with increased urban sprawl, more people are living in the urban-wildland interface and are at increased risk of bushfires (McKay 2009). Fugate (2017) promotes the perspective that 'floods and hurricanes happen. The hazard itself is not the disaster—it's our habits, our building codes. It's how we build and live in those areas — that's the disaster'.

Sustainable urbanisation has become a priority for the global community and governments from both developing and developed countries to deliver a quality life for people as well as to maximise economic and technological opportunities. Habitat-III, therefore, focused on cities, city planning and life in cities. Habitat-III was a paradigm shift of urbanisation as a tool for development. The conference conveyed a clear message that the pattern of urbanisation needs to change in order to better respond to challenges and address issues such as inequality, climate change, informality, insecurity and

the unsustainable forms of urban expansion (United Nations n.d.).

Methodology

A review was undertaken to identify outcome documents of the Habitat process, especially the declarations from Habitat-I, Habitat-II, Habitat-III and the *New Urban Agenda*. Using these documents, a thematic analysis identified development, key elements and relationships. A limited review and reflection on the commentary and follow-up actions generated in Australia and internationally complemented the thematic analysis. This paper is also informed by personal experiences, observations and engagement in the Habitat processes, the Quito Conference, the *New Urban Agenda* and its implementation.

Development of the Habitat process

The Habitat process started with the UN Conference on Human Settlements, held in Vancouver, Canada in 1976. The conference was organised in response to a growing recognition of the deteriorating conditions of human settlements, especially in less-developed countries. It acknowledged the need to improve living conditions to satisfy basic human rights, health, education and shelter. The conference outcome was the Vancouver Declaration and Vancouver Action Agenda (United Nations 1976).

In 1996, the second UN Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat-II, was held in Istanbul, Turkey and generated the Istanbul Declaration (United Nations 1996). Habitat-II and the Istanbul Declaration were a clear recognition of urban issues, challenges and opportunities.

The UN Conference on Sustainable Housing and Urban Development, Habitat-III, was held in Quito, Ecuador in 2016. Habitat-III generated the Quito Declaration on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, now called the *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations 2016b). An extensive, structured, multi-year planning and consultative process underpinned the conference. Over 30,000 conference participants came together to collaborate on this common vision for sustainable urban development; the biggest ever in the history of these global conferences. Habitat-III was a unique opportunity to discuss the important challenge of how cities, towns and villages are planned and managed in order to fulfil their role as drivers of sustainable development and shape the implementation of new global development and climate change goals.

The three Habitat conferences are summarised in Figure 1.

Due to rapid urbanisation and population growth, global demography is changing. Figure 2 illustrates the changes in urban population over time (United Nations 2018b).



1976, Vancouver, Canada

Outcome - The Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements and Vancouver Action Plan.

- Recognises the need for sustainable human settlement and sustainable urban development and that shelter and urbanisation are global issues to be addressed collectively.
- Creation of the United Nations Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS-Habitat).

1996, Istanbul, Turkey

Outcome - the Istanbul Declaration and adopted Habitat Agenda as a plan of action to drive development in an urbanising world.

- Recognises that cities are the engines of global growth, urbanisation is an opportunity and calls for a stronger role of local authorities.

2016, Quito, Ecuador

Outcome - the Quito Declaration, the *New Urban Agenda*.

- Builds on the Istanbul Declaration and Habitat Agenda.
- Recognises the correlation between good urbanisation and development.
- Highlights the connection of the New Urban Agenda to Sustainable Development Goals and *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030*.

Figure 1: Summary of the Habitat conferences.



The New Urban Agenda

The *New Urban Agenda* was adopted by 167 nations at the Habitat-III Conference and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly in December 2016.

The *New Urban Agenda* is a collective vision and political commitment by governments

and the international community for sustainable urban development that recognises the role cities and human settlements play in leveraging opportunities for sustainable development. The *New Urban Agenda* lays down a global framework for an equitable distribution of urban opportunities and sustainable urban development. Hence, it is important that practitioners and academia are informed by the *New Urban Agenda* and its influences on urbanisation.

The *New Urban Agenda* is equally applicable in developed and developing countries. Its theme is consistent with related international frameworks, mainly the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations 2015), the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015), the *Paris Agreement on Climate Change* (United Nations Climate Change 2018) and World Humanitarian Summit (United Nations 2016b).



Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, Gillian Bird, and Suresh Pokharel participated in the Urban Resilience networking session organised by Plan International Australia, and Planning Institute Australia, supported by Arup.

Image: Arup

Elements and global commitments of the *New Urban Agenda*

The global community has expressed commitment to improve the way cities are planned and acknowledges the role of governments. The promise is for a 'people centric' approach to establish urban governance and implement urban policies and planning.

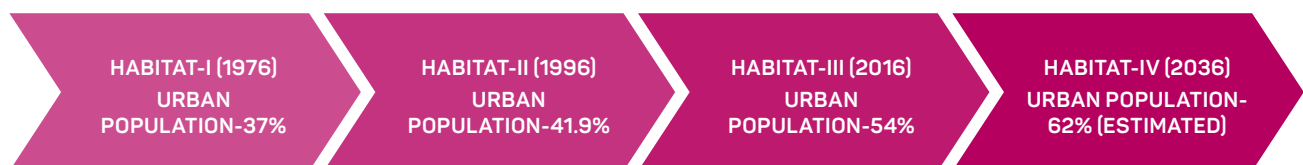


Figure 2: Urban population at the time of the Habitat conferences.

The *New Urban Agenda* has three main guiding principles:

1. Leave no one behind: ensure urban processes are inclusive of all sectors and segments of societies including governments; the private sector; civil societies including vulnerable groups, children, women and girls, people with disabilities, older people and Indigenous communities and that urban benefits are distributed equally to all groups and people living in cities.
2. Achieve sustainable and inclusive prosperity: urban economies include urban growth with proper spatial planning; economic growth that relies on productive capital and sustainable consumption, creation of jobs and employment opportunity and equal access to infrastructure and services.
3. Ensure environmental sustainability: include greener

technology, low-carbon economies, ecosystems-based economy, urban development and urban resilience.

Table 1 presents the transformative agenda and global commitments endorsed through the *New Urban Agenda*.

The United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN Habitat) is a focal organisation within the United Nations on sustainable urbanisation and human settlements. UN Habitat coordinates the implementation of the *New Urban Agenda* and provides a range of free-access resources to support urbanisation processes. UN Habitat's 2020–2025 Strategic Plan adopts a 'Theory of Change' to articulate the relationship of sustainable urbanisation with the overall notion of sustainable development'. The plan puts forward four 'Domains of Change/Focus Areas' (see Figure 3), each being

Table 1: Transformative agenda and the global commitment of the *New Urban Agenda*.

Transformative agenda	Global Commitments to support the <i>New Urban Agenda</i>
Sustainable urban development for social inclusion and ending poverty	Integrated, age- and gender-responsive, disability inclusive policies for infrastructure and services. Affordable, sustainable and equitable access to urban infrastructure. Institutional, political, legal and financial mechanisms Support to national, provincial and local governments in fulfilling their role. Safe, healthy, inclusive and secure environment.
Sustainable and inclusive urban prosperity and opportunities for all	Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth with full and productive employment and decent work. Affordable housing and finance for housing. National, provincial and local institutions to support local economies. Territorial systems that integrate urban and rural functions. Sustainable transport and mobility as well as technology and communications networks and infrastructure. Use of renewable and affordable energy, efficient transport infrastructure and services.
Environmentally sustainable and resilient urban development	Sustainable management of natural resources. A smart-city approach that makes use of opportunities from digitalisation, clean energy and technologies. Promoting the ecological and social function of land. Environmentally sound water and waste management. Sustainable, renewable and affordable energy. Disaster risk reduction, climate change mitigation and adaptation at all levels. 'Resilience building' and integration of the 'build back better' principles.
Building the urban governance structure: establishing a supportive framework	Participatory urban policies, coordination and cooperation among national and local governments. Legal and policy frameworks based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination. Inclusive governance at all levels and reliable financing mechanisms. Partnerships with communities, civil society and the private sector. Participatory age- and gender-responsive urban and territorial policy and planning processes.
Planning and managing urban spatial development	Integrated planning to balance short-term needs and long-term goals. Urban and territorial planning integrating disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Measures for urban safety, prevention of crime and violence, terrorism and extremism. Compliance with legal requirements through strong and inclusive management frameworks and accountable institutions. Land-use planning, improved building codes and standards, development permits and decentralised decision-making.

underpinned by four measurable outcome areas cross-referenced to the Sustainable Development Goals. There are four critical social inclusion areas and two cross-cutting themes to support the implementation of the *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations n.d.).

UN Habitat works in close collaboration with other UN agencies to complement the Sustainable Development Goals monitoring process by including specific components of the *New Urban Agenda* that are not covered by Sustainable Development Goals indicators. UN Habitat is developing guidelines for country-led, voluntary reporting on the implementation of the *New Urban Agenda*. The lead role in reporting lies with national governments. In the lead-up to Habitat-IV in 2036, UN Habitat will work with countries and other stakeholders to monitor progress and develop quadrennial reports to cover the progress in implementing the *New Urban Agenda* (United Nations 2018c).

Relationships of the *New Urban Agenda* to other global frameworks

The basic premises of the *New Urban Agenda* is that, if well-managed, urbanisation offers great benefit to people and countries and can be a powerful tool to achieve sustainable development. The *New Urban Agenda* is an extension of the United Nations *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, the Sustainable Development Goals and the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction* (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015) in urban centres and especially reflects the Sustainable Development Goals shown in Table 2.

The Sustainable Development Goal 11 strongly aligns with the *New Urban Agenda*, which provides the vehicle to achieve the goals and meet targets of sustainability.

The *New Urban Agenda* and Australia

At Habitat-III, Australia was represented by Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations, Ms. Jillian Bird. Australia has adopted the *New Urban Agenda* along with the other 167 countries (Australian Mission to the United Nations n.d.).

Australia is already one of the world's most urbanised countries with almost 90 per cent of people living in urban areas, mainly on the eastern seaboard, which is exposed to a range of stresses and shocks. Projections suggest that by 2051 Melbourne will be home to approximately 7.7 million people and is likely to be Australia's largest city (City of Melbourne 2016). In addition, 1.6 million new dwellings will be required for Melbourne residents over the coming 35 years (Department of Transport, Planning and Local Infrastructure 2017). The existing infrastructure and

Table 2: Sustainable Development Goals linked with *New Urban Agenda*.

Sustainable Development Goals	<i>New Urban Agenda</i> themes
Goal 7	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
Goal 8	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
Goal 9	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialisation and foster innovation.
Goal 11	Make cities and human settlements Inclusive, safe resilient and sustainable.

services, for example roads and transportation, schools and hospitals are already stretched and demand will grow for new capacity. The number of people who are homeless in major cities in Australia equals 50 in every 10,000 people (Homelessness Australia n.d.). These numbers, as well as issues linked with homelessness, are indicators to rethink city planning or management or both. Australian city planners need to plan for continued growth, to capitalise on opportunities and manage impacts on social services, infrastructure and the natural environment as well as building resilience to natural hazards and disasters. The *New Urban Agenda* provides a new lens to approach city planning and urban development to respond to current issues and accommodate the future growth of cities.

The Sustainable Development Goals Index and Dashboards Report 2018 ranked Australia 37 out of 156 countries (Stiftung & Sustainable Development Solutions Network 2018). The Australian Government has produced a progress report, Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2018), however, reference to the *New Urban Agenda* is missing in this report.

In February 2019, the Australian Government Senate Report on the Sustainable Development Goals listed 18 recommendations, all of which demand a whole-of-government proactive response to design and implement policy and planning mechanisms to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. This highlights the need for inter-departmental coordination as well as cooperation with the private sectors and communities (Parliament of Australia 2019). It is estimated that up to 65 per cent of the Sustainable Development Goal targets will need to be met in or by cities. By this account, the implementation of the *New Urban Agenda* is both 'means' and 'goal' for sustainable development in Australia.

There has been some progress in the implementation of the *New Urban Agenda* in Australia. The cities of Melbourne and Sydney, as a part of 100RC project (100 Resilient Cities) have developed the *Resilient Melbourne*

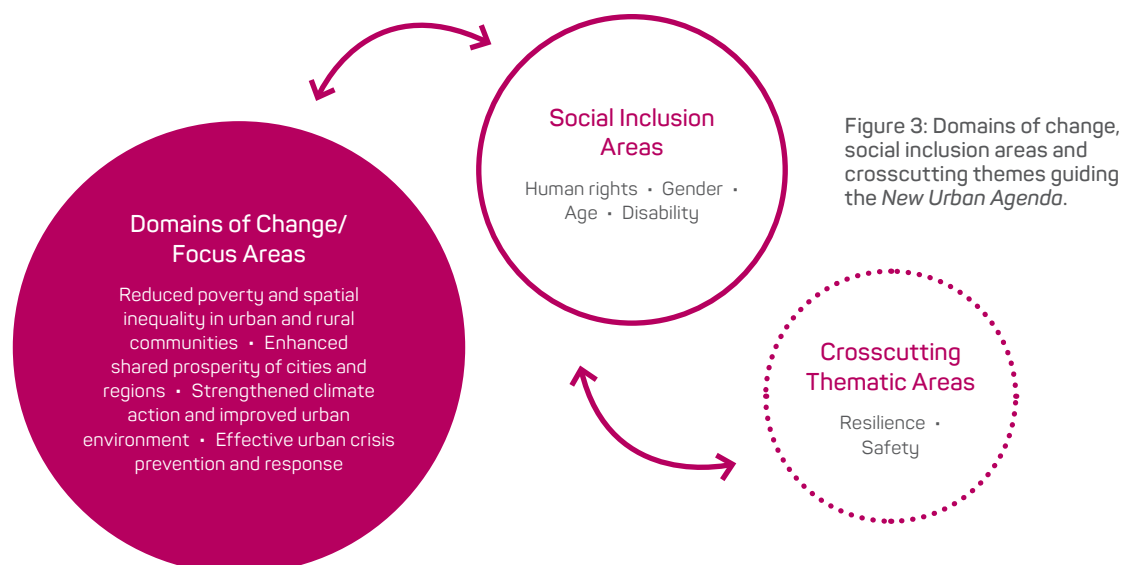


Figure 3: Domains of change, social inclusion areas and crosscutting themes guiding the *New Urban Agenda*.

Strategy (City of Melbourne 2016) and the *Resilient Sydney Strategy* (City of Sydney 2018), respectively. These strategies could embrace the *New Urban Agenda*. In 2017, an international conference addressing the implementation of the *New Urban Agenda* in Australia was held in Melbourne with a second conference in Newcastle in 2018. These activities have created some momentum in delivering on the *New Urban Agenda*. A third conference was held in Melbourne in 2019 in recognition that the *New Urban Agenda* has drawn only limited attention from academics and development practitioners (World Urban Campaign 2017).

Australian-based development and humanitarian organisations are engaged in the development and implementation of the *New Urban Agenda*. Organisations like Plan International Australia have developed a Child-Centred Urban Resilience Framework (Plan International and Arup 2016) that supports the *New Urban Agenda*. The product was formally launched during Habitat-III. Other organisations, for example Save the Children, World Vision, Habitat for Humanity as well as private sector organisations are also engaged in their own capacities.

In *Understanding Drivers of Disaster* (Attorney-General's Department 2017), the *New Urban Agenda* is named, among others, as an international framework to which the Australian Government has committed. Urbanisation itself can be a 'driver of disaster' if not managed well. It is necessary for Australian disaster risk and emergency management policies, strategies and frameworks to be informed by the *New Urban Agenda* and reflect its commitments during implementation. The *New Urban Agenda* is perfectly positioned to inform two significant initiatives of the Australian Government; the *National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework* (Department of Home Affairs 2017) and *Profiling Australia's Vulnerability* (Department of Home Affairs 2018).

Conclusion

City development and expansion policy and planning should be inclusive and engage people. To allow for sustainable growth and maintain long-term prosperity, cities in developed countries should harness opportunities for well-planned urbanisation. Urban growth can offer benefits and also manage risks and challenges of urbanisation.

Through the *New Urban Agenda*, leaders, including from Australia, have committed to provide basic services for all citizens; providing equal access to opportunities and eliminating discrimination; promoting measures that support cleaner cities by strengthening resilience to reduce the risk and the effect of disasters; addressing climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions; respecting the rights of refugees, migrants and displaced people regardless of their migration status; improving connectivity and supporting innovative and green initiatives and promoting safe, accessible and green public spaces.

There is a need to rethink the way we plan, build and manage urban spaces. The *New Urban Agenda* provides a guide to manage urbanisation for sustainable development and offers a vision of cities at present and in the future. The implementation of the *New Urban Agenda* is not an option, but an imperative for governments and the international community.

The review of the existing literature and practices shows Australia is yet to fully embrace the *New Urban Agenda*. Australian governments, at all levels, should deliver policy and planning that translates the *New Urban Agenda* into the managing of cities and urban processes. The *New Urban Agenda* offers a pathway for sustainable urbanisation and urban development to ensure that Australian cities remain highly ranked as the most liveable cities in the world.

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