



**ENHR 2010 – 22nd Conference
European Network of Housing Research
Urban Dynamics & Housing Change
Crossing into the 2nd Decade of the 3rd Millennium
Istanbul, 4-7 July 2010**

**Access to Land and Housing for All:
a strategic approach of UN-HABITAT to address global housing problems**
Claudio Acioly Jr.¹

ABSTRACT

This keynote presentation outlines the strategic vision of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT). It brings forward an array of responses to the problems faced by people in the developing world that significantly hinder their access to adequate and affordable housing. It argues that this is one of the deep-rooted causes of slum formation and proliferation of informal land and housing development processes. The paper and the presentation describe UN-HABITAT long-term strategy and policy to enable access to land and housing for all.

At first, the presentation gives a brief overview of the problems of housing, land and informal settlements with a specific focus on slums and informal settlements in the world. There are over one billion slum dwellers globally and if no serious action is taken, their number is projected to rise over the next 30 years to about two billion. Data collected by UN-HABITAT suggests clearly that slum dwellers are facing far worse conditions in health, education, life expectancy and employment than their non-slum counterparts in the city and even worse than their rural counterparts as some country data reveals. Much of that is related to inadequate housing and poor provision of infrastructure and basic urban services. The persistence and multiplication of these forms of human settlements in our cities is a threat to sustainable urban development. Unless radical measures and significant efforts are made to provide a range of affordable housing options and improved access to legally secure land at scale, the rapidly growing cities in the developing south will be host to hundreds of millions of new and additional urban slum-dwellers. The situation is critical and unprecedented in human history.

In response to the emerging urban crisis, UN-HABITAT aims to mobilize a global coalition of partners to address the challenges presented by unsustainable patterns of urbanization. UN-HABITAT's vision is "to help create by 2013 the necessary conditions for concerted international and national efforts to stabilize the growth of slums and to set the stage for the subsequent reduction of the number of slum dwellers and reversal of the current trend of unbridled urban slum proliferation." This vision, derived from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), cannot be realized without systemic reforms to promote improved access to land and housing for all.

¹ Claudio Acioly Jr. is an architect and urban planner with over 23 years of experience. He is the chief Housing Policy of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT).

The second part of the presentation makes a very brief retrospective of UN-HABITAT experience and the evolution of paradigms and approaches to deal with the phenomenon of slums and informal settlements as well as the evolution of housing policies as practiced by developing countries. Reflections on the experiences and lessons learned from UN-HABITAT practices and country experiences are further outlined depicting the shifts from heavily subsidized government sponsored housing projects towards enabling strategies and people's centred housing programmes. The presentation briefly reviews 20 years of housing policy practice since the Global Shelter Strategy for the Year 2000-GSS that was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1988. It elaborates on the principles and framework of an enabling shelter strategy that basically shifted the role of governments from providers to enablers in the housing sector. That means facilitating housing processes particularly those undertaken by and for the poor and focusing on creating a favourable legal, institutional and financial environment that would enable many to play a role in housing development. The GSS was a milestone in thinking and action on housing as well as in the evolution of housing policy.

The conclusive part of the presentation focuses on the operational and strategic approaches to deliver outputs and necessary actions that will bring results and expected accomplishments of this strategy at the country level. As a strategic result, UN-HABITAT is committed to supporting national and local governments and Habitat Agenda Partners (HAPs) in implementing improved land and housing policies. UN-HABITAT is further committed to the following three outcomes: first, supporting enabling land and housing reforms; second, increased security of tenure; and, third, promoting slum improvement and slum prevention policies. Some of the important activities to be undertaken include: (a) renewed efforts to promoting alternatives to eviction, (b) production of a major new global policy paper on housing, articulating a new normative framework for slum prevention, (c) development of new land tools to implement pro-poor land policies, (d) promotion of a range of land rights rather than just individual titles, and (e) strengthened UN system's capacity to address housing, land and property issues in post-conflict and post-natural disaster situations. A specific effort will be made to further promote measures to mitigate or adapt to risks associated with global climate change. All activities will be gender-responsive. For more details and references, please refer to the extended version of the strategy paper.