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**Commonwealth Action on Human Settlements:  
ComHabitat's Progress Report and Strategic Plan 2007 - 2011**

A Paper by the Commonwealth Secretariat

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# ComHabitat's Progress Report and Strategic Plan 2007–2011

## Executive Summary

1. This paper reviews progress achieved over the past two years by the Commonwealth's partnership on human settlements, ComHabitat. The value of the partnership is that it brings together agencies from different sectors that are implementing the Habitat Agenda (government, local government, civil society and professional organizations). All these groups are actively involved in addressing human settlements concerns within their own spheres, but they also collaborate through ComHabitat to achieve their goals through networking, advocacy, information sharing and the creation of partnerships to promote more integrated approaches.

2. The Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) governs ComHabitat and in 2005, it endorsed a Work Plan with the following substantive elements:

- **Research and information sharing.** ComHabitat research has helped member governments and other stakeholders to assess progress on: the integration of urban poverty into national strategies; and the availability of, and options for, urban development finance. A web site and newsletter have also been established that have disseminated briefing papers, lessons learned through ComHabitat activities, and examples of multi-stakeholder approaches around the Commonwealth.
- **Networking and advocacy.** Over the past two years, ComHabitat has delivered debates and networking events that have deepened understanding of practical approaches to urban poverty reduction, partnerships in water and sanitation, and priorities in disaster risk reduction. ComHabitat has been a strong advocate on the need to place human settlements at the heart of the development agenda. It has also built a strong partnership and an extensive range of contacts that form part of a wider 'ComHabitat Network' which position the partnership well to deepen its impact in the years ahead.
- **The CCGHS.** The CCGHS sets the strategic objectives for ComHabitat. It has used the Commonwealth's strengths in consensus building to help Ministers prepare for international negotiations. By sharing experiences and building connections between member states, the CCGHS has contributed to the efforts of Commonwealth citizens to implement the Habitat Agenda.

3. Over the last two years, funding for ComHabitat has been provided by the UK Department for International Development, the Commonwealth Foundation, as well as through inputs-in-kind from participating organisations. Conscious that funding would conclude in March 2007, the ComHabitat Management Group has developed a new strategic plan for 2007–2011 (Annex 1). This builds on the network's experiences and achievements, and provides a framework for attracting new partnerships and resources. The Strategic Objectives of the new strategic plan are to:

- improve financial investment to ensure adequate shelter for all, including access to essential services;
- strengthen leadership and governance in sustainable and equitable human settlements development; and

- reduce risks and build community resilience in an urbanising World.

4. Finally, Annex 2 provides a review of the activities of some ComHabitat participating institutions. This demonstrates the breadth of this multi-agency partnership and the opportunities that exist for creating synergies through collaboration.

### **Issues for Ministers**

5. Ministers may wish to:

- Comment on progress achieved by ComHabitat over the past two years and whether this has helped stakeholders to achieve their objectives in implementing the Habitat Agenda.
- Review and endorse the proposed Strategic Plan for 2007-2011 in terms of the priority concerns of CCGHS members.
- Agree steps towards a greater involvement of stakeholders from all spheres in the work of the Management Group.

6. In 2005, the CCGHS suggested that the work plan, including the current structure for ComHabitat, could be reviewed in about 2 years, to examine how it was working in practice. It also asked the Management Group to agree a framework for networking and co-ordinating a partnership approach in the Commonwealth, to achieve ComHabitat's objectives. ComHabitat's Management Group has yet to fully realize the CCGHS' vision of a structure that brings in a wide range of stakeholders and sectoral representation into its decision making. One of the blocks to progress has been a lack of resources for convening pan-Commonwealth discussions. Options that the Management Group has considered, which Ministers may wish to review, are: use of the Commonwealth Foundation's model of advisory boards, which often meet virtually or by telephone; networking events for stakeholders in the wings of UN Habitat Meetings aimed at consulting on ComHabitat's work plan; and networking events held through the Commonwealth Foundation, for example at its Commonwealth People's Forum held ahead of Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings.

### **Background**

7. The Commonwealth's principle mechanism for addressing human settlements concerns is a multi-stakeholder partnership known as ComHabitat. This consists of a Ministerial Group – the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) – and a collaborative partnership of agencies from government, local government and civil society. Partners include: Commonwealth Foundation; Commonwealth Human Ecology Council; Commonwealth Local Government Forum; Commonwealth Secretariat; Department for International Development; and Homeless International, which has been hosting a Secretariat for ComHabitat. ComHabitat promotes implementation of the Habitat Agenda and is working towards the Commonwealth Goal of: *“Demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015”*.

8. In April 2005, the CCGHS formally endorsed ComHabitat's Work Plan, which addressed the following areas:

- *information sharing and research*, including research on financing urban development and progress in implementing the Habitat Agenda;
- *networking and advocacy*, including networking events to share experiences, such as the event held during the Barcelona World Urban Forum;
- *the CCGHS process* and meetings of the wider ComHabitat mechanism; and
- *the development of internal capacity*, including an e-newsletter; research dissemination and web site.

## **COMHABITAT ACHIEVEMENTS (2005 – 2007)**

### **ComHabitat has built a strong case for the integration of urban human settlements issues into Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers**

9. ComHabitat research on 7 Commonwealth countries (Dominica, Ghana, Guyana, Malawi, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Zambia) demonstrated that Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) show a general lack of focus on, and understanding of, urban poverty issues. This is a concern since it implies that human settlements concerns are not being prioritized in government spending plans and that governments and donors may not be maximizing the opportunities that exist within urban areas for addressing poverty, reaching the MDGs and building an infrastructure for long-term economic growth and sustainable development.

10. Through its research and networking, ComHabitat has built a strong case on the need for effective mainstreaming of human settlements issues in PRSPs and raised the profile of this concern internationally, through meetings of Commonwealth Finance Ministers, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum, and consultations in the wings of the World Urban Forum in Vancouver in June 2006. Commonwealth Ministers developed a statement and inputs to the WUF Ministerial roundtable in Vancouver in June 2006. A ComHabitat networking event in Vancouver, also reviewed national experiences and the impacts of different practical approaches to urban poverty reduction. Over 150 participants from a wide range of stakeholder groups (including national and local government, inter-governmental organizations, donors, NGOs, community-based organizations, academia and development banks) took part in the debate. Findings have been widely disseminated through the web site, a briefing paper for Commonwealth Heads of Government, newsletters and networking events.

11. As a result of this work, ComHabitat has been asked to assist the Ministry of Housing in Malawi, in collaboration with the Malawi Homeless Peoples Federation to develop a plan for implementing settlement upgrading plans in line with the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy.

### **ComHabitat has placed human settlements at the heart of sustainable development work in the Commonwealth**

12. The CCGHS when it met in 2005, called for “human settlements to be put at the very heart of the development agenda”. ComHabitat has consistently worked towards this goal, starting with a statement delivered by the CCGHS Chair to the 13<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, in 2005, which emphasised the need for an integrated debate on human settlements and for increased finance to support implementation of international goals.

13. Messages by the Commonwealth Deputy Secretary-General and an 'Image of the Week' for World Habitat Day and Environment Day have highlighted the challenges of rapid urbanization and opportunities for poverty reduction. These were released to more than 500 media organizations worldwide and through the Commonwealth Secretariat's web site front page which received around 36,000 hits during the period. ComHabitat was active in civil society preparations for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, in Malta, in 2005 and has prepared numerous articles on human settlements concerns for journals such as Commonwealth People and the Commonwealth Association of Planners' newsletter. All of these initiatives have helped to maintain the profile of urban poverty and human settlements concerns in the international development debate.

**ComHabitat has deepened local government officials and finance ministers understanding of options for urban finance**

14. There is increasing pressure on local government to deliver basic services to meet the Millennium Development Goals, yet this sphere of government does not often have the financial means or capacity to achieve this objective.

15. ComHabitat research in cooperation with Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) focused on the challenges which face local and central government in resourcing local government adequately to meet the development needs of human settlements. The study considered the impact of decentralisation and the complex demands being placed on local government against a backdrop of limited finances and capacity. It emphasised the importance of regular and predictable fiscal transfers from central government, but also looked at case studies of innovative practices which have been employed in different Commonwealth cities including municipal bonds, local government borrowing, access to capital markets and transferable development rights. The recommendations and outcomes of the report have been shared widely through the CLGF network, including via the Commonwealth Local Government Handbook 2006 which has a circulation of over 1000 copies to all parts of the Commonwealth. Further work proposed in the next strategic plan will build on the outcomes of this research paper.

**ComHabitat has deepened the understanding of a wide range of stakeholders on multi-stakeholder approaches to human settlements development**

16. ComHabitat's research and networking events have facilitated debate and access to practical examples and experiences that have created a deeper understanding of the value of multi-stakeholder approaches in addressing human settlements concerns. Areas include the following:

- *Partnerships in water and sanitation.* ComHabitat provided the framework for discussions by Commonwealth Environment Ministers, in 2004 and the CCGHS in 2005, on the related issues of water, sanitation and human settlements. Ministers recognised the valuable role that community–municipality partnerships can play in enabling the poorest communities to collect data about their own settlements and services: approaches that have helped some authorities to plan and implement services and major resettlement programmes with the co-operation of the communities concerned, and to use communities in assessing and monitoring water quality.

- *Partnerships for poverty reduction.* At the World Urban Forum in Vancouver, ComHabitat reviewed practical approaches to urban poverty reduction through a multi-sectoral panel including slum dwellers and development partners. This examined the constraints experienced by different groups in addressing urban poverty, as well as options for making progress. ComHabitat also disseminated a report following a networking event held at the previous World Urban Forum, which focused on experiences of city-community partnerships in moving from a situation of confrontational evictions of railway-side slum dwellers, to negotiations with slum dwellers' federations resulting in mass voluntary resettlement.
- *Risk reduction and climate change.* Multi-stakeholder discussions at the Commonwealth People's Forum, in December 2005, and in Seychelles in September 2006, have scoped-out key concerns with respect to human settlements development, climate change and risk reduction. These include the need to examine building codes, planning regulations, and disaster response and recovery plans. Participants agreed that post disaster reconstruction is more successful when affected communities are able to play a key role in planning and implementing recovery programmes. It was also recognised that professionals could play a valuable role, working in partnership with communities and respecting their knowledge and priorities. Experiences of communities with recent disasters were explored in depth and will form the basis for future work in this area.

**ComHabitat has built a strong partnership that is well placed to deliver benefits in future**

17. One of the key achievements of the last two years has been a marked strengthening of the ComHabitat partnership, with members of the current Management Group working closely together to address strategic objectives set by the CCGHS. The trust and understanding that has been built up lends strength to the partnership in its efforts to address the key concerns of different stakeholder constituencies.

18. ComHabitat has developed effective communication tools, including an e-newsletter which is received by over 350 network members and a web-site with information links and access to briefs on key topics and lessons learned. It has also established a wide-ranging network of contacts in all regions of the Commonwealth.

19. Homeless International, as the Secretariat for the partnership, has played an important role in advancing the ComHabitat agenda during the last two years.

**FUTURE CHALLENGES AND THE COMHABITAT STRATEGIC PLAN 2007–2011**

20. The Strategic Plan that ComHabitat's Management Group has developed (provided as Annex 1) builds on the experiences of the past two years and identifies specific areas where the partnership will focus its work.

***1. Improving financial investment to human settlements development***

As a first step, ComHabitat will develop principles and approaches that support effective public sector decentralization and an improved flow of resources in support of the local delivery of basic services. There is an increasing trend for international development

agencies to provide direct budgetary support to recipient governments. The increasing emphasis on delivery of basic services at the local level implies that effective mechanisms and governance arrangements are needed to facilitate the transparent and accountable flow of such central budgetary resources towards local delivery agencies. ComHabitat will also research new approaches to local financing for human settlements, including bonds and the use of credit rating mechanisms, while recognising the importance of not undermining macroeconomic stability when pursuing these approaches. It will also continue to advocate the concerns of developing countries for improved international financial mechanisms for human settlements development.

## ***2. To strengthen leadership and governance in human settlements development***

As a first step, ComHabitat will build on approaches such as the UN Habitat Urban Governance Index and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum's Aberdeen Agenda to showcase good practice and analyse the lessons that can be learned. Participants agreed that post disaster reconstruction is more successful when affected communities are able to play a key role in planning and implementing recovery programmes. It was also recognised that professionals could play a valuable role, working in partnership with communities and respecting their knowledge and priorities. This will be achieved through the establishment of pilot schemes in member states. ComHabitat will also promote the Commonwealth Association of Planners' 'New Urban Planning' initiative with a view to securing funding and partnerships to make this a reality.

## ***3. To reduce risks and build community resilience in an urbanising World***

Increasing urban populations, slum dwelling and climate change are generating new levels of risk for communities, but the impact of disasters on people's lives can be greatly reduced through effective forward planning and governance. As a first step, ComHabitat will review the adequacy of national legislative frameworks related to disaster risk management, and galvanise professional associations to share examples of good practice of responding in concrete ways to the challenges that disaster risk management poses in urban situations. This work will be closely co-ordinated with, and complement, initiatives under the Hyogo Framework.

21. To underpin the sustainability of the ComHabitat mechanism, the Plan is embedded within the mandates and expertise of its key partner institutions. It will draw on the institutional resources of partnership, but also requires some additional funding to fully implement the plan.

## ANNEX 1:



# ComHabitat Strategic Plan 2007-2011

## Background

For the first time in history, there are as many people living in urban centres as in rural areas. Indeed, by 2030 more than 60 per cent of us will live in cities. The UN estimates that as many as 55 per cent of the world's poor live in urban areas today, and this proportion is expected to increase as population rises since urban areas of developing countries will absorb 95 per cent of the world's population growth between 2000 and 2030. One of the greatest challenges in this trend is the rate at which slum settlements are growing. The poverty and deprivation experienced by urban slum dwellers are often underestimated and low rates of water and sanitation coverage, high child mortality and poor education enrolment go unrecognised. Yet, good slum-upgrading programmes have been shown to greatly reduce infant and child mortality rates. Slum upgrading and strategic urban planning, and effective urban governance have therefore become central to reaching the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Habitat Agenda. It will take vision and leadership, the integration of human settlements concerns into strategic plans and budgets, innovative sources of investment and new planning skills and approaches, to ensure that needs of all city dwellers are met and that sustainable human settlements are achieved.

## Why is the Commonwealth strongly placed to take action on the Habitat Agenda?

The 53 Commonwealth countries vary greatly in terms of size, geographical location, income and type of economy. They are amongst those that are most affected by rapid urbanisation and as such they are central to achieving international development goals and objectives. Over 327 million people or almost one in six citizens living in the Commonwealth live in slums.<sup>1</sup> At least eight Commonwealth member states, all in sub-Saharan Africa, have annual slum growth rates of more than 5 per cent<sup>2</sup>. In a quarter of Commonwealth countries (11 African, 2 Asian and 1 Pacific), more than two out of three urban dwellers live in slums and many of these countries are urbanising rapidly. Indeed, for some small states this is a new and emerging trend that needs innovative solutions.

While the challenges are considerable, the Commonwealth's fundamental principles and its networks are an important resource that can achieve practical results for the Habitat Agenda. Human settlement concerns are inextricably linked to the Commonwealth's fundamental values of good governance, human rights, gender equality and sustainable development. The right to adequate shelter in particular is a principle without which there can be no security and stability for households – or the wider society.

The Commonwealth's networks can enable different spheres of government and society to reach a common understanding of problems and therefore work towards effective solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> The UN's slum dweller estimation is based on a definition of a "slum household" as lacking either: access to improved water; access to improved sanitation facilities; sufficient living area (less than 3 people per habitable room); a durable dwelling (non-hazardous location, permanent structure adequate to protect from climatic extremes); or security of tenure. All statistics in this paragraph are from UN Habitat (2003) *Slums of the World: the face of urban poverty in the new millennium?* Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

<sup>2</sup> There may be others with even higher rates, but data was only available for 32 member states, none of which were in the Pacific region.

The networks include central government, local government, professional bodies, civil society organisations and business. Commonwealth partners can share approaches that are based on similar legal, political and educational systems. In particular, there is often a common institutional legacy in relation to building and planning legislation and training for built environment professionals. Commonwealth initiatives also provide a rare opportunity to work across regions. As a trusted and neutral development partner, the Commonwealth facilitates consultations at the highest political levels, informed by this wider networking, to build consensus and advocate the concerns of developing countries.

## How does the Commonwealth take action on Human Settlements?

The Commonwealth's principle mechanism for addressing human settlements concerns is ComHabitat. ComHabitat is a partnership of the ministerial-level Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements (CCGHS) and agencies from government, local government, civil society and the private sector. ComHabitat promotes implementation of the Habitat Agenda and is working towards the Commonwealth Goal of: *"Demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015"* and associated Millennium Development Goals. It focuses on networking and sharing practical examples of progress in implementation.

ComHabitat provides:

- a forum to foster relationships and projects. By working in partnership, the agencies involved in ComHabitat are able to make new connections and add value to each others work;
- a platform for developing country concerns on human settlements, presenting these at key international events and through information-sharing mechanisms;
- a deeper understanding of the issues through research, high-level dialogues and public debates in areas such as: partnership approaches to the provision of water, sanitation and waste management; financing constraints for urban development; alternatives to forced eviction; reducing vulnerability to disasters; addressing urban poverty in national poverty reduction frameworks; and placing human settlements at the centre of the development agenda; and
- active support to partnership approaches, for example by sponsoring exchanges to study community led approaches to slum upgrading and new building technologies, and assisting government and NGOs in Malawi to develop a plan for implementing settlement upgrading plans in line with the Malawi Growth & Development Strategy and potentially using funds released through debt relief<sup>3</sup>.

## Looking Forward

This Strategic Plan is informed by ComHabitat's experience over the past three years. It provides a focus for a new phase and a framework for the development of partnerships that attract resources and harness the Commonwealth's strengths to add value to efforts at achieving the Habitat Agenda and MDGs.

The Commonwealth's goal for human settlements is *"Demonstrated progress towards adequate shelter for all with secure tenure and access to essential services in every community by 2015"*.

ComHabitat partners will work to achieve this goal and support members of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements in their efforts to:

- provide basic services to households, neighbourhoods and villages;
- incorporate shelter provision into national poverty alleviation programmes;
- promote good governance;
- promote security of tenure; and
- remove systematic discrimination against women, especially in respect of title to property and inheritance rights.

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<sup>3</sup>Malawi reached completion point under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative in September 2006.

ComHabitat has identified specific areas where it, as a partnership, will focus its work. Its mission can be summarised by the call made by the CCGHS Chair's statement to the thirteenth session of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development to put *"human settlements at the very heart of the development agenda"*<sup>4</sup>.

## Strategic Objectives

ComHabitat has identified three strategic objectives to guide its work from 2007 to 2011.

1. To improve financial investment to ensure adequate shelter for all, including access to essential services.
2. To strengthen leadership and governance by Habitat Agenda partners<sup>5</sup> in approaches to sustainable and equitable human settlements development.
3. To reduce risks and build community resilience in an urbanising World.

## A focus on finance

Objective 1: To improve financial investment to ensure adequate shelter for all, including access to essential services.

### Rationale

Meeting the MDGs means greatly expanding investments in infrastructure and basic services, including: water; sanitation; primary health care; community development; housing and education<sup>6</sup>. Commonwealth member states have recognized that financing is a key issue in human settlements development.

Research and consultations by ComHabitat in the past three years have highlighted the following key constraints to financing:

- national frameworks, such as Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, lack a focus on urban poverty issues. This implies that human settlements concerns are not being prioritised in government spending plans and that governments and donors do not always maximise opportunities within urban areas to address poverty and meet the MDGs; and
- increasing pressure on local government to deliver basic services to meet the MDGs, yet it often does not have the financial means or capacity to do so.

### Directions

To achieve the strategic objective of improving financial investment to ensure adequate shelter for all, including essential services, ComHabitat will:

- advocate the concerns of developing countries and seek to improve international financial mechanisms for human settlements development by facilitating high-level dialogue (e.g. at Commonwealth Ministerial Meetings and other forums) on the issues of: financing human settlements development; and the inclusion of human settlements in national and local development strategies;
- exchange experiences between central and local government around the public financing of basic services to develop principles and approaches that support effective public sector decentralization and an improved flow of resources in support of the local delivery of basic services;

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<sup>4</sup> CCGHS (2005) *Statement on Behalf of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements at the Thirteenth Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development*, April 2005

<sup>5</sup> The Habitat Agenda recognises that its goals can only be achieved through various actors working in partnership. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (known as UN-Habitat), is the UN agency responsible for human settlements, cities and implementing the Habitat Agenda works with partners including: governments, international and regional organisations, municipalities and various regional and international local authority groups; parliamentarians, non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, women's and youth groups, trade unions, urban professionals, researchers and spiritual organisations.

<sup>6</sup> UN Millennium Project (2005) *Investing in Development: A practical plan to achieve the millennium development goals*, New York: UNDP.

- research and share examples and experiences of approaches to financing human settlements development to improve access to financing mechanisms at the local level; and
- explore new approaches to local financing for human settlements development that involve a wider array of actors.

### Outcomes

- Financing mobilised at a national and local level for human settlements development.
- Principles and approaches identified and promoted to facilitate decentralisation.
- Senior finance, planning and human settlements officials have a deeper understanding of the concerns and practical approaches to improving financial flows for adequate shelter and basic services for all.
- Innovative approaches identified to local financing of human settlements development.

## **Building effective leadership**

Objective 2: To strengthen leadership and governance by Habitat Agenda partners in approaches to sustainable and equitable human settlements development.

### Rationale

It is widely acknowledged that strengthening governance at all levels is essential for sustainable development, and that this requires effective leadership by all agencies with a role to play. To nurture sustainable human settlements, Commonwealth member states have stressed the need to share practical ideas, showcase good practice and analyse what lessons can be learnt from experience.

Approaches such as the UN Habitat Urban Governance Index, and the Commonwealth Local Government Forum's Aberdeen Agenda (which sets out principles on good practice for local democracy and governance), can help to underpin sustainable and equitable human settlements development.

Leadership is also needed in the planning sphere. A recent position paper by the professional association representing planners in the Commonwealth calls for leadership and new skills amongst planners, stakeholders and all levels of government to address the challenges of rapid urbanisation. It recognises that new urban development approaches need to be: explicitly pro-poor and inclusive; acknowledge the dynamics of informal sectors; and create opportunities for all. There can be no rigid blueprint for urban development, since this rests on a diverse set of cultures and legal systems. The approach recognises the potential that exists to use information and communication networks, Commonwealth universities and other training institutions, professional groups and practitioners, to develop curricula and learning materials, and to share experiences in sustainable planning of urban centres.

### Directions

To achieve the strategic objective of strengthening leadership and governance in approaches to sustainable and equitable human settlements development, ComHabitat will:

- review and promote experiences and implementation of successful initiatives to improve governance of human settlements; and
- exchange ideas and experiences on new approaches in urban development, and promote initiatives such as the Commonwealth Association of Planners' work on "New Urban Planning".

## Outcomes

- Stronger champions for more inclusive and integrated approaches to human settlements planning leading to more economically, environmentally and socially sustainable human settlements.
- More information available to support stakeholders at all levels in improving the governance of human settlements development through leadership.
- Approaches implemented that improve governance for sustainable human settlements.
- Built environment professionals and other stakeholders showing leadership in developing new urban planning approaches.

## **Addressing risk**

Objective 3: To reduce risks and build community resilience in a rapidly urbanising World.

### Rationale

The international community has been heavily engaged in disaster management issues in recent years, and people have found themselves faced with devastating large-scale events. Hurricane Ivan badly affected Jamaica and devastated Grenada in September 2004; the December 2004 tsunami affected countries in Asia and the Indian Ocean, including Sri Lanka and The Maldives; and a massive earthquake occurred in Kashmir in October 2005. It is estimated that more than 200 million people on average have been affected every year in the past two decades by disasters<sup>7</sup>. The impact of disasters on people's lives can be greatly reduced by effective forward planning and governance.

Informal settlements and slum communities are often built on marginal land such as floodplains and coastal swamps, making poor people particularly vulnerable to events such as floods, storm surges and fire. Such events have to be seen as factors preventing poor people improving their quality of life and they greatly aggravate poverty. The worsening of the flood situation and the rise of sea level as a consequence of climate change will thus further increase poverty. It is important to involve the affected communities in planning for post-disaster rehabilitation, disaster risk reduction and the design of more disaster resistant dwellings and appropriate hazard alleviation measures.

The Conference of Commonwealth Meteorologists has noted that about 90 per cent of all disasters are hydrometeorological in nature and effective services are needed to support early warning and preparedness for disasters. Climate change is a growing concern for human settlements. The predominant focus of international initiatives on climate change and cities – such as the Cities for Climate Protection campaign of the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) – is on climate change mitigation. There has been much less emphasis on promoting adaptation to climate change in our growing cities. There is a strong case for special assistance to help poor urban people to adapt to climate change. This is where Commonwealth networking could help to add value.

An international meeting of Commonwealth professional associations and international organisations<sup>8</sup> showed that building codes, planning regulations and disaster response and recovery plans are not always adequate to address current disaster risks. This needs to be addressed and projected risks from climate change must also be integrated into planning for sustainable human settlements.

## Directions

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<sup>7</sup> World Conference on Disaster Reduction, 18-22 January 2005, Kobe, Hyogo, Japan: *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters*.

<sup>8</sup> Commonwealth Foundation Workshop *Preparing for Change: Adaptive Strategies for Climate Change and Disaster Management in the Commonwealth*, held 9-12 October 2006, Mahé, Seychelles.

To achieve the strategic objective of reducing risk and building community resilience in a rapidly urbanising World, ComHabitat will:

- review national legislative frameworks related to disaster management and mitigation to ensure that human settlements concerns are adequately considered;
- galvanise built environment professional organisations to respond to technical challenges posed by climate change and disaster risk management; and
- share examples and experiences of approaches to disaster management and mitigation, and community based climate change adaptation.

### Outcomes

- Frameworks reviewed and shared for integrated approaches to disaster risk reduction, disaster management and adaptation to climate change.
- Jointly owned work plans to advocate disaster risk reduction, disaster management and adaptation to climate change within the Commonwealth.
- Effective policy frameworks in place and operational at national and local levels, supported by communities and professionals with skills to develop, monitor and implement.

### **Implementation**

The value of the ComHabitat partnership is that it brings together agencies from different sectors that are critical to implementing the Habitat Agenda (government, local government, non-governmental organisations, professional associations and the private sector). Ministers that lead on implementing the Habitat Agenda in their own countries are also part of this partnership through the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Human Settlements. All these groups are actively engaged in implementing the Habitat Agenda in their own spheres, but they also collaborate through ComHabitat to achieve their own goals effectively through more integrated approaches to the development challenges of human settlements. The reach of the ComHabitat partnership makes it particularly effective in networking, advocacy, information sharing and the development of innovative policy approaches.

ComHabitat is governed by the ministerial-level CCGHS. A Management Group, made up of partner organisations, oversees the work of the ComHabitat Secretariat and is responsible for approving and monitoring the detailed annual work plan of the ComHabitat Secretariat. Management Group members are: the Commonwealth Secretariat; the Commonwealth Foundation; the Commonwealth Association of Planners; the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council; the Commonwealth Local Government Forum; Homeless International, and the UK Government's Department for International Development. At present, the secretariat function of ComHabitat is provided by Homeless International. ComHabitat has a working relationship with the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) and is developing a network to facilitate broader engagement by many more organisations and individuals in the CCGHS process. Throughout the period of the Strategic Plan, ComHabitat will engage practitioners in developing countries in reviewing the direction and implementation of its work.

The Strategic Plan will draw on the institutional resources and experience of its partner institutions, but ComHabitat will also need to raise additional resources to fully implement this strategic plan.

### **Monitoring and Evaluation**

The strategic plan will be monitored and evaluated through processes at four levels:

- the CCGHS approves the Strategic Plan and reviews its progress on a biennial basis;
- Commonwealth civil society forums provide opportunities to gain wider input on ComHabitat's direction and activities, including partnerships;

- ComHabitat's Management Group will be responsible for implementing and monitoring the overall Strategy and for overseeing the work of the ComHabitat Secretariat; and
- each partner organisation will monitor activities for which it is the lead organisation; this monitoring will inform and drive the implementation of individual projects.

In addition to setting monitoring and evaluation criteria for activities under the Strategic Plan, ComHabitat will develop ways to support the review by its partners of progress towards the Commonwealth goal.

The CCGHS governs the ComHabitat partnership and its biennial meetings provide an opportunity to evaluate progress made midway through this plan (in 2009) and at the end in 2011.

## ANNEX 2: INDICATIVE MATRIX OF WORK BY SELECTED<sup>9</sup> COMHABITAT PARTNERS

Strategic Objective	Activity	Lead Institution(s)	Collaborating partner(s)	ComHabitat funding component	Timeframe	Project Output	Project Outcome
1,2,3	CCGHS and other Commonwealth Ministerial meetings	Commonwealth Secretariat/ Commonwealth Foundation	Commonwealth Foundation (CF) and all ComHabitat partners	In-Kind	Biennial (2007, 2009)	High-level Dialogue and consensus-building  Strategic planning for ComHabitat  Civil society consultations and inputs	Governments and other stakeholders aware of different policy approaches they can use to bring about sustainable human settlements development  Stronger multi-stakeholder approach used in human settlements development
1	CFMM	Commonwealth Secretariat	All ComHabitat partners	In-Kind	February - July	High-level Dialogue and consensus-building	Better understanding generated of the financing constraints to address Human Settlements concerns
1	Decentralising financial flows for basic services and delivery of the MDGs	Commonwealth Secretariat	Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)	Nil	Throughout 2007	check list of practical approaches developed to support decentralisation of funds for basic services delivery	To support greater decentralisation of financial resources for basic service delivery
2	Enhancing local governance	Commonwealth Secretariat	CLGF	In-Kind	Throughout 2007		
3	Legislative frameworks in support of Disaster Risk Reduction and Adaptation to Climate Change	Commonwealth Secretariat	CF	Nil	Throughout 2007	Review undertaken of the adequacy of current legislative frameworks in meeting the challenges of pro-active disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change	Better understanding of role of legislation in promoting pro-active disaster risk management & adaptation to climate change. Results will be used to identify areas of work in 2008/9
3	Post-disaster reconstruction: India	Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (CHEC)	Vastu-Shilpa Foundation, Ahmedabad, India	Nil	2007	Guidelines on best practice using local materials and	Manual on best practice for release to Commonwealth

<sup>9</sup> An updated table including details from other ComHabitat partners will be provided to the CCGHS on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2007

						community collaboration based on experience with Gujerat earthquake and the Indian Ocean tsunami	diasaster prone areas (Forthcoming)
3	Post-disaster reconstruction: Sri Lanka	CHEC	CHEC Sri Lanka	Nil	2005-7	Building proto-type new houses for Indian Ocean tsunami victims	Practical demonstration in Sri Lanka: report in CHEC publications
2, 3	Land and housing for factory workers Sri Lanka	CHEC Sri Lanka	CHEC	Nil	2006-8	Providing land, obtaining title and assisting 24 families to build their own homes on disused peri-urban agriculture land	Secure tenancy and good housing for the poor
2,3	Enhancing livelihoods of peri-urban women: Sierra Leone	CHEC	CHECSIL (CHEC Sierra Leone)	Nil	2005-7	Developing skills in urban agriculture to reduce poverty and enhance women's financial independence	Enhanced roles of women, improving lives of children
1	Paper and strategy on local government finance to go to c/w Finance Ministers and World Bank	CLGF	Commonwealth Secretariat	£5000	Paper complete by 31/03/07; Strategy agreed by 31/07/07 Ministerial meetings in October 2007	Strategy paper	Greater understanding among senior finance officials regarding the role and needs of local government
1	Training workshops in Africa and India in obtaining and using municipal credit ratings	CLGF	Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA)	Nil	Africa workshop 2007  South Asia workshop Nov 2007	Municipal leaders trained in issues re: credit ratings	Municipal leaders better able to make use of the private financial bonds markets to address infrastructural needs
1	Advocacy with joint Africa Institute on proposal for performance-based Grants for local government	CLGF		Nil	Throughout 2007		An understanding amongst the implementers of the of the conditions under which local government operates
2, 1, 3	Commonwealth Local Government conference	CLGF	All partners	In-Kind	March 26-29 2007		
2	Capacity building on strategic planning	CLGF	Jamaican local government authorities	Nil	To Dec 2007	Effective strategic plans in 3 parishes	Stronger strategic planning capacity in 3 parishes

2	Aberdeen Agenda projects	CLGF		Nil	2007	Greater understanding of the state of local democracy in Uganda and Zambia	Capacity to target resources on the areas of governance requiring improvement
2	Advocacy on local government in Malawi	CLGF		Nil	2007	Local elections	Restoration of local democracy
2	Building leadership skills	Commonwealth Foundation	All ComHabitat partners	In-Kind	2007-2009	<p>Training of trainers workshops on participatory approaches to governance</p> <p>Commonwealth People's Forum workshops on urbanisation, poverty and economic growth</p> <p>Arts; Crafts and Photographic Awards that include urban contexts</p> <p>Publication of case studies focusing on human settlement issues</p>	<p>Governments and other stakeholders aware of different policy approaches they can use to bring about sustainable human settlements development</p> <p>Stronger multi-stakeholder approach used in human settlements development</p>

						Paper for Ministers of Women Affairs on financing gender equality for development and democracy including issues related to urbanisation, poverty and provision of basic services	
3	Disaster risk reduction and climate change	CF	Commonwealth Secretariat and All ComHabitat partners	In-Kind	2007-2009	Guide for citizens on policy processes related to climate change. Regional workshops for journalists on climate change; support Commonwealth Forestry Association to publish educational material for young people; role of education in climate change and risk reduction	Governments and other stakeholders aware of different policy approaches they can use to bring about sustainable human settlements development  Stronger multi-stakeholder approach used in human settlements development