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New partnership formed between UN-Habitat and key Commonwealth Associations to focus on capacity building.

On 5 June 2023, at the second session of the UN-Habitat Assembly, members of the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UN-Habitat to help tackle the urgent issues raised by rapid urbanisation. This new agreement aims to address the capacity gaps affecting local and national governments, urban professionals and academia, as well as other urban stakeholders. It focuses on Commonwealth countries that are facing the most urgent challenges.



The members of the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative include:

- The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU)
- The Commonwealth Association of Architects (CAA)
- The Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP)
- The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF)

Two-thirds of the world's population is likely to live in urban areas by the 2050s. UN-Habitat estimates that nearly 50% of the projected growth in the world's urban population will be in Commonwealth countries, many of which are among the most vulnerable to climate change impacts. The aim of the partnership is to increase the capacity of urban stakeholders in these Commonwealth countries to tackle such challenges.

The collaboration will focus on building the capacity of urban stakeholders, particularly in Commonwealth countries, that are facing the most urgent challenges to cope with rapid urbanisation and climate change. This aligns with Resolution 1/3 of the UN-Habitat Assembly (2019) on *“Enhancing capacity-building for the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the urban dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”*, UN-Habitat's Strategic Plan, and Capacity Building Strategy, as well as the [Call to Action on Sustainable Urbanisation across the Commonwealth](#), and the findings from surveys such as the [Survey of the Built Environment Professions in the Commonwealth](#).

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Unchecked and unplanned urban sprawl are universal concerns. In addition to urban poverty, today's cities are also faced with issues such as climate change, environment pollution, lack of housing and basic services, migration, and refugees, humanitarian crises and conflict, together leading to an increase in inequality, vulnerability and instability.

At the global level, significant capacity gaps affect the ability of local and national governments to cope with the demographic pressure and the ever-increasing demand for land, housing, infrastructure and basic urban services. Many local and national government institutions are inadequately equipped to manage cities and rapid urbanisation.

The collaboration endorsed by the MOU will:

- Increase capacity of urban stakeholders in the Commonwealth countries that are facing the most urgent challenges to cope with rapid urbanisation and climate change through enhanced knowledge transfer, exchange of good practice and skills development.
- Strengthen links between policy, education and practice related to sustainable urbanisation and climate change.
- Increase awareness of and access to relevant tools for urban stakeholders working on issues related to rapid urbanisation and climate change.
- Increase awareness among Commonwealth Member States and relevant stakeholders of the extent of the capacity gap and the importance of increasing commitments to address this gap.
- Improve engagement from stakeholders, combined with greater collaboration between stakeholders at all levels.
- Improve identification, definition, recognition of and engagement with key barriers and enablers both among and between key stakeholders at national, regional, and local levels.
- Improve coordination and coherence between different stakeholder groups at both policy-making and operational levels.

The Memorandum of Understanding responds to the Declaration on Sustainable Urbanisation adopted by heads of Government at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting which took place in Kigali in June 2022 and resonates with the theme of inclusive and effective multilateralism which underpins the Second UN-Habitat Assembly taking place in Nairobi this week.

ENDS

About the signatories:

- **UN-Habitat** is mandated by the UN General Assembly to promote environmentally and socially sustainable cities and human settlements and has developed several normative products that support effective urban legislation.
- **The Association of Commonwealth Universities** is an international organisation dedicated to building a better world through higher education. By bringing universities together from around the world the Association of Commonwealth Universities helps to advance knowledge, promote understanding, broaden minds, and improve lives.
- **The Commonwealth Association of Architects** is an association of national institutes of architects from across the Commonwealth. Its objectives are the advancement of architecture across the Commonwealth and the promotion and acquisition of knowledge of the various arts and sciences connected therewith, with the object of ensuring the maximum contribution by architects to the wellbeing of society. The CAA's primary focus is on advocacy, capacity building and climate action.
- **The Commonwealth Association of Planners** brings together 30 national professional planning organizations representing over 40,000 professional planners. Members organizations operate at all levels of government and in the private sector, non-government organizations and community-based associations. Today the institution

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plays an increasingly significant role in promoting planning as fundamental for sustainable human settlements, mitigating the impacts of climate change and building resilient communities.

- **The Commonwealth Local Government Forum** is a powerful voice for local democracy and sustainable development across the Commonwealth focusing on advocacy, programmes, knowledge sharing and research, and networks. CLGF works closely with its members, which uniquely comprise a range of local government stakeholders: individual councils and cities; national and regional local government associations; government ministries with responsibility for local government; research and academic institutions and individuals and professional bodies. CLGF promotes the role and interests of local government and priorities include good governance and effective service delivery; achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals; decentralisation, sustainable development and urbanisation; gender empowerment, politically and economically; and local economic development.

For further information:

- UN Habitat: Visit the UN-Habitat website unhabitat.org or contact unhabitat-info@un.org.
- For further information about the Commonwealth Sustainable Cities Initiative, visit <https://commonwealthsustainablecities.org> or contact info@commonwealthsustainablecities.org.