



# Valuing our communities and cities

## Statement by UN-Habitat Executive Director, Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif

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Local communities are the lifeblood of our cities and towns. And during the COVID-19 outbreak – their contribution has been extraordinary. As urban areas were hit by one of the most serious economic and social crises for generations, communities helped to keep people safe and healthy in countless ways.

In my webinar sessions with over 1,000 cities since we all started working virtually, I have witnessed first hand, how communities have come together to form self-help networks providing food for the most vulnerable, carrying water to the elderly and creating apps to help match donors with recipients based on what was needed the most.

Community leaders and their teams continue to play a key role working with local governments and national government agencies to find quarantine spaces and help set up makeshift clinics.

Youth and grassroots women continue to direct assistance to the most vulnerable. They do this by learning and using local knowledge. In the process, they have found creative ways of disseminating crucial information and empowering the people they serve.

We are in the midst of the worst socio-economic crisis in a hundred years. I am grateful to community actors who work with the private sector to help find alternative livelihoods.

In informal settlements and slums in particular, communities provide a vital safety net. But their value goes far beyond supporting emergency responses.

On this World Cities Day, we must recognise that communities must be at the centre of designing their own, longer term solutions and we must listen to them as their on-ground experience will help us build resilience and equity in the future.

Communities can work in partnerships with local governments, the private sector, healthcare, education and other services to maximise the impact of their knowledge and skills. Valuing our communities is an important first step towards the transformational change we need to build back better and build back greener.

As we celebrate World Cities Day, let us join hands together to value our community leaders and communities themselves. It is only by going beyond acknowledging their contributions to opening up wider opportunities for them to network, co-create and finance their initiatives can we achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in this Decade of Action.

