

## ECOLOGIC

# Adequate housing can become a reality

**T**he last week has been exciting for all in the field of housing and sustainable development, and especially for me, as the chief architect of our firm (my mother and mentor) is representing India on the world stage. Habitat III is the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development that was held at Quito, Ecuador from October 17-20, 2016. The discussions were about important policy and strategy changes to manage 'Sustainable Urbanisation'. It was to seek solutions for sustainable development of cities and ways to manage climate change for the next 20 years. The UN Conference on Housing (Habitat) occurs on a bi-decennial cycle, with the last two hosted in Istanbul (1996) and Vancouver (1976).

The New Urban Agenda (NUA) signed at Quito will set new standards for nation states, cities and regional authorities; and provide civil societies, foundations, NGOs, academic researchers and other UN agencies with new guidelines for tackling the new challenges of urbanisation and ways for sustainable development, which according to some experts will cost the countries to collectively spend \$ 4.5 trillion annually.

The NUA will perhaps give a fresh blueprint for the development of our very own Smart Cities Initiative.



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During the Emergency of 1975, the right to shelter was downgraded from a Fundamental Right to a Constitutional Right. International human rights law also recognises the right to an adequate standard of living. In spite of this, millions live in life/health threatening conditions, in overcrowded slums and informal settlements, conditions which fly in the face of basic human rights.

Creating a plan for sustainable urbanisation and monitoring urban development in cities for the next 20 years does seem overwhelming. The Habitat II in 1996 at Istanbul concluded the Declaration on Human Settlements, which was Adequate Shelter for All. Since then, over 100 countries have adopted constitutional rights to adequate housing. This is, undoubtedly, a great achievement.

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By definition, sustainable urbanisation must provide adequate housing, which according to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN Habitat, is more than just four walls and a roof. Basic services must be included such as potable water, sanitation, energy for cooking, lighting, cooling etc.

Housing needs to be affordable and well located. It cannot be cut off from workplaces, health care, schools and other daily needs of residents. Security against forced evictions and harassment is also required as per the basic human rights outline. Habitability, affordability and location are somewhat contradictory in our system of Housing, because if one box is checked, the others invariably cannot be.

But before we start looking to the government for all the solutions, it must be known that this human right does NOT require the State to build housing for the entire population. Rather, this right to housing protects against homelessness, forced evictions, addresses discrimination while guaranteeing homes that are habitable, affordable and well situated.

Get cracking India; we will soon have an agenda for the world focused on climate change, while we still catch up with adequate housing.