

## Celebrating Empowered Communities and Urban October 2018 activities in Thailand

BANGKOK, Thailand, 2 November 2018 – As the October sun set on Bangkok, the ‘City of Life’, we look back upon the events marking the celebration of Urban October in 2018. Every year and throughout October, partners organize a month of activities, events and discussions on urban issues and sustainable development. The month kicks-off with World Habitat Day, designated by the United Nations as October 1 every year and ending with World Cities Day on October 31.

In 2018, the worldwide theme of World Habitat Day was ‘Municipal Solid Waste Management’. While in Thailand, the inauguration activities this year for World Habitat Day focused on ‘Celebrating Inclusive Cities and Empowered Urban Communities in Asia and the Pacific’.

Certainly, no other region of the world faces a greater need to break the inextricable link between waste generation rates and prosperity than Asia. As the largest waste-generating continent inhabited by more than 4.45 billion people in 2016, it is estimated that Asian cities alone will produce 1.8 billion tonnes of waste in the year 2025, compared to 0.28 billion tonnes in 2012<sup>1</sup>.

Meanwhile across Thailand, efforts such as the ‘Baan Mankong’ programs of the Community Organizations Development Institute (CODI) under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) are underway to address the provision of housing for over 2.25 million people, including some the most poor, vulnerable and marginalized populations.



Photo credits: ESCAP

As such, it was only befitting that Urban October commenced in Thailand with a strong community mobilization by the Four Regions Slum Network on October 2. Gathering several hundred inhabitants of slums and informal settlements from across Thailand, the President of the Network, Ms. Varind Damrongphan, called for the United Nations to act on the issue of homelessness and to alleviate the suffering of those in need by providing living spaces and a sustainable community.

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<sup>1</sup> UNEP-IETC-AIT (2017). Outlook on Solid Waste Management in Asia. Available at: <http://www.rrcap.ait.asia/Publications/Asia%20Waste%20Management%20Outlook.pdf>

*“This region has seen in the last few decades unparalleled economic growth and prosperity, with millions of people raised out of poverty. Many of these economic gains are due to the growth of cities, which generate 80% of GDP, with an ever-expanding economic impact and with a high potential to increase urban GDP over time”,* said Curt Garrigan, Chief of Sustainable Urban Development Section of Environment and Development Division of ESCAP. *“Harnessing the potential of cities requires recognizing the needs and contributions of all citizens to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable- the objective of Sustainable Development Goal 11,”* he continued.

Without question, the detrimental health, societal and ecological risks to those living in informal settlements where waste management is poorly managed are significant. At the same time, waste streams are becoming more complex, non-biodegradable and more toxic.

Building upon this theme, a seminar was organized by the National Housing Authority (NHA) under the MSDHS on October 10 to specifically address challenges related to municipal solid waste management in Thailand. As highlighted during the seminar, many municipalities are simply without the capacity to handle a formal waste management system, leading to the emergence of alternative ways to handle, manage and dispose of waste including informal waste activities.



Photo credits: ESCAP

As part of the official inauguration of World Habitat and World Cities Day, a commemoration event welcoming over 300 participants was organised by UN ESCAP, UN-Habitat, the Royal Thai Government and Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR). Sharing details of the 20-Year National Housing Development Master Plan, the event featured opening remarks by the Minister of Social Development and Human Security, General Anantaporn Kanjanarat, an exhibition of works by CODI, as well as, the launch of Canal Housing Project in Thailand on October 12.

*“Through the 20-Year National Housing Development Master Plan, the National and Provincial Committee on Housing Development is moving towards the achievement of SDG 11 and the implementation of the New Urban Agenda in cooperation with communities and stakeholders. Thailand stands ready to cooperate and share experiences and best practices with other countries to fulfil our common effort to achieve the SDGs”,* shared the Minister.

In her video message, the UN-Habitat Executive Director, Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif, recalled that the concept of *“the 3Rs – Reduce, Reuse and Recycle – should be a guiding principle of our daily lives, as individuals and as community members”* and further noted that *“the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agenda and the New Urban Agenda all recognize the importance of municipal waste management”*.

Presenting awards recognising the dedicated work of individuals and organisations striving to ensure social benefits to their communities, recipients came from across Thailand. To help illicit solutions and a way forwards, a panel discussion was convened on the topic of 'Building Sustainable and Resilient Cities', represented by grassroots and community leaders from over 10 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, affiliated with the Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) Regional Alliance.

Costs of inaction or unsound waste management can be high. It is estimated that the cost of managing solid waste may range between 10 per cent and 35 per cent of the expenses incurred for remediation. A responsibility which resonates with a large cross-section of society, especially young Thai citizens, who will otherwise inherit tomorrow the burden of waste produced today.

Setting out to address the issues of waste management along with sustainable consumption and production, over 150 young people from the Global Shapers Community across the Asia-Pacific region and beyond gathered in Bangkok at the Regional SHAPE APAC event. Featuring a specialized track on 'Sustainable Cities', sessions covered topics including urban resilience; smart cities; circular economy; placeful business; and were followed by an interactive board game simulation highlighting risks and vulnerability in cities conducted by Urban Futures, Thammasat University.



Photo credits: Bangkok Shapers Hub

*"Most Global Shapers Hubs are based in the world's capital cities. As organisers, we are aware that many things need to be changed to improve urban conditions, including personal lifestyle options, and so we exploit this regional space to engage with youth leaders in the hope to instigate more collaboration down the line"* shared Aanas Ali, a Member of Global Shapers Bangkok Hub.

The New Urban Agenda<sup>2</sup> makes a commitment to *"the environmentally sound management and minimization of all waste"*. However, translating the national government commitments to practical and sustainable actions at the local level, needs the support of a network of actors with local authorities taking the lead to maximise partnership opportunities.

Ending the month of October, an observance of World Cities Day was organized by UN ESCAP and Global Forum on Human Settlements at the UN Conference Centre on October 30-31.

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations (2017). New Urban Agenda. Available at <http://habitat3.org/wp-content/uploads/NUA-English.pdf>

As was shared in the seminar on 'Municipal Solid Waste Management', what is required is a shift in our mindsets and consumption patterns from the current linear model of "*take, make, use, dispose*" to a more sustainable and circular economy concept which is gaining momentum.

Date:

October 2018

Sources:

Asian Coalition for Housing Rights (ACHR)

Bangkok Shapers Hub, Global Shapers Community

Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS), Royal Thai Government

UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP)

UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

Themes:

Circular Economy, Environment, Housing, Municipal Solid Waste Management, Smart Cities;

Sustainable Cities, Sustainable Consumption and Production, Urban Resilience, Youth

Regions:

Asia-Pacific