

Dr Nandita Chatterjee  
Secretary  
Ministry of Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation  
Government of India  
New Delhi

Dear Shri Nandita ji ,

Greetings form Ahmedabad.

Prior to the meeting at HUDCO office on 2nd July for the presentation of the Building Centre Committee's recommendations, which you presided over, I had requested you for little time to discuss two other matters: RAY project in Leh city (which was touched upon briefly) and India's participation at Habitat 3. There was no time at all for the second matter. As you head the team that prepares for the global mega event next year and though there is a lot to be said that cannot be done in a letter of this kind, I write this to make a few points for your consideration, while you get on the action mode on the subject.

[if !supportLists]1. [endif]One of the reasons I want to share some ideas and offer some suggestions is that in the matter of Habitat Conferences I am bit of a veteran, having attended the first one in Vancouver in 1976, when I had barely started work on the issues of housing for the rural and urban poor, and the second one in Istanbul in 1996, as the president of Habitat International Coalition (HIC) , a global coalition of NGOs, professionals, activists and others working on the themes such as the housing rights, people friendly cities, inclusive growth and sustainable development. God willing I will have an opportunity to participate in Habitat 3 next year. I will be one of the few survivors having seen the journey of Habitat conferences over four decades.

[if !supportLists]2. [endif]Habitat 3, like others of its kind these days, will be a Jamboree, a huge international Mela , with thousands of people participating : governments, ministers, officers, politicians, professionals, business, human settlements NGOs, other civic groups, academics, activists, donors, development aid and support agencies, media, designers, materials manufacturers, ordinary citizens and who not. A vast variety of topics and issues get presented and debated. There are also displays, demonstrations, protests and celebrations. It also offers a big opportunity to exchange ideas, share innovations, connect, relate, learn and network for all kind of purposes on myriad issues: from climate change to slums to smart cities to Yoga to disasters to children to technology to rivers to economic growth strategies to development model, they all get discussed. Besides being a celebratory event, its serious business agenda is nothing less. Policies, programs, projects, schemes, institutions, organizations, success stories, best practices and innovations get presented, debated and scrutinised. The regional and the national preparatory processes are getting serious too. The event's significance is also that it offers a platform, both external and internal, to the countries, their governments, decision makers, experts, civil society and people to assess the journey, efforts and achievements in making their living places—cities, towns and

villages—and the working environments better, healthier, efficient, productive and sustainable. With the nations, regions and the world as a debating space; with the ideas Bazaar atmosphere; a Mela spirit and all shades of stakeholders as participants and contributors it presents an unique opportunity for reflection, learning, stock taking and even charting new courses. Habitat 3's main significance is not what it is, but what we do with it and what we make of it.

[if !supportLists]3. [endif]For the GoI this is a good opportunity to bring to the notice of the world community its bold resolve and unprecedented efforts to meet the country's urban and development challenge head on—in from of ambitious policies, programs and projects for the development of the cities and towns. By any count the Smart Cities, Amrut, Housing for All by 2022, Make in India, the Skills Development Program, Swatchha Bharat Abhiyan, the Sanitation Programme, etc. constitute a formidable package aimed at making the Indian cities better places to live, work, progress, prosper and contribute to the overall national growth. These initiatives put together and executed with purpose and imagination have the potential to trigger a process that could transform the urban landscape. Habitat 3 needs to be used to showcase these initiatives imaginatively to attract partners, investors, technology and contributors in other forms from among the governments, institutions, market players and others. Facilitating—by offering a platform to meet, share, relate and exchange-- such partnerships is one of the objectives of this event. This needs to be done systematically, creatively and in a planned manner. The government has almost a year to prepare and execute the outreach plans. And doing that will require thoughtful planning and multiple partners.

[if !supportLists]4. [endif]The preparatory regional events, though low key compared to the main conference, in terms of scope for exposure they provide, also deserve attention as the South South exchange has much to offer in terms of replicable and up-scalable ideas and adaptation of best practices for the local use.

[if !supportLists]5. [endif]However, the most significant advantage the country can derive nationally/locally from this high profile global event, which comes only after two decades – next one in 2036, a period that will see India multiply its current urban population by one and a half times, considering the trends, which estimates the country adding 400 million people to its urban population in 35 years —is to encourage/support/facilitate a national discourse on cleaner, healthier, productive, harmonious, people friendly, technology savvy, resource efficient and better governed cities and sustainable urbanization. The country as a whole has never engaged itself-- as it recently did in the Yoga awareness campaign ---in understanding and thinking about the urbanisation process, which is not only changing the address and the living place tag from 'rural' to 'urban' but transforming itself into a new society. It is a social change, cultural transition, as much as physical and economic change. Urbanization in this tradition bound and predominantly rural country —over 6,20,000 villages still despite staggering urban growth; over 830 million people in the rural areas still; about half of the labour force in agriculture still—is a silent revolution and it is essential for the people to understand the process, feel the pulse of the change consciously, and get ready to

contribute to shaping its course. I suggest that the GoI declare year 2016, the year of the Habitat 3, as a “Year of the City”. Not only will that be appropriate in the context of the global event --Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development, in Quito, Ecuador, from 17 – 20 October, 2016-- it will also be a huge opportunity to take the massive government programs of urban investment and development--100 Smart Cities, 500 cities under Amrut, Housing for All in seven years, just to mention three—to the people. India’s urban challenge, as is well-known, is massive and complex. Making people aware of its dimensions and articulating for them the steps being taken to meet the challenge would be a creative use of the global event. Habitat 3 will come to India while being staged in Ecuador. That will be our way of owning it, taking it to the Indian people.

[if !supportLists]6. [endif]This is no place to detail out ‘what’ and ‘how’ of the suggestion—2016 as the “Year of the City”. But if it is taken seriously by the government, a participatory exercise on the design of the year as a national event can be undertaken.

[if !supportLists]7. [endif]Taking the just announced urban programs and initiatives to the general public, certainly to those living in the cities already, is one part. The second important part is to engage the sizeable community of the sector professionals and development specialists –the urban planners, economists, academics, researchers, professional education and training institutions, concerned NGOs and civic groups, etc—and other stakeholders—corporate, business, industry, media, the political class, the officials involved in managing/governing cities, development thinkers and organizations, etc –to explore the deeper dimensions of the urban challenge: how to channel urbanization and develop cities in the context of the wider national challenges : equipping cities to ensure 8/10 percent growth; doing it an inclusive, participatory, people centred, environment preserving and resource conserving manner, and not with the urban against rural mindset but with the urban and rural framework.

8 That is going beyond problem solving, fire fighting. It is also going beyond current programs and projects—be that as recent, modern and talked about as the Smart Cities program. And it is absolutely necessary, as the way urbanization is shaping and being channelled and the way the cities are growing and being developed in India, they are leaving a large trail of new problems and unresolved issues—be that climate change, resource depletion, environmental crisis, widening inequality, social stratification and cultural alienation. Not only that. They are problematic at all ends—be that urban form, liveability, environment, social harmony, culture, architecture. With the cities emerging as the country’s future-- which considering the demographic trends (a predominantly rural country is on the way to becoming a majority urban place quite rapidly), the structural changes in the economy (share of agriculture declining to less than 15 % of overall growth, while share of the labour force in agriculture remaining almost constant at about 50%), and a combination of pull and push factors, they indeed are-- the question to answer is: what kind of future? And therefore what kind of cities? We obviously need better cities—better places to live, work,

progress, prosper, grow and develop in health, comfort, peace and harmony, and all together--and therefore we need new vision, ideas, perspectives, directions and tools to plan and manage our urban future. It is important to remember what Wally N Dow, the Secretary General of Habitat 2 (1996) said. And I quote," .....Urbanization holds out both the bright promise of an unequalled future and the grave threat of unparalleled disaster, and which it will be depends on what we do today..... Unless a revolution in urban problem solving takes place we are facing an uncertain, if not a bleak, future."

[if !supportLists]8. [endif]The cities are obviously a work in progress and as everyone tells us-- and as we know-- it is a difficult task. And to gauge how difficult, just see three cases. India's wealth capital Mumbai has half of its 16 million inhabitants in slums; glamour and filth live side by side there. Delhi, the country's political capital is one of the world's worst polluted cities, so polluted that a leading newspaper recently declared it unsafe to live. Varanasi, the country's spiritual capital, has its most revered national river so polluted that it has merited a special task force by the government and a huge outlay of resources in its cleaning. Wally N Dow is not much wrong in the Indian urban context. And therefore even if not a 'revolution' much re-thinks, over and above the programs like Smart Cities and Amrut is the need of the hour. We have limited resources and not much time as the urban wave is powerful and all pervasive and in the globally connected world people's aspirations are high and patience low. And therefore the search for the options and solutions—workable, cost effective, fast, acceptable and sustainable-- must be as broad based as possible, a widely shared platform and a diverse partnership effort. Inputs and perspectives are needed from all. Both the government—in all its forms-- and the society as a whole—from business to industry to professionals to NGOs to academics to civic organizations-- need to work together in a creative partnership. And what better excuse and opportunity than Habitat 3? If we needed an occasion to get in a reflective mood, stay focused on the subject, get inspired and motivated and galvanise resources and energy in search for new paradigms and solutions, there can seldom be a better occasion than Habitat 3, where almost the entire mankind—197 countries will participate in the Habitat 3-- is engaged in the same pursuit.

[if !supportLists]9. [endif]The list of issues that could be covered in such a framework is indeed quite long. It would be different in different settings and with different stakeholders, as the urban challenge India faces is quite complex and has many facets. Priorities would differ. Yet, some of the matters which besides needing an immediate problem solving response also needs a futuristic perspective and deserve to be addressed include the following:

#### 10.1. The rural reality in the urban future

- , Even if it is a voice of one in a crowd and knowing full well that they call Habitat 3 the "Cities' Summit", we in India cannot afford to see the urbanization and urban development in isolation from the rural life and rural development challenge. Not only because

32 % urban automatically means 68 % rural and if 350 million urban dwellers are living in over 7000 cities and towns, some 850 million are there in over 6,20,000 villages. The predominance of the rural reality cannot be denied despite heavy urbanization trends. Refusing to see the inter connections, inter dependence and continuity, in the silos mentality, is causing much damage. This is not only an Indian but a dominant South Asian reality even under pronounced urbanization trends. And even if others choose to see it in watertight compartments, we in India should know that our urban future is linked to how we handle the rural challenge.

With the current urban trends persisting, even exacerbating, what does India do with its 6.20 lakh villages? Lock them up? In there today live over 850 million people, 75% of the households earning less than Rs 5000 a month. They must be fed, employed, educated and helped to pull out of the poverty, while share of the agriculture economy has plummeted to less than 2%, out of 7 to 8 % overall growth. Under the loud noise that the urban world makes, the productivity argument it advances (65% of the growth happening in the urban areas, likely to go up to 75% in 10/15 more years), the part of the irreversible global trends it is projected as, and with the major decision makers mostly urban based or urban biased, the issues have been pushed under the carpet and the debate has almost vanished. India's future cannot be built on this key issue being seen as a non issue. The urban must be seen and planned with the rural. How do we do it?

## 10.2 Poverty alleviation and urban centric growth and development model

If 350 million are the rural poor and about 80-100 million are the urban poor, what approaches, which policies, what projects will ensure "inclusive" growth and development? Now after practicing and preaching it for over 50 years, the World Bank and the IMF have started saying that the growth does not necessarily percolate down. Our strategy and efforts are on that growth path and development model—the growth impacting poverty through percolation-- which is so dominantly urban centric. If employment, jobs, investment and growth are in the urban sector, and if the direct route poverty alleviation (through the individual poor focused, rights and entitlement based and welfare oriented) strategies are being questioned and somewhat on the back foot, how will the poor get out of the poverty trap? How will the growth be inclusive on that course? And what urban development strategies will reduce/eliminate poverty?

### 10.3 Slums and Investments for Urban Development

Housing is back on the Habitat 3 agenda for many reasons. Overall housing stress resulting from the land scarcity and high costs, affordability issues, institutional inadequacies and delivery system snags are the main constraints and culprits. However, inability of the cities and the different levels of governments to make an effective dent on the slum situation is the prime factor. The slum issue is looking more and more difficult to handle, while the cities in search for investments, if not for human welfare, health and productivity, are keen on finding the ways.

Over the last five/six decades India has been in the forefront of trying ideas and options to deal with the urban slums —from the housing projects for the industrial workers to slum rehabilitation to the Urban Land Ceiling Act to secure land tenure to RAY. If the problem still evades satisfactory approaches and solutions, some believe, it is largely because the planners, administrators and authorities are still oscillating between forced evictions, on one hand, and fully subsidized formal housing, on the other. Neither seems to work.

There is much international experience now showing that citywide upgrading in form of in-situ slum development with the secure land titles or property rights, along with strategic preventive, curative and futuristic measures, works both for the slums and the city, for the people as well as the authorities, as the approach is viable, affordable, do-able and up-scalable for all partners and stakeholders. The cities are recycling and undergoing transformation in their physical form as well. The citywide slum upgrading strategy also goes well with other incremental change trends. The argument is that there is no need to make Mumbai a Shanghai overnight. Mumbai becoming a better Mumbai and more equity-eous Mumbai while offering better life to half of its population living in slums, and remaining inclusive in its growth and development , even if not a universally preferred option, is seen as more sustainable, doable and just choice. Habitat 3 is an opportunity to revalidate this approach and option through global sharing of experience and learning.

It needs reiterating that following six decades of option search and field application it is generally believed that the formal housing is not the answer to the slum problem of the Indian cities, even if money could be found to finance them (not easy) and the organizations to build them (not feasible in a finite time), considering the past experience, and especially as the slums continue to grow, multiply and densify with high urban wards

migratory trends and their concentration on big cities. It is also not possible to make an aspirational society wait for decades for the conditions to improve. What are the workable ways and solutions, especially if the citywide upgrading with property rights or secure land tenure is not in the government's project book any longer? And if making cities attractive for investment—local and international-- needs them clean and without slums?

#### [if !supportLists]10.4 [endif] The Urban Informal system, investment and poverty alleviation

The informal sector of the urban economy is prolific and vibrant in terms of number of people it provides livelihood and income, the goods it produces, services it renders, percentage of city population it houses and its influence in the working of a city besides its dominant presence in a city's visual form. The urban authorities, administration, formal planners and the urban middle class, generally speaking, are hostile to both, the informal housing—the slums—and the informal economy—production and delivery systems of hawkers, vendors and other service providers. Given an option they want them out of the city, forcibly if necessary, as they are seen as chaotic, ugly and a burden. As neither their number nor their contribution is marginal or insignificant, the authorities, the administrators, planners, designers and citizen cannot continue living with a feeling of perennial hostility towards the “unwanted” encroachers. And that requires changing the ways the cities are seen, versioned, designed, planned, administered, governed and developed. Also the way the resources are found and invested in developing them. How is this to be done? And we must remember that we have been taught to see them as a problem, view them as a failure of the planning and governance system and a formidable obstacle to the Indian cities becoming globally attractive,

#### [if !supportLists]10.5 [endif] Job Creation and urban planning

If one million new jobs per month and 15 million new jobs in a year is the need—and the target-- in response to the new entrants to the job market and a huge backlog and if the record of the Indian cities in creating formal jobs is dismal, and the orientation and infrastructure for job creation is city-centric, what strategies and plans will bring about the change? How and where will the jobs happen?

#### [if !supportLists]10.6 [endif] Urban Investment

The much appreciated massive investment plans--for the Smart Cities, Amrut, Housing for All, etc.—in reality are not as massive, if assessed from the “need” angle and seen from what is required to meet the deficit and provide for the new demand. The new report on the Indian Urbanization by the World Economic Forum with Accenture, while quoting the Government of India’s High Powered Expert Committee, estimates the investment need for the urban infrastructure, within coming 20 years, at \$ 640 billion. Compare that with Rs 80,000 crore ( \$ 12/13 billion) that were invested in the urban sector in 10 years under JnNURM. Think also of huffing and puffing in managing that investment despite an accompanying agenda for capacity building. Finding adequate amounts of money (while respecting demands of other critical sectors and priorities) and investing them in a cost effective and a prudent manner is a challenge too. How will that be managed?

[if !supportLists]10.7 [endif] The Foreign obsession and solutions:

Whichever way it is seen India has hardly ever seen and responded to its urban challenge, its city development task, from a local base, from within, from inside. It is always the others and the outside.

It has been mostly the West: Europe, America. Now Singapore and Dubai. It is not a coincidence that Chandrabababu Naidu’s new capital city of Andhra Pradesh, Amaravati, is being designed in Singapore and its first images look so much a replica of that city. Mumbai as a Shanghai model and a metaphor is not an exception but a big statement on what the planners, administrators, big time politicians, business, the real estate developers, the rich and the opinion makers are looking for and where is the source for the ideas, inspiration and solutions—despite a fairly well known fact that those solutions do not work and those models do not fit into the local Indian setting. When, where and how will India find its own, indigenous responses and solutions?

The matter is not confined to isolated responses, it is deeply systemic: both in the mindset as also institutional. Being a part of the colonial legacy it is in the education too, professional education especially. There it is a double cross—foreign influence and obsession, on one side, and worse still, well cultivated alienation for the indigenous, on the other. Also contempt and disdain for the local. Not that there is anything wrong with the foreign solutions and outside influence. The question is: is there an objectivity and honesty to ask if the solutions work and the approaches deliver? India needs to reflect and dig deeper into attitudes systems to find the answers.

[if !supportLists]10.8 [endif] Global, Regional Urban Sustainability and India.



India needs to use this opportunity to assume leadership role-- moral and ethical, if not technical—as she has just done by presenting Yoga to the world community-- by finding and articulating its vision, response, understanding and related practices in context of the search for a genuine and sustainable “sustainability”. With the cities of the world occupying just 2% of the land, consuming 75% of its resources and throwing 75% of its waste in the environment, there is really no global sustainability without urban sustainability. Technical solutions are only a part and a limited response. It needs ascertaining that viewing urbanization and cities in the sustainability framework needs fundamental and far reaching changes in the way we think, live, produce, transact, interact and relate. It demands serious life style and behavioral changes. In this matter of sustainability, the softer options and convenient solutions do not work.

And in doing so, in playing that role—Sustainability Guru?—India has certain advantages over others: from hundreds of years of socio –cultural-religious traditions and practices to Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy and teachings. The search for urban sustainability needs Gandhi besides solar and other renewable energy sources. Also to be credible, we will require bringing Gandhi in our own Smart Cities formulation to begin with.

[if !supportLists]10.9 [endif]The Indian response to the Indian urban challenge

With multiple urban initiatives in form of three ambitious missions for the Smart Cities, Amrut and Housing for All, and also other programs to improve sanitation (toilet construction), cleanliness (Swatchh Bharat), financial inclusion (Jan Dhan Yojana) and revitalisation of the manufacturing sector for job creation in the formal sector (Make in India), India, if she chooses, can have much of the global stage to itself at the regional forums and Habitat 3, as these are formidable initiatives, capable of drawing attention of the event participants. However, India’s role and message –and the meeting is about the message too—should go beyond sharing what she is doing programmatically to proposing that the Asian urban challenge, especially South Asian, being different quantitatively and qualitatively from anything that the world has seen so far, needs—deserves—a nuanced response based on its own soil, grassroots reality, people’s genius, culture and resource situation. Habitat 3 platform should be used to share the global vision from the local context.

Finding the local and indigenous response to the urban challenge is also a way of making it people centered, context sensitive, culture responsive, environment friendly and ecologically sustainable.

#### [if !supportLists]10.10 [endif]The South Asia Region and India in the Habitat 3 context

In this matter—finding an indigenous response to the Asian urban challenge—India could join CityNet, the Asia regional forum to promote good governance for better cities, which has committed to presenting an Asian Perspective on Urbanization at Habitat 3. CityNet's background paper on the subject says, "..... The theme was inspired by the changing landscape of urbanization and the upcoming Habitat III event which will be held in Quito in 2016. The idea departs from the long-held notion that the prime examples of urbanization and urban planning come from the west, and moves beyond the urbanization problems that exist in Asia and into a space of solutions and examples that come from Asian cities themselves. CityNet aims to link stakeholders in Asia to share innovative best practices on a global platform and to support Asian voices, ideas and solutions in urban development."

#### [if !supportLists]10.11 [endif]The Crisis Areas and the Indian Society in the context of Habitat 3

If Indian Express newspaper in a series of well researched articles on the air quality of Delhi had to declare the city almost non habitable (hazardous), other responsible organizations such as the Centre for Science and Environment's assessment is no less scary, and WHO puts some of the Indian cities among the worst in the world on air quality standards, it is clear that a crisis point has been reached and the situation demands urgent and special response. The urban water and solid waste management may not have reached the crisis stage yet. But we all know the situation is grim.

It is suggested that the government consider setting up a comprehensive Crisis Response Task Group on the environment issue. Skill, knowledge and resources of many—government, corporate, business, civil society, professionals and specialists —are needed to be pulled together. And let the outcome—the action plan—be the country's special contribution to Habitat 3.

#### 10.12 Partnership: Government and Society

To the Habitat events' credit it must be said that over the past 40 years —it started in 1976, Habitat 3 is the third edition—it has been as diverse, comprehensive, open, representative and inclusive as possible, so far the theme treatment and hearing the voices is concerned. In

India's preparation and participation that spirit of inclusion and wider engagement should prevail.

This is a long letter to read for anyone, especially for a very busy government secretary. However, the urban challenge is daunting and Habitat 3 is a rare opportunity to galvanise energy, skills and resources in addressing it. What is special about it now is that the entire global community is engaged in the task and there is an environment for collaboration, cooperation and partnership. India, with its new initiatives and programs for the urban sector has embarked on the urban journey with great energy. It is only appropriate that it creatively uses the big opportunity.

I am meeting you tomorrow and hope to find a way to discuss the ideas and suggestions. Goes without saying that I will be happy to elaborate any aspect of this presentation and any follow up you suggest.

I am taking liberty to share this with those who are keen on engaging with the daunting urban challenge and make their big/small contribution.

Warm regards and looking forward to your considered response

Kirtee Shah

Working with

Ahmedabad Study Action Group (ASAG, Hon. Director)

Habitat Forum (INHAF, President)

Ksa Design Planning Services Pvt. Ltd. (Architects, Chairman)

[kirtee@ksadps.com](mailto:kirtee@ksadps.com)

[ahmedabad@ksadps.com](mailto:ahmedabad@ksadps.com)

09925010706