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Immediate Release

The GovLab and United Nations Development Programme partner on Africa Multi-City Challenge

<https://africa.multicitychallenge.org/>

BROOKLYN, New York, and SINGAPORE, November 9, 2020 — On World Cities Day, [The Governance Lab](#) (The GovLab) at New York University Tandon School of Engineering and the [United Nations Development Programme](#) (UNDP) Global Centre for Technology, Innovation, and Sustainable Development launched a collaboration with five African cities. Called the [2020 Multi-City Challenge Africa](#), the public engagement initiative aims to tackle pressing urban challenges by partnering with the people most affected by these issues – city residents.

Africa's urban population will triple to over 1.3 billion people by 2050, making inclusive and sustainable cities a priority. As part of the Multi-City Challenge's focus on helping government employees learn how to engage citizens better, public servants have been participating in an extensive training curriculum focusing on problem definition. This has provided them with increased ability to accurately define the challenges the city is facing, using the tools of data and citizen input. This is very much in line with this year's World Cities Day theme: "Valuing Our Communities and Cities."

Building on this training, each city will soon launch an **open innovation challenge**. City residents can submit innovative ideas for how to best solve priority issues such as **digitalizing the informal economy, building urban resilience, and improving waste management**.

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The initiative is open to residents in these cities, which were chosen for their leadership efforts around urban innovation:

- **Accra**, Ghana
- **Bahir Dar**, Ethiopia
- **Kampala**, Uganda
- **Kano**, Nigeria
- **Mutare**, Zimbabwe

The open innovation challenge will invite the public to share solutions, in a bid to build a pool of “collective intelligence.” A coaching program for residents and public officials to develop those solutions into implementable new policies and services will then follow.

“Many city governments tend to overlook valuable resources that can be instrumental to solving their own unique problems,” said [Beth Simone Noveck](#), founding director of The GovLab; professor in Tandon’s Department of Technology, Culture and Society; and member of the school’s Center for Urban Science and Progress (CUSP). “Often it is their own civil servants and residents of their community who can evaluate the effectiveness of policies and government operations, and whose experience and expertise can fill the gaps needed to overcome city challenges. The Multi-City Challenge is about tapping into that experience expertise, and mobilizing it.”

Added [Victòria Alsina Burgués](#), senior fellow at The GovLab and member of CUSP, “This collaboration will help city governments to meet their short- and long-term goals, restore public trust in institutions, and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of policymaking. At the same time it will create a shared catalogue of scalable solutions.”

[Ahunna Eziakonwa](#), Assistant Secretary General and Director of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Africa, said: “Many of the most exciting and dynamic cities can be found on the African continent. They are centres of innovation, commerce, and talent and an important space for development programming – now and for the future. The Multi-City Challenge will allow us to learn from those who matter most in cities: their citizens — in how we can reap the youth dividend, tackle waste management, build needed infrastructure and recover from COVID-19.”

[Bradley Busetto](#), Director of the UNDP Global Centre for Technology, Innovation, and Sustainable Development, pointed out that the Multi-City Challenge is focusing on the most crucial problems of urban life. “Over 90% of reported COVID-19 cases are occurring in cities. Informal economies are struggling in an era of lockdown. Urban densification presents real challenges — often resulting in overcrowding, traffic congestion, pollution, and exacerbated inequalities. E-commerce and home deliveries have increased plastic pollution and accelerated waste management issues. This is where collective intelligence can offer real value: it is about finding the best ideas, wherever they are found.”

The Multi-City Challenge Africa builds on successful implementation of the City and Multi-City Challenge model in Latin America, the U.S., and Europe. African city leaders will have the opportunity to work with other cities, pooling the expertise from their communities in this first-of-its-kind public engagement effort across cities. This initiative will also be advised by a group of experts on citizen engagement in Africa that will constitute the advisory board for the project.

UNDP is prioritizing [sustainable urbanization across Africa](#), especially in the devastating context of COVID-19. For more information on City Challenges and for updates regarding Multi-City Challenge Africa, please visit <http://africa.multicitychallenge.org>.

About The GovLab

The Governance Lab's (The GovLab) mission is to improve people's lives by changing the way we govern. Our goal at The GovLab is to strengthen the ability of institutions — including but not limited to governments — and people to work more openly, collaboratively, effectively, and legitimately to make better decisions and solve public problems. We believe that increased availability and use of data, new ways to leverage the capacity, intelligence, and expertise of people in the problem-solving process, combined with new advances in technology and science, can transform governance. We approach each challenge and opportunity in an interdisciplinary, collaborative way, irrespective of the problem, sector, geography, and level of government. For more information, visit <https://www.thegovlab.org>.

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About UNDP Global Centre for Technology, Innovation, and Sustainable Development

The Global Centre for Technology, Innovation and Sustainable Development is a joint initiative by the Government of Singapore and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which aims at identifying and co-creating technological solutions for sustainable development. The Centre curates partnerships, identifies solutions and connects partners and innovations with UNDP's Global Policy Network and development partners.

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About the Multi-City Challenge

The GovLab created the City Challenges model in 2016 under the notion that public institutions need to change how they work, becoming more data-driven, agile, innovative, and capable of tapping expertise from new sources to respond more effectively to novel challenges. The first pilot of this initiative was carried out in the municipality of San Pedro Garza García, Mexico. The Multi-City Challenge scales the previous model running the program in parallel in different cities that share similar urban challenges. This program allows them to pool the expertise of their civil servants and residents to define problems and to find innovative solutions to solve them creating synergies and economies of scale between them.

About the New York University Tandon School of Engineering

The NYU Tandon School of Engineering dates to 1854, the founding date for both the New York University School of Civil Engineering and Architecture and the Brooklyn Collegiate and Polytechnic Institute. A January 2014 merger created a comprehensive school of education and research in engineering and applied sciences as part of a global university, with close connections to engineering programs at NYU Abu Dhabi and NYU Shanghai. NYU Tandon is rooted in a vibrant tradition of entrepreneurship, intellectual curiosity, and innovative solutions to humanity's most pressing global challenges. Research at Tandon focuses on vital intersections between communications/IT, cybersecurity, and data science/AI/robotics systems and tools and critical areas of society that they influence, including emerging media, health, sustainability, and urban living. We believe diversity is integral to excellence, and are creating a vibrant, inclusive, and equitable environment for all of our students, faculty and staff. For more information, visit engineering.nyu.edu.

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