



photo by GIZ Bangladesh



The United Nations Innovation Technology Accelerator for Cities (UNITAC-Hamburg) is an innovation lab based in Hamburg, Germany, established in 2021 as a partnership between the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the UN Office of Information and Communications Technology (OICT) and HafenCity University (HCU).

The lab is funded by the Government of Germany. UNITAC-Hamburg is part of UN-Habitat's People-Centred Smart Cities Flagship program, which provides strategic and technical support on urban digital transformation to national, regional and local governments.

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Advancing urban equity through real-time digital participation

What are the challenges?

Effective governance is fundamental to delivering adequate housing, land, and basic services in rapidly urbanizing contexts. Today, **more than half of the world's population lives in cities**. This number is projected to rise to nearly **70 per cent by 2050**, making coordination across national, regional, and local governments more critical than ever. At the same time, over one billion people live in informal settlements, often without secure tenure or reliable access to water, electricity, transportation or other essential urban infrastructure.²

These inequalities highlight the need to address governance gaps and strengthen inclusion. Fragmented institutional mandates, limited civil participation, and weak accountability mechanisms often continue to undermine inclusive and sustainable urban development and are slowing the progress towards global commitments.

Participatory multilevel governance brings together institutions across levels of government with commu-

nities, civil society, academia, and the private sector to co-create solutions tailored to local realities. By aligning policies vertically and horizontally, these approaches reduce repeated work, strengthen trust, and enhance policy coherence.

UNITAC's response

UNITAC advances people-centered, data-informed decision-making by developing participatory digital tools and methods that make governance more inclusive, transparent, and accountable. These approaches enable local voices, particularly those of marginalized communities, women and youth to shape urban policies, ensuring that policies and innovations respond to lived realities of all residents and serve the public good.

¹ UN-Habitat, SDG Cities Programme, <https://unhabitat.org/programme/sdg-cities>

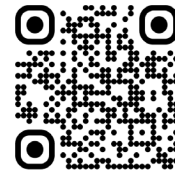
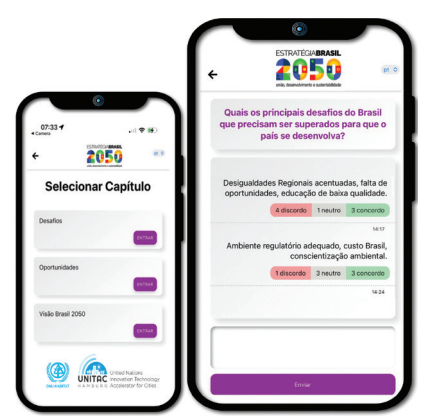
² Sustainable Cities and Communities, Goal 11 (United Nations Statistics Division)

Digital participation for facilitation of inclusive dialogues and events

UNITAC developed **AOVI**, a mobile app that allows real-time digital participation and fosters inclusive dialogue at live events.

AOVI gathers participants' responses and contributions during discussions on key questions. Its advanced features provide real-time data visualization and analysis, helping organizers, moderators, and admin-

istrators guide conversations more effectively. Demographic filters such as age, location or gender can get applied to the data. In future, the tool will be able to project a live animated timeline of submissions in the room and use network visualizations to identify groups with similar viewpoints and related ideas through text analysis. *



Discover the tool



Read the Bangladesh impact story



Inclusive and participatory governance is essential for long-term development planning. However, challenges in developing inclusive public consultations such as digital and geographic inequalities, limited trust in institutions, and the underrepresentation of vulnerable groups remain.

To address this, AОВI was launched in partnership with Brazil's Ministry of Planning and Budget and integrated into the development of the **Brazil 2050 strategy**. This collaborative national planning initiative, led by state governments, engaged



over 3,000 participants in 12 regional workshops to define long-term goals for economic development, social inclusion, and sustainability.

In **Bangladesh**, AОВI was adapted to support the Innovations for Climate-smart Urban Development (INCLUDE) Project, implemented by GIZ Bangladesh. The INCLUDE project facilitates a participatory and inclusive innovation competition aimed at identifying practical solutions for municipalities to address the impacts of climate change in Chapainawabganj, Charghat, Gaibandha, and Sirajganj.

The participating municipalities and stakeholders used AОВI to share ideas and comment on proposed solutions that aim to tackle urban challenges identified by the local community.

Photo: GIZ Bangladesh

Key outcomes

- Strengthened capacities for participatory digital engagement
- Increased integration of citizen perspectives into policy processes supporting more inclusive, transparent and evidence-based decision making
- Enhanced multi-level coordination in long-term planning processes



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