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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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Strengthening basic urban services for inclusive, data-driven cities

What are the challenges?

Equitable access to basic urban services, including water, sanitation, energy, mobility, and waste management, are essential to public health, economic opportunity, and sustainable urban development. Yet access remains deeply unequal within and between cities. In 2024, **2.2 billion people** lacked safely managed **drinking water**, **3.4 billion** were **without adequate sanitation**, and **1.7 billion** did not have **basic hygiene services** at home.¹

Rapid urbanization, climate change, and persistent crises are placing increased pressure on urban infrastructures and local institutions. Informal growth often outpaces planning and investment capacities, while limited municipal finance, fragmented governance, and data gaps constrain inclusive and resilient service delivery.

Without integrated, inclusive, people-centred, and climate-responsive approaches, service deficits will deepen urban inequalities and undermine resilience, leaving the most vulnerable communities further behind.

UNITAC's response

UNITAC supports local authorities in strengthening basic urban service delivery through digital innovation, data-driven solutions, and people-centred approaches. By leveraging digital tools, local data, and strategic partnerships, UNITAC helps cities identify service gaps, improve planning, and allocate resources more effectively — particularly in underserved communities.

Through co-development and capacity building, UNITAC enables municipalities to implement inclusive, people-centred and climate-responsive service systems. By enhancing local governance, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making, UNITAC contributes to more equitable, resilient, and sustainable access to basic urban services.

¹ United Nations, "Water and Sanitation." United Nations Sustainable Development. <https://www.un.org/sustainable-development/water-and-sanitation/>

Strengthening water access in Hargeisa's low-income neighbourhoods

In Hargeisa, only a small number of residents have access to piped water through household connections or kiosks. For the vast majority, particularly women, fetching water is a daily struggle. UNITAC partnered with Hargeisa Water Agency (HWA) to develop a **mobile-first water access platform** that helps improve service delivery by connecting households without piped water to certified water vendors.*

Key outcomes

- Less time spent collecting water expands opportunities for female resident and enhances health and quality of life.
- The app helps to eliminate the need for middlemen, promoting more direct, transparent and reliable access to water.
- Improved access to safe and clean water for the estimated 63-70% of Hargeisa residents without access to piped water.



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* With support from the German Federal Foreign Office

Digitizing urban service workflows in Namibia

In Namibia, UNITAC co-developed the Digital Job Card, a web and mobile application that digitalizes the process of creating and tracking job cards for different urban services such as water meter readings, electricity fault reporting, or building inspection for local authorities. The tool is designed to work offline and online. It has also been successfully piloted in Rehoboth, Rundu, Opuwo, and Helao Nafidi.*



Key outcomes

- Reduction of delays in basic service provision, improved accuracy and better use of limited resources.
- Improved infrastructure and more reliable access to basic urban services.
- Enhanced digital capacities of local staff

* With support from the German Federal Foreign Office



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Collaborate on challenge-driven projects co-created with local partners



Advance your digital transformation strategies, policies and processes



Build skills and strengthen local capacities for ethical, inclusive digital technology use



Enhance urban planning, services or governance through digital innovation and data