DR. WILLIAMS: Let me, first of all, welcome everyone. Thanks, John, very much, and the National Academies and -- am I getting this right? -- the government-industry research network? Correct in that? Close. All three institutions, thanks very much for pulling this together.

I am based here in Washington, and I represent the same organization that my colleague Eduardo Moreno had spoken about earlier, United Nations Human Settlements Program, which is actually one of the few agencies that is not based in Geneva or New York. It is based in Nairobi, Kenya. So we have our global operations in over 87 countries, but it is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, along with a sister agency, United Nations Environmental Program. So UN-HABITAT and UNEP are the two agencies that are not in Europe and North America; they are based in Africa but have global operations.

Just a quick note on context before I get into three examples of collaborative research and looking at cross-cultural aspects of that. Then I would like to wind up with some lessons learned.

Context, I think my colleague Eduardo touched on some of it, but I just want to underscore a few points. The world has actually, just in the last 24 to 36 months, depending on whom you talk to research-wise, become more urban than rural, meaning that the number of people living in areas with 20,000 people or more is now more than those not living in areas 20,000 or more. We have 20,000 and more, then we have 100,000-person cities, half a million-person cities, mega-cities of upwards of 20-to-25 million people.

The number of people that are moving to urban areas is taking place at a rapid rate, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and Southeast Asia. In these two parts of the world, we have the fastest rate of urbanization, both rural-to-urban migration as well as people living in cities continuing to live in that area and having families of four persons or more.

So we are looking roughly at becoming 75 percent urban as a species in the next 25 to 30 years. This is a massive change that is taking place worldwide. Unfortunately, many of the cities are not prepared to handle this. Many are in countries where there is not active economic growth. So contrary to the urbanization process that took place in the 19th century in Europe and North America, rapid urbanization is not accompanied by economic growth or well-distributed economic growth in much of the world. As a result, as my colleague Eduardo had said, many of the cities of the world are 70, 80, in some cases 85 percent people living very much on $2 a day, sub-substandard living conditions, living in informal settlements and slums.

Our agency is charged by member states and the General Assembly to try to deal with this question. We work with member state governments, private sector entities, nongovernmental organizations, local authorities, social movements, to try to grapple with this issue in various ways.

I just wanted to give a little background. This is the part of the UN system that we are working in and the sort of objective of what we are trying to achieve, a very broad and very intense mandate. We are not working alone. We are basically coordinating efforts of many, many different institutions.

Three examples of research. These, I must admit, are a bit dated. They took place in the late 1990s and about 7 and 8 years ago. But I think they are very apropos to the kind of discussion that we're trying to push here, which is sort of getting into the cross-cultural nuances of undertaking global research activities.

Let me just state at the outset that the United Nations Human Settlements Program is itself, as Ryan (sic) had mentioned earlier, an institutional culture in itself. We have over 50 countries that are represented in our staff, and people are engineers and architects, sociologists, urban planners, business managers. It is a very wide range of people who are working for the organization, and just communicating among people within the organization is a challenge. So before we even get into a research project, we are challenged as a global entity to try to overcome misunderstandings and misinterpretations and try to move forward.

Three examples of research. The first one concerns a very large-scale -- I guess our previous speaker, John Kirkland, would call this old-school research. A donor gave a chunk of money to the United Nations, and the United Nations was asked to undertake research, what we would call evaluation research, looking at a particular program that we had run, known as the Community Development Program, over ten years in seven countries. This was in Latin America, in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Costa Rica, and Sri Lanka in Asia, as well as Ghana, Uganda, and Zambia in Africa.

We were asked by the donors to take a reflection about 10 years and begin to look at what was the impact with this work: How did you work with communities, local governments, and central governments to improve living and working conditions in informal settlements and slums? That was the first project.

The second project was one that took place with urban social movements. There is a group known as Slum and Shack Dwellers International. They are an organization that is very innovative. If you haven't heard about them, they actually have a Web site. They are representing about 12-to-14 million urban poor individuals who are associated in savings groups who are then federated in groups of savings associations throughout 15 countries worldwide.

We were interested in the methodology that they were using to try to do two things: to stop violent forced evictions -- which is the way many city governments handle this explosion of urban population; they just want to get people out of the cities, bring business in, and put people into the periphery -- and try to create policy alternatives for resettlement. Slum and Shack Dwellers International, we looked at their work in South Africa, in India, and the Philippines.

The last research was very focused on one country, and that was Kenya, our host country. We had a new executive director at that time, and she basically felt that she could not do urban upgrading and urban development if she wasn't doing it in the host country, in her own backyard. So she had a discussion with the president of the country, President Daniel Arap Moi, who was not known for his democratic principles, was fairly autocratic and hard to work

with, but she said, “I don’t care how difficult he is; we have to work in this country,” and initiated a rapid situation analysis of 110 informal settlements and slums in Nairobi, Kenya. This was sort of an applied action research initiative that took place not within multiple countries, not throughout Kenya, but in one city.

So these are three very different research activities. All of them are applied. All of them are within the context of what we call human settlements, informal settlements and slums and slum improvement. Each of them had very significant challenges in terms of cross-cultural, linguistic, ideological aspects.

Let me give another layer on each of these research projects and then, in the interest of time, really focus on the lessons learned.

With the community development program, this was quite intense because it was seven countries over ten years, and we probably had the overly optimistic goal of trying to measure whether the impact that this program that had been initiated by the United Nations had improved people’s living and working conditions. So we set out to measure three different concepts. One was community management, one was community organizing, and the third was government enablement, the role of government in facilitating community action.

These three different concepts were essentially applied differently in different countries, but we tried to look at a common framework, conceptual framework, for how these were applied by looking at different elements of each of these concepts and different aspects of each of these elements -- very scientific deductive reasoning -- and then bringing down this to the level of indicators and

measuring the set of indicators and developing a survey instrument and applying it to 1,000 households throughout the seven countries both in the communities in which we were working and contrasting that with control communities where we had not worked -- a very ambitious, very complicated project. It cost about $750,000. We did it together with the Institute of Social Research in The Hague, and we worked through national research institutes and communities and local governments. A very complicated, very complex initiative that really took over 2-1/2 years to undertake.

The initiative on the Slum and Shack Dwellers International -- now this is shifting to South Africa, India, and the Philippines -- was in many ways the antithesis of that previous project. It was not necessarily to develop a matrix and a framework that allows comparison between the countries but to give the process of research entirely over to urban social movements and organizations that were working with them, for them to document their own experience, in a sense to develop a set of case studies, a set of narratives, on what it was that they were doing, the approach that they were taking to stop violent forced evictions and to try to work with local governments to undertake efforts of resettlement into areas where they would have tenure security and where the city would be able to improve the city as a whole.

It was a very different orientation in approach and objectives and yet very, very challenging in terms of, if you let go to the degree, what is the basis for comparison? How do you actually an analysis that overcomes India, Philippines, and South Africa? And how do you work with governments where

the urban poor are, in a sense, driving this? We are a member state organization, we are accountable to governments, and here we are throwing a research project entirely over to urban social movements. A lot of those governments are like, “Hey, what are you doing? Where are we in this picture?” Very difficult and very challenging.

The last initiative, the Nairobi situation analysis, also extremely ambitious because it was time sensitive; a very political exercise where the president agreed to be a patron of the initiative, along with the head of the United Nations Human Settlements Program, but wanted to see results in a very short period of time.

So in less than 4 months, we had to identify researchers from the local University of Nairobi and to not set up a desk study but incent to set up a series of focus group discussions. The methodology was different than the first research project and the last one that I talked about. It was focus group-centered.

Urban poor social movements were one focus group. The donor community was another. Central government was a third. International NGOs and local NGOs was a fourth. Private industry, the Federation of Employers, was a fifth, and basically documenting what each of these groups felt was happening in informal settlements and slums, both the causes and potential solutions for addressing them and for more comprehensive city upgrading that included low-income communities, which in Nairobi at that time constituted about 65 percent of the population. And then more systematically to bring each of these focus

groups together in a multi-stakeholder working group to reach some consensus on what constituted a way forward. So highly applied research, not with the urban poor, not with central governance, but a mixture of groups of people.

I am trying in a very short time to give a snapshot of each of these very different initiatives. I could spend 15 minutes on each of them, but in the interest of time, let me just wind up with a series of reflections.

One is, when one is embarking on research, is this a matter of control or is it coordination? What is that balance of trying to undertake an activity, and often if you have donor money or you are operating as a contractor, you have a window of time with which to undertake an exercise. But at the same time, you are trying to coordinate, in our case, multiple stakeholders and multiple entities, and it might not be easy to balance control with coordination. That is the first tension that exists in each of these examples.

The next one is agency. Who is participating in whose process? Classic question that we face in all of our work, especially in the United Nations. The agency of this activity, is it for a donor, is it for the United Nations, is it for the urban poor? Is it for member state governments? Is it for intermediaries? Is it for the research community? I think this was in some of the slides before, a question that was raised: What is the purpose, what is the intention of the research?

International versus local researchers. We heard a bit from John Kirkland on this, and I just wanted to underscore that it is a very difficult challenge in working with the international community. Often in the UN the path

of least resistance is to give international researchers an international stipend, whereas to give local researchers a national stipend. When I joined the UN, I felt this was a mild form of apartheid, and I really did not like it, so I fought very hard to give everybody international or reach some compromise; in other words, to pay everybody the same amount because they were undertaking a similar exercise. But I was met with stiff resistance. I succeeded in this research project, but it did cost me and made many enemies.

The second aspect is how do we contract. I know that is a very mechanical issue, but it becomes very real when you are doing this kind of work. Do you contract an institution or do you contract an individual as a consultant? A seemingly innocent question, but if there are 20 percent overheads and you have to do an international tender if you have an institutional contract, then that prohibits. It is a very prohibitive exercise, and we are, unfortunately, are tied to a lot of these procedures within the UN system because we are under enormous scrutiny for corruption and we need to adhere to that, and so we have to abide by procedures and rules that are quite cumbersome.

So there is a disincentive to do institutional contracting. Now, one would want to do institutional contracting because you are strengthening institutional relations. You are enabling that university to not only benefit from the research project but to undertake other activities and become involved in a global activity. But if that becomes prohibitive and not possible and you have scarce resources with which to undertake large-scale research projects, then you tend to move towards contracting with individuals.

Cultural nuances and ethnicity. I think that's the heart of this discussion, so let me at least touch on that. This is not just a question about nation states and representatives from those countries. There are a lot of nuances once you get below that. In all of these research projects, I had to be very careful not to just hire the people from the particular country who were known as intellectual geniuses. In every country we know that. It's a certain subset of that culture that are disproportionally represented in the university system, and if you go out and hire that group, you can sometimes destroy your entire research project because you are following the path of least resistance. So you have to be very sensitive to diversifying the number of researchers that you have in that particular country, getting people from different communities that may not be historically well placed in the academy and may be very smart, but they are in a minority position, together with people that are more the traditional and classical researchers, so you are in a sense winning both sides.

Fourthly, in terms of ideology, I have found very significant differences, and this is apropos to what others have said this morning. When you do research in Latin America, you often find that what people are obsessed with is much more the role of social movements, of urban poor organizations, contesting with the state, holding the state accountable. Research of any kind, especially the kind we are doing, becomes highly politicized in a Latin American context, whereas in an African context it takes on a very different form. That is the question often: Is it pragmatic? Is it practical? What are people getting out

of this? This research is nice sounding, but what does it mean to us in terms of improved living and working conditions? This becomes a priority.

I think this is apropos to what my colleague said before about our work on the State of the World's Cities report. You have to be very mindful not only of intricacies within a country but also regional trends and tendencies.

In terms of future work on research, the question that often each of these research projects begs is: Where is the research going? This is not just a question of agency but it is also, once the research findings are made, are they in a book or on a Web site and left there, or is there an effort to try to translate research findings into policy efforts, policy reform, into practical operational strategies? Is there a whole component to a research initiative which is about the application of research findings?

As researchers and as scientists, do we hold ourselves accountable about the implications of our findings? Or do we simply stop at the level of research?

These are some broad comments. Thank you very much.