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SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION

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Towards Sustainable Urbanization: The crucial role of governance and public administration

A few years ago, for the first time in history, half of all people on Earth started to live in urban areas. More strikingly, population growth, in future, will be absorbed, almost entirely, by urban areas in developing countries. In slightly more than a decade, the world's rural population will peak at about 3.5 billion people and, then, start a slow decline. But the *world's* urban population will keep on increasing: from 3.3 billion today to well over 6 billion in 2050. In most areas of the world, urbanization is driven by the concentration of investment and employment opportunities in urban areas. Nearly 80 per cent of the world's GDP is generated by urban areas and it is no coincidence that countries with higher per capita income also tend to be highly urbanized. Yet rapid urbanization, as that occurring in most developing countries, poses many challenges.

A common mistake is to look at urbanization challenges only from a demographic perspective or from any isolated perspective. However, sustainable urbanization poses challenges that require institutional, human, and other responses that belong to the operational sphere of governance and public administration. Enhanced capacities in governance, administration and management are critical requirements for sustainable development bearing in mind that this refers to social economic and environmental aspects of development that are overarched by eradication of urban poverty and inclusive development. Successful sustainable urbanization can be engineered best by capable responsive and accountable leadership, human resources that are capable in all governance, administrative and managerial aspects (public policy and strategy formulation, financial management and accounting, procurement, human resource management, facilities management, procurement, budgeting, engagement of citizens in development management, infrastructure development and management, law, etc).

Successful sustainable urbanization also depends on setting up institutional arrangements and mechanisms that facilitate the governance, administration and management of urbanization processes and urban centers. The use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) is increasingly becoming invaluable in making the work of administering and managing urbanization and urban centers more streamlined and the delivery of services quicker, more effective, more efficient and more transparent. Capabilities of the leadership in urban centers to engage urban populations in problem analysis and service delivery and control often determine the quality of life in these urban centers. The whole issue of making sustainable urbanization possible therefore must hinge on the capabilities of various actors in the social, economic and environmental spheres to subscribe to and apply integrated sustainable approaches to urban governance, management and administration.

Urban sustainability initiatives hold the promise of focusing on critical, interconnected issues of security, land use, transportation, air quality, energy, water, climate change, housing and jobs, economic vitality, affordable living, increased social interactions, need for low public infrastructure costs and decreased dependence on cars, opening of government owned land to productive use, participatory governance for planning, budgeting and implementation. This kind of integration cannot be achieved without

appropriate institutional capacities including capable human resources, structural organization arrangements, engagement and participation of urban communities, open, transparent, responsive, accountable, ethical leadership and innovative mechanism including use of information and communication technologies. Pragmatic and results-oriented approach towards local socio-economic growth would include mixed land uses (combined commercial and residential use of urban areas), transit oriented planning, sustainable building practices that enhance water efficiency and promote use of solar power, among other goals. In summary, as urbanization proceeds at such a rapid rate, it is extremely important that urbanization becomes a planned process that enhances social justice and participatory governance aimed at mobility, job generation, cultural diversity, environmental considerations, social housing and 24-hour activity.

The bankability of pro-poor urban policies has been demonstrated as well as the possibility to promote a more livable 21st century city that will remain competitive in an emerging global society. Empowering communities through democratic, inclusive and collaborative decision-making mechanisms is on the increase, as governments utilize social media, open government and mobile government approaches, among other means.

ICT and e-Government become strategic tools for meeting the challenges and opportunities we face in this information age, not as an end but rather as an additional means to revamp public administration as an integrated, whole-of-government force for citizen-centric service delivery.

The integrated approaches mentioned above cannot always occur at the same time. Public officials and public administration frameworks at the local level quite often do not have the capacity or the necessary degree of institutional coordination for designing policies, operationalizing implementation or identifying concrete entry points in a strategic way. The strategic identification of smaller-scale projects, or “quick wins”, engaging communities through information, consultation, participation, partnerships and empowerment, requires public administration capacity that is not always available.

Capacity development does not exist in a vacuum. It requires a context, a concrete demand, clear identification of actors, their contributions and common goals leading to specific public administration policies, programmes and projects.

The mandate of the Division for Public Administration and Development Management (DPADM) includes the development of capacities for the achievement of national and local development objectives. GA Resolution (A/RES/50/225) on Public Administration and Development emphasizes the substantive content of the mandate, including: (a) effectiveness of government requiring an efficient and effective public administration; (b) the need for public administration systems to be sound, efficient and well equipped with the appropriate capacities and capabilities through, inter alia, capacity-building, promotion of transfer, access and utilization of technology, establishment or improvement of training programmes for public service; (c) pooling and facilitating access to information in public administration, promoting training and research in public administration and finance at all levels, advocacy and exchange of experiences, advisory

services, technical assistance, capacity-building and human resources development, including post-conflict situations.

Nearly 70 million people are added to the urban population annually in developing countries. Currently, Africa has the lowest urbanization level but the fastest urban population growth. Asia's challenges are especially daunting, given the anticipated rapid population increases and demands for energy and raw materials. Latin America still displays increasing levels of socio-economic inequality throughout its cities, despite national policy efforts addressing internationally agreed development goals. The results are well-known and tend to increase: unprecedented external pressures such as finite resources, water and food shortages, civil unrest, increasing energy costs, economic uncertainty and problems of sustainability. All these place enormous pressure on the role of politics and decision-making processes for coping with unrelenting urban challenges. Participatory governance, used effectively, can mitigate the risks of urbanisation and may produce innovative and unexpected approaches to sustainability.

Improved public administration, therefore, is not a casual result of national and local development processes. On the contrary, it is major determinant in preparing hundreds of thousands of local authorities worldwide to handle sustainable development challenges, so that social, economic and environmental aspects are tackled in a coordinated manner both at national and local levels.