

Report of the Secretary-General for the 2013 Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) on "Science, technology and innovation, and the potential of culture, for promoting sustainable development and achieving the Millennium Development Goals"

Input by UN-Habitat

Cities have played a major role in creativity and innovation throughout history. Creative people and systems, innovative milieu, knowledge creation mechanisms, and new technological developments have all primarily taken place in cities and have all contributed to societal development and prosperity. Yet, not all cities have fully deployed and benefitted from this potential. Worse, even in those cities that have served as major nodes of creativity and innovation, the prosperity that has been generated has not been equitably shared.

Invariably, innovation has remained segmented in its application and inordinately connected largely to the ends of accumulation and wealth generation. While the basis of creativity and innovation is society as a whole (needs, knowledge, skills, institutions, relations etc), the dynamism generated from therein tends to be far from being socialized and collectivised. For cities, especially in the developing world, to fully optimize and equitably gain from the power of innovation, more attention needs to be given to how the development of science, technology and innovation is mainstreamed in urban planning, management and governance.

In the various components of UNHabitat's work relating to the 'sciences' of sustainable urban development it has endeavoured to promote systems and practices which become part of the everyday culture of city management and governance. It has worked with local authorities and national governments to build capacities for compiling and utilizing data and information systems that would foster urban sustainability. It has also widely disseminated best and living practices through its platforms or data bases and also through its World Urban Campaign. It develops tools and training modules for urban leaders and managers in languages, traditions and experiences deriving from local settings.

Urban technologies relating to local architecture and building designs as well as land-use planning have been applied in various contexts for energy conservation, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and disaster prevention. The preservation of historical neighbourhoods has been an important initiative both for enhancing cultural identity and fostering local economic development. Similarly, new urban technologies, including ICT, have been deployed in arts, music and sports to generate employment, foster inclusiveness, and improve urban governance in general. On the whole, the cultural specificity of the city at the local level has been an important part of UN-Habitat's work in creating the conditions for promoting science, technology and innovation in sustainable urban development.

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