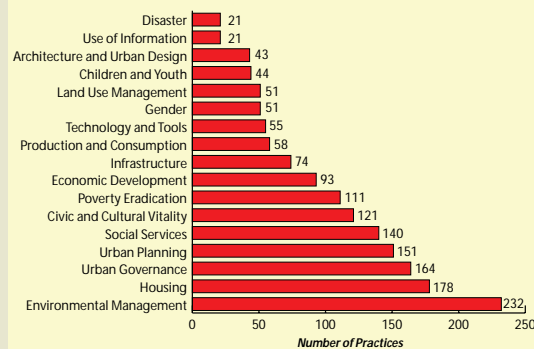


Epilogue Best Practices

The Best Practices Database

Good and best practices are initiatives undertaken by two or more partners at the national, city or community level that effectively address chronic social, economic and environmental problems. The UNCHS (Habitat) Best Practices Database, the source of many of the examples in this report, includes over 1,150 initiatives from 125 countries documented between 1996 and 2000. The mining of this rich database reveals trends and issues, emerging priorities and promising policy responses throughout the world. A breakdown by category shows that environmental problems are receiving the most attention by communities and local authorities worldwide. Housing, urban governance, urban planning and social services closely follow. These innovative approaches and solutions show that partnerships between local authorities and civil society organizations constitute a potent capacity of response to critical issues and problems. They also reveal a policy vacuum, as many of these initiatives are taking place with little or no central government support.

1000+ Best Practices: Environment, housing and governance top the list



Source: www.bestpractices.org

Innovative Responses to Globalization

Globalization in the form of liberalized trade and finance has led to several types of response in cities around the world. Cities - particularly city-regions - in developing countries have realized that strategies that will allow them to effectively compete for foreign and domestic investment and tourism are best activated through social, economic and environmental policies that benefit, first and foremost, their own citizens. In countries where levels of infrastructure and

services are already high, cities and their regions are now turning their attention to their social and cultural assets. This trend is exemplified by investments in museums, festivals and special events, including those rooted in ethnic diversity. Other practices focus on preserving and rehabilitating the cultural heritage and natural endowments, including watersheds, wildlife and eco-systems.

In the transition economies of Eastern and Central Europe, policies for improving the living environment are largely led by compliance with European Union norms and standards aiming for a better quality of life and an improved investment climate. In North America, where mobility is higher than in Europe, a competitive edge is being sought through a combination of economic development strategies for incubating local business opportunities, human resources development, environmental policies and citizen security programmes.

In the developing countries of Africa and Asia, globalization has generated a spectrum of changes that include the emergence of new social actors; the greater importance of cognitive factors in all aspects of social life; the crisis of government and public administration; and the spread of democracy and adoption of new technology. Most of the cities in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean are experiencing a distressing spread of social exclusion, economic growth without a corresponding growth in employment, increase in poverty, crisis of food imbalance and environmental degradation.

Africa

Most city-scale initiatives in Africa involve the expansion of the informal economy. Many initiatives focus on providing affordable housing to disadvantaged groups, targeting proliferating informal settlements. In African cities, provision of secure land tenure in informal settlements is a prerequisite to increasing permanent housing. There is a shift in shelter policies by concerned governments, with more attention being given to infrastructure provision, secure land tenure and support to housing agencies, public and private. Community based organizations (CBOs) are in the forefront in shelter provision, mobilizing community members to participate in improving/constructing their own houses. Most central governments have adopted enabling building codes to make housing standards more affordable. In addition, they are involved in infrastructure provision that has served as an engine behind self-help housing construction. Much new housing stock has been generated through self-help construction efforts.

On Evidence

Arab States

Urban environmental concerns in most Arab States stem from domestic and industrial waste that is usually disposed of in an unrestricted manner. Practices in waste management target recycling of reusable by-products. Assimilation of normally shunned garbage collectors into mainstream life has been among major success stories. Urban blight has been arrested in several cities across the Arab States, paving the way for sustainable urban revitalization. Infrastructure provision has been partly privatized, increasing the efficiency of delivery. Infrastructure provision partly financed by the central governments has enabled shelter development of areas in and outside of cities. Integrated urban planning has replaced archaic planning practices that favoured the well-to-do minority in most cities. Plans increasingly accommodate the changing patterns of settlement in favour of low-cost housing. Through revision of building standards, shelter has become affordable with some cities adopting what have come to be known as 'minimum acceptable standards.' And, in some cities credit for adequate housing is being made available to city households through a need-based system.

Asia and the Pacific

Environmental degradation in informal settlements is a major issue that most cities in the region are facing. Large informal settlements have inadequate means for disposal of sewage and solid waste. Documented practices have managed to arrest and reverse this trend in some cities. There has been an increasing civic participation in infrastructure provision with some local authorities receiving assistance from their citizens through 'People's City Built by the People' initiatives. A sizable number of cities have adopted management practices that augur well for service delivery efficiency. Revision of by-laws and codes to make housing affordable has increased the housing provision goal of many city authorities. Community-based organizations are involved in informal business ventures and provide training enabling their members to make ends meet. These initiatives are usually accompanied by shelter upgrading projects initiated by CBOs. Social inclusion of vulnerable citizens through skills training and micro-financing has greatly reduced poverty levels. In some Asian cities, alternative transport has become popular with the introduction of car-free days and pedestrian pathways. Integrating transport and land use planning, expanding the road networks and maximizing their capacities, managing demand of road usage and providing quality public transport choices has helped reduce traffic congestion in some cities.

Europe

Despite very different macro-economic and social policies that underlie European approaches, a persistent percentage of the urban population remains unemployed and socially excluded. In Europe, some of the more successful practices in dealing with unemployment focus on finding job opportunities for youth, women and early retirees through training. Environmental services

also present a growth sector where community-based organizations are involved in waste recycling and re-use, creating new job opportunities for socially excluded youth, women and minorities. Community security programmes involve the police, social services, the communities concerned and the architectural and urban design professions. Several consumer associations in Western Europe have partnered with businesses and local authorities to reduce wasteful patterns of consumption and raise awareness of the ecological footprint of cities. In mature cities, basic services problems largely relate to maintaining old infrastructure and integrating new and improved infrastructure with environmental planning and management concerns. A major pre-occupation in Europe is provision of social services for the disabled. Documented practices from Europe focus on issues of decentralization and empowerment, partnership and participation, transparent and accountable management practices and the use of information in decision-making.

North America

Many North American initiatives are aimed at cleaner energy production. Scores of the documented practices in infrastructure and services in North America seek to address the issue of social exclusion, particularly with regard to immigrants and ethnic minorities living either on the periphery of cities or in inner-city slums. Security of tenure also remains a problem, especially with the gentrification of neighbourhoods and, in some cases, the propensity of local authorities to give up on crime and poverty-ridden public housing estates. Several initiatives are geared towards achieving secure tenure in such neighbourhoods. Others feature partnerships designed to create opportunities for mobilizing resources and for providing solutions to long-standing issues such as unemployment, waste management, infrastructure and basic services.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Nearly all the environmental practices in Latin America and the Caribbean focus on turning cities into a regional centres, open to the world, that ensure urban development with a high level of environmental quality and good living conditions. With parts of such cities being located in industrial zones it has become increasingly necessary to introduce pollution control without jeopardizing livelihoods. Integrated solid waste management has been widely adopted in cities where it was once a menace. Most documented practices feature housing provision in informal settlements in addition to security of tenure and infrastructure provision. Civic organizations are taking leading roles in advocating for secure tenure for most slum dwellers to allow construction of decent housing. In a number of cities, popular participation in budgeting and planning processes features prominently, with public resource allocation in these cities becoming a democratic process. This, in turn means that all the decisions that are the responsibility of the municipal government on public works and services are decided together with the citizens.