

URBAN MILLENNIUM

Special Session of the General Assembly
for an Overall Review and Appraisal of the
Implementation of the Habitat Agenda

NEW YORK, 6 - 8 JUNE 2001



Istanbul + 5:

Review and appraisal of the Habitat Agenda • The report of the Executive Director of UNCHS (Habitat)

IN 1996 IN ISTANBUL, 171 GOVERNMENTS attending the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) agreed to implement certain policies with the intention of changing the future of “human settlements” – cities and towns, primarily – for the better in our collective future. The agreement they adopted, the Habitat Agenda, is a very large document that contains a number of commitments and strategies. It recognized that urbanization is inevitable, and that it can and must be managed for a better outcome. The Habitat Agenda seeks to encourage what is good in cities in order to maximize the social, cultural and economic benefits to be had. To combat the continuing 8 of the poor – a significant part of the urban population – it specifically encourages approaches that are holistic and more inclusive and participatory.

Today, five years after Istanbul, the same Governments and their Habitat Agenda partners will review their progress and achievements, evaluate the obstacles they have encountered, and agree on what their priorities should be in the “urban millennium”, when more and more cities will confront greater problems. Urbanization in the developed world and in Latin America and the Caribbean is already at 75 per cent. But in the developing countries in Asia and

Africa, the process is gathering speed and intensifying. Concerns that were addressed in 1996 are taking on a new urgency.

In terms of evaluating progress made, certain questions are useful: Since 1996, has your city changed? For the better or for the worse? Has your town become a city? Are there more homeless people, or less? Are there any “unplanned settlements”? Have there been any projects for inner city renewal? If so, have they benefited the poor? Have people been evicted for urban renewal projects? What kind of legal recourse do poor people in your city have when they are evicted? How easy is it for women in your town to inherit and own property?

Preparations for the five-year review in New York have been going on for well over a year. Governments were asked to submit reports on progress they have made at the local and national levels in implementing the Agenda. The reports were organized according to six main themes: shelter; social development and eradication of poverty; environmental management; economic development; governance; and international cooperation. In compiling these reports, they were asked to use a consultative process with broad-based, gender-balanced national committees.

The review process has highlighted some



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important lessons, particularly globalization:

- Countries are becoming more and more inter-dependent, and cities are becoming more competitive;
- Urbanization and globalization have both accelerated since Habitat II and have contributed to an increase in urban poverty;
- Because actions that actually improve the quality of life of people, particularly the poor, are usually designed and implemented at the local level, local authorities are assuming new importance.

At the same time as emerging overall themes can be identified, it remains important to analyze the evidence by region. Below are some of the highlights.

Africa

Africa is still predominantly rural, with only about 36 per cent of its population living in urban areas. However, it is urbanizing at a faster rate than any other continent. Though some of the expansion is the result of a natural increase in populations of cities, most of this shift is the result of migrations due to failed rural development policies and regional conflicts. Countries report:

- While the legislative and institutional framework has improved, both all-around capacity-building and strengthening of local authorities are still needed.
- Informal settlements continue to expand. Some cities report that more than half of the population lives in unplanned squatter settlements without services. In many such


settlements, the poor have no security of tenure and can be evicted without recourse to any legal protection.

- To minimize rural-to-urban migration, there is a need to address rural and urban human settlements issues more equally.
- The HIV/AIDS crisis is having an impact on human settlements. With over 25 million sub-Saharan Africans living with AIDS and another 3.8 million infected with HIV, less resources are available for development. In addition, more and more households are headed by grandparents or by children.
- In many countries in Africa, property laws governing ownership and inheritance rights discriminate against women. In those cases where women are allowed to own and inherit property, customary practices often impede their enjoyment of equal rights.

Asia

Asia is a region of extremes. On one hand, it contains the world's largest city, Tokyo, with a population of over 26 million. On the other hand, it also contains cities with some of the worst slums in the world. It has a range of problems to match, from those of a modern metropolis to meeting the basic needs of the poorest of the poor. Countries report:

- Since Habitat II, there has been a real shift towards more partnerships with private and community sectors.
- Economic growth has resulted in urban renewal, but this, in turn, has led to an increase in forced evictions.
- With widespread recognition of the



negative environmental impact of an increasing number of private vehicles, many cities are working to increase access to public transportation and to encourage green alternatives such as bicycling.

Latin America and the Caribbean

With 75 per cent of the population already living in cities and towns, Latin America and the Caribbean is the most urbanized region in the developing world. But in spite of its high economic growth rate, the region is home to large disparities between the rich and the poor. Between 40 and 60 per cent of all urban residents live in informal illegal or semi-legal settlements. In addition, it is proving difficult to attract overseas development assistance targeting the poor. Lastly, the region has suffered considerable natural disasters and civil conflicts with negative impacts on human settlements. Countries report:

- There is a growing awareness of the role of civil society organizations in neighbourhood planning and management. In many cities, mechanisms of participatory governance have been put in place.
- There is a high incidence of organized movements of the urban poor, who, in the past, have ‘invaded’ empty plots of land and apartments.
- In many places, laws are being passed to grant legal security of tenure to residents of informal settlements.
- There has been greater recognition of the right to housing in the constitutions of some countries. There has also been an

increase in laws that protect tenants.

- There is increased financial and technical support to self-help housing initiatives and cooperatives.
- Women’s access to housing is high on the agenda. There have been many serious attempts to address related issues, such as violence against women and the role of women in local governance.
- Regionally, there have been initiatives to improve disaster preparedness and thus minimize the impact of natural disasters.

OECD and countries in transition

Many OECD cities report successful urban renewal initiatives. Others seek to renew their inner cities while preserving their historical and cultural heritage. An important factor to consider in urban planning is the needs of an aging population. Countries report:

- As of 2000, 20 per cent of the population of Europe was age 60 or over.
- Several countries have initiated programmes to reduce the social inclusion of marginalized communities such as refugees, asylum seekers, disabled persons and ethnic minorities.
- The role of women in governance is increasing.
- Regional conflicts have caused a rapid increase in the population of refugees and internally displaced people in neighbouring cities and towns, leading to shortages of housing and shelter.
- The destruction of housing stock and



urban infrastructure has made post-disaster reconstruction a major priority. This task is made more difficult by the lack of institutions such as local authorities and the destruction of offices and cadastral records.

- Many countries are working on environmentally friendly measures to reduce pollution, such as increasing the use of public transportation and developing alternatives such as light rail systems.

Western Asia

Western Asia is a region with great variations in economic development, from oil-rich gulf countries to those that are very poor with few resources. The entire region suffers from problems associated with harsh climatic conditions and insufficient sources of fresh water. Countries report:

- In some regions, environmental pollution from a large number of vehicles and from the oil industry is a problem that affects many human settlements.
- The need to develop housing for migrant workers is a priority issue.
- Millions of refugees trapped by the Middle-Eastern crisis pose a long-standing human settlements problem.
- In many countries, a high rate of natural population growth has intensified a housing crisis.