

**SYNTHESIS OF NATIONAL REPORTS ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HABITAT AGENDA
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARRIBEAN REGION***

Summary

The main objective of this preliminary report is to highlight the main trends and issues of concern in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, as identified in the national reports received so far from ECLAC Countries by UNCHS (Habitat). The commitments and strategies of the Habitat Agenda, which are the core negotiated agreements of Habitat II, provide the framework for the assessment. For each of the commitments covered, the synthesis highlights key issues from the 15 national reports so far analysed, with an emphasis on progress made since 1996, prevailing conditions, new trends and emerging issues, policy and legislative changes since Habitat II, institutional weaknesses and obstacles encountered and lessons learnt, with emphasis on sustainability and impact. The presentation is organised in six chapters: shelter; social development and eradication of poverty; environmental management; economic development; governance; and international cooperation, as per the guidelines for country reporting issued by UNCHS (Habitat) in October 1999.

Revisiting the Istanbul commitments is a powerful reminder of the strength of the goals set at the Habitat II Conference and a way to assess the extent to which further action is required to implement them. Progress has been made in many countries, but more intensive action is needed in all areas.

The purpose of the regional meeting to be held in Santiago, Chile 25 -27 October 2000, is not only to review progress made but also to identify and agree on concrete initiatives for extending and strengthening action to implement the Habitat Agenda commitments and achieve its goals in the ECLAC region.

* This document has not been formally edited.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul, Turkey in 1996 endorsed important changes in the approach to human settlements, acknowledging the need for guiding urbanisation, rather than preventing it. 171 governments adopted the Habitat Agenda - a global call to action. The Habitat Agenda highlighted that the benefits of economic growth should be spread equitably among all, and that fulfilling the basic requirement in terms of housing, employment and services for the people should rest upon a national consensus where supportive policy frameworks recognise and strengthen action by local levels of government, civil society and communities.

2. As elaborated in the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Global Plan of Action, the objectives of the Habitat Agenda, and the strategies for their implementation revolve around two main themes: (a) Adequate shelter for all and (b) Sustainable human settlements in an urbanising world. By adopting the Habitat Agenda, the international community endorsed the Agenda's key objectives of enablement, participation, partnerships, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation and international cooperation, as well as specific commitments and strategies. United Nations Member States committed themselves to implementing the Habitat Agenda through local, national, sub-regional and regional plans of action and developing policies and programmes for adequate shelter and sustainable human settlements. The overall implementation of the Habitat Agenda is thus dependent on countries implementing their local and national plans of action and monitoring progress towards achieving objectives by means of appropriate indicators.

3. Pursuant to a recommendation of the Conference, the General Assembly in paragraph 12 of its resolution 52/190 of 18

December 1997, decided to hold a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2001 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of Habitat II. The Organisational Session of the Preparatory Committee which was held in Nairobi in May 1999, as a follow up to General Assembly resolution 53/180 of 15 December 1998, adopted the criteria on scope of the review and appraisal process to be conducted at the Special Session.

4. To help organise in-country activities and make national reports broadly congruent and directly relevant to the Habitat Agenda, 20 key items have been identified in a consultative process (in line with resolution 17/1 of the United Nations Commission on Human settlements) as universal priorities from the commitments and strategies adopted in Istanbul in 1996. Although they vary in breadth, the commitments and strategies have a clarity of intent that would assist in keeping preparation and debate clearly focused, with priorities and specific performance objectives against which progress can be measured.

5. Guidelines for national reporting on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda were sent out to Member States and Habitat Agenda Partners and United Nations' agencies and organisations in October 1999. Reminders of the deadlines for submission of the national reports were also sent in December 1999, February and June 2000.

6. The main objective of this preliminary report is to highlight the main trends and issues of concern in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, as identified in the national reports received by UNCHS (Habitat). The list of countries, which have submitted their reports, is attached as annex 1.

7. The synthesis follows the universal-reporting format that was provided to national governments in the guidelines for country reporting. The commitments and strategies of the Habitat Agenda, which are

the core negotiated agreements of Habitat II, provide the framework for the deliberations. For each of the commitments covered, the report considers progress made since 1996, prevailing conditions, new trends and emerging issues, policy and legislative changes since Habitat II, institutional weaknesses and obstacles encountered and lessons learnt, with emphasis on sustainability and impact.

8. The synthesis is organized in six chapters corresponding to the Guidelines for Country Reporting: shelter; social development and eradication of poverty; environmental management; economic development; governance; and international cooperation.

Chapter 1

Shelter

9. Latin America and the Caribbean is the most urbanised region of the developing world. The urban population in the region, which accounted for 57.4 per cent of the total population in 1970 and for 75.3 per cent in 1995, is projected to reach 82.2 per cent in 2025. The rate of rural-urban migration has slowed down in most parts of the region. The rate of urban growth is highest in the Central America sub-region, where a large proportion of the population still lives in rural areas. In these countries rural populations are still increasing in absolute terms, while rural populations in the South America and Caribbean sub-regions are declining. For the region as a whole, it appears that migration generally occurs from one urban centre to another, and less from rural to urban, following the variations of the changing labour market. Where migration from rural to urban occurs, it shows two further phenomena: a younger rather than an older population migrating, and more women than men.

10. The Latin America and Caribbean region does not present a homogenous picture, not between cities, even less between countries, and sub-regions. It is thus difficult to generalise, but there are certain commonalities, such as the phenomena of ‘illegality’, ‘irregularity’, and ‘informality’ in the urbanisation process. Available data indicate that the percentage of urban residents living in informal arrangements varies between 59 per cent in Bogota, 50 per cent in Caracas and Quito, and 40 per cent in Mexico City and Lima. In San Paulo, some 50 per cent of the population live in informal shelter arrangements, some 22 per cent reside in ‘favelas’.

11. The main common shelter sector characteristic of the countries within the Latin America and Caribbean region may well be the prevalence of ‘informality’, defined by:

- The macroeconomic conditions, such as unemployment, low salaries and consequent increase in poverty;
- State policies and how the urban land market functions;
- Land use.

12. In the past, government housing policies did not favour access to land for the urban poor. These policies actually often supported the already very favourable conditions of the upper and middle-income groups both regarding access and control of property and available financial instruments. Currently, governments in the region are democratically elected and, therefore, all urban policies must pass through the legislative process before being approved. Yet, in many countries clientelism and vested interests are still prevalent. There is, however, a growing demand from organised sectors among the urban poor – along with other interest groups (NGOs, politicians, etc.) – and they are becoming more knowledgeable of existing policies and norms and lobbying to claim their rights.

13. One of the most important instruments approved and implemented in the 1990s was the Colombian Urban Reform (law #9/89) which gives each municipality autonomy over the regulation of the land market, with the explicit objective of favouring the most disadvantaged sectors. It creates and puts into effect land banks, grants municipalities the power to expropriate land that is not fulfilling a social function and establishes financial instruments for urban reform.

14. Reconstruction after recent natural disasters (such as hurricane Mitch) and human-made disasters (war related) are important factors within the shelter sector in Central America, the Caribbean and in Colombia. "Distress migration" (due to violence and internal upheaval) has been cited as a major cause of the rural-urban migration in some countries. This creates additional demands for land, housing and services.

1.1 Provide security of tenure

15. In one way or another, all countries of the Latin America and Caribbean region are focusing their attention on strategies to combat homelessness. In many countries the rate of home ownership has increased considerably since 1996. Moreover, in certain countries, such as Cuba where 85 per cent of all inhabitants are homeowners, security of tenure is becoming a tangible reality.

16. Most countries are making great efforts to promote access to secure land ownership for their inhabitants, especially low-income groups; but the land registration mechanisms need to be updated, simplified and made more accessible to the urban poor. Some countries are examining different tenure options that can more appropriately address the needs of the urban poor, sometimes with a specific emphasis on women headed households. Living conditions have improved for the Brazilian population living in towns and cities. The proportion of households with formal ownership titles

rose. However, indicators show that numbers of ownership titles for households headed by women are still below those headed by men. To a higher degree women tend to rent, "borrow" homes or squat. This indicates a higher level of vulnerability for women in terms of home ownership and land settlement. However, all countries experience economic constraints that impede their response to the actual housing deficit.

17. Legal security for renters is ensured in almost all countries of the region. However, "informal" renters remain in high risk of eviction. Most countries have facilitated agreements between stakeholder groups whereby evictions are effected only after due process of law and alternative solutions are sought.

18. The experience has been that secure tenure is often linked to housing and neighbourhood upgrading, better employment opportunities, more say in the development of the municipality and an overall better life-style for all inhabitants, especially those living in poverty. Security of tenure, even among very low-income groups, triggers a housing construction process, usually through self-help, which also contributes to the reduction of the housing deficit.

19. Close to 130.000 households in Chile have benefited from the regularisation of property titles. These families have benefited through a combination of their own financing and grants from the World Bank, the National Fund for Regional Development (FNDR), the Solidarity and Social Investment Fund (FOSIS), Municipalities and private enterprises. It should be noted that the application of this new law has focused on households of which 4 out of 5 beneficiaries have incomes falling below the poverty line. Priority groups for this new legislation include peasants, women heads of households and indigenous peoples. Activities towards better housing in Chile include regularisation, basic infrastructure and

increasing access to already existing housing and/or future housing stock. The new Housing Plan of Venezuela also contemplates the regularisation of tenure and the legalization of land use and property, so that all families can participate in the formal market economy.

1.2 Promote the right to adequate housing

20. In general, the bulk of demand for new housing in Latin America and the Caribbean is in urban areas. The time of massive invasions has ended and most governments are developing programmes with both the formal construction sector and the informal dwellers themselves. Available funds are however insufficient, and the housing deficit is increasing in all countries except Chile. Most of the housing stock in the region is currently under private ownership, some 20-30 per cent is rental housing, while 5 per cent is vacant.

21. The right to housing is enshrined in many national constitutions, with clauses on non-discrimination regarding race, sex, age, etc. In some countries, the co-operative housing movement is strong and specific legislation has been developed for this sector, which opens new alternatives to low-income groups. Popular housing, better known as 'self-help housing' is covered by specific legislation in some countries and strong federations of self-help community organisations exist. In Colombia, self-help housing is subsidised by the government. Most countries are in the process of implementing new legislation with a specific focus on improving the situation of homeless people. Civil society organisations, especially CBOs and NGOs, and specifically women's organisations, in the field of housing and urban development, are working with both national Governments and local authorities in this area.

22. In Brazil the Municipal Districts have been helping reduce the housing shortage

through various types of interventions that include: housing improvements, self-help building programmes through savings groups, self-construction, self-management, basic building materials kits, upgrading of slums and building new housing units. Some successful experiences exist for all types of schemes listed above.

23. The Housing Policy in Venezuela gives priority to low-income households, representing about 90% of the national population. The situation is viewed from a humanistic perspective, offering integral and decent options to the poorest segments of society, through the construction of new housing units and the upgrading of existing units. The Housing Policy also strives for equity and offers better opportunities for access to housing for those most vulnerable segments of society. "Serve the People" in a transparent, efficient and effective way is the motto. Six basic programmes are included: 1. attention to street dwellers 2. physical upgrading of informal settlements 3. housing betterment and expansion scheme 4. rehabilitation of informal settlements 5. new urban areas and progressive housing schemes, special subsidies provided; 6. regular (formal) housing and urbanization schemes, with individual, private and/or public loans available.

24. In El Salvador, advances in housing and land tenure have been made with the objective of better managing public services while ensuring the participation of its citizens in the decision-making process. It is worth mentioning that the Liberty and Progress Institute (ILP), given the support that it has received in the last few years, was able to legalize land tenure for 3000 families. During the 1990s, policies and legislation surrounding housing and housing needs focused primarily on financing strategies. The main strategy being direct subsidies, channeled through the National Fund for Popular Housing (FONAVIPO), and through subsidies via the interest rate-driven Social Housing Fund (FSV). While the government took a lead in these new

strategies, the actual construction of new housing took place via the private sector and non-governmental organizations. However, there is still a deficit as regards housing and land tenure in El Salvador. At present, only 41% of the demand is being met.

1.3 Provide equal access to land

25. It is interesting to note that countries with different constitutional regimes and governed by political parties with different objectives, possess similar instruments regarding the land market. There is a homogenisation of instruments and a differentiation in their use. Regularisation policies for the urban poor increased in the 1990s, even in those countries where such policies were almost non-existent in earlier decades. Urban land and housing regularisation is now being promoted and, on another level, the informal economy is being recognised. Since 1996 and the adoption of the Habitat Agenda, some countries in the region have made special efforts to update their cadastral systems and to develop legal and institutional frameworks which support equal access to land. However, most countries show a huge backlog in registration of property rights. Most national cadastral systems are being updated in order to address this gap. It has been estimated that at least 40 per cent (and in some instances even 50 per cent) of urban plots in Latin America and the Caribbean are not complying with formal land registration requirements and therefore have no secure tenure. This results in huge losses of property taxation potential in the region.

26. As an example of good practice in securing a more efficient system of land access and control, the municipality of Guayaquil in Ecuador, has articulated the information base and collection mechanism of their office of registry and cadastre. This articulation is crucial for a more efficient system. The formal land market is not independent from the informal market in the region. They are not contradictory but

rather complimentary and often even overlapping. The agents of one market are often the agents of the other as well. Whatever happens in one sector considerably affects developments in the other sector. However, spatial and social segregation is increasing because of the growing disparities between the rich and the poor. Land and housing costs and limited access to credit encourages this growing segregation. The rich and powerful in general live behind high walls and vaulted doors, the poor and defenceless live behind billboards or on the periphery of the city – in precarious and dangerous locations, facing long and expensive trips to work and services. However, in Jamaica efforts have been made to reverse these negative developments by the launching of the Emancipation Lands Project in 1998. This project identifies 100 hectares of land in each parish for landless and low-income families.

27. In Panama with a population of almost 3 million people 53.9% of its housing deficit corresponds to families with less than 300 dollars per month. The Ministry of Housing is placing special attention towards programmes of legal land tenure and housing betterment schemes (including technical advice and flexible loans for construction materials) directed specifically at this group of families. This is crucial because up until now the only viable solution for these people has been the informal housing market and the government wishes to offer a viable alternative solution which will benefit not only the families but also society in general. It sees this situation as part of a structural problem, which also must be addressed. A society based on free market politics cannot hope to gain the war against poverty. There's a need to have a greater commitment to democracy and also to the social debt, which the government is committed to upholding.

1.4 Promote equal access to credit

28. Since 1996, special measures have been put in place in many countries of the region to ensure access to credit for those who would normally not qualify. Nevertheless, the very high interest rates prevailing in the Latin America and Caribbean region, together with the fact that private financing agencies are not interested in granting small loans, as required by the poor, continue to marginalise low-income groups from the formal mortgage market.

29. Granting up-front subsidies to allow access of low-income groups to the formal housing market is becoming more and more common as an alternative funding scheme, thus avoiding the marginalising effects of the formal financial market on the access of the poor to housing.

30. Some countries have implemented 'solidarity' schemes (e.g. Cuba and Panama) and special subsidies for self-help housing schemes (e.g. Colombia and Cuba). Other schemes, which directly address marginalised groups such as people with disabilities, young families, women-headed households and the elderly, are being developed. For instance in Brazil, progress has been made in terms of equal access to credit for women. An edict issued in March 1998 by the Ministry of planning and Budget stipulates that the agents implementing housing programmes underwritten by federal funding should include women heads of households among their selection priorities. It also stipulates that the implementation agents should take steps ensuring the feasibility of introducing and disseminating capacity-building programmes for the female labour-force, ushering women into the housing production process, particularly for self-construction and self-help schemes. In many countries, there is also a trend towards promoting more direct and continuous partnerships between public and private sectors (including NGOs and CBOs) within the shelter sector.

31. In the majority of Latin America and Caribbean countries, social housing policies are already in place. The challenge is to provide adequate funding for the housing needs of the poorest groups. Therefore, there is need for increased political will, and a shared vision, articulated in common programmes between related stakeholders such as ministries, parliamentarians, local authorities, private sector, NGOs and CBOs. People's capacity also needs to be improved in order to respond to these new challenges. Decentralisation and the devolution of resources and control to local authorities should definitely support the more efficient, effective, and equitable development and management of the urban habitat. In Venezuela, the housing policy transforms the potential demand of the most needy families into an effective demand through the application of a combination of direct subsidy and credit which guarantees access to housing, adapting the loan and payment schedules to the family income in order to protect their economic situation and preserve the family patrimony. The Dominican Republic has also created a National Fund for Popular Housing (FONDOVIP) and a national housing subsidies programme for marginalised low-income groups.

32. National housing policies emphasise both the construction of new housing and the regularisation and upgrading of existing housing stock. However, severe and growing income disparities, as stated above, provide unequal access for individuals/households belonging to different income groups: the higher the income, the easier the access to land ownership and to adequate housing. In general, funds available are not sufficient for fulfilling the demand for new housing and the available finance is mostly finding its way to the middle and upper-income groups. Therefore, the land market marginalises a huge segment of the population from formal land ownership, pushing them into

illegal/informal alternatives without title or registration. In redressing this disparity, it seems appropriate to focus on slum upgrading and regularisation schemes in order to respond to the needs of the urban poor.

Chapter 2

Social Development and Eradication of Poverty

33. Key elements highlighted in the Habitat Agenda are the provision of equal opportunities for a safe and healthy life, social integration and inclusiveness, and gender equality. Addressing the status and needs of marginalised groups is fundamental to this aspect of policy world-wide. Most countries in the Latin America and Caribbean region identify the need to look at the root causes of poverty and social injustice in order to arrive at lasting solutions to these issues. This is thought to be necessary in a context where basic social services are lacking for the majority of citizens.

34. Most countries also agree on the need to ensure that decentralisation becomes a reality by devolving control over resources to the local level. Law 17-97 in the Dominican Republic pledges 4% of national income to be distributed proportionally towards housing needs according to the population density of each municipality. There is some consensus on the adoption of a strategy for combining the devolution of power with promotion of a strong civil society. The role of civil society is seen as working with local authorities and at the same time holding them accountable to policy goals.

35. Since Habitat II, many countries have enacted legislation, which moves forward the principles of social development and integration, through institutionalizing citizen participation in local leadership. However,

natural disasters, endemic violence, and lack of adequate economic resources are slowing the pace of change. Most countries have put into place mechanisms to ensure gender equality, and a few countries also have indicators to measure progress made on this. In such cases, capacity building, especially in local leadership, is being offered to both women and men.

36. Chile is addressing the issue of extreme poverty, specifically in irregular or precarious settlements through the programme "Chile Barrio" which became operational in 1998. A total of 974 settlements with 117,361 families nationwide were included. In the first year, approximately 13,000 families benefited while the number increased to 30,000 in 1999.

37. In Panama, with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, a participatory programme entitled: PARVIS was developed by the National Government in 1996. This programme contemplated the participation of NGOs and community organizations in the development of the housing programmes. However, due to legal problems and the political orientation of the programme, this collective participation was not developed and priority was given to individual housing solutions. One of the only participatory processes, which generated positive developments at the local and regional level in a short time (1995-1997), was Arraijan (West of the City of Panama). This process included a programme which facilitated the development of a joint, integrated local development plan between all interest groups: organised communities, central government institutions and local authorities. This programme had the technical assistance of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

38. Venezuela's new Housing Policy is being developed within the framework of "participatory democracy" in order to ensure a true and lasting change in urban

development, housing and habitat sectors. Some of the basic norms are: self-help, co-management, cooperative ventures, community enterprises and other forms of associative partnerships, based on the principles of cooperation and solidarity.

2.1 Provide equal opportunities for a safe and healthy life

39. Although health care policies have moved ahead in the region more rapidly in recent years than previously, there is little information on how they impact on social gaps and inequities, especially gender inequity. In general, there is a lack of clear policies and mechanisms for rectifying gender inequities in access to health¹.

40. Conditions within the region vary greatly. While many countries have large urban populations lacking in adequate access to basic services, others are better off. For example, in 1999 88.4 percent of all housing in Mexico had potable water, 79.9 percent had sewerage, and 97.4 percent had electricity.

41. Broader programmes of support and services to low-income settlements do, however, have the potential for impact on creating conditions for a safe and healthy life for the majority poor. Encouraging poor communities to collect garbage in their own areas and swap the results of their efforts for milk, has been introduced by the Curitiba district in Brazil, for cutting garbage collecting costs while upgrading the health and hygiene for the poorest sectors of the population. However, data on the impact on the broader programmes of support in practice is not readily available.

42. Nicaragua's National Plan for Housing and Human Settlements 1996-2000 is aimed at improving safety and health conditions for

the rural and urban poor. The Fund for Social Investment (FISE) gives technical support to 30 of the poorest municipalities of Nicaragua. The goal of this Programme is to significantly improve the level of investment in municipalities facing extreme poverty by the end of the year 2000.

43. In Bolivia sectoral policies clearly give priority to those social groups which are most needy. In the provision of infrastructure and basic services, emphasis is on ensuring potable water, sewerage and solid waste management for all communities. The process of decentralization has also helped ensure the implementation of community development programmes, especially those addressing water, sanitation and basic health measures. Ultimately 600 communities around the country will benefit.

44. In Suriname the government is implementing a programme which will bring safe drinking water to everyone within the space of a few years. The environmental improvement of waste disposal is also being addressed. The Ministry of Public Health is carrying out a campaign for the eradication of malaria and the dengue mosquito.

45. In Nicaragua, through law number 290, the Institute of Urban and Rural Housing (INVUR) was created. This is the decentralised entity, which is in charge of all urban/rural housing developments. In 1999 INVUR was given C\$156 million Cordobas in order to execute the National Programme of Family Subsidy and Housing Betterment. In doing so, INVUR follows the main economic and social policy of the National Government. INVUR has developed the following programmes in order to respond to this growing need:

- Family Subsidy Programme;
- Housing Betterment Programme;
- Promotion of Municipal Housing;
- Pilot Projects (e.g. Bed & Breakfast programme) ;

¹ ECLAC, 2000, The Challenge of Gender Equity and Human Rights on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century, LC/L.1295(CRM.8/3). P37.

- Emergency Housing;
- Sustainable Rural Housing.

46. The Secretariat of Social Action (SAS) created the Housing Betterment Scheme for the victims of Hurricane Mitch. SAS also created in 1998 a Poverty Eradication Programme, which facilitates building materials, technical assistance and land for housing construction in 48 different municipalities.

47. In Chile, environmental management of water as a resource is currently governed by an extensive normative framework and dispersed through various legal bodies. In 1998, CONAMA (National Committee for the Environment) elaborated a proposal for the “Integral Management of Water as a Resource” (including management of rivers, lakes, and underground water). At present, discussions are being held regarding the incorporation of an ecosystem focus within the existing normative framework and in the management of hydro-resources.

2.2 Promote social integration and support disadvantaged groups.

48. For many countries in the region, decentralisation and good governance are seen as critical policy approaches in promoting social integration and reaching out to disadvantaged groups. For example, in Bolivia the Vice-Ministry of Strategic Planning and Popular Participation (VPEPP) is developing an integral plan for poverty eradication, based on the principle of participatory planning and development which involves all stakeholders from public, private and non-governmental organisations.

49. In Brazil several actions have been designed to expand the opportunities for a safe lifestyle, particularly among vulnerable groups of the population. The national congress recently approved the accessibility statutes for the handicapped. These statutes extend cover issues related to housing, urban

transportation and the removal of urban and architectural barriers.

50. Jamaica's Habitat Secretariat, created in 1996 to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, seeks to forge partnerships among national and local government, other public institutions, the private sector and non-governmental organisations including women's organisations. Its National Poverty Eradication Programme, "A Community Based Partnership Approach", was developed as a result of consultations with the private sector, academia, non-governmental organisations, community based organisations and international agencies. It aims at empowering the poor by eliminating dependency, and promoting self-reliance in an attempt to build integrated communities.

51. Social security is one of the main goals of the social policy of Suriname. In the Ministry of Social Services and Housing research is proceeding on needs and viable solutions. These include social services such as monthly financial assistance to the most needy, free medical services, child support, old-age pension and support for school supplies for the most needy. The government has created a “Social Community Work” programme, which supports the development of better living conditions at the neighbourhood and regional level. The target groups for this programme are the elderly (60 years and older), the physically disabled and former civil servants without a pension. The intention is to extend this support to all of the unemployed.

52. Efforts to identify and measure the situation of marginalized groups, and the development, implementation and assessment of policies to redress inequalities are being undertaken in different contexts. There are areas where special measures are needed, for example, domestic violence and violence against women and children. Lack

of safety remains one of the main social problems and therefore undertaking integrated actions aimed at preventing and eliminating violence against women is crucial. In Jamaica, the Ministry of National Security and Justice embarked upon a Victim Support Programme in 1998 to provide counselling, facilitate reparation, ensure awareness of victims of violence on ways to deal with emotional trauma.

53. In Panama, governance and participation are being addressed through the promotion of inter-institutional and inter-sectoral coordination. For example, the Urban Development Plan for the Metropolitan Areas of Pacific and Atlantic came about through a consultative process between public institutions and non-governmental organisations. Similarly, the Metropolitan Urban Environmental Management Project was prepared with the active participation of public institutions and non-governmental organisations, which shared information and open dialogue.

54. Both of these experiences were developed with the technical assistance of UNCHS (Habitat). Even though they are pilot projects, they constitute a foundation on which other experiences can be developed. The potential of the wide social and political networks of civil society, including their high organisational capacity and insight into the planning and execution of urban and human settlements development, can inform and augment the capacity of the public sector.

2.3 Promote gender equality in human settlements development

55. There is a massive influx of women into the regional labour market, which has many implications for the reform of social security systems, the characteristics of poverty, and for changes in education, health and family life in general. Although women in Latin America and the Caribbean now experience a range of rights and a degree of visibility

and recognition that they previously lacked, this is being achieved, in many cases, in the face of growing social exclusion that is a feature of the globalised world. Concentrations of wealth and power, and the rise of absolute poverty, are threatening progress towards equality between men and women. The number of people in Latin America living in poverty has increased from 200 million in 1990 to 204 million in 1997. Although gains in gender equality are threatened by this trend, it is apparent that the extent to which women's rights are advanced is an unequivocal indicator of progress in the consolidation of democracy and respect for human rights in general².

56. Statistics show that female unemployment is higher than male unemployment and that female unemployment is less responsive to economic recovery³. Studies show that women earn on average 75 percent of what men earn, and that their earnings may be as low as 20 percent of what men earn for equivalent work in specific instances. The percentage for Venezuela is 20 percent and 47 percent for Bolivia⁴

57. There have been initiatives in many countries addressing gender inequities on many fronts. The widespread recognition and almost universal legislative action on women's right to a life free of violence. Most countries have expanded the capacity of institutions that prevent and punish such violence, train state officials and alert public opinion. However, there is still a need to deal with the causes of violence through wider social reforms⁵.

58. In March 1999, an agreement was signed by the government and civil society

² ECLAC, 2000, *The Challenge of Gender Equity and Human Rights on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century*, LC/L.1295(CRM.8/3). P 2-6.

³ Ibid. P. 26.

⁴ Ibid. P. 29.

⁵ Ibid. P. 51.

organisations in Bolivia, regarding “Women and Land Security”. This was done in response to both the International Convention on the Elimination of all Discrimination Against Women and article 6 of the political constitution of Bolivia. This has given political space for women to exercise their right to legal security of tenure.

59. In Jamaica a draft gender equity mechanism instrument (GEM) has been developed, which will be utilised by the Planning Institute of Jamaica in all Government projects from the idea to the impact stage to ensure there is gender equity throughout.

60. In Cuba the level of participation of women has increased tremendously between 1990 and 1999. Today 66 percent of all professionals are women. Of these, 30 percent are in high level management and 60 percent are enrolled in Universities. Cuba encourages each citizen to actively participate in local and national politics and structures are in place to facilitate this participation, beginning with the popular councils in each municipality. Emphasis is now being placed on increasing popular participation in local governance.

61. Even though the number of households headed by men is greater than the number headed by women (83 percent compared to 17 percent), more women heading households are the owners of their homes (71 percent of women heading households compared to 69 percent men heading households). And during the period 1995-1999, all of the new housing schemes considered gender equality as one of their main priorities, both in the purchase of houses and in financing credit.

62. In Brazil there is clear evidence that low-income women have been participating to a greater extent, including taking the lead in community organizations and residents associations, as well as grassroots movements calling for better housing.

Women are also playing a far more active role in self-help programmes building houses and participating in other self-construction and self-management housing initiatives.

63. In Mexico special programmes have been created in order to ensure better education, health, and employment opportunities for women. Specific programmes are also being implemented, together with NGOs, to build up women’s capacity to take an active role in local and national development.

64. Suriname has formally adopted a gender policy. Within the Ministry of Home Affairs there is a National Gender Bureau, which is mandated to carry out the national gender policy programme. There are also many strong non-governmental organisations that champion the cause of gender equality in Suriname, and these are linked globally with other similar organisations.

Chapter 3

Environmental Management

3.4 Prevent disasters and rebuild settlements

65. Several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have developed disaster management systems that promote coordinated management at the various levels of the public administration, from the central government to local authorities and communities. Mexico is an example where disaster management is accompanied by complementary support actions such as the creation of a national fund for natural disaster reduction, and the preparation of risk and vulnerability maps. The development of appropriate insurance systems to cover losses as well as the equitable allocation of public sector funding is a main priority of several governments of the region. Countries like Cuba and Peru

have been active in the formulation of participatory risk assessments and prevention and mitigation plans. Cuba supports citizens' preparedness through the creation of neighbourhood teams working directly with civil defence in case of emergency.

66. Land-use and settlements development plans in several countries include criteria for disaster prevention and mitigation. Recent disasters, particularly in Central America and the Caribbean have shown that, in addition to national plans, there is a need for regional strategies to cope with these events. Central America is promoting the activities of an Interregional Committee for the Prevention of Natural Disasters, and there is already a Centre of Coordination for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America operating in Panama. The Caribbean region is also in need to develop specific actions for the particular needs of disaster management in small-island developing states.

67. Several countries in the Latin America and the Caribbean region have implemented environmental programmes. A major factor in the success of these programmes is the cooperation between different actors. In Panama there are various policies regarding sustainable urban environment. The general environment law includes citizen participation with rules guiding citizen's participation as an integral part of the process of environmental impact assessment. Mexico has also gained valuable experience in working together: National government, Local Authorities and communities. This has been very positive with regard to environmental issues.

68. In Brazil the preparation of local Agendas 21 has been undertaken by some States and Municipal districts, in partnership with organisations and civil society, particularly NGOs. This task has been delegated by local Government authorities to environmental forums, generally established with equal participation by

Government and society. The dissemination of these experiences through existing networks, as well as documentation programmes and awards for good practices, in collaboration with NGOs specialising in the environment, have encouraged their spread all over the country.

69. Regulations requiring EIA's for all significant new developments has been in effect since 1997 in Jamaica, and prior to that the serving of notices under the existing legislation encouraged many polluting enterprises to carry out Environmental Assessments and Audits of ongoing activities. This has led to some reduction of pollution in urban centres. Special initiatives have been undertaken to address and reduce exposure to PCB's, asbestos, lead and medical wastes. Jamaica has phased out the use of leaded gasoline. Panama has also a law regarding air pollution resulting from car fumes and other air contaminants and a time frame has been developed for their quick reduction. In Cuba the population is being sensitised to the need to protect the air and soil quality and to find alternative energy sources.

Chapter 4

Economic Development

70. Most economies of the Latin America and the Caribbean Region countries were at the peak of the business cycles during the 1996-1998 period and were initially not greatly affected by the East Asian financial and currency crisis of 1997. The region was however, affected by the Russian financial (default) crisis of 1998, which caused capital inflows into the region to fall 25 per cent in 1998 compared to 1997. The World Bank (2000:139) reported that a combination of deterioration in the external environment, high initial debt levels, a large dependence on foreign savings, and tight monetary policies of many countries of the region caused regional GDP growth to slow from 5.4 per cent in 1997 to 2.1 in 1998. GDP

declined in nine countries of the region in 1999, compared with only four countries in 1998. For several of the countries of the region (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela), high domestic interest rates in the second half of 1998 added to government debt service, widened fiscal deficits and put pressure on exchange rates.

71. In the Caribbean countries, economic performance varied widely but growth in per capita income averaged 2.2 per cent in 1999. Among the countries of the Caribbean sub-region, it was only in Jamaica in which GDP growth was negative for the third consecutive year.

72. The East Asian crisis of 1997 and the Russian crisis of 1998 affected some of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean Region in varying degrees, generally causing increase in poverty levels. Some countries like Brazil, have a significant number of social protection programmes that provide some compensation for many of those affected by the crisis, but many of the most vulnerable, especially those in the informal sector, are not protected (World Bank, 2000:30). Unemployment rate was at heights of 7 to 8 per cent in 1998 compared with 3 to 4 per cent in 1993-1996.

73. The World Bank (2000:30) also reported that poverty rate in Latin America and the Caribbean Region remained constant in the 1990s, despite the acceleration in economic growth in many countries in the mid-1990s, and the number in poverty increased. This notwithstanding, social indicators including: adult literacy, life expectancy, access to safe water, and infant mortality, have improved.

74. Overall, the Region's economic recovery is projected to be gradual and moderate with the regional GDP projected to grow by about 2.7 per cent in the year 2000 and accelerating to about 3.5 per cent in 2001.

4.1 Strengthen small and micro enterprises, particularly those developed by women

75. Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have moved in recent years towards more open models of economic development, promoting the improved functioning of market forces and enterprises of various sizes. Cuba's economic reforms provide an example of this trend. Flexible use of the labour force while maintaining social programmes for needy sectors of the population is at the core of these policies. As part of a general trend in the region, countries like Mexico, Brazil and Bolivia have put in place explicit strategies for the development of small and medium-size enterprises. The success of these strategies depends to a large extent on the existence of mechanisms of support and networks to facilitated the operations of the small enterprises.

76. Gender equality is also a common feature in economic development policies as well as in the implementation of programmes in the human settlements sector. Mexico has explicit policies to facilitate equal access to employment for women. Housing schemes in that country consider gender equality as one of the main priorities both in the purchase of houses and in access to credit. Special programmes have been created in order to ensure better education, health and employment opportunities for women. In Brazil, one NGO specialised in helping women who are either micro-entrepreneurs or production agents for the formal and informal markets: The Women's Bank (Banco da Mulher), is associated with an international financial network.

4.2 Encourage public private sector partnerships and stimulate productive employment

77. Some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are developing credit lines for small enterprises through “solidarity” schemes. Community groups benefit from credit for joint repayment. The success of this strategy, as in the case of Cuba, is reflected in rates of default being lower than 3%. Other countries are promoting public-private partnership through joint ventures. Jamaica has formulated a joint venture policy for housing development that seeks to build a platform to bring together the resources of the public sector with the entrepreneurial capacity of the private sector. As it is well recognised in the region, secure tenure of land is one of the main factors in triggering investment and economic development. Most countries in the region are pursuing active policies for the regularisation of land and real estate tenure in urban and rural areas. Countries with a weak economic base are using housing construction as a generator of employment and economic primer. Self-help construction activities are also seen in countries like Suriname, as an alternative for housing delivery and the promotion of employment.

78. In August of 1996, the Law of Promotion of Private Investment in Public Works of Infrastructure and Public Utilities was passed in Peru. It declares the promotion of private investment under a system of “concessions” in the areas of public works (infrastructure and utilities) of national interest. In the year 2000, the Law of Promotion and Development of Basic Infrastructure was passed, further enabling the participation of the private sector in providing this basic type of services. Concessions can be offered to juridical, national or foreign individuals, for the construction, repairing, conservation and development of public utilities. This new modality, based on a system of concessions to private businesses, is a valuable

mechanism for expanding public utility coverage in Peru.

Chapter 5

Governance

5.1 Promote decentralisation and strengthen local authorities

79. Most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have introduced legal reforms and norms to achieve a greater degree of decentralisation of functions from the central government to municipalities. Countries like Mexico are bringing together public institutions, private sector, NGOs and communities in defining local development and investment processes. In Bolivia, perhaps the most important reform is related to the allocation of resources to the local authorities, both from the national budget and municipal revenues. Public investment now is 35 % at the municipal level, 40% at the regional level, and only 25% at the national level. Still much needs to be done in terms of transforming local authorities into engines of social and economic development. There is a need for support to create municipalities with the capacity to formulate development and investment strategies.

80. Still, several countries have to make great progress into translating forward looking decentralisation policies into real decentralisation of competencies and allocations of funds. The establishment of municipal and local development funds in several countries is a positive step in this direction.

81. The normative framework for Municipalities in Nicaragua considers them to be true local governments and it gives them full autonomy. However, in practice there’s a need for more clarity, coordination with the National government and more resources devolved to the Municipalities.

This is especially a problem with the poorest ones. Since 1997 the Central government has given priority to the poorest municipalities and has supported a policy of respect for the mayors and local councils, larger capital for investment in rural roads, electrification, communication systems, schools and health centres. In so doing, Nicaragua is working towards the fulfilment of the commitments reached by all five Central American Presidents in the Stockholm meeting: democracy, transparency, governance, civic participation and the strengthening of the decentralisation process, understood also to include gender equality and child, ethnic and minority rights.

5.2 Encourage and support participation and civic engagement

82. In countries like to Bolivia the process of decentralisation has also helped ensure the implementation of community development programmes, especially regarding the development of basic services and infrastructure. Many countries are also implementing programmes that explicitly promote the participation of women. Cuba and Bolivia have innovative policies in this regard.

83. The Dominican Republic recognises the importance of participatory citizenship as a basic element for the construction and betterment of social housing. Processes of modernisation and decentralisation in the Dominican Republic have facilitated the work of non-governmental organisations and the collaboration between government and civil society. This is evident in the progress made since 1996 with, for example, the adoption of the 11 point programme to better address the housing needs of low income families, changing of role of the State from constructor and executor to facilitator, supporting NGOs and communities working in construction and up-grading.

84. In Brazil, mass participation and civil mobilisation has multiplied countrywide, due to advertising campaigns, grassroots movements, networks, forum, and committees, as well as the communications media.

Chapter 6

International Cooperation

6.1 Enhance International Cooperation and Partnerships

85. In the last few years the trend of reduction of ODA funds (multilateral and bilateral) to the Latin America and Caribbean region has been drastic; the region receives now less than 3% of total funds earmarked for world-wide activities. This is the result of global decisions directing the bulk of ODA toward the poorest regions in the world, with special earmarking for Less Developed Countries (LDCs). Currently, only Haiti is listed as LDC in the LAC region. Particularly affected have been UNDP, a traditional multilateral provider of funds for development assistance. As a result, technical multilateral agencies which had historically relied on UNDP as main source of financing for their technical cooperation programmes have been adversely affected. Donor countries have also considerably reduced the volume of their spending in Latin America and the Caribbean focusing geographically on a reduced number of especially vulnerable countries.

86. The Latin American and Caribbean region shows as a whole higher GDP levels than other developing regions, which explains the policy decision of reducing drastically the volume of financial assistance. At the same time, countries of the LAC region display more sharply than those of other developing regions, unequal distribution of wealth, discrepancies of

income, excessive concentration of GDP within tiny percentages of population. Poverty is therefore an acute and endemic phenomenon, a situation that does not justify the reduction in international aid. This has prompted a further shift in much of the current bilateral financing which is increasingly being directed toward those institutions perceived to better address poverty alleviation concerns and more efficiently reach the poor, i.e. NGOs.

87. United Nations agencies, like UNCHS (Habitat) without core resources of their own to invest in country programmes, have also seen their traditional technical assistance role change drastically. The main source of funding originates now from Governments of the regions rather than from external funding; this factor tends to shift toward the punctual provision of specific technical services in support of government programmes rather than the execution of complete projects.

88. A Memorandum of Understanding between Jamaica and Cuba and a draft Agreement between India and Jamaica have been signed. This enables Jamaica to facilitate transfers of technology between Jamaica and those countries. International Cooperation in the areas of science and technology is of great significance to Jamaica as Information Technology is one of the key areas on the Government's development agenda.

89. In multi and bilateral programmes, housing does not rank high at all in current priorities except when it enters as a component in broad poverty reduction programmes. Housing has ranked highly in the last few years, in terms of capital

funding and related technical assistance, only as a result of natural catastrophes, which have brought emergency funding directed at reconstruction. Inadequate attention has however been paid, because of the humanitarian oriented character of the funding, to addressing long-term policy issues including the root-causes of settlements vulnerability.

90. Increased emphasis has been directed to issues related to decentralisation policies, municipal management and strengthening. Central Governments in most countries in LAC have transferred progressively a number of competencies, tasks and functions to local government. Municipal authorities appear therefore increasingly as very logical and legitimate partners of multilateral development institutions and are in need of technical assistance. However, they are hardly getting the assistance that they need.

91. The relation between municipalities and multi and bilateral agencies is not yet a direct one, requiring instead, an agreement between the external agency and central government. In many countries the process is unduly complicated by regulations and procedures, or political considerations. This is a central point in the agenda of the debate between central authorities and municipal institutions. The difficulties of entering directly and easily into project agreements with municipalities also exist in cases when a municipal authority can afford and is willing to finance the project. The result is that multilateral agencies still find it difficult to translate into practice their message of increased support to local and grass-root action, in spite of good intentions. This constraint proves especially serious for Habitat whose explicit focus is the city level.

Annex 1

List of member states that have submitted their reports as of March 2000

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Chile
Colombia
Cuba
Dominican Republic
El Salvador
Jamaica
Mexico
Nicaragua
Panama
Peru
Suriname
Venezuela