



## **ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review**

### **Regional Preparatory Meeting on Sustainable Urbanization Kingdom of Bahrain, 1-2 June 2008**

#### **Background Note<sup>1</sup>**

##### **1. Background**

The Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain is hosting a regional meeting on “Sustainable Urbanization” on 1-2 June 2008. The outcome of the meeting will contribute towards this year’s Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) to be held in New York in July 2008 during the Substantive session of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The theme of the 2008 Review is "Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development ".

From the 1995 Rabat Declaration on Sustainable Human Settlement Development to the 2000 Bahrain document on basic principles and procedures for the implementation of the Habitat agenda in the Arab region (Istanbul + 5) and several recent initiatives, this region has made substantive headway in addressing the daunting challenges of rapid urbanization. More recently, the 2007 Arab Regional Conference on Interdependency between Rural and Urban Areas, held in Cairo, underscored the need to address the phenomenon of urbanization with a sustainable development approach that recognizes, on the one hand, the strategic roles of cities in economic development and, on the other hand, the adverse impacts of uncontrolled urbanization. It has become clear for Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) countries that sustainable urban development is paramount for the quality of urban life of future generations.

The Regional meeting on Sustainable Urbanization has the following objectives:

##### *Overall Purpose:*

To provide a forum for national governments, local authorities and civil society to assess progress made towards the implementation of Millennium Development Goal 7 (targets 9, 10 and 11) and other related Global Plans of Action,

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by UN-HABITAT.

including the Habitat Agenda and the Johannesburg Programme of Implementation (JPOI).

*Specific Objectives:*

- i) Fully understand and promote the concept of sustainable urbanization as a means of addressing the social, economic and environmental challenges of rapid and often poorly planned urbanization in the region;
- ii) Assess implementation of specific policies and strategies on: (a) slum upgrading and prevention, including equal access to land, housing and basic infrastructure and services; and (b) governance, including decentralization and the planning and management of settlements;
- iii) Formulate appropriate actions to integrate sustainable urbanization and the attainment of MDG 7 Targets 9, 10 and 11 in national development plans and priorities as key steps in the implementation of the Johannesburg Programme of Implementation (JPOI) and the Habitat Agenda;
- iv) Develop recommendations in the area of urban planning, providing social services, meeting the technological and financial needs, including Islamic banking;
- v) Share lessons learned from successful policies and promote scaling-up of good practices; and
- vi) Report the outcome of the regional meeting to the 2008 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review to be held in New York in July.

## **2. Introduction**

“Sustainable Urbanization” is a multi-dimensional dynamic process. It includes not only environmental but also social, economic and political-institutional sustainability. It encompasses urban-rural linkages and the full range of human settlements from village to town to city to metropolis. Sustainable urbanization bridges the crucial linkages between cities and their environment, at local, metropolitan, regional, national and global levels. It provides a framework for dealing with the environmental impact of cities on their hinterlands, including adaptation to, and mitigation of, climate change. It also provides a platform for managing the economic relationships between town and countryside. Sustainable urbanization is a concept that goes beyond the traditional arguments around the urban-rural dichotomy and recognizes the need to come to terms with rapid urbanization and urban growth by focusing on the effective management of these processes to achieve functional, resilient and responsive human settlements.

Economic and social dimensions, such as poverty and deprivation, governance, gender inequality and social exclusion are central challenges to sustainable urbanization at all levels. Water and sanitation in human settlements, for instance, are vital for health and for economic prosperity, especially for the poor. But, if the current inadequate provisions are to be corrected, communities, civil society and local government will have to work together. Local authorities endowed with adequate powers, resources and operational capacity, combined with empowered

communities and other local partners are the key actors in the sustainable urbanization equation.

This partnership approach was well articulated in the Habitat Agenda that has two main goals, adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world. This mission was restated in MDG 7 (environmental sustainability) under target 10 on halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015, and target 11 on making significant improvements in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 and promoting cities without slums through slum prevention strategies at national and local levels.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development of 2002 further emphasized the importance of shelter as a key focus alongside water and sanitation, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB). The 2005 World Summit Outcome in Paragraph 56(m) re-iterated the importance of slum upgrading and called for further and urgent action to prevent the future formation of slums and encouraged support to the United Nations Habitat and Human Settlements Foundation and its Slum Upgrading Facility.

Urbanization is taking place at an unprecedented scale and pace. It is estimated that the world's urban population is growing at the rate of about 70 million people per year, most of whom end up living in overcrowded slums, which are characterized by extreme poverty, inadequate housing, lack of secure tenure and lack of basic services, especially drinking water and sanitation.

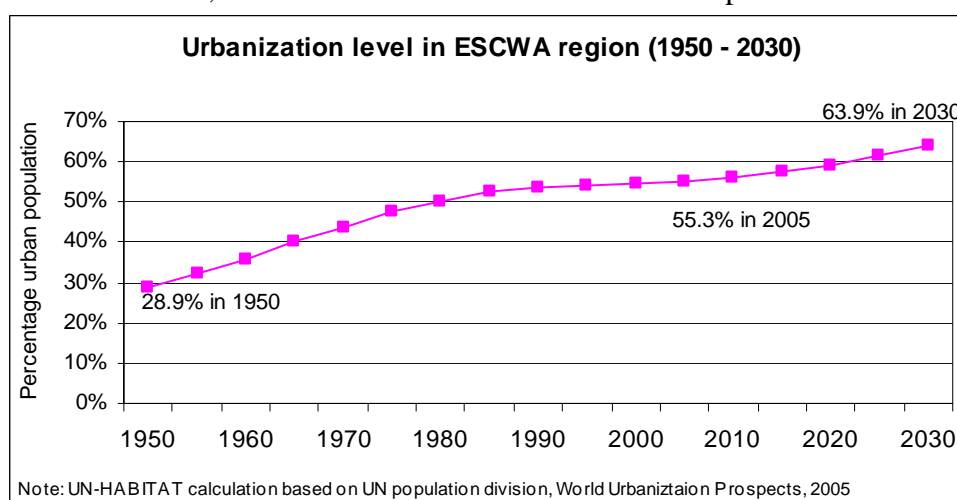
It is projected that in the next 25 years the number of slum dwellers, which currently stands at about one billion, will increase to two billion if no serious action is taken. Recent estimates indicate that about 2 billion people will be added to the number of urban dwellers in the developing countries over the next 25 years. To meet the needs of this additional population, an average of 35 million new houses, and the requisite infrastructure and services, will have to be provided every year for the next 25 years. Of the one billion urban dwellers currently living in slums, 94 per cent are in the South. In the least developed countries, 78 per cent of the urban population live in slums, while 42 per cent of the urban population in all developing countries combined are slum dwellers.

### **3. Urbanization trends in the ESCWA region**

In the ESCWA region, slightly more than half of the total population (55.3 per cent or 106 million people) was living in urban areas in 2005. The urban population in the region has grown more than nine-fold since 1950, and urban growth rates were approximately 3 per cent a year from 1990 to 2005. It is projected that this trend will continue, and the urban population in the region will reach nearly 200 million by 2030.

Slum and urban growth rates in the region are almost the same, roughly 3 per cent per annum since 1990. Slum prevalence in the ESCWA region, as a whole, was 36 per cent in 2001, but varied greatly among countries. While only 2 per cent of the urban population of Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates live in slum conditions, in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria, the figures are between 10 to 20 per cent.

Very high slum prevalence is found in Iraq, Oman, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Yemen, where more than 50 per cent of the urban population live in slums. However, some cities suffer more from shelter deprivation than others. For



instance, while 96 per cent of the population of Port Said in Egypt has access to sanitation, Aswan has slightly less than 70 per cent access. In other cities, like Sana'a and Taiz in Yemen, access to sanitation was 77 per cent for both cities, while access in Aden is more than 90 per cent. While most cities in Yemen enjoy access to a safe water source, in the city of Taiz, only 56 per cent of the population enjoys this access. In some countries, conflict has worsened urban living conditions. The Iraq Living Conditions Survey of 2004, for instance, shows that while water coverage is nearly universal in cities, such as Baghdad, almost half of all other Iraqi households experience problems with water supply. Iraq is introducing large scale change under extremely difficult conditions but sustainability remains an issue.

Although rural poverty levels in the region are generally higher than urban poverty levels, inequalities in cities tend to be higher than in rural areas. However, the regional average for inequality is much lower (0.3 gini) than that of Latin America and the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa (more than 0.5).

Several policy implications follow. Cities and governments must address the challenge of the increasing demand for housing, land and basic services, coupled with continuous upward demographic pressures. This means both addressing urgent needs, as well as identifying strategic opportunities for achieving long-lasting solutions geared to sustainable urbanization.

#### **4. Urban infrastructure and access to services in the ESCWA region**

Urban infrastructure and services run a wide spectrum – from the basic, such as water, sanitation and electricity, to the more-advanced, such as public transportation, information and communication infrastructure, and waste management. While all are integral components contributing to sustainable urbanization, access to clean water -- the foundation of life -- is the most critical of them all. It is also the service most at risk throughout the region.

An adequate water supply to cope with a rapidly growing urban population and with water scarcity remains a chronic difficulty in the ESCWA region. Key challenges are demographic pressure, coupled with rapidly expanding irrigated agriculture, as well as rapid industrialization. Another challenge for sustainable urbanization is that growing demand cannot be matched by an adequate supply, which, in turn, further increases the pressure on finite supplies. This dual pressure – population growth and rapid urbanization – is a critical challenge, resulting in increasing demand for domestic water in cities that are thirsty for water but have insufficient financial resources. Although most people have access to clean drinking water and sanitation services in the region, services coverage remains a problem, especially in lower-income areas (see box 1).

Water shortage results in increasing competition for water among the various sectors. Agriculture accounts for 85 per cent of water use in West Asia, domestic use for 10 per cent and industry five per cent. The agricultural share is well above the world average of 70 per cent. The scarcity and unreliability in service provision has boosted the uncontrolled spread of private wells. In some cities in the region, for example Sana'a, Amman and Damascus, water shortage for domestic use has become a key issue. In some countries, like Yemen, rapid population growth is outpacing new water supply schemes.

**Box 1: MDGs in urban areas and integrated water resources management**

A comparatively high percentage of people in West Asia have access to a water supply and basic sanitation and the region is favourably placed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in these areas. The MDG goals aim to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015.

However, the development of integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans between 2000 and 2004 has been slow. An effective national institutional framework will be required through the adoption of national water plans, improvement of irrigation systems and cooperation in shared river basins. Sound water resources assessment in several countries requires monitoring networks and databases.

Poor water resources management threatens aquatic ecosystems in the region. To protect them, the issues of pollution and increased salinity, recycling of wastewater through treatment and reuse, and water harvesting must be addressed.

A report by ESCWA submitted to the 13th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development underscored the need for sufficient funds, training and credible information. Among its recommendations were the: Establishment of an Arab fund to finance preparation and implementation of water development projects; Development of a regional programme for education, training and awareness raising; and Creation of regional water monitoring and information networks.

Source: <http://www.unep.org/geo/yearbook/yb2004/056.htm>

Amman, Jordan is a specific example of a thirsty city, as shortages have reached the point, where many residents receive water only one day a week. The government is undertaking a series of initiatives to address this problem, including piping water to the city from the Disi aquifer some 325 km away. The sustainability of this supply remains a concern as the aquifer holds fossil water and is already showing signs of depletion and increasing salinity.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries face even greater water scarcity and, if present trends continue and the problem is not addressed structurally, water shortages may soon reach crisis level. Groundwater mining is now the key source to satisfy the demands for water. However, other forms of water collection are becoming more popular, such as desalination, waste-water treatment and reuse, and the harvesting of surface runoff water. Rising demand implies a need for heavy capital investment in treatment plants and alternative means of water production. Therefore, water management and planning is likely to become a key issue with regard to sustainable urbanization in the region.

## Questions

- **What are the major successes throughout the region in improving access to services, including basic ones, such as water, sanitation and energy? How are the issues of mass transit, waste management and health being managed? Which cities are lagging behind?**
- **In light of the expected increase in population in the region, is enough being done to ensure long-term access to water? What actions must be taken at city, country and regional levels?**
- **How well is urban planning systematically employed in cities and towns to ensure adequate infrastructure and services in the region? Are cities mainly coping with present challenges or preparing for the future? To what extent are other stakeholders involved in the planning process?**
- **What could be done to strengthen the capacity of local authorities and planners to ensure sound, long-term urban planning?**

## 5. Green architecture for sustainable urbanization

It is no coincidence that climate change has emerged at the forefront of international debate precisely at the same time, and virtually at the same pace, as the world becomes urbanized. This is because urbanization brings about irreversible changes in our production and consumption patterns. How we plan, manage and live in our growing cities determine, to a large extent, the pace of global warming. This is because 75 per cent of global energy consumption occurs in cities and 80 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming come from urban areas. Roughly half of these emissions are caused by burning fossil fuels for urban transport; the other half comes from energy to heat or cool our buildings and to run our appliances. These are the hallmarks of our built environment and our quest for quality of life in urban places.

Cities, especially new cities, can support larger populations while limiting their adverse impacts on the natural environment and, consequently, hold promise for sustainable human settlement. To safeguard the environment and preserve the quality of life for future generations, it is, therefore, imperative to respond with better sustainable planning for urban growth. Developing the world's cities and achieving sustainable urbanization require the balanced integration of sustainable urban development into urban planning, while paying due attention to its impact on the outer-city environment.

Sustainable urban design and architecture are key considerations in environmental planning and management that seek to improve living conditions while preventing inequity and exclusion. Sustainable architecture is about capturing the relationship between human beings and living systems in the built environment, while

at the same time enhancing the harmony, performance and durability of the relationship. Sustainability should be an essential consideration during the urbanization and building design and planning processes, and fully integrate form, function, site, structure, system, resource use and construction, among others. Designers need to integrate different aspects of project decisions, management, and implementation that attend to concerns with indoor air quality, pollution, climate change, energy and water conservation, and affordability and sustainability, in general.

With the rapid turn-around in the development prospects of some developing countries and the imperative of rapid urbanization mentioned above, the potential for leap-frogging urban settlements of the future through smart growth offers potentials for the development of more sustainable built environments and more sustainable urban settlements for the future. This potential can be unleashed through strategies that promote sustainable urban development that have positive impacts by improving on successful practices from the past and by emulating new techniques that have recently been developed and tried in new urban developments.

Buildings account for a substantial amount of electricity and water consumption, greenhouse emissions, raw material use and waste output. Breakthroughs in building science, technology and operations are available with which to 'build green' and maximize both economic and environmental performance, use of materials, technology, planning design and construction techniques. Green buildings promote the use of locally produced, renewable products, environmentally sound development and construction practices, and energy and resource-efficient systems.

## **Questions**

- **Can the principles of "smart growth" be applied in the region to help cities leap-frog to more sustainable urban settlements?**
- **Are the technologies needed to do so widely available? Are they affordable?**
- **What benefits have so far been realized from the deployment of green architecture in the region?**
- **How can the principles of green architecture and sustainable urban planning be applied in less affluent cities and sub-regions?**
- **What can the rest of the world learn from the region's experience in constructing green buildings?**

## **6. Financing and technology transfer for sustainable development**

Resource mobilization must be a key strategy, in order to promote sustainable urban development. Cities must resort to innovative land use instruments and land management tools that foster resource mobilization and result in different financing mechanisms – generated from within their own domain – for investments in infrastructure, services, affordable housing and environmentally sound technologies. The design of legal instruments and the capacity to apply land use planning instruments, such as transfer of development rights, land readjustment, and progressive tax, to mention a few, need to also be part of the equation.

Mobilization of resources, both public and private, including through the Islamic banking and finance system, is another key challenge that requires concerted

action and capacity building. Recent experiences have shown that, with a combination of enabling policies, strengthened capacities and improved governance and accountability, local authorities in rapidly urbanizing developing countries are able to raise their revenue levels several fold. These revenues can then be leveraged with private and public sector resources and invested in urban infrastructure and basic services, including transport, energy and water and sanitation, as well as in slum improvement. Lessons learned from these policies and practices need to be widely shared and disseminated.

Due to its underlying principles, the Islamic financial system can help economies follow a sustainable development path. As investors, innovators and stakeholders, Islamic banks have the ability to contribute to strengthening environmental policy. They can encourage borrowers to be socially responsible, align lending activities with environmental causes and provide financing for eco-friendly projects. Islamic financial institutions could develop new, profitable lines of business, such as building expertise in providing finance for key sustainable development sectors, including city planning and water and waste management.

Microfinance schemes, particularly those funding the purchase of houses, their improvement or services, have an important role to play in extending and enhancing property and land rights, while alleviating poverty. Islamic principles of equal opportunity, advocacy of entrepreneurship, risk sharing, disbursement of collateral-free loans, and participation of the poor are supportive of microfinance principles. Islamic finance has an important role to play in widening provision of funds to enable the purchase of, or building of, homes, and in enabling their owners to use the property for further income generation.

The poorest of the urban poor, including squatters on remote or unutilized land and those living in rental arrangements in overcrowded inner-city slum tenements are not currently being served by housing microfinance programmes. The development of appropriate financial instruments to meet the shelter needs of this latter population group is a great challenge facing the housing microfinance industry today. An appropriate regulatory framework is required for a vigorous housing finance system, especially given the importance of housing as a key national asset in most countries.

Technology transfer is also essential for sustainable development, for example, in the areas of climate change adaptation and mitigation, and sustainable urbanization, as noted above. Transmission of knowledge and skills to effectively utilize new technologies is also essential. Despite recognition of the need for technology transfer at the various United Nations conferences and summits on sustainable development, many countries still face difficulties in accessing proprietary and even publicly available technologies, especially due to a shortfall of financial resources.

In order to live up to commitments to ensure technology transfer to developing countries, development partners need to step up in providing preferential and concessional terms of technology transfer. The Global Environment Facility (GEF), for instance, provides financing for projects in renewable energies, energy efficiency, sustainable transportation and new low-greenhouse gas energy technologies. As the main driver of public research and development programmes and a contributor to private sector research and development for environmentally sound technologies, developed country governments can play a critical role in the transfer and dissemination of technology. The private sector, as owners of intellectual property (IP), is also an important vehicle for transfer of proprietary technology and should be



tapped in combination with local innovation. Increased incentives are further needed to promote research and development of new environmentally sound technologies.

## Questions

- **What innovative financial products have the potential to promote sustainable development in the region?**
- **What types of financial services are available to the poor? How can they contribute to national savings and facilitate ownership of homes?**
- **What further steps are needed to standardize products, procedures, systems, rules and regulations for Islamic finance and banking?**
- **How best can Islamic financial institutions attract non-Muslims interested in ethical investments?**
- **What actions can be taken in the region and by the international community to ensure the transfer of environmentally friendly technologies on a concessional and preferential basis to developing countries?**
- **How is it possible to build the absorptive capacities of the countries in the region for technologies that are essential for sustainable urbanization?**

## 7. Challenges and responses

The principal challenges to sustainable urbanization lie in the general lack of planning and management capacities of local governments and their ability, or willingness, to work in partnership with local stakeholders. Meeting this challenge requires a combination of policies and strategies that effectively deal with urban governance and management (see box 2). Key issues include: fiscal and political decentralization to enable local authorities to fulfil their roles comprehensively; strengthening spatial planning and management and pro-poor housing and urban development; and the provision of basic infrastructure and services, including water and sanitation.

These issues call for a variety of responses, particularly capacity-development initiatives directed at the full range of local and national authorities and their civil society partners, so that both institutional strengthening and improved skills are put in place to address the challenges imposed by unprecedented urbanization. This will enable countries and cities to embed sustainable urbanization in national development policies and strategies, as well as in the preparation and implementation of integrated local development plans.

However, addressing the challenge of sustainable urbanization must go beyond capacity, autonomy and political will issues, related to the role of city governments. It must also include the design and implementation of local development plans in partnership with other stakeholders.

### **Box 2: Urbanization and sustainability in Jordan**

Jordan's urbanization is closely associated with the geo-political situation in the region. It has a population of 5.5 million. As a middle-income country, it is making economic progress. Despite the fact that it is notably resource-poor, with no oil resources and limited water resources, its population enjoys one of the highest per capita disposable incomes compared to other countries in the region. The country depends, to a large extent, on migrant labour remittances from its work force abroad. Jordan's GNI per capita was \$2,500 in 2007. Jordan's success is based on its political stability and its ability to attract investments from Gulf countries.

Jordan's cities are modernizing at a very fast pace compared to other countries in the region. This is mainly a result of its leadership that puts governance reform and planning for development and

investment at the forefront of Jordan's urban agenda. Cities in Jordan, which have sprawled without any plans in the past, are now being organized. Cities are increasingly adopting strategic planning approaches that address environmental issues and plan strategically for effective conservation of their very limited water resources and consumption of energy.

Amman, Zarka and Aqaba have been leading in recognizing the importance of strategic planning and preparing a master plan that adopts a new governance agenda. These initiatives place the people in the forefront and are demand driven in their problem-solving approach. These cities address transportation issues, natural resources conservation and effective utilization of land and ensure security of tenure.

Amman's master planning process can be regarded as a best practice in regard to good urban governance, through the creation of a collective city vision of sustainable urbanization. The plan won the world leadership award for town planning in 2007. The city of Amman was also awarded with the title of the city of the year for the Middle East and Asia for many reasons.

The system of governance is modernizing and all efforts are geared to work effectively in attracting investment while ensuring sustainable development. Furthermore, the city embarked on an efficient transportation plan while building its capacity for effective local governance, land management, taxation and by providing employment opportunity for its young population.

Jordan's challenge in regard to sustainable urbanization remains one of ensuring adequate shelter for lower-income households and improving living conditions in the few remaining slums and in the refugee camps.

Following a successful housing reform programme, this type of problem is being addressed in the master plans of cities, together with the Housing and Urban Development Corporation, which is actively involved in a programme for low-income housing. The housing reform programme aims to liberalize the housing market and widen housing finance opportunities, as well as diversifying the available housing options in the market.

UN-HABITAT, 2008.

City managers and planners should find ways of exchanging experiences within the region and beyond. This calls for more diverse and active forms of experience sharing, information exchange and mutual learning, including effective access to lessons learned and best practices.

Making cities aware of, and responsive to, their wider social and environmental impacts, especially potentially adverse impacts on surrounding rural areas, is another vital awareness-raising and capacity-building task. Equally important is the development of institutions, procedures and capabilities for communities to become active partners in decisions that affect their living conditions and livelihoods.

Addressing the growth pattern of cities through anticipated policies and strategic plans that can induce smart growth developments will help local governments and planning agencies to better manage land resources and the surrounding urban environment. Cities can no longer grow indefinitely into their valuable surrounding environment without incurring serious risks to their sustainability and manageability. Programmes of urban intensification, together with the maximization of existing infrastructure and land within its urban boundaries, indicate the need to change urban planning and management practices. There is a need to move away from blueprint planning that has characterised many of the new towns, urban growth projects and redevelopment interventions in many of the ESCWA countries. As seen in Egypt, sustainable urbanization implies the need to introduce significant changes in urban planning practice (see box 3).

The issue of regional and global cooperation also deserves more attention. Such cooperation could focus on three major aspects. Firstly, it could identify areas where regional efforts need to be intensified for the creation of sustainable cities. Secondly, mobilizing regional and global partnerships could be an important aid in promoting sustainable urbanization. Thirdly, the mobilization of resources and technological know-how is a key to sustainable development.

**BOX 3: Eforts towards sustainable urbanization in Egypt**

Egypt is suffering more than benefiting from the seeds of its growing urbanization. Egyptian cities, which cover only 5.5 per cent of its total area of one million kilometers, are facing great challenges. The country's population has reached 80 million, due to an annual increase of approximately 1.35 million per annum. Almost 25 per cent of the total population is poor; unemployment is approaching 20 per cent; and around 50 per cent of the urban population live in slums and unplanned informal settlements. Lack of security of tenure and access to quality infrastructure are challenges for sustainable urbanization. The lack of affordable housing combined with poorly administered public land, weak land management and administration and the lack of effective property taxation are the main causes of the increasing informal land subdivisions and encroachments on agriculture land. This is the most serious threat to sustainable urbanization in Egypt.

Economically, Egypt has achieved growth rates of around 7 per cent in recent years, due to an aggressive structural economic adjustment programme and national advocacy campaigns to attract foreign investments. Privatization accelerated and reforms in the income tax system yielded good economic returns. The Government has also undertaken measures to reform the financial sector, restructure customs, expand mortgage lending and create a micro-finance market and its related institutions.

However, the majority of the urban poor have not gained from the economic boom. The historical over-centralized local governance system inhibits attempts to distribute the economic gains. Additionally, the current education system is unable to respond to the requirements of the job market, leaving large number of recently graduated youth unemployed.

In addition to aggressive economic reforms, Egypt is giving serious attention to addressing the socio-economic and environmental negative impacts of uncontrolled urbanization. A sustainable urbanization strategy is being developed. The Government, with the support of UN HABITAT, embarked on a country-wide programme to revise its urban planning process, review and enact a new urban planning law to ensure citizen participation, and commit cities to develop strategic plans. Nearly 50 cities are taking part in this process. Effective local governance remains a challenge in Egypt. However, the Government has taken active steps to decentralize services to the local level (water, privatized solid waste collection and electricity supply). However, some of these services are still not efficient (e.g. solid waste collection, public transit), leading to increased air, earth and water pollution.

The Government is also slowly implementing a programme to redevelop Cairo: improve slums in different cities; provide infrastructure services; regularize informal settlements; and grant tenure security. The programme that started in 1993 has yielded good results, contributing to reduce the number of people living in slums by 30 per cent. The new town initiative was partially successful in addressing the growing need for shelter, economic opportunities and quality education. Good examples are Six October City and New Cairo. An important factor for their success is connectivity to old urban centres. Their success has encouraged the Government, after careful studies for more than two years, to create new governorates that oversee those new towns (Six October and Helwan Governorates). This will also reduce the pressure on the current Cairo governorate urban management system.

The great challenges to sustainable urbanization are effective transport and proper transit-based urban planning and the creation of urban nodes. Good networking of cities and the creation of a culture of reliance on public transportation systems remain one of Egypt's key challenges. The Cairo underground has been successful in transporting middle- and low-income Egyptians in Cairo and reducing air pollution. The challenge remains on how to effectively redevelop urban centers around it and ensure a smart growth approach.

UN-HABITAT, 2008.

UN-HABITAT is the focal point agency in the United Nations system for the Millennium Development Goal 7, Target 11, which aims to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020.

UN-HABITAT is in the process of strengthening this sustainable urbanization agenda and its assistance to Member States by implementing a six-year Medium-Term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTSIP) 2008-2013, approved by the Governing Council in April 2007. The overall goal of the strategy is to “support governments and their development partners to achieve more sustainable urbanization.” It aims to promote policy and institutional reform and impact at scale. UN-HABITAT will play a strengthened catalytic role, emphasizing partnerships and the development of a new enhanced normative and operational framework. The Plan is informed by an in-depth analysis of emerging trends and patterns of urbanization, slum formation, urban poverty, cities and climate change, and constitutes UN-HABITAT’s contribution to the United Nations system-wide reform and coherence.

As part of the MTSIP, five mutually-reinforcing Focus Areas have been identified as an integrated approach to realizing more sustainable urbanization: (i) advocacy, monitoring and partnerships; (ii) participatory urban planning, management and governance; (iii) pro-poor land and housing; (iv) environmentally sound basic urban infrastructure and services; and, (v) strengthened human settlements finance systems.

In conclusion, sustainable development cannot be achieved without sustainable urbanization. Many countries in the region are already adopting best practices and innovating approaches. However, the challenges remain daunting. Countries in the region need to continue to share and build cooperation with each other, in order to address one of the biggest challenges of our times, namely urbanization.

## **Questions**

- **What challenges are common throughout the region? What challenges are unique to the sub-regions?**
- **What successes should the region highlight from which members of the Economic and Social Council can learn?**
- **How can the international community, including the United Nations system, most effectively assist the region/sub-regions to overcome challenges associated with sustainable urbanization?**
- **What actions can be taken in the region to strengthen efforts to achieve sustainable urbanization? What roles do civil society and the private sector have to play?**