



ECOSOC • Integration Segment (27–29 May, 2014)
SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION

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GEORGIA

Contribution to the 2014 United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Integration Segment

Annex

2014 ECOSOC Integration Segment: Sustainable Urbanization

27-29 May, UN Headquarters, NY

- What has been the experience of your country in using urbanization as a tool for the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development?

Growing migration to the cities have resulted in the increase of population density, demand for new workplaces and need for additional transport facilities. All of these have raised significant environmental concerns in many cities, including in Georgian cities. Having analyzed long-term damages these processes may cause, local self-government bodies have started taking respective measures. As a first step, urban development instruments, such as masterplans, have been developed for most of the major cities in Georgia, including its capital Tbilisi. Reflecting current and future potential development trends, these documents help ensure long-term management of natural resources.

With a view to improving the livelihoods of local communities living in dilapidated conditions, especially in the old parts of the city, the City of Tbilisi initiated a large-scale project which envisaged restoration and rehabilitation of cultural heritage properties respecting their cultural value and at the same time addressing the needs of the socially vulnerable population living in these areas. It is important that the inhabitants of the historic quarters were not relocated from the historic districts which enabled to retain the social cohesion in these areas. The investment made in the project has spurred economic development and increased tourist attraction of these areas. It is well known that urban sprawl in many cities has caused additional environmental problems and Tbilisi was not an exception. Contamination of river waters and their surroundings, illegal constructions resulting from the lack of enforcement of relevant regulations in the 1990s, increased CO₂ emissions have been some of the most acute environmental concerns. To address these problems, a report on the condition of the Mtkvari River (the biggest river in Georgia) and a relevant management plan has been developed by the City within the frames of the EU supported project. Masterplans for a number of rivers and lakes in Tbilisi have been developed to create environmentally-friendly urban spaces. Rehabilitation of the Leghvtakhevi, a small river in the old part of the city, was another important project that enabled to integrate the river in the urban space and create unique climatic conditions in the central area. As a result, residents of Tbilisi acquired a new space where they can relax without leaving the city.

It is important to note that Tbilisi joined Covenant of Mayors in April 2010 becoming the first Capital City in the Eastern Partnership to join the Covenant. With this initiative the City committed itself to take up European Commission's initiative of reducing at least 20% of CO₂ emissions by 2020.

In transport Sector the measures are mainly concentrated on raising public transport share in the passenger turnover, raising the attractiveness of public transport, as well as development of electric transport. A major masterplan has been designed for reintroducing light-rail transport in Tbilisi. On the initiative of the city, a cable car network has been constructed in the city to relieve traffic and ensure smooth access to recreational areas in the city.

- **What kinds of investments have been made in your cities to make them hubs of sustainability?**

Several major investments have been made in recent years by the City of Tbilisi to ensure the sustainable urban development of the Georgian capital.

The Tbilisi City Hall made a major investment in the restoration and rehabilitation of the historic parts of the city. The project envisaged the replacement of the outdated underground infrastructure including water and sewage systems, reinforcement of buildings in critical state of preservation and restoration of façades.

Another large-scale project initiated by Georgian authorities was the development of the Rail Bypass Masterplan which envisaged the removal from the centre of Tbilisi of the railway lines used for transporting oil products creating environmental threats to the city . The masterplan was developed with the support of EBRD by an international consortium.

A landfill previously located in the city was closed down and replaced by another landfill outside the city far from the populated area.

- **How have you addressed specific urbanization challenges in an integrated way?**

Increased urbanization in the Georgian capital has resulted in the reduction of recreational areas, which are essential for ensuring proper living conditions of city inhabitants. The Tbilisi City Hall has produced a major long-term development plan for the Tbilisi Sea (artificial lake located in the suburbs of the city) to ensure its integration in the urban fabric of the city and enable its recreational use. The site will be a major venue of the European Youth Olympic Festival 2015. It is important to note that the infrastructure created for the international sports event was designed to allow certain changes in its use after 2015 (e.g. residential, hotel accommodation and public uses). The project helped to address environmental, social and economic challenges as it enabled to create eco-friendly urban setting with recreational facilities (aqua park, yacht club, sports facilities, etc), improving living conditions of the local community living in the vicinity of the Tbilisi Sea, increase the attraction of this site and make it a tourist destination.

- **What kinds of institutional structures are in place in your country for effective governance, policy-making and planning for sustainable urbanization?**

Competences regarding the urban development are separated among authorities at local, regional and central level. Tbilisi is a self-governing city which enables it to make important decisions regarding the development of the entire city and its districts. The Architecture Department of the Tbilisi City Hall is a major structure responsible for the city development policy. It works closely with other relevant units of the City Hall (i.e. Transport Department, Department of City Improvements, Department of Ecology and Green Spaces and Department of Economic Affairs). It is authorized to determine conditions for land use, approve urban and architectural designs and issue construction permits. It is responsible for drafting major urban development documents and proposing amendments final decision regarding which are made by Tbilisi City Council (elected local authority). Decisions regarding large-scale projects of outstanding significance and those containing increased risks are made by the central authorities (e.g. Ministry of Economy). Developments in the historic part of the city are authorized by the Cultural Heritage Agency, a body subordinated to the Ministry of Culture of Georgia. In certain cases, depending on the complexity project, the approval of the Environmental Agency is also required.

Regional infrastructure projects (e.g. construction of highways, airports, industrial sites) are approved by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development of Georgia.

- **What are some innovations and partnership that demonstrate the power of urbanization in the integration of three dimensions of sustainable development in your country?**

In recent years some positive changes have taken place in Georgia with regard to energy saving issues in the building sector. The Tbilisi Municipality has implemented several programs, including a partnership program that targets energy efficiency issues in buildings. The framework agreement on “Municipal Energy Efficiency Planning” (MEEP) with Energy Saving International (ENSI), a Norwegian energy efficiency and energy business development consulting company, addresses energy efficiency in buildings, the training of municipal key personnel, as well as the development of a municipal building database with the purpose of identification and reduction of energy consumption in the municipality-owned buildings and the planning of future energy saving actions.

USAID has implemented over 30 pilot projects targeting energy efficiency as well as supported a research assessment on energy efficiency and renewable energy potential in Georgia. The residential construction sector of Tbilisi has also been assessed from energy efficiency

perspective. USAID-Winrock launched the NATELI project, aimed at energy efficiency interventions in public and hospital buildings. The project framework has also foreseen cooperation with the municipality in targeting common properties of residential buildings.

Within the INOGATE-SEMISE project preparatory assistance work for SEAP has been done together with the Tbilisi City Hall. According to this assessment the greatest energy saving potential can be found in buildings and the transportation sector.

Energy efficient uses of power and introduction of renewable energy for heating and hot water supply are some of the important innovative solutions currently promoted in the city. The Tbilisi City Hall is working actively with the population to encourage the use of new sources of energy. This has resulted in an increasing demand for eco-friendly residences. One of the recently implemented projects envisaged the utilization of biomass (biowaste) in the heating system of municipal buildings and solar energy use for hot water supply in municipal buildings.