



World Urban Forum

Cities: Crossroads of Cultures

Inclusiveness and Integration?

14-17 September 2008, Barcelona, Spain

Dialogue On Urban Sustainability

Effective partnerships for the environment, the economy and society

Urban areas concentrate half of the world's population and the notion of 'sustainable urbanization' is gaining momentum. It is playing an increasingly important role in the pursuit of global objectives, particularly in connection with Millennium Development Goals. This dialogue will look at sustainable urbanization and discuss the most effective management strategies in the face of the irreversible reality of urban growth.

What is 'sustainable urbanization'?

Sustainable urbanization has no ready-made answers. There are no quick or easy answers and no short cuts either. Instead, UN-HABITAT has opted to look at it as a process of challenges and responses. The discussion will be of special relevance to MDG 7, 'Ensuring environmental sustainability', and more specifically target 7/11: "Improving the lives of 100 million slum dwellers by year 2020, gradually moving towards 'Cities without slums.'"

Challenges to the concept

Sustainable urbanization is a very dynamic process that combines environmental, social, economic and political-institutional sustainability. It brings together urban and rural areas, encompassing the full range of human settlements from village to town to city to metropolis, with links at the national and global levels.

On top of risks to the environment, three factors - poverty, gender inequality and poor 'quality of life' - pose major challenges to sustainable urbanization. Therefore, the economic and social dimensions are important. Just as important is the scourge of HIV/AIDS, which has such powerful effects on cities and poverty. This particular aspect highlights the ability of the concept to include not just current problems and immediate improvements, but the longer term as well.

Governance and capacity

Lack of adequate capacities among local governments and partners in civil society is the major challenge to sustainable urbanization. Good governance has a vital role to play. If they combine adequate powers, resources and operational capacities with community and partner empowerment, local authorities can take a central role in sustainable urbanisation. Mobilization of local resources, whether public or private, is a major challenge.

A broad range of local stakeholders - local authorities, NGOs, communities, women, youth and the private sector - need to build various types of capacity. This includes exchange of information and mutual learning, awareness of, and responsiveness to, cities' broader effects on the environment, and institutional development. Another task is to establish procedures and capabilities to enable communities (especially the poor and women) to become significant and active partners in local urbanization.

A partnership culture

Sustainable urbanization requires a culture of partnerships. This refers to increased commitments by all development partners to support a coalition of joint efforts, particularly in the area of the urban environment at the local, national and global levels. This paper focuses on the environment. A culture of partnerships can make sustainable urban development both achievable and effective through increased resources and more action. It can also result in better implementation and efficiency.



UN bodies as catalysts

As the various partners look to upgrade their capacities to meet the challenges of sustainable urbanization, international agencies like UN-HABITAT can share with them both expertise and linkages. For instance UN-HABITAT, together with the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), supports the urban affairs unit of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) and its "sustainable city" scheme. More generally, the two UN agencies act as catalysts of international, regional, national and local capacities, resources and efforts in favour of sustainable urbanization.

Supporting Agendas 21

UN-HABITAT helps local authorities and their partners build capacities for sustainable urbanization under local Agendas 21. These partnerships in environmental planning and management further MDGs (access to water and sanitation, improving the lives of slum dwellers) through participatory planning, decentralization and inclusive decision-making. UN-HABITAT's main partners in this regard are UNEP, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and capacity-building institutions.

Extending Agendas 21

Other partnerships promote upgrading of 'Local Agenda 21' initiatives into *national* policies. They bring together pivotal urban institutions, city-to-city networks and North-South co-operation. These partnerships enhance the capacities of local and central authorities and urban training institutions, with a view to build the lessons of local experiences into national policies and legal frameworks for sustainable urban development. The main partners include UN-Habitat, UNEP, ILO, UNDP, national governments, local authority associations, the private sector, NGOs and capacity-building institutions.

Local capacities, global agendas

These schemes support the global involvement of local authorities ('G-local'). They provide assistance to those local authorities that contribute to regional and global environmental policies and implement them through various inclusive channels. The partnerships help local authorities achieve MDGs and follow up on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs), the 1996 UN-HABITAT Agenda, as well as the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and the Commission for Sustainable Development. UN-HABITAT's main partners in those schemes are UNEP, regional programmes, national governments, local authority associations like United Cities and Local Government (UC&LG), the private sector and (international) NGOs.

Meeting the challenges

One of the ongoing 'G-local' partnerships is the UNEP/UN-HABITAT Global/Local concept, which raises awareness of the crucial roles cities play both as contributors to, and practitioners of, global environmental issues and standards. Other partnerships include the 'Cities for Climate Protection' Campaign (launched in 1993) and the UN-HABITAT/UNEP Coalition on the Urban Environment in Latin America and the Caribbean.

With its many complex, global dimensions, sustainable urbanization has all the appearances of a daunting challenge. However, the experience that UN-HABITAT and other agencies have gained over the years shows that partnerships have actually delivered a number of tangible local improvements. These partnerships owe their success to co-operation, co-ordination, inclusive governance, broad participation, adequate resources and capacity building.

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