

Better municipal law making for sustainable urban development

Tuesday, October 1st from 14:00 to 17:00, in CNRST (auditorium 2)

There is substantial global consensus, backed by robust evidence, that strong legal systems are a cornerstone of sustainable economic and social urban development. A predictable and transparent urban legal framework is an indispensable precondition to support the sustainable economic and social development of towns and cities and to developing more inclusive and equitable outcomes for urban dwellers. Legal systems affect land and property development, planning and construction, business establishment and operation, the provision of basic services and infrastructure and mobility. They also influence people's capacity to feel safe on the streets or undertake a range of economic activities. Strong legal systems are thus the basis of effective urban governance and can also stimulate and organize urban economic growth, sharing equally the costs and benefits of urban development, preventing speculation and the unbalances of unregulated urban land and property markets.

Many towns and cities experiencing rapid urban growth, however, are largely unprepared to cope with the implications of that change and do not have the necessary regulatory frameworks in place to address issues like urban sprawl, informality, lack of access to basic services and poor infrastructure for example. Appropriate legislative and regulatory frameworks, present a genuine practical challenges for many local authorities in terms of having robust structures in place to manage the range of sustainability challenges facing many towns and cities around the world.

Local law making is thus a critical issue for the 'urban sustainability agenda'. Local law making, whether provincial or municipal, affects urban resident's everyday lives in all countries on a daily basis. Local urban law may involve relatively detailed day to day issues such as parking, waste collection or urban maintenance. It may also touch on important development and planning issues such as real property rights, urban design, infrastructure planning, safety and mechanisms to manage population diversity, i.e. issues that fundamentally impact the biggest assets, basic needs and fundamental rights that many citizens have.

A substantial amount of urban law is made, or at least its implementation designed, at the level close to the people - local government. Despite this, local law making often receives far less attention than national law making. Further, while national level governments usually have fairly sufficient access to human resources for law making (drafters, analysts, statistics, time etc) the same is normally not the case for local governments.

The session will focus on the practical ways in which local law making can be improved to support local authorities urban development and sustainability agendas. The session will explore the issues facing local government in terms of local law making drawing on the practical experience of various municipalities (case studies will be presented). The session will also provide an opportunity for Mayors and representatives from local authorities to discuss possible solutions and ways to improve their regulatory systems, including capacity building needs and reform priorities.

The outcomes of the session are vital for UN-Habitat to better assist local and municipal governments in ensuring that their urban legislation can deliver the urban development and planning outcomes required for their towns and cities.