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**Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements  
Programme, including coordination matters**

**Activities of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme**

**Report of the Executive Director**

**Addendum**

**Coordinated implementation of the guidelines on access to basic  
services for all and the guidelines on decentralization and  
strengthening of local authorities**

*Summary*

In accordance with Governing Council resolution 22/8, the present report provides a brief overview of activities undertaken to implement the guidelines on access to basic services for all. In addition, it highlights the activities carried out by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme in consultation with national Governments, local authorities and other stakeholders, including the private sector and United Nations bodies, to prepare and operationalize a strategy for the implementation of the guidelines on access to basic services for all in a way that complements the international guidelines on decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities. It further describes tools prepared to facilitate the implementation process and presents initial findings from assessment surveys carried out in several countries. It also provides information on coordination with other international initiatives and on collaboration with United Cities and Local Governments. Lastly, it provides recommendations with the aim of consolidating the continuing process and streamlining the adaptation of both sets of guidelines to national contexts.

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## Background and introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in response to paragraph 9 of Governing Council resolution 22/8 of 3 April 2009, which requested the Executive Director, in close cooperation with member States and other relevant stakeholders, to prepare an assessment of the implementation and complementarity between the guidelines on decentralization and the guidelines on access to basic services and to report on the progress made in the implementation of the resolution to the Governing Council at its twenty-third session.
2. By that resolution, the Governing Council approved the guidelines on access to basic services for all and acknowledged the coherence and complementarity between the guidelines on access to basic services for all and the international guidelines on decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities adopted by its resolution 21/3 of 20 April 2007.
3. The Governing Council also requested the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), among others, to develop training instruments and assist interested Governments to adapt the guidelines to their national contexts, where appropriate, and further to develop tools and indicators as part of its support for the implementation of the guidelines, in a manner coordinated with the continuing work on the implementation of the guidelines on decentralization.
4. It also requested UN-Habitat to develop innovative partnerships with other United Nations bodies, development banks, Governments, local authorities and their associations, including United Cities and Local Governments, private service providers and Habitat Agenda partners, to support the ownership of the guidelines and their application to local and national circumstances.

### I. Implementation of the guidelines

5. Since their approval in 2009, few local, national or international initiatives have made clear and direct reference to the implementation of the international guidelines on access to basic services for all. Although the process to develop the guidelines was inclusive, participatory and based on the documentation of good practices to capture continuing policy trends for improving access to basic services for all in various economical and geographical contexts, more work remains to be done to adapt the guidelines to local, national and regional contexts and thus to transform them into a useful tool for improving legislative, regulatory and operational frameworks.
6. The difficulty in monitoring the implementation of the guidelines at the national level lies in the required multisectoral approach that is acknowledged in the guidelines' principle on interrelated and coordinated development of basic services<sup>1</sup> of various types. In most countries, no specific national institution is in charge of such coordinated monitoring. National – or subnational where appropriate – responsibilities for developing basic services are often fragmented through various line ministries or specialized agencies and lack a systematic, intersectoral and coordinated approach. Developing and monitoring such efforts to improve access to basic services at the national level would therefore require additional instruments for reviewing and coordinating various sector policies.

#### A. Complementarity with the international guidelines on decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities

7. The ultimate objective of the guidelines on decentralization is to promote the strengthening of local authorities and to advocate their empowerment in the provision of basic services. This provides the justification for the adoption of a complementary approach to both sets of guidelines in line with resolution 22/8. Recognition of the local dimension of basic services and the need for effective decentralization to facilitate their delivery, along with the need to improve citizens' access to them, remain the focus of UN-Habitat work in these key areas.
8. Following on from efforts to formulate a road map for the implementation process, supported initially by the Government of France and Veolia Environment with the participation of other countries and partners,<sup>2</sup> UN-Habitat developed a comprehensive programme document highlighting the three major components of its strategy and outlining specific steps towards effective convergence and harmonization of activities in the adaptation of both sets of guidelines to national and local situations. The main elements of this strategy include:

- (a) Policy development and advocacy at the national and regional levels;

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1 Defined in paragraph 84 of the Habitat Agenda.

2 Explained in paras. 15 and 17 of the present report.

- (b) Training and capacity development at the local, national and regional levels;
- (c) Monitoring and reporting.

9. In Latin America, UN-Habitat efforts to mobilize partners at various levels have been focused on the first component of this strategy, in particular on the dissemination of the guidelines on decentralization. The guidelines have been presented to the Federation of Latin American Cities, Municipalities and Associations of Local Governments and other interested partners, including at an expert meeting during a Federation conference in Argentina in 2009. As a follow-up to similar consultations in other countries, a number of specific projects have been developed to facilitate national dialogues on decentralization and the strengthening of local authorities in Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica and Mexico with the aim of identifying innovations in public policies and intergovernmental coordination at the local and national levels. The exchange of experiences between representatives of the Governments of Ibero-American and Mediterranean countries at the local, municipal, national and regional levels on the relevance of decentralization policies in improving access to basic services has the potential to facilitate fruitful South-South cooperation in the region.

10. Preliminary surveys are under way in several countries to elicit information for the above-mentioned implementing strategy for the adaptation of the guidelines to local contexts and the development of related action plans to improve access to basic services for all in coordination with decentralization frameworks. Preliminary findings demonstrate that many stakeholders share similar concerns and are familiar with the principles highlighted in both sets of guidelines.

11. Wherever action has been taken to implement this process, surveys have shown that assessments conducted at the municipal or city level are crucial to understanding geographical and sectoral gaps in access to basic services and their interrelated nature. Pilot initiatives demonstrate the necessity for intersectoral horizontal coordination at various levels.

12. Surveys have also highlighted the importance of vertical coordination between the district or neighbourhood levels (where communities can engage practically), the municipality and city levels (where local authorities hold major related responsibilities) and the provincial and/or national levels (where key legislative, normative, financial and, sometimes, operational functions are anchored). Against this backdrop, coherent financing frameworks working across the various levels are essential to consolidating the decentralization process and tackling the lack of stable contractual engagements and overlapping mandates and responsibilities between the different administrative levels. Independently of the nature of a particular service, its management mode and the performance of the inter-level coordination framework, universal access is better achieved where local authorities have extended responsibilities in the provision of the service.

13. To deal with the essential cross-sectoral and cross-level dimensions of the development of basic services, the systematic application of strategic development planning instruments is required at various levels, complemented by specific measures for improving cross-level synergies.

## **B. International consultations with partners on implementing tools and related national and regional initiatives**

14. Three major international meetings of partners have taken place since the adoption of the international guidelines on access to basic services. A special meeting and a technical meeting of interested partners were both held on 25 March 2010 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, during the fifth session of the World Urban Forum, followed by a third meeting in Paris on 27 and 28 October 2010. The aim of the third meeting was to pave the way for country-level activities following a comprehensive discussion of the implementation strategy proposed by UN-Habitat with all partners, including external support agencies, beneficiary countries and local authorities.

15. An additional regional meeting of partners will be held in Warsaw in 2011 to discuss the creation of a regional network to support the decentralization process and related developments on access to basic services in the countries of Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe.

16. The meetings held during the fifth session of the World Urban Forum were attended by participants from national Governments, local authorities, civil society, the private sector, financial institutions and international organizations<sup>3</sup> from 15 countries.<sup>4</sup> In conjunction with the development of the above-mentioned pilot projects, a draft version of a handbook for the coordinated implementation of the two sets of guidelines was prepared and discussed at the technical meeting. Participants welcomed the initiative to establish a multi-stakeholder consultative mechanism to support the implementation of the guidelines and coordinate related efforts. Several participants recommended coordinating and harmonizing but keeping separate the implementation processes for the two sets of guidelines in accordance with their distinct scopes, agendas and stakeholders.

17. Participants also recommended that capacity for collecting information on relevant initiatives and tools should be mobilized, taking into account the considerable scope of the issue; that communication and training capacities relevant to the development of national and local knowledge pertinent to the guidelines and the documentation of implementation initiatives and practices should be enhanced; that benchmarking tools for self-assessment and evaluation at the national level should be developed; and that the implementing process should be firmly linked to the capacity development of local authorities to avoid situations where only a few skilled local authorities were able to engage in relevant partnerships and develop bankable projects.

18. At the meeting held in Paris,<sup>5</sup> the strategy and programme for supporting the implementation of the two sets of guidelines was agreed upon, including criteria for the selection of approximately ten interested countries to be considered for the implementation programme's pilot phase, which was aimed at encouraging and supporting further policy reforms and capacity development at the national and regional levels. Following on from the discussions initiated at the meetings in Rio de Janeiro, it was agreed that a single handbook should be finalized to guide the coordinated implementation of the two sets of guidelines by enriching the draft handbook with elements on the process of decentralization to enhance its relevance in improving access to basic services. The revised handbook was finalized by UN-Habitat. It is available in Arabic, English, French and Spanish, and is currently being disseminated worldwide. Participants at the meeting also stressed the need to mainstream the two sets of guidelines together with the handbook in multilateral and bilateral development agencies. In the case of volunteer pilot countries that might require international financial support to adapt the two sets of guidelines to their national contexts, participants agreed on a minimum funding package to be managed by UN-Habitat as the coordinating agency for the implementation of the guidelines or used directly by donor agencies in the context of their bilateral cooperation with selected countries, in which case UN-Habitat would be informed for reporting purposes.

## **C. Coordination with other international initiatives**

19. In recognition of the strategic importance and necessity of ensuring universal social protection, the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination adopted in April 2009 a global initiative for a universal social protection floor. At the request of UN-Habitat, the guidelines on access to basic services for all were included in a compendium of existing technical tools of United Nations agencies for use at the country level to develop national social protection floor concepts. Initiatives related to the implementation of the guidelines at the local and national levels were presented at the second inter-agency technical meeting on the social protection floor initiative held in Geneva on 22 and 23 November 2010.

## **D. Collaboration with United Cities and Local Governments**

20. Based on a revised and consolidated agreement of cooperation providing United Cities and Local Governments with an active role supporting the implementation process at all levels, and as a result of consultations held during the above-mentioned Paris meeting, UN-Habitat reconfirmed its willingness to step up efforts to mobilize local authorities and their associations in two areas. The two areas were capacity-building for local elected leaders to facilitate the dissemination of the guidelines

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3 International Labour Organization, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Institute for Training and Research, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UN-Habitat and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

4 Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Cameroon, China, Eritrea, France, Madagascar, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, Poland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United Republic of Tanzania.

5 Attended by representatives of national Governments, United Cities and Local Governments, the private sector, selected United Nations entities and intergovernmental organizations, including Euromaid and the World Bank.

through informed sources, and monitoring and reporting of good practices through the elaboration of country profiles and enrichment of the Global Observatory on Local Democracy and Decentralization.

## II. Conclusions and recommendations

21. Improving access to basic services for all is a key means of attaining the targets of the Millennium Development Goals and the guidelines represent a major step forward in the international normative agenda.<sup>6</sup> Ensuring universal access to basic services for all is an ambitious objective that can only be achieved progressively through a sustained, coordinated, multisectoral, multi-stakeholder and cross-level endeavour. It should be operationalized mainly at the local level through strategic territorial development planning instruments that require further development and more systematic implementation. Improving articulation and coordination between administrative levels is crucial to tackling overlapping mandates and enhancing indispensable complementarities in the financing of basic services in line with the international guidelines on decentralization.

22. Accordingly, and further to appeal for the coordinated implementation of the two sets of guidelines, the Governing Council may wish to recommend to all Governments that they step up efforts to review and improve their legislation in that area, including on the application of multisectoral and multi-stakeholder strategic development planning instruments at various territorial levels with emphasis on poor and marginalized settlements, and for reviewing inter-level administrative frameworks to avoid overlapping mandates and improve financial mechanisms for ensuring access to basic services for all.

23. The Governing Council may also wish to recommend to all relevant United Nations entities, international financial institutions and development agencies, international associations of local authorities, including United Cities and Local Governments, and other international stakeholders, that they streamline integrated development approaches for all basic services within international normative instruments and support related coordinated operational activities at the local and national levels.

24. The Governing Council may wish to request UN-Habitat to accord special emphasis in its activities and programmes related to decentralization and access to basic services on enhancing national-level and regional-level activities for the implementation of the two sets of guidelines.

25. Lastly, the Governing Council may wish to consider requesting UN-Habitat, within the context of the enhanced normative and operational framework of its medium-term strategic and institutional plan, to strengthen the human and financial capacities of the Regional and Technical Cooperation Division to facilitate the development and testing of multisectoral, multi-stakeholder instruments for operationalizing the guidelines and to assist interested countries to undertake the coordinated adaptation and implementation of the two sets of guidelines.