



Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development
Ministry of Construction

URBAN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (URDI) MYANMAR

CONTEXT

Myanmar, with the installation of the new government, is on the road to modernization and development. Although still a predominantly rural country, urbanization and hence urban development is already a key factor in determining the country's ability to address development challenges like providing jobs to a growing labour force, the provision of socio-economic services and managing the environment. The anticipated rapid economic development will accelerate urbanization and increase the size of the cities & urban centres putting additional burden on existing urban infrastructure and services which are already deficient. There is therefore a need to pursue urbanization policies and programs that will not only address the service deficit but also make urban growth complementary to rural development. It is towards achieving this objective that UN-HABITAT's technical assistance will be wide ranging and delivered in a manner consistent with the need of the sector and government priorities.

In its simplest form, urban development is about facilitating the construction of infrastructure and the provision of services to urban populations to safeguard public health, improve safety and create jobs. Myanmar has 365 urban centers of varying size, ranging from 4.57 million people living in Yangon City to rural service centres of 10,000 people or less; with 81 secondary cities with populations of 100,000 and above. About 34% of the total population is urban. Whilst the three cities of Yangon, Mandalay and Nay Pyi Taw account for more than 35% of the total urban population on average there are two urban centers for every 2,000 sq. km. of the country's land mass. This suggests that while the main cities (with more than 100,000 populations) are economically and politically important, the smaller centers are also playing an important role as service centers for their rural hinterland, fostering urban-rural linkages. These two categories of urban centers will require somewhat different approaches to support their growth management and future urban programs will need to cater to the need of smaller towns and cities as well.

For smaller towns government support will be mainly in the form of installing basic infrastructures complemented by sustained effort to build capacity of those towns to plan their cities and program their investment. For larger cities, visioning, improving urban governance and enhancing the regenerative capacity of the environment will assume greater importance. In all cities and towns, addressing the needs of the urban poor will be a challenge demanding direct action and policy support.

URBAN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE (URDI)

As the center of excellence in human settlements development, UN-HABITAT has the global mandate, responsibility and commitment to support the Government of Myanmar's search for sustainable responses to existing and future challenges. Addressing the service needs of the growing urban population, making urban development more self-financing, and making cities and towns capable of creating enough jobs for the growing urban population are the three facets of the urban challenge the country will face in the near future. Applied urban research and policy cohesion across the sectors will be important to ensure coordination in urban investment coming from public and private sectors, individual households and civil society.

The establishment of Urban Research and Development Institute (URDI), under the umbrella of the Department of Human Settlement and Housing Development (DHSHD), Ministry of Construction, will provide an institutional platform to undertake such research and studies linked to policy formulation and to undertake capacity building initiatives. In this sense URDI will facilitate coordination in technical assistance coming from various sources so that these can be directed at areas where the needs are greatest and in a strategic manner. URDI has been established with the following four main objectives:

- Enabling government agencies and research institutes to perform a think-tank function for the sector, to advocate for due recognition to urbanization as an inevitable process. Important aspects include reviewing urbanization and urban development from the perspective of climatic change, whilst ensuring that it also supports sustainable rural development.
- Assisting the Government to play its role as an enabler in urban planning and development, especially to strengthen the role of local governments and the private sector in the urbanisation process. In this regard URDI aim is to assist the DHSHD to undertake (i) formulation of regulatory framework and enabling planning and building regulations, (ii) training of local officials including future city councillors, and (iii) technical support to selected medium and lower size cities exhibiting growth potentials in areas of poverty alleviation, environmental planning, land development and cultural preservation are urgent.
- Championing research and studies in the following key areas: urban land management, urban poverty alleviation, urban finance, urban environment, disaster mitigation, and strengthening urban-rural linkages.
- Initiating/supporting/facilitating poverty alleviation efforts that allow the government and the United Nations to demonstrate better ways to address the problem. A few priority interventions in this regard are working with the urban poor to improve their living and environmental conditions and to enhance their participation in urban management.

Implementation will be anchored on three key Centres: an Urban Research Centre to be established by March 2012, an Urban Resource Centre to be established by April 2012, and a Training Institute on Planning and Development to develop and run a comprehensive urban training strategy and medium-term training program for urban sector partners in Myanmar.

TRAINING INSTITUTE ON PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

UN-HABITAT will provide national and international experts to design course curricula and train public servants on Urban Planning and Development in a cascading manner leading to a certification programme. The courses will be held at URDI premises in Yangon with approximately 30 participants/trainees per batch. Those that complete the training will be awarded a Certificate by UN-HABITAT and the DHSHD. A total of 160 officials are expected to be given training on various aspects of urban planning and development a year once URDI becomes fully functional.

In the initial phase of the training program much of the training materials will be developed by national experts working in collaboration with a few selected international experts.

Eventually, a 12 month 'Planning and Development' Certificate program will be introduced which will become a pre-requisite for entry into a scholarship program to be sponsored under URDI. The scholarship program will consist of short-term courses, post-graduate diplomas and masters' program in planning (rural and urban) and allied subjects.

URBAN RESOURCE CENTRE

An Urban Resource Centre comprising a library of urban and urban development related documents, publications, services brought out by UN-Habitat, the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, UNESCAP, private research institutes of global standing, and selected technical journals. These will be available to scholars, research students as well as government staff.

URBAN RESEARCH CENTRE

The research entity of URDI would be the principal focal point for collecting all the latest information and indicators relating to urban issues. Key urban research will be sponsored under the aegis of this arm of URDI.