



UN-HABITAT FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

GLOBAL REPORT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS 2009



PRESS RELEASE

NEW ROLE NEEDED FOR URBAN PLANNING IN 21ST CENTURY

URBAN PLANNING CRITICAL FOR FUTURE OF SUSTAINABLE CITIES ACCORDING TO UN-HABITAT REPORT
PLANNING SUSTAINABLE CITIES: GLOBAL REPORT ON HUMAN SETTLEMENTS 2009

Urban Planning and management need immediate evaluation and revision to deal with the hundreds of millions of people likely to suffer hunger, water shortages and coastal flooding as global warming increases and more people migrate to cities, warns UN-HABITAT in its new report: **Planning Sustainable Cities: Global Report on Human Settlements 2009**

"As the world becomes numerically more urban, it is important that governments accept urbanization as a positive phenomenon and an effective means for improving access to services, as well as economic social opportunities," says Anna Tibajuka, the Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director United Nations Human Settlements Programme, in the introduction of to the report.

In 2008, for the first time in humanity, half of the world's population lived in urban areas. By 2050, that will reach 70 per cent. Existing planning systems in some parts of the world are unable to deal with this rapid urbanization. Urban planning in developing countries, particularly in Africa and Asia, needs to respond to this by developing new participatory methods of urban planning.

Among the most significant of these planning needs - now and in the next few decades - is how to meet the housing, water supply and sanitation requirements of this exploding urban population. New planning systems are needed to encourage environmentally sustainable urbanization to meet the challenges in this 21st century.

The report calls for urban planners to be given more opportunities to manage urban development; otherwise, it warns, we are in for a future of chaotic cities: a world of socially and environmentally unsustainable cities.

Setting out a new role for urban planning, the report says: "Reformed urban planning systems must be shaped by, and be responsive to the contexts from which they arise, as there is no single model urban planning system or approach that can be applied in all parts of the world."

In **developing countries** at least one billion slum dwellers have yet to be integrated into urban plans for housing and basic services. Unemployment among the youth is another source of social disruption. Yet, planning for a youthful population places particular demands for education, training facilities as well as investment in sports and recreational facilities. In Africa and Asia, urban planning must prioritize the interrelated issues of rapid urbanization, urban poverty, informality, slums and access to basic services. In developed, transition and a number of developing countries, urban planning will have to play a vital role in dealing with the causes and impacts of climate change and ensuring sustainable urbanization.

Elsewhere in developed and developing countries urban planning should play a key role in enhancing urban safety by taking on issues of disaster preparedness, post-disaster and post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation, as well as urban crime and violence.

In **developed countries** and in those of the former communist world making the transition to market economies, the planning challenges arise from urban shrinkage. Planners need to determine how to meet the cost of under-used infrastructure; identify alternative uses for abandoned social facilities; and what to do with the huge swaths of vacant housing units, as well as commercial and industrial facilities.

Planning for an ageing urban population is an added problem requiring innovative planning, as a rapidly ageing population places increased demand on healthcare, recreation, transport and other amenities for the elderly.

The Global Report assesses the effectiveness of urban planning as a tool for dealing with the unprecedented challenges facing 21st century cities and for enhancing sustainable urbanization. It argues that though older forms of urban planning such as master plans have been discredited, it is important to encourage new forms of strategic spatial planning and more inclusive participatory urban planning.

PLANNING SUSTAINABLE CITIES

STEPS TO IMPROVE URBAN PLANNING

Several preconditions are needed for effective urban planning. These vary regionally around the world but others may be applied generally. One important precondition is that countries must develop a national perspective on the role of urban areas and challenges of urbanization, articulated in some form of national urban policy.

A reformed urban planning will have to pay greater attention to small- and medium-sized cities, especially in developing countries where planning is often focused on larger cities. Countries will also need to integrate various aspects of demographic change in their urban planning policies, particularly the youth bulge.

Urban planning needs to be institutionally located in a way that allows it to play a role in creating urban investment and livelihood opportunities, through responsive and collaborative processes. In addition, corruption at the local-government level must be resolutely taken up through appropriate legislation and robust mechanisms.

Developing countries must increase their capacity to enforce urban planning regulations but should set realistic and attainable standards. The regulation of land and property development, through statutory plans and development permits, is a vitally important role of the urban planning system.

Other preconditions set out by the report are:

- **Prioritizing Urban Policy:** National constitutions and preambles to national legislation need to contain a commitment to basic principles of social and environmental justice and sustainability, and an acknowledgement of the importance of rights to access urban opportunities. A national urban policy should also set out a national spatial perspective that considers the long-term balance between urban and rural, and between different kinds and locations of urban settlements.
- **Planning Legislation:** For more effective urban planning, national legislation needs to be updated to respond to current urban issues. Most legislation dates to the colonial era when the urban conditions were far different than at present.
- **Decentralization or Urban Planning Functions:** Decisions on urban planning issues should be made as close as possible to those affected by them. This implies the decentralization of urban planning decisions to the urban level of government.
- **Urban Planning Function within Municipalities:** In many parts of the world, urban planning forms a separate department within municipalities. This leads to a lack of coordination between planning and other line function departments. Therefore, at a municipal level, a city development strategy can set out an overall vision to guide the work of all sectoral departments and political representatives.
- **Urban Research & Data:** Frequently, useful information may be held by international agencies and research departments, but is not consolidated and made available in ways that can be accessed by professional planners. The idea of an urban observatory is a useful mechanism for collating this information, as are national state of the cities reports.
- **City Planning Networks for Information Exchange:** Although a few planning professional networks exist for sharing information and experiences, they still need building and support.
- **Planning Education:** In many developing and transitional countries, planning curricula have not been updated for a long time and are unable to produce planning professionals that are able to address current and future urban challenges effectively.

GRHS/09/PR4

This is a UN-HABITAT Feature/Backgrounder. Please feel free to publish or quote from this article provided UN-HABITAT features is given credit. Suitable photographs are available on our website. For more information, please contact:

Spokesperson & Head of Press & Media Relations Unit, or Media Liaison, Tel: (254 20) 7623153; 7623151; Fax: (254 20) 7624060; E-mail: habitat.press@unhabitat.org; Website: www.unhabitat.org.