NATIONAL REPORT FOR UNITED NATION CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HABITAT III)

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FOREWORD

FOREWORD

The UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) is organized to strengthen global commitments on sustainable urbanization, focusing on the implementation of a new urban agenda, on the basis of the Habitat II Agenda. The conference plays a major role in providing a framework that allows countries, including Viet Nam, to evaluate past efforts, current inadequacies and the future challenges of urbanization.

The year of the Habitat II Conference, 1996, was also the starting point of the most rapid urbanization in Viet Nam. The conference provided for experts and policy-makers on urban development in Viet Nam with knowledge and lessons to shape the urbanization process of the country. In 1998, the Prime Minister approved the direction of the master plan for Viet Nam's urban development, providing objectives and orientations for urbanization up to 2020. In 2009, the direction of the master plan was adjusted by the Prime Minister to keep up with the socio-economic development of the country.

Over the last 20 years, the national urban system has seen many positives changes. Urbanization has had a significant pace in areas surrounding the major cities and also throughout the country in more evenly manner. However, rapid urbanization has also created new challenges, such as the ineffectiveness of land use planning, the inadequacy of urban infrastructure which still does not meet the needs of all people and the lack of competitiveness of cities. These issues have negative impacts on people's quality of life and urban economic outputs. Moreover, Viet Nam is one of the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change and this is worsening the situation and creating new challenges for urbanization. In 2013, the Prime Minister approved the project "Viet Nam Urban Development and Climate Change Resilience". It gives overall objectives to actively respond to climate change and to the rational use of resources in urban development.

Viet Nam has joined the group of developing countries for which improving urban planning and management capacity, meeting people needs of access to urban services, protecting the environment, strengthening urban competitiveness, promoting economic activities and responding effectively to climate change are all urgent requirements. In addition, there are emerging issues such as protecting rural areas from the pressures of rapid urbanization and ensuring the integration of social policies in urban development policies. Viet Nam is looking forward to actively participate in the Habitat III Conference, to share experiences and to learn international lessons on urban development policy-making.

With support from UN-Habitat Viet Nam, the Ministry of Construction has prepared this Viet Nam Country Report for Habitat III. The report reviews the urbanization process over the last 20 years, analyzes existing issues and new challenges and provides orientations for future urbanization. We believe that Viet Nam's orientations for sustainable urbanization will be valuable information for the Habitat III Conference – to be held in the end of 2016.

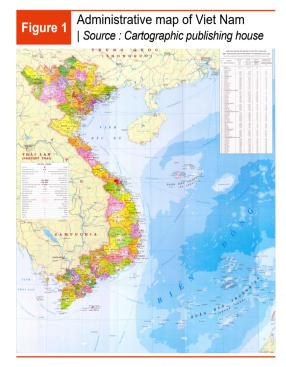
mph Phan Thi My Linh **Deputy Minister of Construction**

INTRODUCTION

The period between the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul in 1996 and the Habitat III Conference in Quito in 2016 was also the period in which Viet Nam made big strides to transition from a centrally planned economy to an open market economy with a socialist orientation. The measures taken to open the national economy and integrate it into the global economy had many social, economic and demographic consequences which required further policy measures. The major challenge faced by the country is to reconcile the principles of the open market economy which is required to achieved rapid economic growth, with a socialist orientation to ensure that economic growth is inclusive and that it benefits all, and a protection of the local and global environment which is vital for Viet Nam as it is one of the countries that is most vulnerable to climate change.

Like in other countries, cities have proven to be the main engines of economic growth and

the economic growth has concentrated in the two main cities, Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City and has been driven by both foreign direct investments and local small and medium-sized enterprises. There has been a massive creation of employment in the two cities which in turn has attracted numerous migrants from smaller cities and towns and the rural areas and has generated growing demand for housing and urban services. At the same time, the expanding private sector and energized stateowned enterprises are increasingly demanding more and better urban infrastructure to create efficiently performing cities. So, economic growth is straining the cities and *requires more effective* management, increased financial resources, improved human resources and more effectively operating urban authorities and institutions.



The Habitat III Conference in Quito offers an opportunity to prepare a report that takes stock of the positive results that the country has produced in the urbanization process and the challenges that are remaining to build a prosperous and strong country with wealthy people and an equitable, democratic and civilized society. While progress has been considerable, challenges remain and many new challenges have emerged, particularly related to global economic integration and climate change. The Government is committed to address these challenges, while building an inclusive society and a market economy with a socialist orientation.

The current context is fierce competition in the global economy for foreign direct investments and as Viet Nam develops and production costs rise, the economy has to focus on higher-value-added

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production to avoid falling into the middle-income trap. This requires improvement of infrastructure services required for economic development and enhancement of the productivity of the labour force through education, training and the improvement of living conditions (including access to adequate housing and basic urban services). The most efficient way of making these improvements is to promote the urban system, especially the national and provincial cities as engines of growth, particularly Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City which are already the main engines of national economic growth.

A concentration of investments in these two cities will, however, increase the uneven spread of economic opportunities across the country and encourage further rural-urban and urbanurban migration to these two cities. In order to achieve a more balanced and inclusive economic development, the Government is promoting other cities (e.g. Da Nang in the centre of the country). Furthermore, the Government is establishing urbanized areas and an urban network in the whole country, and they are also linking rural areas with nearby cities to bring the benefits of economic growth to the rural population. To further rural development, rural-urban migration will also have to play its role, as remittances from urban areas will contribute to rural poverty reduction.

Over the past years, Viet Nam's economy has

phase, resulting in a higher dependency ratio. As a consequence, a shrinking working-age population will have to earn an income for a growing elderly population. This will also require further productivity enhancements through education and better living conditions.

Currently, economic activity and employment are concentrated in formal small and medium-sized and informal household businesses in urban areas. Many of these enterprises do not yet benefit from access to business credit, market information, secure locations and training services. Support for the enterprises will have to be expanded to ensure that their productivity rises and income grows and that some can transition to the formal economy. Otherwise, the gap between formal and informal sector will grow and lead to increased income inequality, as experienced by other economies in the region. In any market economy, income inequality is a growing concern and the Government will take all measures necessary to ensure that economic growth will bring inclusive benefit for everyone.

As research in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City has shown, poverty, and particularly urban poverty, is not just a matter of income, but has many other dimensions such as access to adequate housing and urban services, coverage by social protection programmes and community participation in local organizations. The Government is also committed to reduce poverty in all of its dimensions and

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