Implementing the Habitat Agenda

The 1996-2001 Experience

Report on the
Istanbul+5 Thematic Committee
25th Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly
New York, 6-8 June 2001

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Foreword

The Habitat II Conference held in Istanbul, Turkey, in June 1996 was the first global conference in which representatives of local authorities and civil society participated actively in the formulation of the major outcome, the Habitat Agenda. Habitat II also included a specific Partner Committee through which the voice and concerns of Habitat partners were brought to the attention of Heads of State, Ministers and other representatives of central governments.

In the same vein, the Special Session of the General Assembly for an Overall Review and Appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, known as Istanbul +5, held on 6-8 June 2001 in New York introduced in the General Assembly a new forum for debate. The Thematic Committee broadened participation beyond national government delegates and focused on concrete experience gained since 1996. The innovative character of the Thematic Committee was emphasised at the opening of the Special Session by the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Harri Holkeri, who indicated that the Committee will allow members "to share experiences from different corners of the world and to learn from each other … on many important issues pertaining to shelter, social development and eradication of poverty, environmental management, governance, effective city development strategies and financing for urban development".

At the end of the Special Session, the media reported very favourably on the contribution and spirit of the Thematic Committee, remarking that this forum generated a true dialogue involving frank discussions related to sensitive issues such as corruption, political will, housing rights and democratic urban governance. Participants suggested that such a Committee should be replicated in the future, for instance, at the upcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Chairman of the Committee, Minister Slaheddine Belaïd from Tunisia, noted in his closing summary that the United Nations had proven to be the best forum for this exchange of experiences and good practices. He also expressed the hope that the outcome of the Committee would be synthesised and published to help countries in the formulation and implementation of their national policies.

As focal point for human settlements in the United Nations system and organiser of the Thematic Committee, it was the responsibility of UNCHS (Habitat) to respond to that request and prepare the present report which comes in addition to the abundant information already available on our website. I hope that this publication will not only contribute to tell the story of human settlements development since 1996, but also guide our partners in further implementing the Habitat Agenda.

Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka
Executive Director, UNCHS (Habitat)

1 Introduction

In its Resolution 55/195 of 20 December 2000, the United Nations General Assembly decided that the Special Session of the General Assembly for an Overall Review and Appraisal of the implementation of the Habitat Agenda should have a Thematic Committee, the details of which were to be worked out at the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the Special Session. In its Resolution 55/246 of 21 March 2001, the General Assembly adopted the organisational arrangements for the Thematic Committee and entrusted UNCHS (Habitat) with the selection of thematic experiences from the full range of Governments and accredited Habitat Agenda partners.

The Preparatory Committee of the Special Session drafted this second resolution in February 2001. The Preparatory Committee also adopted a decision on the preparatory process for the Thematic Committee (decision 2/4) which guided UNCHS (Habitat) in the selection and preparation of the presentations to the Thematic Committee. Among the selection criteria were thematic and regional balance to reflect a broad variety of experiences in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, as well as partnership involving several actors, innovation, sustainability and cross-cutting elements such as gender equality, inclusion of disadvantaged groups and scaling up local practices. The Preparatory Committee decided that the Chairperson of the Thematic Committee would be assisted by facilitators who will be members of official delegations. Nine high-level facilitators were therefore selected by UNCHS (Habitat), based on governmental proposals. They reflected a balance of viewpoints from Argentina, France, Iran, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Mexico, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

Both case studies and facilitators were selected by the secretariat in consultation with the Committee of Permanent Representatives to UNCHS (Habitat), between March and May 2001. Presentations in electronic format together with the provisional agenda of the Thematic Committee were available on the Istanbul +5 and Habitat websites on 23 May 2001 to allow participants to prepare for the dialogues.

As a result of this well-structured preparatory process, 16 presentations were selected emanating from all parts of the world. Four cases reflected the experience of Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania), two cases of the Arab States (Egypt, Morocco), three cases of Asia (China, India, Thailand), three cases of Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Peru), three cases of Western Europe (France, Spain, Sweden) and one case of Central and Eastern Europe (Poland).

While the selected experiences were based on partnership between various levels of government and participation of the civil society, leading partners varied according to national and local situations. In seven cases, the presenters were Ministers or central government representatives (Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Egypt, Morocco, and Colombia). In seven cases they were Mayors or local authority representatives (China, Brazil, Peru, France, Spain, Sweden, Poland). In two cases they were NGO leaders (India, Thailand).

In thematic terms, the Committee was sub-divided into four sessions dealing with the main issues addressed in the Habitat Agenda:

- shelter and services;
- environmental management;
- urban governance;
- eradication of poverty.

While most presentations addressed several inter-related topics, for example, urban services and the environment, urban governance and eradication of urban poverty, they were distributed among the sessions according to their main focus. The structure adopted aimed essentially at facilitating a meaningful debate through the reduction of overlaps and repetitions. It allowed the Thematic Committee to undertake a multi-faceted review of a variety of national and city experiences and to draw general lessons from the concrete implementation of the Habitat Agenda in very different contexts. The case studies described not only best practices but also good policies applied at country or city levels. Taken collectively, they testified that the improvement of shelter and urban conditions is possible, even on a large-scale, in any country of the world, provided some basic policy principles are adopted. These principles are presented in the form of "conclusions and recommendations" in the next chapter.

The Thematic Committee of Istanbul +5 has once again demonstrated that "good policies can make a difference". This was also the conclusion of the report of the Executive Director of UNCHS to the Special Session (A/S-25/3) and the message of the flagship reports prepared by the Centre in 2001, the State of the World's Cities Report and the Global Report on Human Settlements. It is hoped that the present publication will be used, together with these former Habitat reports, to further improve cities and other human settlements all over the world.

Daniel Biau
Secretary of the Thematic Committee
Ag. Deputy Executive Director, UNCHS (Habitat)

2 Conclusions & **recommendations**

As stated by the Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Slaheddine Belaïd, Minister of Equipment and Housing of the Republic of Tunisia, in his summary to the Plenary on 8 June 2001, the Thematic Committee fully reached its goal which was to tell the important story of the development of human settlements since 1996 and to guide the quest for solutions and progress that will benefit the world's citizens.

The lessons drawn by the Thematic Committee from the 16 case studies under consideration are quite consistent with the "Declaration on Cities and other Human Settlements in the New Millennium" negotiated in parallel by the Committee of the Whole of the Special Session. Among these lessons, the following deserve the full attention of decision-makers and experts involved in reviewing, designing and implementing shelter and urban development policies:

- Cities and towns are engines of growth and are significant contributors to the development of both the local and national economy. Policies aimed at forging public-private partnerships and strengthening small and micro-enterprises should be encouraged to make cities more productive.
- Multi-stakeholder consultations and participatory planning and decision-making are effective instruments for urban planning and management and should be further developed and expanded.
- Decentralisation and the strengthening of local authorities are effective means to mobilise local actors and stakeholders in improving human settlements conditions and should therefore be generalised.
- Specific policies and support for reducing urban poverty and empowering the poor are necessary to bring about social development and inclusiveness;
- The management of urbanisation processes requires strong and accountable public institutions, and institution-building for improved governance remains a fundamental goal.
- Legislative and administrative reforms need to be pursued to give women full and equal access to economic resources, to ensure their right to security of tenure and their effective participation in urban governance.
- The upgrading of slums and the regularisation of squatter settlements are effective means to reducing poverty and improving urban sustainability and should be incorporated into national policies.
- Forced evictions that are contrary to the law should be prevented and secure tenure should be promoted as a major component of any shelter strategy.
- Efforts for ensuring transparent, responsible, accountable, just, effective and efficient governance of cities are essential to addressing the challenges of urban poverty and environmental degradation and therefore need to be intensified.
- More determined action against urban crime and violence and to address the challenges of human-made disasters is required.
- Access to housing finance and to micro-credit by the poor is a key contributing factor to their self-development and to removing one of the key structural causes of poverty.
- Monitoring and evaluation, through shelter and urban indicators and the documentation of best practices and action plans, should be part of human settlements policies at all levels.
- International cooperation in human settlements, based on local and national initiatives, has demonstrated its potential but is still very insufficient and should be enhanced.

2.1 Shelter & Services

The enormous concentration of extreme poverty in the cities, particularly the cities of developing countries, raises difficult policy issues that will need to be addressed within a rights-based approach to development. This approach integrates human rights into the overall development framework. For the marginalised urban poor, access to land and services cannot be improved merely within market mechanisms. Appropriately targeted policy measures will have to be put in place. Although several countries have included provisions for the realisation of housing rights in their constitutions and have relevant legislative frameworks (for example, South Africa), lack of progress in promotion of security of tenure still continues to be one of the most pressing problems for the urban poor.

The experiences presented in the Thematic Committee are consistent with the policies promoted and advocated by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat), especially through the global Campaign for Secure Tenure. They demonstrate that secure tenure will improve the access of the urban poor to credit, adequate shelter, infrastructure and services. The following specific recommendations should guide shelter policies:

a. Security of tenure can be promoted through a variety of means that have proven effective:

- City and national governments will have to recognise unambiguously the rights of the poor, and to extend to them full urban citizenship.
- City governments and local communities have an essential role to play in promoting security of tenure and reducing housing rights abuses, such as forced evictions. To fulfil this role they must be supported by appropriate legislation and capacity building.
- Networking and the exchange of information, expertise and experience on successful informal settlements upgrading initiatives can be an effective means of assisting city governments and their partners create an enabling framework for promoting security of tenure, formulating/revising legislation, and to institutionalise effective administrative arrangements.
- Land policies need to be developed and agreed so as to protect people from forced evictions.
- National land legislation should clarify the rights and obligations of landowners and other stakeholders and provide protection for vulnerable groups, especially the urban poor and women.
- Promoting the systematic extension of tenure security with special considerations for the role of women is an important component of any meaningful shelter strategy for the urban poor.
- Complementary to regulatory mechanisms, information campaigns should aim at changing social and cultural attitudes.
- Shelter policies and strategies for the poor are most effective when they involve innovative partnership arrangements among different stakeholders, and the active involvement of the urban poor in the urban management and housing development processes.

b. Access to housing credit is often denied to large segments of the population, especially low-income households. Access to credit can be facilitated through a variety of approaches, including:

- Special support programmes that leverage the resources of government with those of civil society organisations and the private sector can be effective means to make mortgage credit available to low-income households.
- Targeted subsidies, especially those provided to community-based savings and loans schemes, are often instrumental in helping the urban poor in gaining access to housing credit.
- Private rental housing should be promoted both as a means of providing more housing options for the poor and as an element to reduce pressure on the lower end of the housing markets.

c. Ensuring the availability of basic services is an important part of any shelter development policy and should include the provision of safe water, sanitation and waste management.

- The absence of legal tenure in settlements is a major obstacle to the improvement and maintenance of basic services such as water supply and sanitation.
- Public-private partnerships can be an effective means of introducing greater cost effectiveness in the water and sanitation sector. The challenge for countries suffering from lack of adequate urban infrastructure and services is to put in place effective regulatory bodies and measures to oversee the provision of services in an efficient and equitable manner. A new tool for local authorities to better manage infrastructure and services is to develop strategies for conservation and demand management. Strong political commitment, transparency in management and coherent strategies reduce investor's risk and are essential to attracting private sector investment in water and sanitation services.
- Urban poor are reliable and accountable partners in providing and maintaining basic urban services through community self-determination and community co-management. Community participation in the provision and management of water and sanitation services can significantly improve cost recovery, maintenance and, consequently, long-term sustainability.
- There is an urgent necessity to enhance both institutional and human resource capacity of local authorities to effectively manage basic services.

Secure tenure will improve the access of the urban poor to credit, adequate shelter, infrastructure and services

2.2 Environmental Management

The management of environmental resources and hazards improves economic efficiency, social equity and long term sustainability in urban development

Some fundamental principles arise from the operational experience reported in the sessions on environmental management. These principles are consistent with lessons learned in the broader context of national reports on the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, as well as with the general experience gained by international programmes supporting cities in their efforts to improve environmental management. In summary, these principles can be grouped into three sets of recommendations as follows:

a. The management of environmental resources and hazards improves economic efficiency, social equity, and long-term sustainability in urban development.

- Environmental improvements enhance the development potential of cities. Aside from the obvious benefits to human health and well being, environmental improvements promote investments from within and outside the city.
- Controlling environmental hazards, such as flooding, has the same positive effect on socio-economic development in cities.
- Because the lives and health of the urban poor suffer most directly and disproportionately from environmental degradation, environmental improvements provide excellent opportunity for supporting the urban poor.
- Although many cities seem to be struggling with the requirements of sustainability and are suffering severe environmental degradation and economic loss, there are many encouraging signs that environmental deterioration is not a necessary or inevitable consequence of urbanisation and economic change. To the contrary, proper urban environmental planning and management are major contributing factors to urban productivity and efficiency.
- Improving urban governance is a fundamental requirement for effective urban environmental management wide in their impact, and have long-term implications for economic growth and social development.
- Successful urban environmental planning and management requires a mutual understanding of issues, broad agreement on strategies, and co-ordinated actions by the full range of public, private and community groups and organisations - now widely referred to as the stakeholders.
- The process of identifying and involving stakeholders often reveals major groups, which have been excluded by traditional planning and management systems. These groups typically include women, private sector groups and interests, marginalised and disadvantaged citizens, especially the urban poor, at both city and neighbourhood levels.
- Relevant stakeholders for specific issues can be determined as follows: (a) those whose interests are affected by the environment-development issue at hand; (b) those who possess information and expertise needed for effective strategy formulation; and (c) those who control means to influence environment-development interactions and have the capacity to implement environmental management strategies.
- It is important to be selective and to set priorities on environmental management, so that action can be focused on a limited array of problems and tasks in a strategic sequence. Priority setting should result from a participatory process and be based on both the development implications of environmental concerns and the local capacities to respond.

c. International cooperation and mutual learning are effective tools for improving urban management and to make it more responsive to the specific challenges of local environmental concerns.

- As more and more cities engage in environmental planning and management the need for sharing information, expertise and experience has led to emerging

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