



**ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review**

including the Habitat Agenda and the Johannesburg Programme of Implementation (JPOI).

*Specific Objectives:*

- i) Fully understand and promote the concept of sustainable urbanization as a means of addressing the social, economic and environmental challenges of rapid and often poorly planned urbanization in the region;
- ii) Assess implementation of specific policies and strategies on: (a) slum upgrading and prevention, including equal access to land, housing and basic infrastructure and services; and (b) governance, including decentralization and the planning and management of settlements;
- iii) Formulate appropriate actions to integrate sustainable urbanization and the attainment of MDG 7 Targets 9, 10 and 11 in national development plans and priorities as key steps in the implementation of the Johannesburg Programme of Implementation (JPOI) and the Habitat Agenda;
- iv) Develop recommendations in the area of urban planning, providing social services, meeting the technological and financial needs, including Islamic banking;
- v) Share lessons learned from successful policies and promote scaling-up of good practices; and
- vi) Report the outcome of the regional meeting to the 2008 ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review to be held in New York in July.

## **2. Introduction**

“Sustainable Urbanization” is a multi-dimensional dynamic process. It includes not only environmental but also social, economic and political-institutional sustainability. It encompasses urban-rural linkages and the full range of human settlements from village to town to city to metropolis. Sustainable urbanization bridges the crucial linkages between cities and their environment, at local, metropolitan, regional, national and global levels. It provides a framework for dealing with the environmental impact of cities on their hinterlands, including adaptation to, and mitigation of, climate change. It also provides a platform for managing the economic relationships between town and countryside. Sustainable urbanization is a concept that goes beyond the traditional arguments around the urban-rural dichotomy and recognizes the need to come to terms with rapid urbanization and urban growth by focusing on the effective management of these processes to achieve functional, resilient and responsive human settlements.

Economic and social dimensions, such as poverty and deprivation, governance, gender inequality and social exclusion are central challenges to sustainable urbanization at all levels. Water and sanitation in human settlements, for instance, are vital for health and for economic prosperity, especially for the poor. But, if the current inadequate provisions are to be corrected, communities, civil society and local government will have to work together. Local authorities endowed with adequate powers, resources and operational capacity, combined with empowered

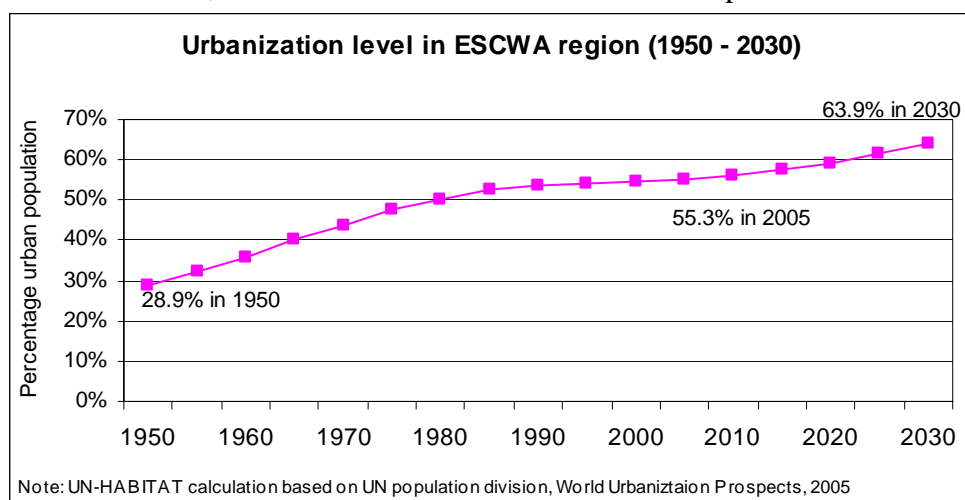
communities and other local partners are the key actors in the sustainable urbanization equation.

This partnership approach was well articulated in the Habitat Agenda that has two main goals, adequate shelter for all and sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world. This mission was restated in MDG 7 (environmental sustainability) under target 10 on halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation by 2015, and target 11 on making significant improvements in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 and promoting cities without slums through slum prevention strategies at national and local levels.

The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development of 2002 further emphasized the importance of shelter as a key focus alongside water and sanitation, health, agriculture and biodiversity (WEHAB). The 2005 World Summit Outcome in Paragraph 56(m) re-iterated the importance of slum upgrading and called for further and urgent action

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Very high slum prevalence is found in Iraq, Oman, the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Yemen, where more than 50 per cent of the urban population live in slums. However, some cities suffer more from shelter deprivation than others. For



instance, while 96 per cent of the population of Port Said in Egypt has access to sanitation, Aswan has slightly less than 70 per cent access. In other cities, like Sana'a and Taiz in Yemen, access to sanitation was 77 per cent for both cities, while access in Aden is more than 90 per cent. While most cities in Yemen enjoy access to a safe water source, in the city of Taiz, only 56 per cent of the population enjoys this access. In some countries, conflict has worsened urban living conditions. The Iraq Living Conditions Survey of 2004, for instance, shows that while water coverage is nearly universal in cities, such as Baghdad, almost half of all other Iraqi households experience problems with water supply. Iraq is introducing large scale change under

An adequate water supply to cope with a rapidly growing urban population and with water scarcity remains a chronic difficulty in the ESCWA region. Key challenges are demographic pressure, coupled with rapidly expanding irrigated agriculture, as well as rapid industrialization. Another challenge for sustainable urbanization is that growing demand cannot be matched by an adequate supply, which, in turn, further increases the pressure on finite supplies. This dual pressure – population growth and rapid urbanization – is a critical challenge, resulting in increasing demand for domestic water in cities that are thirsty for water but have insufficient financial resources. Although most people have access to clean drinking water and sanitation services in the region, services coverage remains a problem, especially in lower-income areas (see box 1).

Water shortage results in increasing competition for water among the various sectors. Agriculture accounts for 85 per cent of water use in West Asia, domestic use for 10 per cent and industry five per cent. The agricultural share is well above the world average of 70 per cent. The scarcity and unreliability in service provision has boosted the uncontrolled spread of private wells. In some cities in the region, for example Sana'a, Amman and Damascus, water shortage for domestic use has become a key issue. In some countries, like Yemen, rapid population growth is outpacing new water supply schemes.

**Box 1: MDGs in urban areas and integrated water resources management**

A comparatively high percentage of people in West Asia have access to a water supply and basic sanitation and the region is favourably placed to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in these areas. The MDG goals aim to halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015.

However, the development of integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans between 2000 and 2004 has been slow. An effective national institutional framework will be required through the adoption of national water plans, improvement of irrigation systems and cooperation in shared river basins. Sound water resources assessment in several countries requires monitoring networks and databases.

Poor water resources management threatens aquatic ecosystems in the region. To protect them, the issues of pollution and increased salinity, recycling of wastewater through treatment and reuse, and water harvesting must be addressed.

A report by ESCWA submitted to the 13th Session of the Commission on Sustainable Development underscored the need for sufficient funds, training and credible information. Among its recommendations were the: Establishment of an Arab fund to finance preparation and implementation of water development projects; Development of a regional programme for education, training and awareness raising; and Creation of regional water monitoring and information networks.

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries face even greater water scarcity and, if present trends continue and the problem is not addressed structurally, water shortages may soon reach crisis level. Groundwater mining is now the key source to satisfy the demands for water. However, other forms of water collection are becoming more popular, such as desalination, waste-water treatment and reuse, and the harvesting of surface runoff water. Rising demand implies a need for heavy capital investment in treatment plants and alternative means of water production. Therefore, water management and planning is likely to become a key issue with regard to sustainable urbanization in the region.

## **Questions**

**What are the major successes throughout the region in improving access to services, including basic ones, such as water, sanitation and energy? How are the issues of mass transit, waste management and health being managed? Which cities are lagging behind?**

**In light of the expected increase in population in the region, is enough being done to ensure long-term access to water? What actions must be taken at city, country and regional levels?**

**How well is urban planning systematically employed in cities and towns to ensure adequate infrastructure and services in the region? Are cities mainly coping with present challenges or preparing for the future? To what extent are other stakeholders involved in the planning process?**

**What could be done to strengthen the capacity of local authorities and planners to ensure sound, long-term urban planning?**

## **5. Green architecture for sustainable urbanization**

It is no coincidence that climate change has emerged at the forefront of international debate precisely at the same time, and virtually at the same pace, as the world becomes urbanized. This is because urbanization brings about irreversible changes in our production and consumption patterns. How we plan, manage and live in our growing cities determine, to a large extent, the pace of global warming. This is because 75 per cent of global energy consumption occurs in cities and 80 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming come from urban areas. Roughly half of these emissions are caused by burning fossil fuels for urban transport; the other half comes from energy to heat or cool our

at the same time enhancing the harmony, performance and durability of the relationship. Sustainability should be an essential consideration during the urbanization and building design and planning processes, and fully integrate form, function, site, structure, system, resource use and construction, among others. Designers need to integrate different aspects of project decisions, management, and implementation that attend to concerns with indoor air quality, pollution, climate change, energy and water conservation, and affordability and sustainability, in general.

With the rapid turn-around in the development prospects of some developing countries and the imperative of rapid urbanization mentioned above, the potential for leap-frogging urban settlements of the future through smart growth offers potentials for the development of more sustainable

action and capacity building. Recent experiences have shown that, with a combination of enabling policies, strengthened capacities and improved governance and accountability, local authorities in rapidly urbanizing developing countries are able to raise their revenue levels several fold. These revenues can then be leveraged with private and public sector resources and invested in urban infrastructure and basic services, including transport, energy and water and sanitation, as well as in slum improvement. Lessons learned from these policies and practices need to be widely shared and disseminated.

Due to its underlying principles, the Islamic financial system can help economies follow a sustainable development path. As investors, innovators and stakeholders, Islamic banks have the ability to contribute to strengthening



tapped in combination with local innovation. Increased incentives are further needed to promote research and development of new environmentally sound technologies.

investment at the forefront of Jordan's urban agenda. Cities in Jordan, which have sprawled without

The issue of regional and global cooperation also deserves more attention. Such cooperation could focus on three major aspects. Firstly, it could identify areas where regional efforts need to be intensified for the creation of sustainable cities. Secondly, mobilizing regional and global partnerships could be an important aid in promoting sustainable urbanization. Thirdly, the mobilization of resources and technological know-how is a key to sustainable development.

**BOX 3: Efforts towards sustainable urbanization in Egypt**

Egypt is suffering more than benefiting from the seeds of its growing urbanization. Egyptian cities,

UN-HABITAT is the focal point agency in the United Nations system for the Millennium Development Goal 7, Target 11, which aims to significantly improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020.

UN-HABITAT is in the process of strengthening this sustainable urbanization agenda and its assistance to Member States by implementing a six-year Medium-Term Strategic and Institutional Plan (MTS