

**SYNTHESIS OF NATIONAL REPORTS ON
THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HABITAT AGENDA
IN THE WEST ASIA REGION***

Summary

The main objective of this synthesis is to highlight the main trends and issues of concern in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, as identified in the national reports received so far from ESCWA Countries by UNCHS (Habitat). The commitments and strategies of the Habitat Agenda, which are the core agreements of Habitat II, provide the framework for the assessment. For each of the commitments, the synthesis highlights key issues from the 6 national reports so far analyzed. Emphasis is placed on progress made since 1996, prevailing conditions, new trends and emerging issues, policy and legislative changes since Habitat II, institutional weaknesses and obstacles encountered and lessons learnt, with emphasis on sustainability and impact. The presentation is organized in six chapters: shelter; social development and eradication of poverty; environmental management; economic development; governance; and international cooperation, as per the guidelines for country reporting issued by UNCHS (Habitat) in October 1999.

Revisiting the Istanbul commitments is a powerful reminder of the strength of the goals set at the Habitat II Conference and a way to assess the extent to which further action is required to implement them. Progress has been made in many countries, but more intensive action is needed in all areas.

The purpose of ESCWA regional meeting held on 16-18 October 2000 in Bahrain, was not only to review progress made, but also to identify and agree on concrete initiatives for extending and strengthening action to implement the Habitat Agenda commitments and achieve its goals in the ESCWA region.

* This document has not been formally edited.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), held in Istanbul, Turkey in 1996, endorsed important changes in the approach to human settlements, acknowledging the need for guiding urbanization, rather than preventing it. 171 governments adopted the Habitat Agenda - a global call to action. The Habitat Agenda highlighted that the benefits of economic growth should be spread equitably among all, and that fulfilling the basic requirement in terms of housing, employment and services for the people should rest upon a national consensus where supportive policy frameworks recognize and strengthen action by local levels of government, civil society and communities.

2. As elaborated in the Istanbul Declaration on Human Settlements and the Global Plan of Action, the objectives of the Habitat Agenda, and the strategies for their implementation revolve around two main themes: (a) Adequate shelter for all and (b) Sustainable human settlements in an urbanising world. By adopting the *Habitat Agenda*, the international community endorsed the Agenda's key objectives of enablement, participation, partnerships, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation and international cooperation, as well as specific commitments and strategies. United Nations Member States committed themselves to implementing the Habitat Agenda through local, national, sub-regional and regional plans of action and developing policies and programmes for adequate shelter and sustainable human settlements. The overall implementation of the Habitat Agenda is thus dependent on countries implementing their local and national plans of action and monitoring progress towards achieving objectives by means of appropriate indicators.

3. Pursuant to a recommendation of the Conference, the General Assembly in paragraph 12 of its resolution 52/190 of 18

December 1997, decided to hold a special session of the General Assembly in the year 2001 for an overall review and appraisal of the implementation of the outcome of Habitat II. The Organizational Session of the Preparatory Committee, which was held in Nairobi in May 1999, as a follow up to General Assembly resolution 53/180 of 15 December 1998, adopted the criteria on scope of the review and appraisal process to be conducted at the Special Session.

4. To help organise in-country activities and make national reports broadly congruent and directly relevant to the Habitat Agenda, 20 key items have been identified in a consultative process (in line with resolution 17/1 of the United Nations Commission on Human settlements) as universal priorities from the commitments and strategies adopted in Istanbul in 1996. Although they vary in breadth, the commitments and strategies have a clarity of intent that would assist in keeping preparation and debate clearly focused, with priorities and specific performance objectives against which progress can be measured.

5. Guidelines for national reporting on the implementation of the *Habitat Agenda* were sent out to Member States and Habitat Agenda Partners and United Nations' agencies and organizations in October 1999. Reminders of the deadlines for submission of the national reports were also sent in December 1999, February and June 2000.

6. The main objective of this report is to highlight the main trends and issues of concern in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda, as identified in the national reports received by UNCHS (Habitat). At present, six reports have been received from the ESCWA region: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syrian Arab Republic, and Yemen. Therefore, the review by this regional report is by necessity limited. In order to partially overcome this limitation, an effort has been made throughout the report to link trends and solutions highlighted by individual ESCWA countries to broaden issues equally

detectable in neighbouring countries or in the region as a whole.

7. The synthesis follows the universal reporting format that was provided to national governments in the guidelines for country reporting. The commitments and strategies of the Habitat Agenda, which are the core-negotiated agreements of Habitat II, provide the framework for the deliberations. For each of the commitments covered, the report considers progress made since 1996, prevailing conditions, new trends and emerging issues, policy and legislative changes since Habitat II, institutional weaknesses and obstacles encountered and lessons learnt, with emphasis on sustainability and impact.

8. The synthesis is organized in six chapters corresponding to the Guidelines for Country Reporting: shelter; social development and eradication of poverty; environmental management; economic development; governance; and international cooperation.

Chapter 1

Shelter

9. Housing conditions and policies are very diverse in the West Asia region where most countries suffered a serious economic setback after the Gulf war in 1991. Housing policies were however reviewed and advanced in the majority of the countries in the region during the preparations for the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II ¹) and after the Conference in the implementation process of the Habitat Agenda with more effective strategies to provide adequate shelter for the urban poor.

10. The new housing policies and strategies adopted/revised recently by several governments helped the public authorities being relieved from the heavy financial

burdens in investment in the housing sector. This process was primarily shifted to the private sector and to other stakeholders such as housing cooperatives and banks involved in housing delivery. Adopting/revising these policies and strategies has been a part of the framework of governments' efforts to move towards market economy. ²

11. The characteristics of the housing stock and demand are different in the oil producing gulf countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) from other countries in the region. The existing housing stock and the actual housing demand are influenced by a number of factors such as the considerable expatriate population of workers and employment-seekers in the GCC area and the unprecedented flow of refugees from Palestine, particularly to Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Jordan was especially affected by the flow of refugees after the Gulf war. The destruction resulting from the Lebanon civil war and the war in Iraq (both the Iraqi-Iranian and the Gulf war) and the civil conflict in South Yemen, to a certain extent, had negative implications on the housing stock and conditions in the region.

12. The high natural growth rates of population in Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Yemen have added to the already existing housing crisis in these respective countries. Unfortunately, some of these factors were treated as temporary and foreign problems to the countries concerned, which resulted in an acute crisis in the supply of the low cost housing. All the countries in the Western Asia region have diverse housing policies based on the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000³, which have been revised according to the recommendations of the Habitat Agenda. However, provision of housing to the poor has remained in all countries, a central focus common to housing strategies in all countries. It is worth noting that the demand for housing is limited and manageable in the GCC countries despite the level of refugees and expatriate populations. Housing is rather an

acute problem in several other countries in the region where there is pressure of population increase and difficulties in economic growth persist.⁴

13. Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Yemen have strengthened their housing delivery processes by involving and increasing the role of the private sector and the various actors of the civil society. In Egypt, the current housing policy states that the government is responsible for the formulation of the housing development plans and afterwards to carry out directly only 20 per cent of this plan, where as 80 per cent is to be implemented by the private sector.⁵

14. In Bahrain the government has achieved the goal of offering 45.500 housing units to the country since the outset of its housing program. The funding and costs of housing services totaled nearly 800 million B.D's between 1993 and 1998.

15. Another important development taking place in the shelter field in the region is the strengthening of the role of women in housing and urban development as stated by the national reports from both Egypt and Iraq. A regional Arab Women Network on Urban Development was created just before the Habitat II Conference and this Network was actively involved in the formulation of the housing and urban development national policies, particularly, in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Syria and Yemen.⁶

1.1 Providing Security of Tenure

16. Security of Tenure is enshrined in the cultures, social beliefs and religious teaching in the Arab States. It is seen and treated as a fundamental right in the region.⁷ In Egypt, the legislation that ensures security of tenure takes into consideration the various forms of tenure such as the situation in rental housing, free hold titles and conditional titles in housing. The overall developments of specific regions in urban centres where

private investors are allowed to operate are also exceptions to this general situation.⁸

17. The laws in Iraq ensure that every citizen has access –with symbolic affordable cost to low-income groups- to a plot of serviced land ready for construction without any kind of discrimination of ethnic origin, religion etc. Women have equal right to property as men.⁹ However, the policy of distributing these plots are based on a number of priorities such as giving first incentives to the least developed cities in the country to balance population distribution and the consideration given to the low-income groups and the lower category of the civil servant beneficiaries in each project.

18. In Jordan recent achievements include a programme offering a security package to combat poverty at the Kingdom level; amendment of the landlords and tenants law; and the Housing Support Programme.

19. It has been widely recognized by the governments of the region that actions related to the promotion of security of tenure can not be limited to the provision of shelter only, but rather, is a part of an integrated approach to poverty alleviation and improvement of access of the urban poor to basic services and opportunities for employment. Security of tenure is considered the center piece of housing and urban development policies in the region and in this connection various legislation ensure security of tenure, right to property and to land. Many efforts were deployed to upgrade informal settlements in Yemen and Jordan¹⁰, which aimed at granting security of tenure to the inhabitants in those respective areas. In most cases, housing units and serviced plots were distributed to beneficiaries with heavily subsidized costs.

1.2 Promote the right to adequate housing

20. While there is common understanding among the governments of the region that housing is a basic right, it is still – in most

cases - not translated into action with specific provisions in the national housing and urban development policies. The current legal instruments governing the housing sector in the region acknowledge, in general, the vital role of housing in the development of a harmonious society and in this connection, reconfirm the right for each individual and/or family to have a safe and adequate house.

21. A number of countries in the region undertook legislative reviews in compliance with the recommendations of the Habitat Agenda and amended existing legislation and/or promulgate new legislation in favor of the poor. The relevant legislation in Egypt and Iraq for example reinforced the rights of the individual and the family for the acquisition of adequate housing, for secure tenure and the provision of infrastructure and services. Poverty reduction schemes were formulated to control the mushrooming of slums and squatter areas through the provision of equal access to serviced land in the urban centres supported by the facilitation of housing construction/maintenance loans.¹¹ Similar legislation is in force also in Jordan and Syria. In the GCC sub-region the legislation grants free housing for all citizens in addition to extremely low rate loans and grants to the persons/families who wish to construct their own housing.

22. The accommodation of refugees and asylum-seekers within and/or outside of the region can provide a practical example on the challenge to which extent the right to housing can be addressed and fulfilled by various stakeholders. In Jordan, Lebanon and Syria there are legal frameworks to address the needs of the refugees and provide them with the necessary instruments to be fully integrated in the society. These include providing equal access to shelter, basic services and employment.

1.3 Provide equal access to land

23. The policies adopted in most of the GCC sub-region secure provision of serviced land to all citizens with also some grants and loans with very low interest rates and very long repayment schemes for construction of houses.

24. National reports from Egypt and Iraq state that their governments provide serviced land for housing to needy citizens with emphasis on the equalization of opportunities for women. These policies directly aim at improving living and housing conditions of the urban poor.

1.4 Promote equal access to credit

25. Housing credit mechanisms differ largely in the region. Housing credit facilities are offered in the GCC sub-region either directly by a special fund established by the government or by a bank and/or a specialized financial institution. The loans from the government funds are given at an extremely low interest rate and are accessible equally to all citizens including women. The commercial institutions also provide equal access to loans but at the normal commercial interest rates.

26. In most of other countries in the region¹², a similar situation exists in providing subsidized loans to the urban poor, including women. Specialized financial institutions such as the housing banks (in Yemen, Oman and Jordan¹³) offer loans at a much lower interest rate to low income groups compared to the practice of the commercial banks, which also do not discriminate women applicants to credit.

1.5 Promote access to basic services

27. The extent of access to basic services varies from one country to the other in the region. In the GCC sub-region, the majority of households are connected to electricity, water and sewage facilities. In many cities of this sub-region, access to roads, public

facilities and walkways are facilitated within the framework of internationally adopted norms and standards for persons with disabilities. The United Arab Emirates and Jordan are good examples of this achievement.

28. Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria and Yemen have all established policies to provide basic services to their citizens. Most of the dwellings in the established urban locations in these countries are connected to such facilities. A more concerted effort is however needed for the informal settlements and for the other areas where the urban poor live.

Chapter 2

Social Development and Eradication of Poverty

29. Key elements highlighted in the Habitat Agenda are the provision of equal opportunities for a safe and healthy life, social integration and inclusiveness, and gender equality. Addressing the status and needs of marginalized groups is fundamental to this aspect of policy worldwide. Within the Western Asia region there is a marked difference in social progress and the scale of poverty between the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) ¹⁴ and the rest of the countries. These wide regional disparities are paralleled by disparities within countries in several cases. While the majority of people in GCC have adequate shelter, access to basic urban services, health and education, in the other countries there are still gaps in meeting the needs of the population, in spite of the policies put in place after Habitat II.

30. One of the most significant changes in policies and legislation is the general acceptance of the principle of partnership. Many governments in the region have

integrated the principle of involving the various stakeholders from civil society in their new shelter and urban development policies. Many governments also supported these policies by promulgating legislation ¹⁵. As a result of that, numerous non-governmental organizations have emerged and now work actively with the central and local governments and other actors.

31. Equally, one of the fundamental changes is the emergence of the local authority as a recognized partner with Central governments and the private sector in the development of cities and urban areas. The private sector has also been widely recognized as an active partner in the overall efforts of providing adequate shelter for the poor and for urban development.

32. Nevertheless, the representatives of local authorities still need to be accorded a stronger role in urban development, in order to secure their active involvement in the policies, planning and budget allocation of their own municipalities. It is also highly recommended that Governments include representatives of local authorities in their official delegations to regional and international events.

33. Various laws and policies have contributed to a general and visible change in the role of women in the region. This has also come about through the encouragement by many governments of the formation of non-governmental organizations that are targeted at women, and of organizations of women themselves at the community level. The last few years have also witnessed the elections of a few women as Mayors or members of municipal councils. Equally, women were also elected (or appointed by quota) in parliament in Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon.

34. However, although the legislation in the region supports the equality of women in the provision of shelter, access to land, tenure, education and health, some of the legislation in force remains to be translated into

practice. Further legislative reforms will still be required, but even more important is to institutionalize such legislation. In order to support the strengthening of women's role in the communities, women need to be appointed to decision making bodies and to be associated with the decision making processes in general, and at all levels.

2.1 Provision of equal opportunities for a safe and healthy life

35. The wide disparities between GCC countries and others in the region are demonstrated by the fact that, while 100 percent of the urban population have access to fresh water in Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Lebanon¹⁶, the percentage drops to 82 in Egypt¹⁷. Access to sanitation is 100 percent of the urban population in countries like Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. In Oman and United Arab Emirates which are also part of GCC it is 98 and 93 percent respectively. By contrast only 20 per cent of the urban population in Egypt have access to sanitation, 40 per cent in Yemen and 77 per cent in Syria¹⁸. These are all non-GCC countries. The figures also show the differences in access to opportunities for a safe and healthy life, and the situation of the urban poor.

36. In most of the countries of the region, eradication of poverty has been tackled mainly through comprehensive five-year development plans¹⁹. Such plans address the provision of adequate shelter, basic urban services, health, education, employment and the empowerment of women. Results are beginning to show in some countries. For example, infant mortality rates in Egypt dropped down from 43.3 per thousand in 1996 to 35.2 per thousand in the year 2000.

37. Bahrain reports on successful State's endeavors to eradicate poverty and support health services and secure safe life for its citizens. This has been done through building governmental hospitals, encouraging the private sector to provide

health services, caring for the elderly and encouraging women's participation in different activities as Bahraini women have assumed important positions in Bahrain.

38. However, the situation in Iraq in the field of health and infant mortality has consistently worsened the last ten years because of the economic sanctions imposed on that country. Infant mortality rate per one thousand children in Iraq is 125 as of 1998.²⁰ The sanctions also contributed to a tremendous deterioration in the living conditions of most segments of the society, particularly the poor, and to the aggravation of poverty at many economic levels of Iraqi society.²¹

2.2 Promote social integration and support disadvantaged groups.

39. A number of policies and laws have been adopted in several countries of the region to meet the most urgent needs of the poor. Some of these specifically address social integration of the poor as a policy goal. In Egypt, where 23 per cent of the population live under the national poverty line²², several plans have been instituted and funds set up to tackle poverty, both in the rural and urban areas. Social funds have also been set up to help individuals and families to be more integrated in the social fabric. These particular policies and laws treat women and women headed household equally.²³

40. Similar policies and laws have been adopted in Iraq's governorates with the establishment of social development funds to help the poor and the needy to acquire the most urgent human needs, such as food, shelter, health and basic education²⁴. Social integration has been at the core of human settlements national policies. This principle has been translated into action, through the upgrading and improvement of poor neighborhoods, including newly formed slums areas that have recently developed in the large cities. The policies and laws

specifically address social integration for the handicapped and for people with special needs, and provide solutions for them.²⁵

41. In Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, non-governmental organizations play a very active role alongside central and local governments in helping the poor in both urban and rural areas. Their activities include the implementation of micro-credit and income generating projects and the empowerment of women.²⁶

42. The increasing recognition of the civil society as full partners in development has led several governments in the region to promulgate or amend laws in order to facilitate the operation of this partnership through community work. This has led to the poor working themselves towards the improvement of their living conditions with the help of local authorities, NGOs and the central governments. Most of the countries which have adopted such policies and legislation have also given NGOs and community based organizations reasonably free access to the to external funding. These external funds have helped dramatically in empowering the urban poor. The voice of the urban poor is now frequently heard in public debate, and there is a corresponding improvement of their poor living conditions. This approach also facilitates the social integration of the urban poor through job creation and income generating projects such as recycling of solid waste.²⁷

2.3 Promote gender equality in human settlements development

43. The major United Nations Conferences, in particular, the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 and Habitat II in 1996 were instrumental in placing women on an equal footing with men as well as placing women at the centre of development. Equal opportunity for women in education is legislated in Egypt and Iraq. Particularly since Habitat II, the role of women is increasingly visible and becoming more important in urban development in the

region. Several women NGOs have been formed, and these are working closely with the leadership of urban communities to strengthen the role of women. These NGOs and the communities they work with are assisted by local authorities, the central governments and sometimes external donors as well²⁸.

44. A regional Women's NGO has also been formed, with the specific goal of ensuring an equal role for the women in the development of urban policies and the implementation of urban projects. The Arab Women Network in Urban Development was established with the assistance of UNCHS (Habitat) during the preparations for Habitat II. It is currently active in Yemen, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Iraq, Oman and Egypt and has influenced policy and practice at national and local levels.

45. Regarding the role of women in governance, most of the countries in the region have addressed the participation of women in the political arena and in decision-making generally, either through the vote or by quotas. Women have been elected or appointed by quota to the parliaments of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon. The Council of People in Egypt (the Parliament) used to have a reserved quota of 9 per cent of the seats for women in 1979. However, through elections, this percentage changed to only 2.2 per cent in 1992 and to 2 percent in 1995. Women's representation in the Consultative Council (the upper house of Parliament) has gradually risen from 3.3 in 1980 to 5.7 in 1998²⁹. In the municipal elections in Jordan, a few women have been elected to the Municipal councils of different cities and one woman was elected as a Mayor in a small town

46. Among the programmes and projects developed in many countries to respond to the particular needs of women, the basic principle of involving women in the decision making process, and the strengthening of their role in communities, has been a central

concern. The increasing importance of the role of civil society groups as indispensable partners to governments in their efforts to eradicate poverty, create employment and promote social integration is also contributing to the increasing involvement of women.

Chapter 3

Environmental Management

47. Key aspects of the Habitat Agenda concerning environmental management are (a) promotion of geographically balanced settlement structures, (b) management of supply and demand for water in an effective manner, (c) reduction of urban pollution, (d) prevention of disasters and rebuilding of settlements, (e) promotion of effective and environmentally sound transportation systems, (f) supporting mechanisms to prepare and implement local environmental plans and local agenda 21 initiatives.

48. Environmental issues remain paramount in the region, most of which is pressured by harsh climatic conditions where the basis of survival - water resources - are scarce. This fact is particularly compounded vis-à-vis the majority of urban areas, which face critical limited resources, with the exception of towns, endowed by rivers. Water resource management is therefore of paramount importance within the region. Environmental pollution resulting from all urban areas (particularly due to the prolific use of the private automobile) and coastal urban centres (ports dealing in the export of crude oil) is given increasing and special attention.

49. Policies and strategies have been adopted in most of the countries in the fields of environmental protection, and in the use of natural resources; particularly water which is becoming increasingly a rare commodity in the region. At the municipal level, only few countries (in the GCC sub-region) have adopted environmental policies to ensure effective environmental

protection³⁰, and more could be done in such areas as effective EIAs, and promotion of ISO standards. A number of countries are reviewing the local government institution and how best to build and strengthen capacities to plan and manage at local level, including involving community based organizations.

50. Progress has been made in the West Asia region for promoting geographically balanced settlement structures through policy and legislative changes. Improvement to some extent in the management of supply and demand for water was made possible through advanced technological processes that have increased the efficiency of water use, as well as the establishment of comprehensive water resource management plans and water resources policies. In the area of urban pollution, efforts have been undertaken for reduction of air and water pollution through minimization and prevention of discharge of most polluting and hazardous substances, as well as reuse and recycling incentives. However increased air pollution generated by motor vehicles, bolstered by type of fuel, remains a strong concern. For preventing disasters some West Asia countries have enacted legislation to promote establishment of prevention and mitigation plans at local level. Recent natural disasters such as earthquakes and flooding have highlighted the urgency to develop and implement these plans. In the field of environmental management a number of countries now recognize the need to decentralize environmental policy-making and implementation at local level, and strengthening of partnerships between local authorities and other stakeholders, particularly local leadership-based organizations.

3.1 Promote geographically balanced settlement structure

51. The high rates of population growth and the internal and external migrations contributed to the acceleration of the city expansion in many countries of the region,

particularly, in the GCC sub-region. However, the size of cities is still manageable, in most cases. The only mega city in the region is Cairo in Egypt with 11.5 million inhabitants³¹, the second largest city in the region is Baghdad (Iraq) with little over 5 million inhabitants. The rest of the city populations vary from less than one million up to three million.

52. In Egypt, a phenomenal number of 97%³² of the population live in only 4.5 per cent of the total superfiery of the country³³. A number of policies and strategies have been adopted in Egypt to correct this situation through encouragement of reallocation of population in the desert land of Egypt; and moving out of the densely populated centres. Planning new development regions, including provision of infrastructure and services is a deliberate policy³⁴.

53. The relatively recent urbanization phenomenon has been widely accepted by the countries of the region. The rapid expansion of cities, particularly in the GCC sub-region, made certain countries to become like city-states. With densely populated cities as centres of economic and industrial activities, the central governments in this sub-region have delegated most of the environmental policies, strategies and their law enforcement to the municipal and local authorities.

54. The Bahrain report shows efforts to preserve settlement balance the rational distribution of urban centers, which are connected by an efficient road network as well as inter-islands bridges.

3.2 Manage supply and demand for water in an affective manner

55. One of the major emerging issues is the lack of potable water for cities. Countries in the region are looking at internal underground reserves and regional cooperation to strengthen their capacities to meet the increasing urban demand. Some countries in the GCC sub-region are using the

technology of desalination of seawater³⁵. Countries such as Syria, Iraq and Egypt have rivers that satisfy -to different degrees- the demand for freshwater. The three countries have also adopted policies to reinforce the river water use for the agriculture, industrial and for the urban use³⁶. In several countries, new water projects were conceived and prioritized for implementation to maximize the national reserve of freshwater.

56. Increasingly new projects include aspects of 'water demand management' and mitigating the impact of urbanization on freshwater resources and aquatic ecosystems. Such programmes are assisting countries to put in place early warning mechanisms for timely detection of potential 'hot spots' where sustainability is likely to be threatened. These are programmes, which can also facilitate the assessment of long-term environmental impact of the growing ecological footprints of large cities on the region's water resources.

3.3 Reduce urban pollution

57. The trend of human settlements policies in the region has been towards adopting the environmental dimension in the national strategies, and planning aiming at sustainable human settlements development. However, industrial pollution has adversely impacted on air and water quality, and remain an area of major concern still requiring legislative review and action and effective enforcement. Some countries still struggle with effective and environmentally sound waste management systems.

58. In Egypt, a number of procedures have been introduced to reduce air pollution, recycling of solid waste, and controlling sources of pollution in the urban areas, protecting the national resources, strengthening of the sustainable urban management system and reinforcing the principle of partnership and coordination at the bilateral and multi-lateral levels³⁷.

59. In Iraq, regional planning and city planning have incorporated the environmental dimension as criteria to define land use.

60. Several effective measures, including promotion of ISO standards, lead-free petrol and enforcement of objective environmental impact assessments (EIA), have been taken to reduce pollution and introduce environmental management systems and awareness in a number of countries mainly in the GCC sub-region ³⁸.

3.4 Prevent disasters and rebuild settlements

61. The natural and man-made disasters in the region are mainly: floods, earthquakes, risks resulting from hazardous wastes, and the minefields remaining from previous conflicts.

62. The adopted policies to prevent disasters comprise the establishment of a comprehensive database, digital maps, remote sensing and geographic information systems to help the decision-makers to formulate the best strategies possible ³⁹.

63. Programmes have been undertaken in Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Iraq to remove and clean the mine fields in their respective countries.

64. In the case of recent earthquakes, the Egyptian government undertook to rebuild settlements with the cooperation of international organizations; providing emergency shelters and services for the immediate needy. The disaster-sensitive areas ⁴⁰ will be replanned.

3.5 Promote effective and environmentally sound transportation systems

65. Most of the countries in the region embarked on various transport projects such as free highways, and circular express roads in larger cities, and flyovers and tunnels to

help ease the transport congestion⁴¹. In Egypt, the government policies aim to encourage and facilitate the private sector and foreign companies to invest in highways and express roads ⁴² in order to relieve the government from the required high investment costs of such projects. The rapid growth of motorization in the vast majority of cities significantly and increasingly contributes to urban air pollution. The higher-cost lead free petrol is not generally promoted, except for some GCC countries.

66. In Iraq for example, there is a noticeable increase of air pollution in the larger cities because of the transport system, the type of fuel used and the extensive use of old vehicles due to the continuation of the economic sanctions ⁴³.

3.6 Support mechanisms to prepare and implement local environmental plans and local agenda 21 initiatives

67. Support mechanisms for implementation of Local Agenda 21 initiatives have been undertaken in a number of countries. There have been continuous difficulties however, on how best to concretize Agenda 21 discussions into actions. Specific programmes aimed at improving the access of the poor to shelter; basic infrastructure and services through the implementation of broad-based participatory environmental improvement plans have been carried out, particularly in Egypt including preparation of sustainable development strategies through a consultative process with stakeholders from different sectors. Other preparations of urban strategies for sustainable development are undertaken within the framework of the Earth summit and other United Nations bodies mandated to deal with environmental issues. One of the key challenges is how to provide a better life not only for the present generation but also for the future, using the limited resources efficiently and avoiding destroying the environmental resource base.

68. There is a rising awareness that environmental and human settlement policies are not only intertwined but are parts of the same whole. It has also been acknowledged that environmental management cannot be limited to responses to individual development proposals but has to be linked to both long-term environmental requirements and with development needs at large. Other initiatives have involved establishment of enabling framework such as stronger Ministries and/or Environmental Affairs Agencies, launching of national initiatives and establishment of national committees for effective implementation of Local Agenda 21, but most of them still need to be concretized into action and mobilize resources for their implementation.

Chapter 4

Economic Development

69. Western Asia, comprising mainly the Middle East and North Africa (Arab States) is to a large extent, an oil economy region. Consequently, the historical low oil prices of 1997/98 depressed economic growth in the region. Industry (mainly oil) accounts for about 40 per cent of the GDP; service about 48.0 per cent and agriculture approximately 12 per cent. GDP per capita is about US\$4,500 (1998).

70. Adjustments to oil revenue shortfalls resulted variously in expenditure cuts, exchange rate devaluation, rescheduling of external debts, and in the case of the Islamic republic of Iran, import compression and liquidity stress as foreign reserves declined and import cover fell.

71. GDP growth in the region averaged 2 per cent in 1999, as drought conditions in several countries (Jordan, Morocco and Syria) led to a decline in agricultural incomes, as well as to further pressure in urban labour markets and increased food import bills. The World Bank (1999)

however, projects that GDP growth in the region should accelerate to 3.2 per cent and 3.5 per cent in 2000 and 2001 respectively. Privatization and restructuring programmes in Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, in conjunction with a deepening of capital markets, are attracting higher inflows of foreign direct investment.

4.1 Strengthening small and micro enterprises, particularly those developed by women

72. The years 1990-1998 witnessed a steady increase in the overall economic growth of most of the countries of the region. Although the rates of economic growth varied between the countries, the performance is satisfactory in countries such as Egypt with an annual growth rate of 4.2, Jordan 5.4, Lebanon 7.7, Syria 5.9 and Yemen 3.8⁴⁴.

73. The private sector has been given gradually a more prominent role in the various economic activities of the region. With new legislation and reforms in the economic and investment activities, the participation of the private sector has significantly improved. In Egypt, the participation of the private sector in the economic activities during 1980 was about 20 per cent while this percentage rose to 65 in 1999⁴⁵. The private sector is heavily involved in most of the economic development activities of the GCC sub-region.

74. Several governments have policies to encourage small and micro enterprises. This has also been done in partnership with NGOs and community-based organizations. In Egypt, for instance, the small enterprises provide employment for almost the third of the active labor force⁴⁶. While in Iraq, the government provides land and other facilities for both micro and small enterprises, whether, they are service or product oriented enterprises⁴⁷. A large emphasize has been put to strengthen women economic role in poor communities

by providing credit and loans for micro economic projects in urban poor areas.

75. Governments such as Yemen, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine have adopted policy encouraging the micro and small enterprise projects⁴⁸. Special funds were established for this purpose and specialized banks were given this matter as priority. Women have been the center of these policies. In Bahrain, there has been a focus on poverty reduction through employment creation. UNIDO has assisted in creation of small nation enterprises.

4.2 Encourage public private sector partnership and stimulate productive employment

76. Many countries in the region have adopted a free economic policy whereby the private sector plays a vital role. In the GCC sub-region the private sector has been partner in various economic and development activities for the last two decades. The private sector is in other countries of the region instrumental in generating productive employment.

77. In Jordan, a mortgage company has been established to make long-term housing financing available as well as to expand the role of the private sector. This is presented in the Jordanian report as being one of the major achievements in this context.

Chapter 5

Governance

78. Urban governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative actions can be taken. It includes formal institutions as well as informal

arrangements and the social capital of citizens (Good Urban Governance Campaign Concept Paper).

79. The emerging priorities concerning good urban governance (defined by the Habitat Agenda in 1996) can be categorized in three broad fields, namely (i) to promote decentralization and strengthen local authorities, (ii) to encourage participation and civic engagement, (iii) and to ensure transparent, accountable and efficient governance of cities.

80. In the Western Asia region, progress has been made to promote governance, especially in the last decade even though the region has not submitted much information to Habitat on that crucial area of governance.

5.1 Promote decentralization and strengthen local authorities.

81. Decentralization has been encouraged in many countries of the region, such as Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. Good practices show that Local Authorities have more responsibilities and have been strengthened. In Gaza for instance, the municipality built the capacity building of its staff in three years and was therefore able to achieve many positive results such as the improvement of the city's outlook and the social and cultural services. (The Best Practices Database). In Egypt, the State has encouraged decentralization, supported local authorities through the development of self-government and local management laws, and has taken measures to ensure women's representation in local and national government.

5.2 Encourage and support participation and civic engagement.

82. Participation and civic engagement have also been made possible in the region thanks to changes in legislation in many countries. It is acknowledged that participation will increase the effectiveness of initiatives and

partnerships between governments, local authorities, NGOs, community-based organizations, are being developed. For example, in Iraq, a neighborhood rehabilitation project has proved that much can be made to improve the living conditions of human settlements through the support of NGOs and the inhabitants themselves, thus reducing the burden on the crippled municipalities (the Best Practices Database). In Egypt, the rehabilitation and upgrading of an informal settlement has been made possible through participatory approach and transparent dialogue with local inhabitants in both the planning and management phases (the Best Practices Database).

83. In addition to that, many laws and policies have supported an overall visible change for women role in the region, especially through the elections of women as mayors or members in the municipal councils. In Jordan, for instance, in the municipal elections, some women have been elected to the Municipal councils of different cities and one woman was elected as a mayor in a small town

5.3 Ensure transparent, accountable and efficient governance of towns, cities and metropolitan areas.

84. Little information has been collected on transparent, accountable and efficient governance of cities. The best example, 86.

which received the Habitat Scroll of Honour (in 1994) and the Best Practices status- is the Dubai municipality, which sustainable development efforts include the excellent partnership maintained by the Municipality with the private sector, NGOs, other municipalities and government organizations. Furthermore, financial sustainability has been achieved as the Municipality's revenues cover its recurrent and capital expenditure (The Best Practices Database).

Chapter 6

International Cooperation

6.1 Enhanced International Cooperation and Partnerships

85. It is of paramount importance to establish cooperation ties with international organizations, regional banks and bilateral donors. The scope of urban problems in certain large cities in the region is of such magnitude that national governments can only benefit from international experience. Therefore, it is within the spirit of the Habitat Agenda to institutionalize cooperation at the international and regional levels between agencies and governments to overcome the ever-increasing problems of cities, especially in the developing world.

References

- ¹ A number of progress reports have been presented by various governments to the regional preparatory meetings prior to Habitat II Conference. Many governments submitted national final reports to the Habitat II Conference in 1996.
- ² A framework based on the Habitat Agenda for regional Arab Strategy has been elaborated by several governments, the League of Arab States (LAS), ESCWA and UNCHS (Habitat). The Strategy was then adopted by the Council of Arab Ministers for Housing and Reconstruction, LAS
- ³ See Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000, UNCHS, 1988.
- ⁴ While the population of Egypt is estimated just below 70 million, the population in most of the GCC countries is hardly above two million -less than one million in the case of Bahrain and Qatar- with enormous disparity in the national income between this two categories of countries. This disparity is also valid particularly in the case of Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Yemen and the Palestinian territory.
- ⁵ Egypt draft national report.
- ⁶ The Arab Women Network created and supported by the Women programme of UNCHS (Habitat)
- ⁷ Egypt draft national report.
- ⁸ Egypt draft national report.
- ⁹ Iraq draft national report.
- ¹⁰ Two projects for slum upgrading and site and services were successful in countries. These projects were financed by the World Bank.
- ¹¹ Draft national reports of Egypt and Iraq.
- ¹² Egypt draft national report
- ¹³ The housing bank of Jordan has shifted his operation from specialized housing finance institutions to a fully commercial bank. It is also, to be noted that both housing banks in Oman and Yemen experience some serious problems since few years.
- ¹⁴ The GCC consists of six countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman and United Arab Emirates.
- ¹⁵ Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen and Egypt have policies and/or legislation supporting the involvement of various stakeholders in the overall efforts of shelter provision and urban development
- ¹⁶ 2000 World Development Indicators. The World Bank
- ¹⁷ No data available for other countries of the region
- ¹⁸ 2000 World Development Indicators. The World Bank
- ¹⁹ Draft national report of Egypt
- ²⁰ 2000 World Development Indicators, The World bank
- ²¹ Draft national report of Iraq
- ²² Draft national report of Egypt
- ²³ Draft national report of Egypt
- ²⁴ Draft national report of Iraq
- ²⁵ Draft national report of Iraq
- ²⁶ The NGOs work in this sector is more visible in Gaza and the West Bank and also in Lebanon as the NGOs were extremely active during the civil war in the absence of the central government.
- ²⁷ The zabaleen project, which is initiated by an Egyptian NGO and implemented by the community of Zabaleen themselves, could serve as a good example.
- ²⁸ Draft national report of Egypt
- ²⁹ Draft national report of Egypt
- ³⁰ The case refer to Dubai municipality in UAE and Amman Municipality in Jordan
- ³¹ World Urbanization Prospects, 1999 revision. UN Population division/DESA, New York
- ³² Draft national report of Egypt
- ³³ Egypt total superficies is 1 million square km, with a population of 69 million
- ³⁴ Draft national report of Egypt
- ³⁵ Among others are Saudi Arabia and Kuwait
- ³⁶ Draft national reports of Syria, Egypt and Iraq
- ³⁷ Draft national report of Egypt
- ³⁸ UAE and Dubai in particular
- ³⁹ Draft national report of Egypt
- ⁴⁰ Draft Egypt national report

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- ⁴¹ This system is particularly visible in the GCC sub-region
- ⁴² Draft national report of Egypt
- ⁴³ Draft national report of Iraq
- ⁴⁴ 2000 World Development Indicators. The World Bank
- ⁴⁵ Draft national report of Egypt
- ⁴⁶ Draft national report of Egypt
- ⁴⁷ Draft national report of Iraq
- ⁴⁸ This refers particularly to Yemen and Jordan

Annex 1

List of member states that have submitted their reports as of May 2001.

Bahrain
Egypt
Iraq
Jordan
Syrian Arab Republic
Yemen