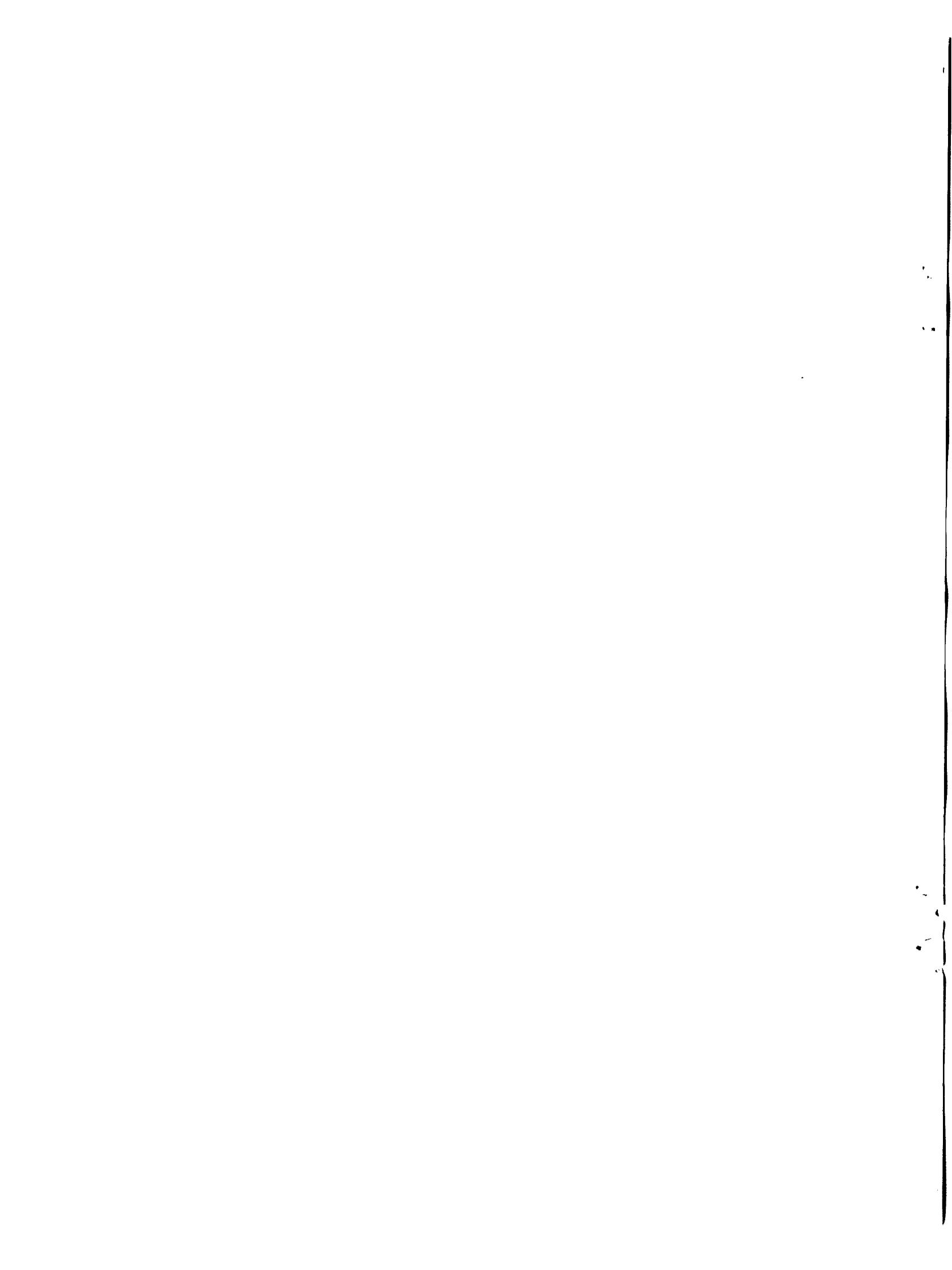**ESCWA**   **UNCHS**   **ARAB LEAGUE**   **BUNIAN**

Regional Preparatory Meeting for the Arab Conference
on Integrated Follow-up to Global Conferences:
Follow-up of the United Nations Conference on
Human Settlements (HABITAT II)
Beirut, 24-27 November 1998

ROLE OF NGOS IN THE FOLLOW-UP
TO HABITAT II: SOME EXAMPLES
FROM THE REGION

98-0368

Introduction

The expanded role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in development is rooted in the changing development paradigms of the 1980s and 1990s. Mounting problems of rapid urbanization, such as pressing demands for shelter, adequate social and physical infrastructure and needs for urban employment, have characterized cities throughout the world, including the Arab region. This situation has been aggravated by receding public resources, necessary for managing the complex urban environment, which has often resulted in serious urban crises. This has occured particularly in large cities, with the proliferation of informal settlements and urban decay in many central city locations.

These conditions have imposed new realities in terms of the roles and responsibilities of different actors concerned with the delivery of public goods and services, including government agencies, NGOs and the private sector. No longer is the public sector able or expected to be the sole provider of public goods and services. Policy makers are increasingly exploring possibilities for tapping into the existing and potential resources of the private sector and NGOs, as partners in development. The provision of some public goods and services in a multi-institutional environment is receiving serious considerations, with options of privatizing the ownership of public enterprises or contracting out some of the services.

Governments in the region are realizing that sustainable development through a vibrant private sector is dependent to a large extent on the availability and accessibility of financial markets for housing finance at affordable rates, and to small- and medium-scale investors for income-generation activities. An adequately trained labour force as well as the creation and sustaining of an enabling environment by the Government are also needed to induce dynamic and effective participation by the private sector and NGOs.

An enabling environment concerns foremost the adequate functioning of institutions and legislation, including an efficient regulatory framework, to ensure that public services are delivered to acceptable standards, and that public resources are managed in a transparent and accountable manner. It also involves support to local institutions in order to facilitate access to credit, technical know-how, information and training facilities to local communities, following the principles of partnership between the State, private sector and civil society (Mitlin and Satterthwaite 1994, p. 64). In many cases, such reforms remain in their infancy in the region, although a number of success stories have been registered, where Governments have cooperated with private sector institutions, NGOs and donor agencies. However, the challenge remains in translating such cases of best practices into the day-to-day urban management process: to strengthen and institutionalize partnerships between stakeholders across the public, private and community sectors.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the opportunities for NGOs as well as the major challenges facing them, in light of the scaling-up they are experiencing as a social actor. In particular it is concerned with the implications of the intervention of NGOs as partners in the urban development process, which represents one of the cornerstones of the Habitat II agenda. Thus, the paper starts with a discussion of the recommendations of the Habitat II agenda, with reference to commitments and guidelines for consolidating State-NGO partnerships in housing and urban development. It then reviews examples of NGO involvement in housing and urban development, through service provision, advocacy or backstopping in local capacity-building. In particular, it addresses the challenges and opportunities facing NGOs as a result of the expansion of their activities in recent years.

While NGOs have generally been active in areas of social development, such as income-generation activities, or facilitating access to social services, such as schools, nurseries or health facilities, their involvement in urban development and housing has emerged more recently. It is therefore important to question the implications of this expanded role, in terms of its potential to affect public policy-making and the NGOs' relations with other partners. The paper concludes with some recommendations as to how NGOs could play a more effective role as partners, without undermining other actors in the process. There is much room for exploration of the ways in which NGOs could capitalize on their unique role as catalysts in promoting participatory local development, which is at the core of the Habitat II agenda.

A. DEFINING NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS: AN ON-GOING DEBATE

The wide diversity of NGOs is a well-known feature of the sector. This diversity renders statements about the effectiveness of NGOs or their shortcomings and comparative advantages either too general to accommodate this diversity, or too specific, and as a result, often incorrect and misleading. This is problematic, particularly in view of the fact that this sector is usually defined by what it is not (non-governmental, non-profit making), with limited areas of commonality: functional, legal, institutional, financial, ideological and organizational. Efforts to establish criteria and indicators for comparative evaluation of NGO performance and their cost-efficiency, including the direct and indirect outcomes of their intervention, remain at an early stage of development. These indicators are particularly important to verify sweeping assumptions made about the comparative advantage of NGOs over other actors, such as government institutions or the private sector, and questions as to whether an expanded role and more visibility in the public domain inevitably leads to more effective impact.

Defining the word NGOs has raised controversies over what to include, or rather exclude from this category, to such an extent that many sceptics have labeled NGOs as a residual sector. The problem of definition is exacerbated when NGOs are studied on comparative grounds, particularly in a cross-cultural context. The range of activities defined also covers community-based organizations (CBOs); government/ non-government organizations (GONGOs); and private sector organizations (PSOs) or membership organizations (MOs). For the purposes of this paper, the term NGOs will be used as an umbrella term to encompass all NGOs with these distinguishing characteristics.

Thus, taking a minimalist definition, NGOs can be said to be non-profit-making organizations, involved with public interest issues, independent from government or state institutions and self-governing[1] (Arrossi et al 1994, p. 39). Different attempts have been made to develop typologies of NGOs to break through their context-specificity, which would allow, among other things, to their assessment in regional and international perspectives and the consolidation analytically, empirically and theoretically, of the concept of NGOs as a social actor within civil society. Clark (1991) and Korten (1990) present often-cited models, which are structured around development agendas that have undergone a series of changes since the 1970s. For them NGOs have evolved from emergency relief work to a more strategic involvement in policy-making, including advocacy and lobbying.[2] Both authors emphasize the dimensions of voluntarism and mobilization of people as important, which make NGOs catalysts for change and agents of democratization; in their perspective, development is about democratic and participatory development.

Other typologies classify NGOs according to their location (northern or southern NGOs); scale of operation; membership or constituency served; approach to development (or agenda); and types of activities, including advocacy, lobbying, operational, income-generation and research. In sum, NGOs are defined differently depending on the purpose of the analysis. Consequently, a legal definition clarifies the regulatory framework governing their operation, while an economic/financial definition differentiates organizations by their sources of funding, which implicitly and sometimes explicitly influence their agendas in line with priorities set by donors. A functional definition allows a classification according to stated, or sometimes hidden, agendas of

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[1] Voluntarism in many sources is identified as an important condition of NGOs. However, the increasing specialization in the field has necessitated the recruitment of more paid staff into the sector. Independence from Government is extremely difficult to monitor, particularly in tracing sources of funding and links to the State operate in a much more complex manner. For a discussion of typologies and problems associated with definitions, see Majdalani (1996).

[2] Clark proposes six categories of NGOs: relief and welfare agencies; technical innovation organizations (involved in appropriate technology projects); public service contractors; popular development agencies (include northern and southern NGOs involved in social development and grassroots democracy); grassroots development organizations (similar to the previous category but locally based); and advocacy groups and networks. Korten (1991) proposes four generations of NGOs based on their functional activities: welfare and relief; public service contractors; voluntary or people organizations; and advocacy groups.

the organizations; and finally a structural/operational definition includes a number of features such as level of voluntarism, mode of operation and organizational structure.[3]

In the case of the Middle East, the literature offers limited methodological material related to the typology debate. The literature is predominantly descriptive, providing valuable information on the range of NGOs activities and mode of operation. Recently however, there have been some serious attempts to study NGOs in the region, in the light of conceptual models developed elsewhere.[4] Furthermore, as most NGOs in the region use a combination of advocacy, research and project implementation in their activities, the proposed categories become fluid and often overlap. While taking the functional dimension, such as NGOs operating in housing and urban development, as a category, the other parameters reviewed above are borne in mind, particularly when assessing differences among NGOs in terms of access to resources and power.

B. THE HABITAT II AGENDA AND MODES OF PARTNERSHIP

The Habitat agenda and Istanbul Declaration of the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Istanbul, 3-14 June 1996) emphatically calls for an expanded role for NGOs as partners involved at all levels of the development process, from decision-making to implementation. Among the many references in the Habitat II agenda, the following quotations capture the broad-based potential for NGOs to play an effective role in the implementation of the agenda. Thus, in terms of goals and principles the Habitat II agenda States:

Partnerships among ... public, private, voluntary and community-based organizations, the cooperative sector, non-governmental organizations and individuals are essential to the achievement of sustainable human settlements development and the provision of adequate shelter for all and basic services. Partnerships can integrate and mutually support objectives of broad-based participation through, *inter alia*, forming alliances, pooling resources, sharing knowledge, contributing skills and capitalizing on the comparative advantages of collective actions (p. 19, par. 33).

Furthermore, all official delegations and participants pledged to:

Encourag[e] the establishment of community-based organizations, civil society organizations, and other forms of non-governmental entities that can contribute to the efforts to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life in human settlements (p. 28, par. 45 (g)).

Institutionaliz[e] a participatory approach to sustain human settlements development and management, based on continuing dialogue among all actors involved in urban development (the public sector, the private sector and communities) (p. 28, para. 45 (h)).

In terms of strategies for implementation, the agenda stresses the following:

Establishing agenda-setting participatory mechanisms enabling individuals, families, communities, indigenous people and civil society to play a proactive role in identifying local needs and priorities and formulating new policies, plans and projects (p.105, par. 182 (h)).

Fostering an understanding of contractual and other relationships with the private and non-governmental sectors to acquire the skills for negotiating effective partnerships for project implementation, development and management that will maximize benefits for all people (p. 105, par. (i)).

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[3]   See Carroll (1994), and Salamon and Anheir (1992) for a more detailed review of approaches to and rationales for developing typologies of NGOs.

[4]   Amani Kandill, and Shahida Base have made, separately, serious attempts to develop a conceptual framework for understanding NGOs as a sector, including function, sources of funding, personnel/level of professionalism, and types of constituencies as important determinants of their analytical frameworks.

The need for partnership in human settlements development is linked to important socio-political and economic changes happening at the global, national and local levels. The public sector has its limitations, affecting its ability to manage on its own an increasingly complex urban environment. Alternatively, partnership provides a cost-effective option for public service delivery, in view of the structural adjustment process affecting almost every nation in the world. Furthermore, partnership necessitates a process of decentralization, conducive to promoting local participation and democratic practices. Nonetheless, NGOs have earned a reputation as efficient actors, capable of mobilizing large constituencies and ensuring access to resources at the local level, although in some cases, this statement is based on empirical evidence, while in others it is a matter of perception.

In addition to the above, the rationale for State-NGOs partnership in the Middle East has taken on a dimension of its own, in view of the major socio-political changes specific to the region. Post-war reconstruction in Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen, efforts at State-building in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and measures for liberalizing the economies in Egypt, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, have opened a space for NGOs to intervene, not only in the implementation of development projects, but also in influencing public policies.

Hence, NGOs can function in different capacities and assume a multitude of roles as partners in the implementation of the Habitat II agenda. Since the early 1990s, NGOs are expected to play a more proactive role in development, which entails changing from the roles of service provider and project contractor for government agencies and donors to an advocacy role. The Habitat II agenda calls in particular NGOs to take an advisory and consultative role in order to assist local authorities in reviewing social, economic and environmental policies and in setting priorities for their local communities. They should also set standards for services such as basic education, child care, public health and public safety (The Istanbul Declaration and the Habitat Agenda 1997, p.106).

The role of advocacy ranges from raising awareness to development issues, including the environment, public health and literacy, to more direct political mobilization that addresses issues of human rights. These rights include housing, land tenure or safe drinking water. Mobilization takes various forms of information dissemination to the beneficiaries concerning their rights and the means of achieving their objectives and aspirations. It also involves informing donors and public authorities about the needs and problems facing local communities, which cannot usually be covered by large quantitative surveys or censuses (Arrossi 1994, p. 50).

In their technical capacity, some NGOs can monitor or advise on the monitoring of development projects, advise on project identification, participate in research teams, through action research or participatory rapid appraisal (PRA). They can also train local communities in needs assessment and in planning, monitoring and evaluating projects funded by international donors (Arrossi 1994, p. 49). NGOs have often been praised for providing the link between donors, government agencies, and international NGOs on the one hand, and the local communities on the other. This has enhanced their role as mediators and facilitators. This is true particularly for the community-based organizations, which can ensure that local communities have access to such resources as credits, technical know-how, and institutional and legislative back-up. Thus, grass-root NGOs can function as pivotal players in the housing sector, in which the participation of the local community and organizations becomes a process of community building.[5]

Hence, the Habitat II agenda, in line with other global conferences, has set out an ambitious role for NGOs. Whether NGOs can perform this role efficiently remains to be tested on the ground. The space to maneuver, which NGOs have, depends mainly on the socio-political environment in which the different partners operate. By the same logic, partnership also depends on the size of the different partners, their modes of operation, their power bases and sources of legitimacy, as well as the financial and technical resources they command. The following section will illustrate, through some examples of NGOs intervention

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[5] John Turner, in *Freedom to Build* and his other writings, is one of the pioneers in advocating this role for community-based organizations. This participatory approach to housing provision later evolved into the core of the enabling strategy adopted by Habitat and other international agencies.

in housing and urban development, the range of roles NGOs perform in the region, and their prospects for expanding them.

C. NGOS IN HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT:
EXAMPLES FROM THE REGION

1. *Overview of the sector*[6]

NGOs in the Arab region have experienced a spectacular increase over the past two decades. Estimates of numbers of NGOs in the region are conflicting, which is partly due to the confusion in defining NGOs, as indicated above. However, based on the available evidence, NGOs are estimated to have increased from a total of 70,000 in 1994, to around 120,000 in 1998.[7] The expansion in the numbers of NGOs is also coupled with an expanded scope for their operations, a larger budget and more members on board, including volunteers and paid staff or what is known as a scaling-up of the NGOs' role in development.

For example, in 1991, in Egypt alone there were some 13,521 NGOs registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, or about one NGO for every 1,824 adult population;[8] the number would be much greater (around 20,000) if existing non-registered associations were taken into account. NGOs in Jordan increased from 112 in 1980 to over 670 in 1996, and have an estimated budget of 10 million Jordanian dinars a year. About 50 per cent of these operate out of Amman and mobilize some 40,000 volunteers.[9] In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, NGOs, until 1994, filled an important gap, as providers of basic services in the absence of a legitimate Government. More importantly, NGOs as a part of the civil society sustained the political mobilization against occupation. In 1996, World Bank sources estimated Palestinian NGOs to number over 1,200 in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with an additional 200 international NGOs. It is also estimated that NGOs provide over 60 per cent of primary health care, low income housing and microcredit facilities.[10] Since the Palestinian Authority took office, the public debate has revolved around the freedom of NGOs to maneuver versus the need for an emerging State to regulate and monitor NGOs activities.

In Lebanon, NGOs have long constituted a dynamic sector, and more importantly, filled vital social functions at the height of the civil war. At present an estimated 5,000 NGOs are operating in the country, including over 100 working at the national level; they are active in operational projects in the area of income generation, health and social welfare, and care for the disabled.[11] Since the end of the war, the country has witnessed a substantial increase in advocacy-type NGOs concerned with democracy and human rights issues,

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[6]   Information in this section is based on available material from selected countries, particularly those with a vibrant NGOs sector. There is still a need to expand the information base for the Gulf countries as well as for Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic who have traditionally had a weak NGO sector.

[7]   Amani Kandill, "The Role of Civil Society: Opportunities and Challenges" in UN-ESCWA *Arab Conference on the Implementation of the ICPD Program of Action*, Beirut, 22-25 September 1998, E/ESCWA/POP/1998/WG.1/12, p. 7. The author estimates this number could be as high as 150,000, after the NGOs in Algeria and Morocco are added. However, these numbers can be misleading, as some countries report diverse types of organizations, including sports clubs, as NGOs.

[8]   Mustafa K. Al-Sayyid, "Civil Society in Egypt?" in Augustus Richard Norton, *Civil Society in the Middle East*, vol. 1. New York, 1995. p. 272.

[9]   Roula Majdalani, "The changing role of NGOS in Jordan: an emerging actor in development", *Jordanies*, vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 119-135, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain, 1996.

[10]   Clark and Balaj, *NGOs in the West Bank and Gaza*, 1996.

[11]   See Krayem and Titsworth, "State. society, sustainable human development, support for good governance in Lebanon", report to the United Nations Development Programme, Beirut, 1995. p. 51. Bennett (1995) on the other hand states that the total number of NGOs can reach 10,000, depending on which ones are included in the definition.

sustainability of the environment and gender balance.[12] Considering the scale of the devastation from the war, NGOs in Lebanon are still involved in operational projects assisting in local area development, resettlement and reintegration of displaced population.

NGOs in the region are shaped by framework of the political economy in which they operate. Their relations with the Government, the performance of the private sector and the legal system determine the size of the NGO sector as well as its social, political and economic clout. Furthermore, NGOs mirror the dominant development paradigms in their respective agendas, choice of activities and mode of operations. As in the case of Lebanon, many NGOs established in the late 1980s and early 1990s, in Egypt, Jordan and the Palestine, have adopted a pro-active mode of operation, as advocated by development agencies. Thus, these NGOs tend to focus on specific issues, such as architectural and cultural heritage, election watch, care for urban street children, and training programs and capacity-building for grass-roots organizations. They target policy makers and combine advocacy with research and networking functions, are usually based in urban areas, and draw a middle-class constituency.

Many of these NGOs, encouraged by positive prospects for funding, have emerged in preparation for or as a result of the major global conferences, notably Habitat II. In particular, national urban management committees have been encouraged to establish national NGOs specializing in urban development issues. Jordan illustrates this trend, where the dismantling of the urban management committee is paralleled by a newly established NGO on urban development, with the same founding members as the original committee.

However, this category remains comparatively smaller in size than the more traditional NGOs, which have maintained their multi-purpose operations in welfare functions, training and service delivery or income-generation projects. Collaboration exists among different types of NGOs, in terms of training, subcontracting of work from larger to smaller NGOs, or from national/international to local community-based organizations. Nevertheless, more frequently the different generations of NGOs seem to operate in juxtaposition, independently from each other, and expressing in some cases a mistrust of the other.

Except for a few NGOs specializing in the provision of housing and urban development services,[13] through technical assistance, operational research, credit facilities, or project implementation, the direct involvement of NGOs in this field has been limited. There are of course numerous community initiatives for home building and service extension, which emerge on ad hoc basis and in response to an emergency or a specific collective housing problem. However, the number of integrated housing projects involving external assistance from NGOs remains limited. One of the main reasons is that, outside the private sector, the State has, until very recently, monopolized the social housing and infrastructure sectors, either as a direct provider or through the control of policy and institutional mechanisms.

Overall, NGO involvement in the housing sector has mainly consisted in backstopping support to on-going projects, such as income-generation projects to secure mortgage repayment for low-income families, environmental awareness campaigns, and the maintenance of public spaces in upgrading sites and services projects. Thus the intervention of NGOs is mainly in the role of facilitator, to complement the construction process and mobilize community groups to participate in the process, particularly when projects are undertaken on cost-recovery basis. In that sense, while NGOs are sought as partners in development, their potential to make a contribution that extends beyond the execution of the project has not yet been fully tapped. Very few of these NGOs are called on to take part in setting development priorities, contributing to the planning and design stages or in the monitoring and evaluation of development activities.

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[12]   *Youth In the Urban Environment in the ESCWA Region* (E/ESCWA/HS/1997/7).

[13]   The NGO was established in August 1998. According to the urban management programme coordinator in Lebanon, the same process may be underway there. Examples of this type of NGO include Almee in Lebanon, working on appropriate technology in energy and architecture; the Housing Council in Jerusalem; the Friends of Salt in Jordan, working on architectural conservation of the old town; and Community Development Services in Cairo, working on urban upgrading in low-income neighborhoods in the city.

Judging from various empirical studies and field observations undertaken in the region, the role of NGOs in urban development and housing in the region has yielded mixed results. Almost all development projects stipulate that NGOs should be involved as partners at all stages of project making, particularly when international donors are involved. In reality, however, the terms and conditions of the partnership and its value added on the overall outcome of the project are largely determined by factors inherent in the project concept and design, the social actors involved and the policy environment surrounding the project.

2. *Notes on some field observations from the region*

In a comparative study undertaken by the Economic and Social Committee for Western Asia on community participation in upgrading projects in three secondary settlements in the region (Ismailia in Egypt, Aqaba in Jordan and Nablus in the West Bank) the dynamics of partnership with NGOs changed at different stages of project design and implementation.[14] In all three cases, NGO involvement in the upgrading projects contributed to cost-reduction, or cost-recovery. It also insured good relations and channels for negotiation with the community.

In Ismailia, the first phase of the project was small in scale and based on a participatory approach. The neighborhood associations were involved in the design stage, which insured cost-recovery of loans for the upgraded units and connection services. More importantly, community participation in this project generated initiatives beyond the realm of the project itself, and assisted in building up the capacity of local people, including the emergence of a class of local entrepreneurs and real estate developers and leading to the phenomenon of urban gentrification. As the project expanded in scope, more stakeholders entered into the negotiations and decision-making process, sometimes on day-to-day issues. Stakeholders included private sector organizations and entrepreneurs, not necessarily from Ismailia, as well as various donors, representatives of government institutions, experts and international NGOs. Under the new phase of the project, the Sustainable Ismailia Project (SIP), local NGOs were given financial incentives and training to engage in income-generation projects and to participate in environmental awareness campaigns. At the time of the study, there was a proposal within SIP to initiate a garbage-recycling project in one of the upgrading sites, modeled along the lines of Zabbaleen project in Cairo, which is a well-known "best practices" case of partnership between NGOs, donors and local authorities. Scaling-up of the project in that case, did not entail an expanded role for NGOs; in fact, many of the decisions were taken at a central level, even outside the local authority structures.

In Aqaba, upgrading was well underway and completed in some neighbourhoods when a community participation project was introduced in 1992. This project involved 27 local NGOs who worked in collaboration with local authorities in the upgrading exercise. Their efforts focused on turning open or unused land into playgrounds for children, the greening of public spaces, clean-up campaigns and the income-generation projects at upgrading sites. A local joint committee including representatives of the local authorities was established to create a community forum for dialogue and follow-up on existing and planned activities. This committee was active as long as funding was available for the different activities. In fact, once the funding was stopped the momentum could not be sustained, although committee still exists as an institutional structure.

In the case of Nablus, donors, including some international NGOs usually undertake infrastructure and upgrading projects. However, as most of them work independently, their projects are piecemeal and are provided as turnkey projects, in view of the uniqueness of the situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. When the new Municipality assumed its functions in 1996, it attempted to streamline development funding and projects according to its own priorities. This caused strained relations with some donors, and particularly affected NGOs which hitherto had had more freedom in deciding where, when and how they

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[14] This study involved field observations in the above three secondary settlements to evaluate the mechanisms of community participation in upgrading projects, particularly when different actors were involved: donors, local and central state agencies, community and interest groups, and NGOs and CBOs. For further information on these case studies, please refer to ESCWA, *Community Participation in Urban Development in the ESCWA Region* (E/ESCWA/HS/1997/4).

would implement their projects. The Save the Children Fund (SCF),[15] had to relocate its small-scale upgrading work and infrastructure projects to rural areas outside Nablus, while in the city their intervention consisted in working with local communities, targeting school children in particular, on environmental awareness programs and campaigns. As in the case of Aqaba, a local committee involving community groups, representatives from the Municipality and private sector organizations was established to plan, execute and monitor these activities and raise funding for follow-up. However, meetings and coordination among committee members decreased substantially with the end of funding. In both cases, the enthusiasm for community work and collective action could not be sustained without financial incentives, particularly as employment opportunities were limited.

3. *The LIFE project*

While the number of "best practices" cases and pilot or model partnership projects between NGOs and other public and private sector actors has increased considerably, for most of these projects, the partnership ends with their completion, as the three case studies above have illustrated. How to institutionalize participatory development and promote a practice of local democracy remains an important challenge for policy makers, development experts and researchers.

In recent years, however, and in line with the Agenda 21 and Habitat II agenda principles and commitments, the Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment (LIFE) was established by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as a pilot program to support local governance. The aim of the program is to promote a policy dialogue among local partners, the State, NGOs and the private sector, as a means of improving the urban environment.[16] In the Arab region, LIFE was already been introduced in Egypt in 1993 and in Lebanon in 1995. In Egypt, four projects addressing waste management, environmental education and legislation have been completed or are under implementation in four governorates: Cairo, Alexandria, Beni Suef and Suez. Lebanon has five ongoing projects in Bcharre, Nabatiyeh, Baalbeck and Beirut on waste management and sanitation, environmental education and the greening of the city.

According to a UNDP report on LIFE, these projects represent successful initiatives in community mobilization, with a pro-active role played by local NGOs. Dialogue was established with government agencies at local and national levels, but did not necessarily lead in all cases to positive or constructive partnership. However, with regard to the negotiation process, community involvement and capacity-building, these projects seem to have opened an institutional space for debate and dialogue among partners. In terms of planning concepts and techniques, the LIFE program offers an innovative approach to linking participation at the project level with participation in the policy domain. The project builds on the notion of "upstream-downstream-upstream" as an ongoing process of project planning and implementation, with a continuous flow of information, moving from the local to the national and back to the local level. While this concept is not new to planners, the challenge lies in expanding the role of non-State actors, particularly NGOs in this case, in the dialogue and in information dissemination and exchange. It remains to be established whether this dialogue can be sustained beyond the life span of the project and incorporated within the municipal structure. Another question concerns whether or how it allows NGOs a greater institutional space to share in decision-making.

As indicated in the report, these are still pilot attempts that should serve as a laboratory for experimenting with planning techniques. It would be very important and useful if these attempts were monitored independently, over time and in comparative perspectives, in order to understand the dynamics of different actors, notably NGOs, in the urban development process. More importantly, there is a need to explore the links between decentralization, local governance and participatory local democracy, and to set the appropriate indicators for monitoring the interplay among these variables.

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[15] The case study focused on the role and activities of SCF as one type of international donor in an urban development project.

[16] "Participatory local governance: LIFE's method and experience 1992-1997", Technical advisory Paper I, United Nations Development Programme.

4. *NGOs in advocacy*

While NGOs have a long-established practice in operational activities, their intervention in policy-making remains in its infancy stage in the region. NGOs command the skills and ability to mobilize resources and provide the necessary welfare functions and emergency assistance in times of crisis, which is a frequent occurrence in the region. The eviction of squatters from land or housing units occupied illegally, or the influx of refugees and those displaced as a result of wars and natural disasters have usually generated swift collective action by local NGOs, among other actors. NGOs, and particularly those operating at the grassroots level, acquired high visibility for their effectiveness in providing food and shelter during the earthquakes in Cairo and in the Dhamar and Ibb provinces in Yemen. Similarly, NGOs have delivered vital services in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine to people affected by war or the Israeli occupation.

In contrast, the role of NGOs in advocacy has been curtailed, particularly in situations where their action is perceived as a challenge to the authority and legitimacy of the State. This explains why many NGOs working on human rights and democracy issues report strained relations with the State, and government interference with their work. For example, NGOs have been active in mobilizing people to vote in municipal elections or in establishing their rights to adequate housing. Environmental advocates have exposed problems of degradation of the environment, and the inability of the concerned agencies to control abuses or improve public services, such as access to safe drinking water, drainage and sewage networks. Some NGOs have also exposed the lack of safety on the road and the impact of inadequate public transport on increasing levels of pollution in cities. Advocacy in this sense impinges on the political domain. As NGOs challenge policy makers on policy matters, it makes government institutions suspicious of their motives, and exposes them to criticism for operating outside their terms of reference. This situation is even more sensitive when NGOs have access to external sources of funding or international media coverage, with the means to apply pressure for public action. Tighter legislation and regulations governing the scope of NGO operations have been imposed as one way of controlling their infrigement on the political domain.

While hailed as effective in shaping public opinion, advocacy-type NGOs have also aroused some suspicion from NGOs themselves, notably those who have retained their traditional role as service providers.[17] Traditional NGOs may perceive advocacy as a covert route for political action. Their objectives are raised on the grounds that advocacy-type NGOs may antagonize the Government, and in some cases jeopardize the trust of their constituencies, losing their political neutrality.

Some of the more effective and commonly used tools of advocacy by NGOs in the region, consist in information dissemination, lobbying and networking in the NGO community as well as among donors, private businesses and in particular the media. One dynamic example of this approach is the work of the Arab Network for Environment and Development (RAED)[18] based in Cairo, involving over 100 Arab NGOs focusing on environmental issues and sustainable human settlements. Advocacy in this respect is based on the dissemination of information and the opening up of channels for dialogue across sectors and social actors, and has so far remained non-confrontational.

The absence of legislative mechanisms to allow NGOs as advocacy groups to take legal action against the abuse of the public good by such entities as private businesses or government departments, or against the mismanagement of public resources, limits their scope of intervention to raising awareness and lobbying. The media, particularly in Lebanon have been an effective partner for the work of NGOs in this area. In other countries, such as Jordan and Egypt, some media groups have recently established their own NGOs to educate the public and policy-makers about the issues of urban development and housing. However, the possibilities for cooperation and partnership with the media, particularly in the light of the advocacy role of NGOs, still need to be explored. In most countries of the region, the media lacks transparency and independence from the State. Furthermore, with the exception of a few countries, such as

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[17] This is based on interviews, undertaken during 1997 and 1998, with representatives of NGOs, providing basic health and educational care facilities in Jordan and Lebanon.

[18] "Participatory local governance: LIFE's method and experience 1992-1997", Technical advisory Paper I, United Nations Development Programme.

Egypt or Lebanon, the media has not yet embraced the issues of urban development and housing with their diverse social, political and economic implications.

There is still much more to learn about the role of NGOs as advocates for sustainable human settlements and housing, and to understand how this role complements their other functions as service providers, mediators and facilitators in the field. These different roles need to be empirically studied and monitored longitudinally, and on comparative grounds. While the cases above suggest that NGOs have the potential to be powerful actors in public life, in many cases they have not been used to their full capacity, or allowed to achieve it. However, there is a need to question the social, political and institutional implications for their performance of an expanded role of NGOs in development. This will be addressed in the following section.

<center>D. SCALING-UP ACTIVITIES OR SCALING-UP IMPACT:
WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR NGOS?</center>

The notion of scaling-up implies more than just a quantitative increase in the numbers and budgets of NGOs. It also entails other processes of transformation affecting these organizations, such as changes in their agendas, modes of operation and relations with their constituencies. Some parameters for observing the different aspects of scaling-up include reaching a larger constituency, through spreading and the replication effect. It can also be functional, by changing the type of activities or adding new components to on-going projects. It can be political, including participating in policy formulation and targeting policy-makers, donors and consumers, expanding or shifting the target for their constituency. Finally, scaling-up can be organizational, by diversifying the funding basis, increasing self-reliance and promoting institutional development.

A key feature in understanding the scaling-up process is to differentiate between expanding impact and expanding activities, which is often a confused issue, particularly in evaluation reports where the inclusion of more activities can be used to justify increases in spending. With more funding and responsibilities, NGOs may need to rationalize the work process according to cost-efficiency standards. This process consumes time, and effort and implies commitments to external actors, such as donors, government departments or researchers, which may in actual terms alienate NGOs from their constituencies. In other words, there is a need to question whether bigger necessarily means more effective. More importantly, NGOs need to explore, if they choose to scale-up, how to retain their comparative advantage in terms of flexibility of operations and closeness to the grass roots.

Proponents of NGOs usually argue that scaling-up is necessary and useful, if the end result is to contribute to institution-building at the local level. As presented in the different projects reviewed above, scaling-up can allow pilot exercises to be institutionalized. In this process, NGOs have the chance to move beyond "gap filling" functions, and share in planning and decision-making.

By increasing their professionalism and specialization in their mode of operations and intensifying their activities, NGOs actually provide their members, as staff or volunteers opportunities, to learn new skills, such as negotiation, lobbying or networking, and possibly prepare them for the employment market. Additionally, NGOs, particularly through their advocacy work, represent a positive avenue for integrating youth and marginal groups into social and civic life. This form of organizational life raises the awareness of youth in regard to public interests issues, and helps them articulate their rights as citizens.

However, scaling-up comes at a cost. When investments are made in expanding the base of operations, hiring staff or renting office space, management has to insure a steady source of income, which in this field has proven to be precarious. In fact, a well-known and common drawback to scaling-up is that many NGOs become resource-dependent. As a result, many NGOs are compelled to modify their agendas, invest in high visibility types of operations, and spend time and resources on networking and lobbying, which in some cases may not correspond to priority needs emerging from the field.

Furthermore, "... it is usually the larger and more visible [NGOs], those capable of networking, with donors, northern NGOs and relevant government ministries, who benefit most from scaling-up. They tend to

<center>10</center>

have better access to information than smaller, local and less wealthy NGOs or grass roots organizations, and hence are in a more favoured position to promote their services. Knowing the "language" or rhetoric of the donors, being able to employ professional staff to formulate their project proposals and evaluation reports considerably increase their eligibility for funding. Through practice they learn how to tailor their programs or project proposals to fit donors' requirements."[19]

Finally, one important aspect of NGOs role as advocates is insuring that government institutions are accountable to the public and transparent in their use and allocation of public resources. In addition, through their model projects, NGOs provide lessons in "alternative" approaches in urban development and planning, which the public sector can emulate or learn from. However, unless government institutions are also exposed to avenues and opportunities for improving their performance and mode of operations, relations with NGOs would remain one of competition, rather than complimentarity and partnership.

E. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has reviewed the different types of NGOs intervention in the area of housing and urban development. The Habitat II agenda calls for an expanded role of NGOs, as partners in development. Thus the paper has explored how this partnership is interpreted in some countries of the region, and practiced on the ground, through a review of urban development projects involving the participation of NGOs.

Although an increasing number of ESCWA members endorse at the official level the participation of NGOs and community groups as partners in development, individual experiences in this respect differ significantly, as evidenced by the scope and impact of NGO participation in public life. There is also wide divergence in the level of effectiveness of NGOs in their different roles, whether as public service providers or as advocates of a participatory process of development. Such differences relate to the NGOs themselves, in terms of their capacity and modes of operation, as well as to the socio-political and economic environment in which they operate.

Information about NGOs remains scattered and, in many instances, conflicting, in quantitative terms: size, beneficiaries, budgets and sources of funding. As a result of a lack of widely-accepted indicators, data is even more confusing with respect to impact assessment, cost-efficiency of intervention by NGOs and their role in democratic change and empowerment. Hence, a systematic and comprehensive review of the role of NGOs in development, at the regional level, cannot be undertaken at this stage, particularly in the case of Iraq, the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Gulf States, where there are very few NGOs in operation.

The three case studies undertaken in the ESCWA region during 1996 and 1997 on community participation in urban upgrading projects, referred to above, illustrate the dynamics of different actors negotiating over urban development projects. The socio-economic, institutional and political weight of the different actors determine to a large extent how partnerships are drawn among them. Equally important is the stage at which NGOs are brought in to take part in these projects. Furthermore, unless these experiences of NGOs-State partnership are institutionalized, particularly at the local level, as in the LIFE project, such cases of participatory development are likely to remain discrete, pilot examples with limited possibilities for replication.

In fact, the more NGOs understand such development agendas as the Habitat II agenda under consideration in the present report, and the tools for intervention they can use in the process, the more they will be able to tailor their role according to their own priorities. While most NGOs in the region are concerned with action-oriented projects, it is important that they understand and appreciate the relevance of the relationship between policy and practice, between research and operational work, and the impact of their localized individual intervention on shaping development concepts and vice versa.

Capacity-building, which has recently received more attention from donors and policy-makers, particularly in the area of training, has still other dimensions that have not yet been fully explored. Training is *sine qua non* for capacity-building; however institutional development should proceed in parallel:

[19] Rula Majdalani, "The changing role of NGOs in Jordan: an emerging actor in development", *Jordanies* p. 124, vol. 12, No. 2, 1996, Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain.

capacity-building is for both people and institutions. Thus, NGOs, particularly those operating at the grass roots level, still lag behind in terms of access to resources, including information, legislation, institutional backing, technical support and, most of all, funding. These issues should be explored in the context of municipal development, particularly as the Habitat II agenda emphatically argues for decentralization and participatory local governance as the only path for sustainable human settlement development.

NGOs still have a vital role to play in operational projects, including delivery of services and welfare functions, particularly at times of crisis. Additionally, through pilot projects, NGOs provide examples of innovative approaches in solving housing and urban environmental problems. On the other hand, NGOs need to develop more proactive strategies in their role as advocates, particularly in the area of the rights to adequate housing, to drinking water and to a safe and clean environment. In addition to stepping up lobbying and networking with policy-makers and the media, NGOs need to press for reforms in legislation that would allow them to follow up legally on issues of public concern for which they advocate.

Finally, NGOs need to intensify their networking functions, particularly at the regional level. Although a few regional networks of NGOs have been established in recent years (such as RAED) there is much room to develop further these linkages, particularly in areas of shared interest or similar type of work. A regional NGOs network for sustainable human settlements could strengthen recent efforts to establish at the national level NGOs for urban development, sponsored by the Urban Management Program (UMP). Specialized regional networks would provide a new informal forum for the exchange of information and experiences, and would allow the streamlining of local or national strategies with a view to developing a common regional vision for the role of NGOs in urban development. These forums should intensify workshops, seminars and meetings at the regional level, as one means of increasing regional cooperation and laying the groundwork for regional comparison of individual experiences.

The considerable increase in the number of NGOs is indicative, as a matter of principle, that the institutional space exists for them to intervene. However, a bigger challenge lies in making this intervention more effective. Thus, what is needed is not only to expand NGOs, in size or numbers, but rather to encourage them to play a more effective role, thereby expanding their impact.

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