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DEVELOPMENT AND INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION: ENVIRONMENT

Progress made towards sustainable and environmentally sound development

Addendum

Report submitted by the United Nations Centre for
Human Settlements (Habitat)

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*   A/44/150.

INTRODUCTION

1. At its forty-second session, the General Assembly considered *Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond*[1] and the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) entitled *Our Common Future.*[2]

2. The General Assembly adopted resolution 42/186 of 11 December 1987 on the Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond, and resolution 42/187 of 11 December 1987 on the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. In the former resolution, the General Assembly requeste... the governing bodies of relevant United Nations organizations to report regularly to the General Assembly on the progress made in achieving the objectives of environmentally-sound and sustainable development in line with paragraph 114 of the Environmental Perspective. The latter resolution invites the governing bodies of the organs, organizations and programmes of the United Nations to report, as appropriate, to the General Assembly, not later than at its forty-fourth session, through the Economic and Social Council, on progress made in their organizations towards sustainable development, and to make such reports available to the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme at its next regular session.

3. At its eleventh session, the Commission on Human Settlements after reviewing resolutio: 42/186 and 42/187 of the General Assembly, adopted resolution 11/4 of 11 April 1988 entitled "Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development", in which it requested the Executive Director of the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) to prepare a report on the contribution of the Centre, based, inter alia, on the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000,[3] to the international efforts towards sustainable development within the field of human settlements.

4. The present report has been prepared in response to Commission resolution 11/4 and General Assembly resolutions 42/186 and 42/187 in consultation with the substantive officials concerned in the United Nations Environment Programme.

5. The report is not intended to be a statistical tabulation but a descriptive and analytical narrative, based on the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000, to show how the medium-term plan and the biennial work programme of the Centre have been oriented to contribute to the

international efforts towards sustainable development in the field of human settlements.

A. The Environmental Perspective

6. There is a close relationship between sustainable development as defined by the Environmental Perspective and the World Commission's report, and the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000. The Environmental Perspective, in reaching the overall aspirational goal of sustainable development, introduces two bases for action: (a) prudent management of available global resources and environmental capacities; and (b) the rehabilitation of the environment previously subjected to degradation and misuse.

7. The Environmental Perspective also recognizes, *inter alia*, the following factors:

(a) Since mass poverty is often at the root of environmental degradation, its elimination is essential, as is ensuring equitable access of people to environmental resources, for sustained environmental improvement;

(b) The environment provides constraints as well as opportunities for economic growth and social well-being;

(c) Environmental issues are closely intertwined with development policies and practices;

(d) Since conflicts of interest among population groups, or among countries, are often inherent in the nature of environmental problems, participation of the concerned parties is essential to determine effective environmental management practices;

(e) Strategies to deal with environmental challenges have to be flexible and should allow for adjustments to emerging problems and evolving environmental management technology.

B. Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development

8. The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development defines sustainable development as a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. This definition contains within it two key concepts:

(a) The concept of "need", in particular the essential needs of the poor such as food, clothing, shelter, jobs and to which overriding priority should be given;

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[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-second Session, Supplement No.25 (A/42/25 and Corr.1), annex II.

[2] A/42/427, annex.

[3] Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-third Session, Supplement No.8 (A/43/8), Addendum.

(b) The idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet current and future needs. The report explicitly notes that the satisfaction of human needs and aspirations is the major objective of development.

C. *Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000*

9. The broad framework for international action in the field of human settlements between now and the year 2000 is provided by the Global Strategy for Shelter to the year 2000. The main objective of the Strategy is to facilitate the provision of adequate shelter for all by the year 2000. The Strategy relies on a set of enabling policies as a basis for both national and international action. It recognizes the following factors and principles as the foundations of the Strategy:

(a) The right to adequate shelter is recognized universally;

(b) Meeting basic shelter needs for all is a national responsibility with appropriate international support;

(c) The inadequacy of shelter is closely related to poverty, lack of income and joblessness;

(d) There is need for a fundamental change in the existing approaches to shelter problem;

(e) Shelter policies cannot be separated from human settlements development strategies;

(f) Both shelter and settlements strategies are integral parts of development policies and plans;

(g) The management of all potential indigenous resources must be environmentally sound.

10. It is clear from the above analysis of the three documents that the objectives, strategies and policies of the Environmental Perspective, the World Commission Report, and the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000 are in most parts mutually supportive. How then are these linkages translated into the medium term plan and the work programme of the Centre?

I. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND THE MEDIUM-TERM PLAN AND THE WORK PROGRAMME OF THE CENTRE

11. The work programme is organized in eight areas: settlements policies and strategies; settlements planning; shelter and community services; indigenous construction sector; low-cost infrastructure; land; mobilization of finance, and institutions and management. There is no specific area devoted to the environment, or to the environment and development, or to sustainable development. Such an arrangement would imply the exclusion of environmental and developmental concerns from the remaining areas of work, whereas all of the Centre's work is built around the concept of sustainability.

12. In order to present this approach in a coherent and direct manner, the main issues addressed in the medium-term plan of the Centre are discussed below under five headings: (a) policies and strategies; (b) resources management in urban and rural areas; (c) enabling strategies; (d) development of indigenous capacities; and (e) information.

A. Policies and strategies

13. A sustainable development strategy should include shelter and settlements development policies. These policies as defined in the context of the Centre's medium-term plan are aimed at: (a) responding to the essential needs of population; (b) improving the overall quality of human settlements; and (c) mobilizing resources for development based on environmentally sound practices. Thus, the objectives of the Centre's medium-term plan are fully consistent with those of the Environmental Perspective and the WCED report. For example, subprogramme 2: "National policies and instruments", which is one of the priority areas chosen by the Commission on Human Settlements, aims at influencing the process of integrating shelter and settlement policies with other policies and strategies at the national level. The Centre's research, technical co-operation and information activities are, therefore, formulated in respect to this overall objective.

14. Work in the area of settlement policies and strategies is focused on the analysis of selected policy themes of human settlements development, all of them with important implications for environmental and developmental issues. Examples include the development of small and intermediate settlements, an area which has been explicitly stressed by the WCED report; the role of community participation in the utilization of scarce resources; settlements rehabilitation and maintenance as an alternative to costly new development; and the role of rural growth centres.

B. Resources management in urban and rural areas

15. The Centre's medium-term plan addresses the issue of resources management in urban and rural areas.

Urbanization has been considered by the Centre as one of the most pressing issues of the development process. The positive, dynamic and innovative characteristics of urbanization have helped to sustain a development process, without which the economies of many developing countries would not survive.

16. Urban agglomerations are the producers and users of a portion of all resources. In the process of production and consumption, cities also generate waste. Therefore, the management of resource-use in urban areas is an important issue in sustainable development.

17. The implications of this issue for the design and formulation of the subprogrammes of the Centre's medium-term plan in the areas of research, technical co-operation and information are profound. It is for this reason that subprogramme 3: "Settlements management" deals specifically with the problems of management of all types of settlements, and two work elements are directly concerned with the management of metropolitan areas and secondary urban centres.

18. The supposed issue of environmental degradation caused by the concentration of population and activities in urban areas is not a problem in itself, but simply a function of the resources invested in managing urban development processes and patterns and in developing the infrastructure needed to prevent pollution and other undesirable environmental effects. These resources are only a fraction of the wealth produced by urban development, and it is imperative that they be earmarked for environmental sustainability.

19. In addition, urbanization can be the most powerful instrument to save from wanton destruction enormous portions of territory in the developing countries which are ravaged through uncontrolled exploitation and population pressures which lack alternative settlement options. Indeed, recent evidence suggests that urbanization, through low fertility rates in urban areas, contributes to relieving overall population pressure.

20. As regards rural areas, the Centre's medium-term plan is also concerned with the management of the subnational systems of settlements and rural development. Operation and maintenance of subnational settlement systems and networks is a part of an integrated approach to sustainable development. The problems of management of subnational systems of settlements are specifically addressed in the work programme element entitled "Subnational systems management and institutions". This work element includes activities related to: planning of subnational settlement systems; planning of rural development; implementation of subnational and rural development plans; operation and maintenance of

subnational settlement systems; and functioning of local authorities.

21. All these topics are, of cou. se, at the basis of the concept of sustainability. Regional development planning is developed to promote and guide harmonious development based on careful utilization of natural resources and the promotion of sustainable production activities and processes.

C. Enabling strategies

22. The Centre's has contributed in the past and will continue to support all efforts in bringing more people, especially the poor and disadvantaged, into the mainstream of development activities. By adopting the concept of "enabling strategies" to promote and strengthen the actions taken by various actors in provision of shelter and services, the Centre has been instrumental in changing attitudes and policies which were exclusionary, i.e., that discouraged or prevented participation. Sustainable development is achievable when all groups participate in developmental activities as well as benefiting from the results of development.

23. The Centre's work programme outputs related to this topic are focused on the provision of shelter and community services to low-income people in urban and rural areas, according to the principles of the Global Strategy for Shelter to the Year 2000. The issue of housing and services for the poor in the cities of developing countries is one of the main points of the chapter on "Urban Challenge" in the WCED report. In the past 10 year , the Centre's has given the highest priority to research, training, technical co-operation and information activities devoted to helping low-income people improve their day-to-day living environment.

24. Looking to the future, although participation permeates all subprogrammes of the medium-term plan of the Centre, the subprogramme on "Shelter production" is particularly relevant to this subject. The overall objective of this subprogramme is to support efforts in producing shelter as an essential element of human settlements development. For this purpose enabling strategies, expressed in terms of participation of all actors in the shelter production process, play an important role. The poor and disadvantaged are to be helped to help themselves in production and maintenance of their shelter and services.

25. The Centre has actively promoted participation of women in human settlements development and management, inter alia, by organizing a series of five workshops on this topic during the 1988-1989 biennium.

D. Development of indigenous capacities

26. Indigenous capacity-building - including human resources development, institutions and management - as a prerequisite for sustainable development, has been a major concern of the Centre's medium-term plan.

27. Capacity-building, as a component of resource planning and management, is concerned with both physical and human resources. Human settlements, as producers and consumers of goods and services, need to develop capacities for production, for technological development for more efficient production and for reduction of wastes, and for human resources development to manage the processes of production, consumption and recycling. This last concern is addressed by the "Human resources development" components of all subprogrammes of the Centre's medium-term plan. Capacity-building for production and technological development is being addressed in subprogramme 6 on "Infrastructure development and operation"; and subprogramme 7 on "Shelter production". The former deals with water supply and drainage, sanitation and waste disposal, transport, and energy supply, while the latter addresses issues related to the production of shelter.

28. The Centre's work programme includes a subprogramme on indigenous construction technology and low-cost infrastructure which is based on the premise that proper settlements development, operation and maintenance has to be "sustainable" in terms of technical operation, affordability and environmental standards. The Centre assists developing countries in developing, testing and applying appropriate construction technologies which make use of local materials, skills and resources, thus discouraging the introduction of costly and inappropriate building materials, technologies, processes and finished products. This equally applies to the kinds of solutions which need to be adopted in developing countries to introduce water supply, sanitation and transport services suited to local conditions, which are easily improvable and affordable both by providers and by users.

29. Another subprogramme is addressed to land for human settlements. Here, the Centre's policy is not to preserve land indiscriminately and at all costs but to ensure that land use is planned and managed in such a way that all development needs, including environmental needs, are satisfied and reconciled with one another. In a developing-country context, particularly in rapidly growing urban areas, this means ensuring a supply of developed land commensurate with the demand for shelter, infrastructure and services. The failure to me land needs leads to chaotic development, rampant land speculation, occupation of marginal and ecologically fragile lands and worsening of the environmental conditions of disadvantaged and economically vulnerable groups.

30. Finally, the subprogramme on finance, institutions and management is based on the concept that sustainability also means developing practical ways to ensure that shelter and human settlements programmes and projects are cost-effective. Shelter and human settlements programmes are still seen by many governments, financial institutions and public managers as budget expenditure items instead of means of promoting social and economic development patterns that are self-sustainable and, in

fact, capable of mobilizing and generating new resources. The Centre's integrated research, training, technical co-operation and information programmes aim at improving institutional performance in these areas and at introducing these principles as an integral part of development policies and strategies.

E. Information

31. Information, education and participation have been considered vital to progress towards sustainable development. The Centre's past and current biennium work programmes have been committed to the principles and policy orientations implied in the concepts and ideals of sustainable development. The results of the Centre's research, training and technical co-operation activities have periodically been published and widely distributed.

32. The Centre's publications that have direct relevance to the concept of sustainable development in relation to human settlements planning, development and management are listed in the annex of this report.

II. CONCLUSION

33. Environmental concerns and planning and programming to achieve sustainable development are continuing concerns of UNCHS (Habitat). Its programmes in research, training, information and technical co-operation are formulated with the objective of sustainability of development in mind. The Centre is committed to assisting Member States in analysing, monitoring, and managing human settlements environmental problems in accordance with their national development plans, priorities and objectives.

34. The Centre is specifically concerned with the problem of poverty and its relationship to environmental degradation and the concept of sustainable development in all aspects of human settlements planning, development and management.

35. The Centre will continue to base its activities on the principle that its "enabling approach" is the human settlements dimension of sustainable development. This applies particularly to urbanization processes in the developing countries, which can be the most powerful instrument to improve the quality of life of millions of people in new urban settings and, at the same time, relieve human pressure on threatened environmental resources in non-urban regions.