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REPORT

EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON THE USE OF URBAN OBSERVATORIES AS A TOOL FOR LOCALIZING URBAN AND SOCIAL POLICY IN THE ESCWA REGION BEIRUT, 1-2 DECEMBER 2009

Summary

The Expert Group Meeting on the Use of Urban Observatories as a Tool for Localizing Urban and Social Policy in the ESCWA Region (Beirut, 1-2 December 2009) was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) within the work programme of the Social Policy in the City Team. The main purpose of the meeting was to review the use of urban observatories within a framework of social policy and sustainable urbanization.

Its main goals were to explore issues of urban observatory frameworks and networks, localize social policies and urban governance, focus on the complex urban issues that will be monitored by urban observatories and address the processes involved in localizing social and urban policies to achieve sustainable urbanization. The meeting sought to deepen knowledge of the urban situation in the cities and countries of the ESCWA region, covering the dynamics of urban settings, problems related to sustainable urbanization, and the institutionalization and networking of urban observatories.

The meeting also included a special session for the regional launch of the Global Report on Human Settlements 2009 – Planning Sustainable Cities: Policy Directions and concluded with a set of recommendations addressed to Governments and United Nations agencies.

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Introduction

1. Cities are not only growing in number, they are also growing in influence. There is an increasing consensus among experts and decision makers that cities and metropolitan areas are becoming the focal points of economic and political power at the expense of nation States. However, such opportunities are undermined by a number of challenges, including growing inequality, urban violence and social exclusion. Thus, cities are becoming a test bed for the adequacy of political institutions, the performance of Government agencies and the effectiveness of urban governance.
2. In the ESCWA region, urban growth and the accelerating drift to towns and cities are straining an infrastructure which is already overstretched and creating overcrowded, unhealthy and insecure living conditions in many cities. In view of their potential contribution to urban and social policy, local urban observatories have a critical role to play in achieving sustainable and inclusive urban development.
3. A local urban observatory for a town or city is designed to be a focal point for urban policy development and planning, in which collaboration between policymakers, technical experts and representatives of partner groups is fostered. Networks of local urban observatories can be facilitated by national urban observatories. The Global Urban Observatory (GUO) Programme established by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) focuses on how to build the capacity of both local and national urban observatories.
4. However, local urban observatories face a number of challenges, the most important of which include the following:
 - (a) The institutionalization of local urban observatories;
 - (b) The setting-up of cooperation frameworks to harmonize the work of local observatories in order to build significant databases at both urban and national level;
 - (c) The monitoring of urban inequalities beyond conventional access to such essential services as adequate water supply and sanitation, shelter, sufficient living space and security of tenure;
 - (d) The effectiveness of urban observatories and their ability to make a concrete contribution to urban policy formulation and implementation in ways that promote sustainable urbanization;
 - (e) The need for a clear understanding of the overall operational framework within which urban observatories can contribute to localizing processes of urban and social policies;
 - (f) The need for an integrative model based on functional links between the multiple components of urban observatories;
 - (g) The integration of social policy analysis into the key functions and activities of urban observatories;
 - (h) The effective integration of urban observatories into the urban development planning and policy processes;
 - (i) The identification of the ways in which urban observatories can best meet the needs of different urban spaces, thus ensuring optimal promotion of sustainable urbanization through their collection, analysis and use of urban indicators.
5. To this end, a conceptual and operational model – the Sustainable Integrative Model for Urban Observatories – was prepared for ESCWA as a methodological guide, in order to assist urban observatories

in the ESCWA region to achieve sustainable local urbanization. This framework is based on international guiding principles, indicator frameworks, and a number of operational and academic concepts and findings in the fields of city planning, urban and social policies.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

6. The meeting concluded with a set of general recommendations by participants on the use of urban observatories as a tool for localizing urban and social policy, the use of urban observatories in the cities of the ESCWA region, and the relationship of such observatories to Government agencies and authorities. The participants addressed their recommendations to Governments and United Nations agencies.

A. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO GOVERNMENTS

7. Governments are urged:

(a) To support existing observatories both politically and financially, and to establish new observatories;

(b) To integrate social policy objectives into the key functions and activities of urban observatories;

(c) To integrate urban observatories into urban development planning and policy processes;

(d) To review the legal restrictions on the formulation and implementation of urban plans and programmes by municipalities in order to ensure enhanced provision of services;

(e) To optimize data collection procedures and urban problem appraisal;

(f) To provide additional revenue mechanisms to fund key urban services;

(g) To build the managerial capacity of municipalities and the skills of civil servants in order to ensure better urban administration and management;

(h) To decentralize functions to local government and, in parallel, put in place mechanisms to give an effective voice to civil society organizations and the poor in the decision-making process;

(i) To encourage private sector institutions to participate in policymaking and urban planning.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO ESCWA, UN-HABITAT, THE ARAB TOWNS ORGANIZATION AND THE ARAB URBAN DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

8. ESCWA, UN-HABITAT, the Arab Towns Organization (ATO) and the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI) are urged:

(a) To activate the agreement between the four parties for the provision of technical assistance to urban observatories and the cities of the ESCWA region cities;

(b) To help to develop an integrated network of local and national urban observatories in the countries of the ESCWA region;

(c) To build an efficient network for the exchange of information and expertise about best practice in the fields of urban development and urban observatories;

(d) To contribute to the unification and harmonization of criteria used by urban observatories to establish indicators for the ESCWA region;

(e) To contribute to the establishment of an agenda for regional sustainability indicators;

(f) To help to empower observatories to move beyond simple data collection and analysis, and into provision of policy advice on social development in urban areas;

(g) To help to strengthen the capacity of ESCWA member countries to formulate and implement policies designed to achieve a more equitable distribution of urban services through better monitoring of urban social indicators, including health, education, and access to water supply, sanitation and adequate housing;

(h) To contribute to the consolidation of participatory processes between governmental institutions, the private sector and civil society in the elaboration of policies and urban development plans by stressing the social responsibility of private sector institutions;

(i) To encourage regional and international organizations, and other institutions supporting the integration of social issues into Arab development processes, to have a voice and a role in the creation and operation of urban observatories;

(j) To support the sustainability of the AUDI programme, and the development and enhancement of its technical assistance for the creation and operation of urban observatories;

(k) To ensure that ATO and AUDI hold meetings with political and executive figures in the cities of the ESCWA region, stressing the need for the integration of social issues and indicators into the design and operation of urban observatories;

(l) To ensure that ESCWA works to foster coordination and transparency between local and national observatories in order to optimize urban development.

II. DISCUSSION PANELS

9. The discussions focused on three main thematic pillars and experience in selected ESCWA member countries. The interventions dealt with urban observatory networks and the social dimensions of urban observatories on the first day, and focused on urban spaces and country experience on the second day.

PANEL 1: URBAN OBSERVATORY NETWORKS

10. The panel was chaired by Mr. Frederico Neto, Chief, ESCWA Social Development Division. It proposed and discussed measures to develop an integrated network of local urban observatories in ESCWA member countries. The main focus areas included:

(a) Offering assistance to Governments, local authorities and central statistical offices to increase their ability to collect, manage, maintain and use information on urban development;

(b) Enhancing the use of urban indicators for policy formulation, planning and urban management;

(c) Stimulating broad-based consultative processes to enhance the role of civil society in urban information networks, as well as the dissemination of good practice worldwide, with particular focus on the activities of the UN-HABITAT Global Urban Observatory Network (GUONet).

11. Ms. Maharufa Hossain, Coordinator of the Global Urban Observatory at UN-HABITAT in Nairobi, Kenya, gave a presentation on GUONet. She explained that the purpose of establishing an urban observatory is to understand how cities function as social and economic systems, and to use this knowledge to improve local and national urban policies. She argued that we live in an urban era, with cities offering opportunities in terms of employment, innovation and creativity, but also imposing challenges when they become pockets of poverty, exclusion, marginalization and environmental degradation. GUONet comprises more than 200 local, national and regional urban observatories and its role is wide-ranging. It aims to provide technical guidelines to local, national and regional urban observatories in urban planning and policy issues; transform information into knowledge; share best practice and lessons learned; facilitate partnership agreements; and guide informed policy formulation. Its partners are Governments, local authorities, local authority associations, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, the media, and research and professional institutions. GUONet is thus able to foster a holistic, integrated approach, facilitating the adoption of a standard methodology in indicator development and learning from global best practice.

12. The post-presentation discussion focused on the means of strengthening cooperation between Government, civil society and the private sector in order to improve data collection, analysis and decision-making in relation to urban issues. There was consensus on the importance of examining the experience of different countries, and extracting the lessons learned and best practice. Participants reiterated that urban observatories should not be viewed as a privilege, but as an essential tool for urban planning in order to improve quality of life in urban settings.

13. Mr. Ahmed Taha Saghier, Head of AUDI in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, gave a presentation on the regional approach to urban observatories. He identified a number of problems faced by urban observatories in the ESCWA region, including: (a) insufficient knowledge of the UN-HABITAT agenda and major United Nations conferences to tackle urban issues; (b) the lack of an effective and efficient participatory approach between Government, civil society and the private sector; (c) the low priority given to gathering information and conducting research in the region; (d) the lack of reliable, accurate, timely and comparable data on cities of the ESCWA region; (e) the fact that most staff in urban observatories are engineers, whose technical focus sometimes leads to a failure to integrate social issues into their planning; and (f) ongoing political instability in the region. He also highlighted the importance of local urban observatories, but noted that the ability of urban observatories to operate efficiently at the local level requires a certain degree of decentralization, an approach which is rarely favoured in countries in the ESCWA region. Finally, in relation to the issue of hosting urban observatories, he explained that experience has shown that municipalities tend to be more effective hosts than other bodies, such as academic institutions or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

14. The post-presentation discussion revolved around the following main issues: (a) the need for countries whose data are unreliable or insufficient to enhance their analytical capabilities in order to overcome such data constraints, identify urban problems and adopt the strategies needed to overcome them; (b) the distinction between the functions of urban observatories and those of municipalities, in order to prevent municipalities from viewing observatories as competitors; (c) the importance of having staff from a variety of professional backgrounds (including engineers, social scientists, economists and environmentalists) in urban observatories in order to form a comprehensive approach to urban issues; and (d) the importance of the advisory role played by the United Nations to urban observatories, in particular with respect to data collection, analysis and strategy formulation.

PANEL 2: THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF URBAN OBSERVATORIES

15. The panel was chaired by Mr. Ghassan Samman, representing ATO, Kuwait. It proposed and discussed methodologies for the provision of comprehensive coverage of social development issues by urban observatories in the ESCWA region. The main social dimensions examined included:

(a) The need for urban observatories to incorporate frameworks of indicators to assess urban social trends and challenges that go beyond simple access to essential urban services and including key issues related to the Millennium Development Goals, such as health, education and employment;

(b) The need to empower observatories to move beyond simple data collection and analysis, and into the provision of policy advice on social development in urban areas;

(c) The interaction of urban observatories with key urban stakeholders concerned with socio-economic development, including community associations, civil society organizations, local and national government, academia and the private sector.

16. Ms. Gisela Nauk, Chief, ESCWA Social Policy Section, gave a presentation on the ESCWA approach to integrated social policy. She argued that the concept of social policy has frequently been misunderstood or misrepresented in recent development literature. It is vital that social policy should concern itself with ensuring equitable access to such social services as healthcare and education, and must also respond to social challenges and market failures by providing social security systems and structures to support vulnerable and marginalized groups in society. However, she posited that social policy is not limited to such matters; the primary concern of social policy is the attainment of social objectives compatible with the ideal of a just, equal and prosperous society. These include the equitable distribution of wealth, increased participation and national integration, and steady increases in living standards and levels of welfare.

17. Social policy thus fulfils three interrelated functions and addresses three dimensions. The three interrelated functions of social policy are the social, political and economic functions, while the three dimensions are social protection, investing in people and social development. The responsibility for creating social policies is shared between the State, the private sector, the family and civil society, while responsibility for implementing social policies is shared between the State, the family, the market and the community.

18. Ms. Nauk concluded her presentation by identifying a number of levels and design issues related to social policy. Social policy comprises three levels: central government; regional government (or, in certain areas, the governorate level); and the municipality. Social policy must be designed within a framework of dialogue between three main structural elements: a social development vision, conceived as a springboard to social justice; consultation with and participation by stakeholders; and implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

19. Mr. Jihad Farah, lecturer at the Lebanese University, gave a presentation on the ESCWA Social Guide for Urban Observatories (SGUO), followed by an example of the implementation of its indicator framework in urban and social fragmentation. He argued that the importance given to social issues and the way in which they should be incorporated into the work of urban observatories in the ESCWA region varies considerably, being highly dependent on the methodologies, status and objectives of each observatory. The indicator framework of the SGUO is less concerned with global comparisons than with moving towards more socially-inclusive agendas, by providing a city-level analysis which could serve as a participatory tool in the policy development process. The SGUO framework adopts a problem-based approach, its design methodology incorporating a number of different categories. This approach builds on two primary assumptions, namely that the main challenges facing cities in the ESCWA region are of a trans-sectoral nature, such as poverty, urban sprawl, urban fragmentation and security; and that policybuilding, in the age of societies of risk, is primarily a responsive, problem-solving approach. The first of these two categories is thus the “issue” or the “problem”, while the second is the “level”, where the complexity of the problem is fragmented across various social levels. The third category in the framework is the “determinant”. Determinants are conditions that define the outcome of a particular issue; defining determinants is therefore the most important exercise in the SGUO indicator framework methodology. The final category in the framework is “indicators”. The SGUO does not adopt a predefined set of indicators, but leaves them to be constructed locally, based on local data.

20. Mr. Farah then dealt with the issue of urban fragmentation, which he considered a major challenge to sustainable urban development in the cities of the ESCWA region. He defined urban fragmentation as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon, affected by social and spatial practices as much as by political dimensions or more encompassing radical global and technological changes. He then tested the model and its implementation, using the above definition of urban fragmentation as a basis for both the determinants and social levels categories.

21. The post-presentation discussion revolved around the following main issues: (a) the need to empower citizens to participate effectively in the decision-making process through such mechanisms as forums and citizens' meetings; (b) urban observatories should be considered to be workshops for the identification of urban issues, determinants and associated indicators; (c) holistic and systemic approaches should be adopted in the design of urban and social policies, in order to integrate the various dimensions of urban dynamics; (d) following preliminary implementation across a number of urban observatories in the ESCWA region, new methodologies for the functioning of urban observatories and indicator frameworks should be revisited from a participatory point of view; and (e) urban observatories should adapt to the specificities of the region, particularly in terms of urban problems, and local conceptions and representations of sustainable development.

PANEL 3: URBAN SPACES

22. The panel was chaired by Ms. Maha Yahya, ESCWA Regional Advisor on Social Development. It discussed the relationship between urban observatories and the changing structures of urban territorial organization, and examined how key stakeholders, primarily State institutions and civil society organizations, strategically use urban space in their urban monitoring and management activities. The main focus areas included:

(a) How urban observatories can respond to the changing dynamics between the State and civil society, with particular regard to the provision of and demand for urban services, in ways that allow them to provide effective policy advice;

(b) Broad-based consultative processes that could assist Governments in the implementation of urban and national structural and territorial reforms;

(c) The role of urban observatories in policy formulation, against a backdrop of globalization and decentralization processes.

23. Ms. Cecilia Marocchino, Urban Specialist, UN-HABITAT, Amman, gave a presentation on good governance and management. Arguing that participatory good governance is the process of shaping and implementing decisions in close cooperation with stakeholders, she identified those stakeholders and defined the principles, sectors and indicators of good urban governance. The main stakeholders include governmental institutions, local authorities, civil society, the private sector and academics, while the main principles at the core of good urban governance are sustainability, subsidiarity, equity, efficiency, transparency, accountability, civil engagement, citizenship and security. In summary, she said, inclusive decision-making is at the heart of good urban governance.

24. Ms. Marocchino then presented the Urban Governance Index (UGI), its indicators and underlying sub-indices, before concluding her presentation on the role, mission and impact of urban observatories. She said that the urban observatory is a combined tool for monitoring the process and promoting good urban governance; its mission is responsiveness and openness to innovative and creative proposals; and its main impact is on the social sector, seen primarily in urban service delivery, investment attraction, the management of risk and the assurance of safety, and the provision of budgeting and financing services.

25. Mr. Serge Yazigi, Director of the MAJAL Academic Urban Observatory and Professor at the Balamand University in Lebanon, gave a presentation in which he redefined the role of urban observatories in relation to planning. His presentation focused on new trends in planning and the challenges facing urban observatories in the ESCWA region. He dealt with three questions in particular, the first on the reasons behind the move from traditional master planning to strategic planning and the direction of this trend; the second on the capacity of urban observatories to meet the requirements posed by the new trend; and the third on the obstacles that face observatories in the ESCWA region in their journey from theory to reality.

26. Mr. Yazigi said that he had observed two main trends in planning practice over the last 25 years. The first, which he described as strategic planning, relates to the shift from a master plan to an action plan for a specific urban area and the synergy between the various actors involved in that process. The second, which he referred to as an interactive-reactive approach, relates to the continuous changes and complexity seen in urban situations, and the need to account for a variety of issues in this process, such as the need to incorporate a variety of components, to react quickly while not losing sight of the bigger picture, to integrate the dynamics and opinions of the various actors involved, and to quantify and qualify urban data in normative ways and on comparative national, regional and international scales. Mr. Yazigi concluded by setting out two major objectives: that urban observatories should be fully integrated into local government structures and that local authorities should be required to adopt the recommendations made in reports by urban observatories.

27. The discussions following these two presentations revolved around the following main issues: (a) in their new role, urban observatories should work in conjunction with strategic planning and good governance; (b) their activities should correspond to changing mindsets in the Arab world in terms of increased transparency, accountability and reinforcement of democracy-related issues; (c) the success of urban observatories is closely linked to the sense of ownership by those administrations responsible for implementing policies recommended by the observatories; (d) the success of urban observatories can have a major impact on long-term vision in both planning-related issues and sustainable development approaches; (e) the need to reconsider the urban space in relation to the metropolitanization and decentralization processes in the countries of the ESCWA region; and (f) the need for greater power and increased financial resources for municipalities and local government for the provision of urban services and the implementation of public social policies.

PANEL 4: COUNTRY EXPERIENCE

28. Ms. Fahima El-Shahed, Under Secretary for Regional Planning Centres in Egypt, gave a presentation in which she set out details of the recent activities promoted by the General Organization for Physical Planning (GOPP) in her country. This national authority is structured around planning and urban development centres in all economic regions, each with a unit for an urban observatory. The local observatories are all linked to the national urban observatory, which serves as a receiver of data for analysis and a provider of indicators for decision-making and policymaking at various levels. Ms. El-Shahed emphasized that this type of structure requires a solid plan for staff capacity-building at all levels of the organization.

29. Mr. Abdallah Abdul Wahab, Director of Al-Fayhaa Urban Community, Tripoli, Lebanon, gave a presentation on the Tripoli Environmental and Development Observatory (TEDO). TEDO is institutionalized, being affiliated to and supported by the municipal authority of Al-Fayhaa. The activities of TEDO are wide-ranging, covering issues of a socio-economic, cultural, natural and environmental nature, urban planning and land use. TEDO has encountered difficulties in number of areas, including data collection that is poor, scattered and not readily available, leaving the observatory dependent on other sources for data; and problems related to the role of the observatory as a tool in the decision-making process, which tend to arise from a lack of expertise in drawing up efficient diagnostics, highlighting key local issues and setting priorities based on the identification of problems. TEDO has entered into partnership with a

number of local and international institutions and is responsible for the management and implementation of decentralized cooperation projects, including the Al-Fayhaa City Development Strategies project and the Al-Fayhaa Sustainable Development Strategy project. To this end, TEDO needs to bolster its existing staff with scientific experts in order to become both an effective tool for urban policy formulation and development, and an advisor to municipal councils.

30. Mr. Mohammad Abdel Salam, Director of Jeddah Urban Observatory, gave a general presentation on the activities of the observatory. Part of the Higher Council for the Development of the City of Jeddah, the observatory is chaired by the Governor of Jeddah and supported by the governorate. Its main activities are based on a geographic information system (GIS), building primarily on UN-HABITAT indicators through the help of private consultants. One of the main purposes of the observatory is to monitor the strategic plan for Jeddah and its data are made available both through censuses and the various ministries which participate in the Higher Council.

31. Mr. Mahmoud Ramadan, Director of Aleppo Urban Observatory, gave a presentation on its activities. The observatory is the result of a process which started with collaboration between the city of Aleppo and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation, progressed to a survey of the informal sector in the city and finally led to the creation of a formal urban observatory, directly affiliated to the city. Its main purpose is to monitor the city development plan, and although data on informal activities in the city is still being gathered before the participatory phase can be initiated, the observatory will eventually contribute to greater social and economic development for the city.

32. Ms. Yasmeeen Al-Awadhi, Coordinator of the National Urban Observatory in Yemen, gave a presentation on its work. The observatory has three primary objectives: evaluating national urban policies and providing decision makers with urban and population indicators; evaluating the development processes of its partners; and setting up local urban observatories and networks. The difficulties it has encountered fall into three main areas: problems with the preparation of indicators, primarily related to the paucity of detailed data and lack of communication with the sources of that data; problems with the existing model and the indicator framework; and a lack of field research. The most urgent needs currently facing the observatory are the development of field study-supported indicators; a GIS system; the development of skills and capacities of staff and national partners; and comprehensive documentation, mainly in the fields of technical exchange, research studies and foreign consultancy.

33. The discussions following these presentations were wide-ranging, focusing on the need for urban observatories to: (a) have clear models, frameworks and methodologies for operation and data collection; (b) gather reliable qualitative and quantitative information on urban centres and cities, as such information is generally only recorded at national or sectoral levels in ESCWA member countries; (c) serve not only as data collectors, but also to have an advisory role in the monitoring and evaluation of problems, issues and trends in their cities; (d) create sustainable hosting mechanisms within municipalities, rather than in academic institutions or NGOs; (e) establish master plans and strategic plans locally, rather than being fully outsourced to foreign companies; (f) be fully recognized as partners by municipal councils and public authorities in policymaking; (g) establish partnerships with local multidisciplinary experts and institutions; (h) account for the informal sector; (i) work towards financial autonomy by providing training, preparing studies and selling customized data; (j) work to ensure that urban observatories are viewed as learning platforms, involving a variety of social actors; (k) bring together human development and good governance; (l) create networks between urban observatories, nationally, regionally and globally; and (m) improve coordination between city, national, regional and international institutions and organizations for the exchange of best practice.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. DATE AND VENUE

34. The Expert Group Meeting on the Use of Urban Observatories as a Tool for Localizing Urban and Social Policy in the ESCWA Region was held at United Nations House, Beirut, on 1-2 December 2009.

B. OPENING

35. Mr. Frederico Neto, Chief, ESCWA Social Development Division, opened the meeting with a statement in which he welcomed the global, regional and national experts participating in the event and conveyed to them the good wishes of Mr. Bader AIDafa, Executive Secretary of ESCWA, for their success.

36. Mr. Neto argued that the twenty-first century is the urban century, and that cities are becoming the focal points of economic and political power at both the regional and global levels. He noted, however, that such opportunities are all too easily undermined by a number of challenges, including growing inequality, inadequate access to basic services, and social exclusion. Referring to the Arab Human Development Report 2009 and the Millennium Development Goals Report 2009, he also noted that urban growth and the accelerating drift to cities and towns is straining already-overstretched infrastructure and creating overcrowded living conditions in many cities, and that the number of people in absolute poverty in Western Asia increased fourfold between 1990 and 2005. It is for this reason that cities are becoming a test bed for the adequacy of political institutions, the performance of Government agencies and the effectiveness of urban governance; it is also where urban observatories could play a critical monitoring role in the ESCWA region, in terms of their potential contribution to urban social policy and the creation of more sustainable and inclusive urban development.

37. Mr. Neto noted with pleasure the ongoing cooperation between ATO, UN-HABITAT and ESCWA in the organization of the meeting and the regional launch of the UN-HABITAT *Global Report on Human Settlements 2009 – Planning Sustainable Cities: Policy Directions*.

38. He concluded his statement by acknowledging that localizing social policy at the city level requires the inclusion of urban observatories in national development strategies. In order to achieve urban development and sustainable urbanization, and enhance the welfare of the peoples of the region, he invited participants to examine further four concepts related to the establishment and operation of urban observatories: the role of Governments, new urban challenges, sustainable development and governance.

39. Ms. Bayan Tabbara, Leader, ESCWA Social Policy in the City Team, delivered a statement in which she welcomed the participants and noted the importance of the use of urban observatories as tools in localizing social policies. She also spoke of the need to promote equity in policy in the cities of the ESCWA region for the purposes of sustainable urbanization, and urged Governments to support existing urban observatories and foster the creation of new ones.

40. Finally, Mr. Leon Televizian, ESCWA consultant and expert in urban planning and local development, gave a detailed presentation on the use of urban observatories as a tool in localizing urban and social policies. The presentation was in three sections, the first being a general introduction to the challenges and issues facing urban observatories in the ESCWA region; the second, a brief overview of current urban dynamics and the new role of urban observatories; and the third, a conceptual and operational framework for urban observatories.

41. In the first part of his presentation, Mr. Televizian argued that the combination of local urban observatories as a tool, sustainable development as a paradigm and governance as a mechanism could provide a useful integrative, sustainable urbanization framework. Urban observatories should be designed to act as a focal point for urban development and planning, fostering collaboration between policymakers,

technical experts and partner groups. Urban observatories can make a contribution by dealing with three issues in particular: the changing dynamics between the State and civil society; the consultative processes that can assist Governments in implementing territorial reforms; and by playing an advisory role in formulating policy in an increasingly globalized and decentralized world.

42. The second part of his presentation provided a brief overview of the conceptual framework associated with the establishment and operation of urban observatories. The first concept involves rethinking the role of Governments: the traditional power of Government or the State-centred model of regulation and arbitration of social conflicts is being challenged in many areas, as cities become places of learning, experimentation and struggle for the formal recognition of civic, political, social and cultural rights. The second concept is rethinking the city: urban populations are spreading beyond old city limits, rendering traditional municipal boundaries and, by extension, traditional governing structures and institutions outdated. There is thus an urgent need for balanced territorial policies solidly embedded in metropolitan planning and governance frameworks. The third concept is rethinking sustainability: a global consensus has emerged which holds that social policy extends beyond a limited safety net and services to cover market failure. Social policy which is both well-designed and carefully implemented can powerfully shape countries, reducing poverty, fostering employment and development, eradicating marginalization and overcoming conflict. The final concept is rethinking governance: new forms of local governance are emerging in municipalities, which involve a larger role for NGOs and community groups, greater transparency and accountability, and the increased devolution of legal and financial responsibility for urban affairs to the local level.

43. In the third part of his presentation, Mr. Telvizian set out a general framework in the form of a conceptual and operational model: the Sustainable Integrative Model for Urban Observatories. Based on the concepts outlined above, this model proposes a multipronged approach to developing indicators on sustainable cities. The process for selecting the indicators to be tracked by urban observatories involves citizens, public officials and experts. While the work of experts is likely to have a bias towards standards, the work of citizens is likely to have a deeper understanding of context-dependent issues; and while expert-based recommendations tend to be sectoral in nature, indicators resulting from stakeholders are likely to reflect trends across sectoral boundaries and to be more closely related to local, rather than non-local, conditions. By supporting the interplay of different knowledge types in this way, the model optimizes the indicator selection process.

C. PARTICIPANTS

44. The meeting was attended by experts from ESCWA member countries, United Nations agencies and experts specializing in urban planning and monitoring. A list of participants can be found in the annex to this report

Annex*

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

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