

Section IV C. Sustainable human settlements development in an urbanizing world

2. Sustainable land use

109. Land is essential for the provision of food, water and energy for many living systems, and is critical to human activity. In rapidly growing urban areas, access to land is rendered increasingly difficult by the potentially competing demands of housing, industry, commerce, infrastructure, transport, agriculture and the need for open spaces and green areas, and the protection of fragile ecosystems. The rising costs of urban land and other factors prevent persons living in poverty and members of other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups from gaining access to suitable land, the location of which does not pose economic, environmental or health risks to the residents for such reasons as its proximity to polluting industrial facilities, inappropriate geographical conditions or its susceptibility to natural disasters. Bringing the development of urban areas into harmony with the natural environment and the overall system of settlements is one of the basic tasks to be undertaken in achieving a sustainable urbanized world. The tools for achieving a physically more balanced development include not only specific urban and regional policies and legal, economic, financial, cultural and other measures, but also innovative methods of urban planning and design and of urban development, revitalization and management. National, subnational and local policies and programmes need to be integrated. In this regard, the principle of the precautionary approach, stipulated in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, should be widely applied by Governments according to their capabilities, and the use of environmental and social impact assessments is desirable.

110. Land use is closely related to water resource management because of the critical need to protect aquifers and other fresh-water resources from the harmful effects of human settlements. Special attention should be paid to guiding potentially hazardous activities away from the fragile areas. Oceans and coastal areas should be protected from land-based sources of pollution.

111. Many cities are using peripheral land for urban-related purposes in a wasteful manner while existing serviced land and infrastructure may not be adequately developed and used. To avoid unbalanced, unhealthy and unsustainable growth of human settlements, it is necessary to promote land-use patterns that minimize transport demands, save energy and protect open and green spaces. Appropriate urban density and mixed land-use guidelines are of prime importance for urban development. National, subnational and local policies and development plans must be carefully re-examined to ensure optimal land use and geographically better balanced economic development, including the protection of indispensable agricultural land; land that sustains biodiversity, water quality and groundwater recharge; fragile areas, including coastal areas; and other sensitive areas in need of protection.

112. Green spaces and vegetation cover in urban and peri-urban areas are essential for biological and hydrological balance and economic development. Vegetation creates natural habitats and permits better absorption of rainwater by natural means, which implies savings in water management. Green areas and vegetation also play an important part in reducing air pollution and in creating more suitable climatic conditions, thereby improving the living environment in cities. Healthy and environmentally sound agricultural activities and the provision of common land should be integrated into the planning of urban and peri-urban areas.

Actions

113. Governments at the appropriate levels, including local authorities and other interested parties, with the support of the relevant international and regional institutions, should support the efforts of human settlements to establish sustainable urban land-use patterns and planning and, to that end, should:

- (a) Establish, as appropriate, legal frameworks to facilitate the development and implementation, at the national, subnational and local levels, of public plans and policies for sustainable urban development and rehabilitation, land utilization, housing and the improved management of urban growth;
- (b) Promote efficient and accessible land markets that are responsive to demand and meet community needs;
- (c) Develop, where appropriate, fiscal incentives and land-use control measures, including land-use

planning solutions for more rational and sustainable use of limited land resources;

- (d) Focus greater attention on meeting the capital investment requirements of human settlements through resource mobilization strategies and policies that facilitate greater flows of private investment in urban development in locations that contribute to sustainable land-use patterns;
- (e) Encourage partnerships among the public, private and voluntary sectors and other interested parties in managing land resources for sustainable urban development;
- (f) Promote urban planning, housing and industrial siting initiatives that discourage the siting of hazardous industrial facilities in residential areas;
- (g) Prevent or minimize pollution and exposure to pollution from industrial facilities, while also promoting urban planning, housing and industrial siting initiatives that discourage the disproportionate siting of polluting industrial facilities in areas inhabited by people living in poverty or those belonging to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups;
- (h) Develop and support the implementation of improved land-management practices that deal comprehensively with competing urban land requirements for housing, industry, commerce, infrastructure, transport, green spaces and forested areas, taking into account the need for spaces for everyday activities - for playgrounds, parks, sports and recreation areas and areas suitable for gardening and urban agriculture;
- (i) Promote the integration of land-use, communications and transport planning to encourage development patterns that reduce the demand for transport;
- (j) Develop and implement integrated coastal zone management plans to ensure the proper development and conservation of coastal resources;
- (k) Promote the use of tools and the development of capacities for transparent urban monitoring and reporting activities based on appropriate indicators for the environmental, social and economic performance of cities;
- (l) Institutionalize a participatory approach to sustainable human settlements through the development and support of strategies and mechanisms that encourage open and inclusive dialogue among all interested parties, with special attention to the needs and priorities of women, minorities, children, youth, people with disabilities, older persons and persons living in poverty and exclusion;
- (m) Promote best practices for community-based land management in human settlements;
- (n) Strengthen capacities in integrated environmental management.

114. To develop and support improved and integrated land management, Governments at the appropriate levels, including local authorities, should:

- (a) Develop integrated land information and mapping systems;
- (b) Establish, as appropriate, structures for the enforcement of land management laws and regulations in order to make enforcement and appeals more efficient and effective;
- (c) Develop the land market through the establishment of an effective legal framework that incorporates environmental concerns and encompasses the diversity of tenure systems;
- (d) Develop, with the participation of all interested parties, comprehensive and environmentally sound land-use strategies at the local level.

