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"Localising Agenda 21 in small cities in Kenya, Morocco and Vietnam"

## SUMMARY

*The Localising Agenda 21 Programme is a collaborative initiative to enhance the local capacity for urban planning and management, for the benefit of the citizens of selected medium-sized cities and the quality of their urban environment. The paper first explains the focus of the Programme within a world-wide Local Agenda 21 movement which is gaining momentum. Then two methodological cornerstones of the Programme are highlighted, namely the strategic structure planning approach and the capacity-building strategy. This is followed by a description of the contexts and thematic action plans in three cities in Kenya, Morocco and Vietnam, incorporating a discussion on limitations and constraints posed by the contexts. The next section discusses the issue of impact assessment. The paper ends by drawing lessons which were learned while supporting cities to localise Agenda 21.*

## I. IMPLEMENTING AGENDA 21 AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Agenda 21, the Programme of Action agreed to by 179 states at the Earth Summit (UNCED)[1] in 1992, reflects a global consensus towards more integrated policy-making concerning environment and development. Five years later, a review indicates that the implementation of Agenda 21 is disappointing. However, one area which did progress was the initiatives by municipalities. Indeed, local authorities are becoming increasingly integrated into a world-wide approach to urban sustainability[2]. They are a strategic entry point for initiatives aimed at resolving conflicts between urban development and the natural environment and their participation is a primary determining factor in fulfilling Agenda 21 activities at the local level.

In Chapter 28 of Agenda 21, local authorities in each country are called upon to undertake consultative processes with their populations in order to achieve a consensus on a "Local Agenda 21" for and with their communities. Local Agenda 21 processes encourage more self-reliant local development [3], whereby the key partners include different layers of government as well as the civic society and the private sector. In the *Habitat Agenda* [4] the Local Agenda 21 framework has been reconfirmed as an valuable approach to harmonise urban development and the environment.

Following the Earth Summit, more than 2000 local authorities in 64 countries have started Local Agenda 21 campaigns [5]. Local Agenda 21 has become a growing world-wide movement, whereby an impressive amount of experience has been gained in merely six years. However, it should be noted that there are significant differences in the specific strategies, working methods, support systems, intensity of activity, speed of progress and level of results. We will now focus on one of the programmes promoting Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

## II. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME

UNCHS (Habitat)'s *Localising Agenda 21 Programme (LA21)* offers a multi-year support system for selected medium-sized cities in different cultural and institutional contexts to develop their Local Agenda 21. These cities are typically provincial headquarters with between 50,000 and 500,000 inhabitants. Local authorities of secondary

cities are amongst the most in need of capacity-building initiatives but at the same time are often the most neglected. There is a serious gap between the nature of their problems and the capacity available to address those problems. Furthermore, as urban environment problems in secondary cities are often in their early stages, much can still be accomplished in terms of prevention through choosing pathways of development which meet current human needs without compromising the needs of future generations. In addition, in medium-sized cities there are less external factors interfering with urban development as compared to larger cities and it is therefore easier to isolate causes and effects related to improved environmental planning and management and the quality of the living environment.

Within this framework, the Localising Agenda 21 Programme supports the development and implementation of *broad-based environmental action plans* that focus on context-specific aspects of municipal planning and management. The Programme enhances the capability of local authorities to integrate these action plans into a *strategic structure plan*, stimulate inter-sectoral synergy, draw attention to cross-cutting issues, and fulfil the local authority's pivotal role between all public and private local development actors.

Multi-disciplinary *Local Teams* in the priority cities are a focal point for information, exchange, studies and projects concerned with the spatial development of the city. *Advisory Boards* represent a wider group of stakeholders involved in or affected by the project's action plans. An increasing number of local, national and international actors are re-orienting and integrating their activities into the Local Agenda 21 process.

Core funding for the Localising Agenda 21 Programme is provided by the Belgian Administration for Development Co-operation (BADC). The Post Graduate Centre Human Settlements (PGCHS) of the K.U.Leuven acts as the convenor of a consortium of Belgian universities, municipalities, consultancy firms and NGOs, providing support to Programme activities. The Training and Capacity-Building Section of UNCHS (Habitat) plays a similar role within the Centre.

### III. STRATEGIC STRUCTURE PLANNING

The Programme adopts the strategic structure planning approach as the main tool to organise the Local Agenda 21 process. Strategic structure planning addresses spatial, ecological, social, economic, technical and institutional factors of urban development. It mobilises key actors in a dynamic, continuous and consensual vision-building and policy-making process. This process runs in parallel along three tracks as follows (*see figure 1*):

1. VISION: Working towards a long-term shared vision on the desirable development and structure of the city;
2. ACTION: Daily action formulation and implementation; Removing obstacles which hinder progress towards the above vision;
3. COMMUNICATION: Involving actors in planning and decision-making process, Resolving disputes between different levels of civic society.

These three tracks must be continuously inter-related. At the meeting points of the tracks, policy decisions are integrated into the process. These policy decisions are formalised through "*Urban Pacts*", which are dynamic, result-oriented negotiated agreements between all responsible parties, integrated into the institutional framework of the local authority. Incrementally, the activities along the three tracks result in a strategic structure plan. This product consists of a vision on urban development, a spatial concept and a programme of actions. The local authority plays a key role in the organisation of this process.

Prevailing planning and management practices in diverse institutional contexts show that there is often a lack of balance between the three lines of strategic structure planning [6]. Vision without action does not yield tangible results. Action without vision does not address strategic long-term conditions which ensure that essential resources for a qualitative urban life are available for future generations. Vision and action without communication is deemed to fail as it does not take into consideration the aspirations of civic society as a whole. It will be illustrated further how the institutional and economic context of Kenya, Morocco and Viet Nam pose important constraints to a smooth implementation of strategic structure planning and to the development of a Local Agenda 21.

### IV. MULTI-FACETED CAPACITY-BUILDING

In order to alleviate these constraints, capacity-building activities are integrated into the strategic structure planning process. The capacity-building efforts are designed towards an equilibrium between vision, action and communication efforts [7]. A matrix (*see figure 2*) shows the relationship between capacity-building and action plans in three contexts [8]. The scope of the main capacity-building components is described below.

- *Consultation.* The local authority is encouraged to broaden strategy development by conducting broad-based consultation processes to reach consensus on priority areas for action.
- *Action Research.* Applied research into specific urban issues and exploration of solutions helps to develop strategies and increases the range of implementation options.
- *Developing Tools:* Improving planning and management practice through the development of tools to support the implementation of pilot action plans
- *Encouraging Partnerships.* Showing the municipalities the advantages of working in partnership with other interested urban actors, to enhance the impact of environmental planning and management activities.
- *Human Resources Development.* Targeted group training is organised for key actors, often through national institutions for local government training.
- *Institutional Strengthening.* While Programme operations are fully integrated within Council operations, institutional change is supported through sensitisation at the appropriate levels when there is sufficient justification
- *Leveraging of Resources.* Action plans are implemented through technical and financial support from a wide range of partners. An important way of leveraging resources is to scrutinise the municipal finances and adopt measures for strategic and equitable revenue collection and expenditure control.
- *Dissemination and Exchange.* Starting from local experiences, policy dialogue is promoted through exchange. Dissemination is directed to other cities facing similar problems, but also to national institutions who can play a role in encouraging broader application.

## V. PRIORITY CITIES AND THEMATIC AREAS

The Localising Agenda 21 Programme is currently active in three regions. Throughout its first phase (1995-1998) LA21 is providing concentrated capacity-building interventions to support planning and management in Essaouira (Morocco), Nakuru (Kenya) and Vinh City (Vietnam). The paper will now describe the physical and institutional setting, limitations and constraints posed by the context, and thematic areas of action plans. More detailed factual information on the context and on the actors involved in the above three cities can be found in the attached fact sheet (*see figure 3*).

### **Nakuru, Kenya**

Nakuru is a rapidly growing centre with a diverse economic base. Particular environmental concerns are caused by the inter-relation between human settlements and the Lake Nakuru National Park. Lack of investment and maintenance in urban infrastructure has since the end of the 1970s resulted in a dramatic reduction of the standards of urban services. This situation is aggravated by lack of municipal autonomy in planning and management of its own affairs, compounded with inadequate human, technical and financial resources.

The main urban actors have lost faith in planning. The last structure plan dates back to 1975 and has never really been followed. Planning has become synonymous with incremental subdivisions of agricultural land on the outskirts of the urbanised area. This has over the years created a patchwork of settlements without due attention to structuring elements and protection of environmentally fragile areas. Meanwhile, the tradition of self-help and the relatively strong presence of community based groups led to small scale actions in the field of environmental management, largely uncoordinated and often in parallel with mandates of the municipal council. In is not

surprising that in this context the idea of making planning more action-oriented is attractive, but it certainly does not take root easily because of the planning practice during the last decades.

The key thematic action areas in Nakuru include the following:

- The responsibility of the Council in urban planning has been limited to approving subdivision plans. A strategic structure plan is now being developed jointly by the local and central government, university departments and environmental groups, leading to the creation of a *Town Planning Unit* to reinforce the Council's planning capability.
- Space use conflicts at the *bus park and market area* lead to congestion, environmental degradation and loss of revenue for the Council. Stakeholder meetings were held to resolve conflicts in the short run and to work out a long term plan for more efficient utilisation and integration of this area as part of a municipal transportation policy.
- The Council's *rental housing stock* is a liability because of its irrational rent structure, lack of maintenance and environmental degradation. Detailed revitalisation proposals have been formulated for three estates and a pilot project for upgrading of one of these estates is ongoing.
- Uncollected solid waste in poorly serviced areas results in blocked drains and health hazards. Alternative options for community assisted removal of solid waste have been implemented through the construction of refuse transfer chambers and a task force has been set up to map out an area-based *waste management policy*.
- Unsatisfactory collection of municipal revenues compromised implementation of urgently needed environmental infrastructure projects. An action plan for rationalisation of collection of *Council revenues* and for more equitable prices of housing, water, markets, solid waste, and property rates is being implemented.
- Lack of structured collaboration between the Council and community groups is addressed through the setting up of *Zonal Development Committees* which have advisory capacity to the Council. Meanwhile efforts are made to train elected officials to better perform their leadership responsibilities and to make them more aware about their role as environmental guardian.
- An innovative *inter-municipal partnership* with the Municipality of Leuven has resulted in an exhibition on Nakuru, sensitisation campaigns about urban development challenges in North and South and joint implementation of various projects.

### **Essaouira, Morocco**

Essaouira is a coastal town founded in 1760, located between the ocean and a dune forest. At present, Essaouira has a moderate demographic growth and is isolated from the main communication networks of the country. As the previous economic base of fisheries is in crisis, urban employment is limited to sectors like tourism and handicraft production. The current economic decline has had severe repercussions for the quality of life and the built environment. The rich cultural heritage has suffered degradation, particularly the Mellah part of the old town which has become a squatter area for rural migrants. Continued expansion of the city inland is threatening the fragile nearby ecosystem of lagoons and dune forest, which induces in turn negative impact on drainage and leaves the city unprotected from winds carrying sand.

In the face of these environmental challenges, the municipal council lacks skilled personnel and investment resources and is overshadowed by the Province, even in matters pertaining to local planning and management. There is a strong tradition of top-down planning controlled by the central government system. Consultation is limited to academic discussions between professionals and bureaucrats with little concern for the expectations of the population at large and their potential role in implementing the plan. The municipal council does not assume ownership of the plans and continuously presses for amendments, compromising the main visionary options. The few non-governmental organisations that exist mainly focus on cultural issues leaving the entire responsibility for environmental management to the public and commercial sectors. Therefore, in Essaouira, much emphasis has

been put on linking plans with commitments for action from all sections of the society.

Thematic action areas in Essaouira include the following:

- The key roles in the planning process are traditionally dominated by the Provincial authorities and planning consultants based in the capital city. The municipal council has been empowered to spearhead critical evaluation and *broad-based consultation around the new Master Plan*.
- A newly created *urban action planning centre* with multi-disciplinary teams composed of key urban actors has assumed the role of advisory body concerning urban development issues, including protection of natural and cultural heritage.
- The northern *sea retaining wall* was severely degraded causing major damage to foundations of adjacent housing in the old town. A local task force was set up to formulate and implement an emergency repair programme. A long term solution is being developed through a wave barrier and a continuous maintenance programme.
- The cultural heritage of the old town is threatened by the lack of a consistent *conservation and revitalisation policy*. Collaboration between the council and architectural schools has led to the creation of socio-economic and physical database of the old town which helps both the private and public sector in the formulation and implementation of revitalisation projects.
- Urban sprawl into the dune forest has caused the removal of vegetation fixing the dunes, resulting in sand invading infrastructure and public facilities. An *urban buffer zone* is being developed, limiting further housing development into the forest dunes. This area consists of an urban front facing the dunes, a chain of public green spaces and leisure facilities and a natural park.

## Vinh City, Vietnam

Vinh City, the political, economic and cultural centre of Nghe An province in North/Central Vietnam, is one of the poorest provincial cities in the country. The city has a harsh climate and is frequently affected by the Laos hot-dry winds and by storms. Part of the urban area is flood-prone. Urban infrastructure is outstripped by the population growth, as evidenced in insufficient water supply, solid waste collection and liquid waste management. In contrast with other cities, Vinh has not yet significantly benefited from the Vietnamese "open door" policy.

The dominance of the hierarchical structure of the one party state over all aspects of life, including planning and management of urban affairs, and several decades of rigid development plans make strategic planning a concept which is not easily understood by the decision makers. The ideas of defining only key strategic interventions, leaving most of the infill to the rapidly increasing initiatives of the private and community sector, requires a lot of time and energy to be appreciated. It goes without saying that the lack of effective participation of civic society in consultation is not conducive for a balanced strategic structure planning process.

The main thematic action areas in Vinh City include the following:

- In a time of rapid liberalisation of the economy, planning procedures are still largely top down and inflexible, resulting in master plans with little relation to the city's needs and dynamics. *Consultation around the master plan* was facilitated, encouraging strategic planning and coherence in investment projects.
- Environmental improvement plans are out of touch with the city's financial means. Now a new approach is emerging which looks at the entire *solid waste management cycle* and including sensitisation campaigns to minimize waste production, pilot projects for waste recycling at ward level and alternative disposal options.
- In the new economic system there is no place for heavily subsidised *public rental housing*. The deteriorated public housing scheme of Quang Trung is now being upgraded with adoption of participatory management approaches.

- *Targeted training* on environmental planning and management issues for the People's Committee and for community leaders in the city wards complements the action plans in the above thematic areas.

## VI. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

One of the major hurdles that local governments encounter in establishing a Local Agenda 21 action plan is the scepticism that residents may feel towards more planning and more plans [9]. This calls for mechanisms to monitor the implementation of the plan. Despite the clear need for user-friendly locally based monitoring and impact assessment tools to measure the implementation of Local Agenda 21 initiatives, this area is still relatively undeveloped, perhaps mainly due to the conceptual complexity of the matter. For the LA21 Programme, the monitoring of the Urban Pacts (see above) is the main assessment tool. It has the advantage that the municipal councils, which are key players in the formulation of these agreements, are familiar with the expectations and commitments contained therein.

While it is much too early to assess the ultimate impact of the LA21 activities in the three cities, the following examples illustrate how the variety of outputs induces different types of results [10], and at the same time they show the difficulties in finding simple, objective and verifiable impact measures.

- The improvement of community managed water draw-off points from boreholes in peri-urban areas in Nakuru has direct benefits for the whole community using the water. As a result of these environmental three peri-urban communities have access to cleaner and safer drinking water. It is, however, difficult to measure the impact of these improvements on community health.
- The organisation of seminars for sensitisation of community leaders in Nakuru, resulted in the creation of a number of environmental action groups. These further lead to joint environmental action between CBOs and the Municipality, which in turn impacts on the living conditions of the residents of the neighbourhoods which were sensitised during the seminar.
- The collaboration between the municipality of Nakuru and the University of Nairobi with the involvement of researchers and students in strategic structure planning not only contributes to the collection of information and testing of ideas for the structure plan of Nakuru, but also exposes future planners to an innovative planning methodology.
- The transformation of the old Palais de Justice into an action planning centre in Essaouira gives a concrete example of how completely dilapidated buildings can be given a new life and function. It also gives an important new mission for the Municipality as co-ordinator of revitalisation and environmental management initiatives, and it assists in structuring its relationship with local associations.
- The protection of an ecologically sensitive wetland in Essaouira, through lobbying for legal protection in the Master Plan, has far reaching impact on the environmental quality of the Ksob river estuary. At the same time, it encourages more productive tourism development elsewhere in the town.
- The pivotal role of the Local Team in expressing urgent urban problems and co-ordinating planning and management actions attracted international organisations and relevant Moroccan Ministries to undertake an urban poverty programme in Essaouira, which is expected to have impact on a more stable and diversified employment.
- The organisation of a strategy development seminar in Vinh City helped in developing a new approach to planning and managing public rental housing that optimises the use of prime urban land and that develops a partnership between tenants and the city authorities, with immediate action in the Quang Trung Housing Estate. There are immediate effects in terms of physical improvement of housing conditions and enhanced skills of key actors to continue similar actions. However, the full impact of such change in policy can only be assessed over a long period.
- The development of a Training Manual for Councillors as Guardians of the Environment is an example of an output which has a direct impact on a few Municipal Councils and a potential impact on Councillors world-

wide when translated and adapted to local contextual conditions of other countries and municipal government systems.

- The exhibition on "Nakuru, an African town" and a range of related activities evolving from the partnership between the municipalities of Nakuru and Leuven (Belgium), help to sensitise civic society in Leuven about urban development challenges in North and South. These activities also paint a more balanced picture about life in sub-Saharan Africa than is usually portrayed by most European media. The impact of these activities on public opinion is significant, although measuring it is difficult.

## **VII. LESSONS LEARNED**

Few people will dispute the fact that to achieve a pattern of urban development that meets current needs without compromising the needs of future generations requires a continuous effort from the whole society, with local government in a pivotal role. Based on its experience in three geographic regions, the Localising Agenda 21 Programme feels that the following lessons are worth sharing.

### **a. Constraints of capacity-building in medium-sized cities**

There is usually very limited local human resource capacity for urban planning and management in medium-sized cities. It is often necessary to sensitise the municipal authorities to recruit more experienced planning professionals, expose their staff to innovative planning methods and to encourage them to enter into partnership with national Ministries or with University departments to fill the capacity gaps. However, while doing this, one needs to continuously assess whether such initiatives can be kept going within the perspective of the city's resources. Further it is important to ensure that the example set would be potentially replicable for other cities facing similar problems.

### **b. Information sharing is a prerequisite for participatory decision-making**

The availability of good quality information on various aspects of urban development is essential to start a Local Agenda 21 process. In this respect it is important to start with streamlining existing information management practices within municipalities. Too often, there is a lack of communication between municipal departments while information is used as a power tool within the organisation. There is little chance for a successful outward participation strategy if already within the municipality the playing field is not level. Making information on different sectors routinely available to the top management can be a start for a more integrated way of formulating and running municipal projects.

### **c. Set realistic levels of broad-based consultation for each context**

The extent to which civic society can be involved in strategy development and priority setting depends to a great extent on the existing planning traditions, institutional set-up and cultural context. Even within the same countries cities have different traditions in involving citizens in planning and management processes. Therefore it is very important to have for each city baseline indicators on participation of stakeholders in planning, against which progress in broad-based consultation and decision-making can be measured.

### **d. Setting priorities among action plans**

Broad-based consultation processes tend to generate long lists of actions which need to be prioritised. Criteria for prioritisation include, amongst others, urgency, strategic value, political feasibility, impact on poverty, economic viability, and neighbourhood versus city-wide impact. Urban Pacts are useful instrument to keep direction and avoid deviation from the initially agreed list of priorities. However, when political, economic and environmental conditions change, these Pacts should be renewed and updated to reflect new conditions, while keeping in mind a long term vision on the development of the city.

### **e. Influence of municipal politics on LA21 process**

After two years of work on LA21, local elections brought political change in Morocco and Kenya. Political change undoubtedly induces some delays in implementing certain activities under the Localising Agenda 21 framework, particularly as far as institutional change and municipal resources are concerned. It should be recognised that the political factor is an integral part of formulating and implementing local Agenda 21 processes at the municipal level. This factor can be handled in a constructive way by putting emphasis on familiarising new elected officials with the long term vision and actions already achieved, while at the same time leaving enough room for priorities of the new Council.

#### **f. Effective partnerships with pivotal role for local authorities**

An important objective of Local Agenda 21 processes is to strengthen the capacity of local authorities to create partnerships for the formulation and implementation of action plans. In some cases institutional changes are being implemented to ensure the structuring of these partnerships, for instance between CBOs and the municipality. In other cases, such as the development of the strategic structure plan in Nakuru, the complexity of a partnership with multiple institutions requires considerable co-ordination efforts to keep time, quality and resources on schedule. This calls for balancing between the added value of bringing in more partners making the process more rich and inclusive, and the decreasing efficiency due to the complexity of co-ordination.

#### **g. Mobilisation of resources for implementation of action plans**

In several cases the programme has been able to act as a catalyst to leverage additional funding. Apart from the municipal councils themselves, additional resources are coming from international organisations, bilateral development aid agencies, National Ministries, international and local NGOs, community based organisations and municipalities from the North. However, it should be noted that this leveraging of resources to implement action plans is only possible by virtue of the catalytic multiplier effect of the core funding which enabled local teams to formulate well-prepared action plans.

#### **h. Development of generic methods and tools which need to be localised**

The development and use of tools is a prerequisite for the efficient replication of the LA21 initiative. It has been observed that, if decentralised dissemination is to work, the local teams need to have appropriate tools to transfer their knowledge and build capacity in other cities. The methodology for strategic structure planning is continuously being refined, documented and adapted to the local conditions of the priority towns. It has been found, however, that there is need for weighing the advantages of tools with generic nature and compare this with the effort needed to localise these tools in each case to reflect cultural, socio-economic and institutional diversity. Tool development is thus a two-way learning process with continuous feed-back between methodological principles and their local applications.

#### **i. Tailor-made national dissemination strategies**

In response to requests for replicating LA21 experiences, different mechanisms have been deployed to disseminate LA21 principles. These include, in Kenya, links with the Ministries of Local Authorities, Associations of Local Government Authorities and university departments. In Morocco, a lot of attention is paid to a parallel LA21 process which is starting up in Tineghir, supported by the local team of Essaouira. Contacts with international NGOs and with Architecture Schools are other dissemination mechanisms for furthering the LA21 approach in Morocco. Dissemination in Vietnam is tackled through the Association of Provincial Cities of Vietnam and the Hanoi Architecture University. As the Programme deliberately started off in a limited number of cities, the national dissemination strategies continue being refined, matching the needs of the cities with the mandates, capacities and commitments of national partners.

#### **j. National governments have also an important role to play**

The power and revenue base of local authorities is often too weak to champion a Local Agenda 21 process on its own. National governments have a critical role to play to create a climate in which a Local Agenda 21 can flourish. They can enable Associations of Local Government Authorities to take up their role. They can run nation-wide programmes for environmental awareness which can go a long way in complementing initiatives of individual

cities. They can address environmental concern which transcend municipal boundaries. They can organise national post-election training programmes for municipal elected officials. Above all, they can remove legal and administrative barriers that hinder effective implementation of municipal Local Agenda 21 initiatives.

### **k. Localising Agenda 21 is by its nature a long haul process**

External initiatives can be catalytic to put Local Agenda 21 processes in place, but patience is needed to see results come through. In all three contexts, at several moments during the process, the Programme has been faced with reactionary forces which threaten achievements and slow down the pace of implementation. Considerable time flexibility is needed to allow for local actors to fully back politically or socially sensitive components of action plans. A process of 5-6 years with decreasing intensity of external inputs seems to be more appropriate for this purpose than a 3 year period of assistance.

### **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Three tracks of Strategic Structure Planning.

Source: LA21 Programme documentation.

Figure 2: Capacity-building components versus action plans.

Source: LA21 Programme documentation.

Figure 3: LA21 Cities Fact Sheet

Source: LA21 Programme documentation.

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