

**EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION
OF THE HABITAT AGENDA, WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO LOCAL AGENDAS 21
Turku, Finland, 7-11 September 1998**

Summary Report

Introduction

1. The expert group meeting, jointly organized by UNCHS (Habitat) and the Ministry of the Environment of the Government of Finland, had as its objective to review practical experiences and conceptual issues of significance to local level action, in the context of both the Habitat Agenda and Agenda 21. For this purpose, the expert group meeting examined the lessons learnt from case studies and experiences which were presented to the meeting from China, Colombia, Finland, Kenya, Peru, Philippines and Tanzania. The meeting was attended by 22 experts and observers, from local authorities (Durban in South Africa, Turku in Finland, Storstrom County in Denmark), Government and affiliated agencies (South Africa, Finland, China) NGOs and networks (ENDA, ICLEI, HIC, ECOCIUDAD), associations of local authorities (Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities UTO/WACLAC), technical co-operation programmes of United Nations agencies (Urban Management Programme, Localizing Agenda 21, Asia Pacific 2000), universities (St. Petersburg, Colombia, Nairobi, Newcastle upon Tyne), and the European Commission. The EGM was preceded by the Baltic Local Agenda 21 conference which gave a good overview of European local level sustainable development to most of the expert group members.
2. In his message sent to the opening session of the meeting, the Acting Executive Director of UNCHS (Habitat), Dr. Klaus Töpfer, underlined the complementarity of Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda, both of which placed emphasis on the local level as a point of entry for their implementation. He also underlined that the concept of sustainable development through partnerships and participation of the civil society was an essential theme of both agendas, as regards actions at the local level.
3. In his statement to the opening session, Mr. Jukka Uosukainen, Deputy Director, as representative of the Ministry of the Environment of the Government of Finland, noted that most major cities have some major problems in common. These include air pollution, traffic, and solid waste management. He suggested that it is important that countries should not wait for legally binding instruments but, instead, act in time to save the urban environments.
4. The Habitat Agenda prepared at the Habitat II Conference in Istanbul should be seen as a culmination of concerns expressed at the series of UN conferences that preceded it. It incorporated many of the concerns and approaches recommended by Chapter 7 of Agenda 21 towards achieving sustainable development in human settlements.
5. Human settlement development and management is, for the most part, an activity controlled locally, by local authorities and local private sector interests and local communities. 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 their community. In the Habitat Agenda, this local action is seen to be the way forward. Local Authorities are to take the lead in coordinated and integrated action at the local level, acting in partnership with other local stakeholders (see below).
6. In the context of this report, we will refer to "local level action" when discussing Local Agenda 21 activities and local responses to the Habitat Agenda. There is a need to bring these together at the national and local levels to co-ordinate action and make the best use of resources. "Local" can be defined at many levels, as a region, a city, a municipality, or a neighbourhood. The principle of subsidiarity also demands that action over the Habitat Agenda be taken at the lowest level appropriate.
7. The Habitat Agenda addresses two major substantive issues:
 - i. Adequate shelter for all: "The provision of adequate housing for everyone requires action not only by governments, but by all actors of society, including the private sector, non-governmental organisations, communities and local authorities, as well as by partner organisations and entities of the international communities" (Habitat Agenda, 1996: para 61).
 - ii. Sustainable human settlement development in an urbanizing world: "Urban settlements hold a promise for human development and for protection of the world's natural resources through their ability to support large numbers of people while limiting impact on the natural environment. ...Therefore, a largely urbanized world implies that sustainable development will depend largely on the capacity of the urban and metropolitan areas to adjust production and consumption patterns and to manage transport and waste disposal systems needed to preserve the environment" (Habitat Agenda, 1996: para 101).
8. Local authorities around the world are beginning to adopt local level action through programmes promoted by organisations represented at the Expert Group Meeting and others, with UNCHS as the lead agency in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. However, there appears to be a relatively low level of knowledge about, and understanding of, the Habitat Agenda, especially at the level of municipal political and technical officers, planning professionals and private entrepreneurs. While Agenda 21 has generated widespread activity for its concern over a sustainable future, it is perceived in many developing countries as an agenda for developed countries. The Habitat Agenda, on the other hand, is in many developed countries perceived as an agenda for only developing countries, when putting emphasis on improving the conditions endured by the poor. Both these false perceptions need to be corrected to enable the Agendas to be fully implemented.
9. Sustainable development activities are essential for the survival of the biosphere but, in the era of a global economy, measures taken may be harmful to sustainability at the local level, at least in the short to medium term. In fact, with the current economic world order characterised by a massive debt burden on the developing world, power imbalances, unequal treaties and trade agreements, sustainable human settlements represent mere rhetoric. Sustainability demands fundamental and far-reaching changes in the world economic order and relations.

Conclusions

10. The following are the main conclusions reached by the participants in the Expert Group Meeting after reviewing and analysing a number of experiences so far in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda.

Initiating policy change

11. It is now recognized that the Habitat Agenda, with 260 paragraphs in 130 pages, is so far largely unknown to decision-makers and people at large around the world. There is an urgent need for preparation and extensive dissemination of a much shorter, unburdened, popular version of the Habitat Agenda in hard copy and on the internet, in an easy-to-read format, with pictures, and in major national languages. Governments should help in the process by tailoring publicity material to regional and national contexts. There is a need for people to take ownership of the Habitat Agenda rather than thinking it belongs to others.
12. Methods for popularising the contents of the Habitat Agenda include a major international campaign, national campaigns, material for schools, etc. The media should also be involved as part of the communication strategy. The campaigns should be linked to already existing national Local Agenda 21 campaigns. This would strengthen the dissemination of both Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda and make the best use of resources.
13. Legislation must create "space" for public participation and facilitate local action planning. Authorities involved in local level action should make recommendations on necessary legislative framework reforms at the national level, and are encouraged to collaborate with each other so as to make this more effective.
14. It is advisable to position the local level action at as high an administrative and executive level in the local context as possible, e.g., close to the mayor or the town clerk, and to integrate local level action into the existing statutory planning and investment processes. There is a need to institutionalise participatory approaches in local level action (e.g., with neighbourhood development committees, resident associations, or consumer organisations).

15. Local initiatives should not be inhibited even while a legal and administrative framework to co-ordinate these efforts of local authorities and local actors is established. NGOs, CBOs, etc., should be linked into the decision-making processes and not just used for consultation.
16. There is a need to identify the most appropriate agent to initiate policy changes, even if this is outside the local authority structure. It might be a university, a NGO, or some other local body.
17. Technical co-operation projects can be used as opportunities to initiate legislative reforms.

Establishment of priorities for local level action

18. There should be meaningful involvement of all stakeholders in a process of consultation, leading either to negotiated agreements or a consensus. This involvement of stakeholders should embrace not only the formulation of policies and actions but also the implementation of local level action.
19. The consultation and other forms of partnership should aim to generate a shared "Vision", which in turn can lead to concrete points of agreement among stakeholders. Local level action should proceed at different scales at the same time in a co-ordinated manner. At city level, local level action focusing on the strategic level should be complemented by local level action activities with narrower scope but whose neighbourhood level concerns dovetail into the larger plan.
20. The scope of "local" in the implementation of local level action should be very flexible and should be determined by the scale and scope of common concerns or interests of the locale such as river basin, city, metropolitan area, town, village, neighbourhood.
21. To ensure sustainability, solutions as far as possible should be based on local existing initiatives and on local institutions/structures/dynamics. These should be strengthened instead of creating new ones.

Methods and tools for the implementation of local level actions

22. There are no general recipes for action at local level, even if the existing system (administrative, legal, etc.) is "rigid". However, methods and tools can enhance effectiveness of local level action if they are adapted to local circumstances.
23. In the preparation of the local level action, the choice of partners is very important. Each should have something to contribute. There is little point in involving additional partners if their presence does not make the process more fruitful. The process should also recognise the importance of politicians and provide resources for investing in their capacity and awareness. Partners must understand and face conflicts between sustainability and immediate needs and between equity and growth.
24. Disquiet felt may be relieved through the establishment of measurable targets and regularly monitoring economic benefits (income generation, reduced health hazards etc.) and costs. These should be highlighted to show politicians, business people, etc., that progress being made makes good economic sense and that the local level action should be sustained through long term commitment. This and other evaluation and monitoring should include both physical changes (improvements in services, pollution levels, housing, etc.) and process indicators (e.g., more groups involved, etc.).
25. The process of developing local level action should include developing incentives and disincentives to encourage all groups to participate in planning and implementation. For example, industries that clean up their waste disposal may receive tax relief but a "dirty tax" may be introduced to catch polluters who ignore their obligations. In addition, local level action should not take participation for granted. It is not an easy process, so methods and tools should be developed nationally or internationally for use by local level action initiators.
26. The local level action process is a community-based, people-orientated movement. It should review the role, and increase the utilisation of, organisations and groups that could take leading roles in it. These would include scientists and technologists, staff in appropriate ministries and local authority administrators to help the community to articulate their concerns and priorities. It must build upon existing initiatives from communities and other grass-roots bodies and create synergies between them, consult and involve local leadership at all stages of the local level action. All these actors could be encouraged through education about the Habitat Agenda (especially using the simpler version suggested above).
27. In setting up city consultations, local level action should establish local platforms for partnership discussions leading to common understanding and agreement for actions. The process should encourage the active contribution of professionals at each step of the process. Consultations at different levels require different approaches for effective communication (language, style, format, etc.).
28. Urban pacts are a vital tool for agreements with local partners, enabling the steps in the action plans to be measured, timing of the actions planned, and schedules for implementation to be set. The pacts would state who are the parties in it, and what commitment is expected from their side.

Resources

29. Sustainable development needs adequate resources. It must be recognised that local level action requires both additional resources and the effective use of existing financial and other resources. At the local level, therefore, there is a need to improve municipal finance to support local level action. This should take account of the need for resources to be more congruent with responsibilities than has been common in the recent past.
30. Funds for technical support are not enough. There is a crucial need for a better and easier system for the local authorities to obtain loans, or any other form of funding, at national level, for long term investments. The sustainability of a project must be based on local/national funding resources and should not be reliant only on international loans.
31. There is a need for capacity building and technical training amongst the key actors to sustain local level action. This should include technical, managerial and leadership training for central and local government organisations acting at the local level, NGOs and CBOs and a greater effort to bring about an exchange of knowledge among the developing and developed countries.

Learning from experience

32. A comprehensive approach to local level action provides the community with an opportunity to examine the interrelationships between issues and to consider the longer term. However, it is recognised that such an approach is time consuming.
33. In contrast to a comprehensive approach, local level action to address existing problems is most effective when only a few issues are tackled at a time. Local actors need to understand the implications of sustainability in local contexts and in its sectoral components (e.g., in maintaining or achieving a clean river, in disposing of garbage, etc.) and how these contribute to a gradual improvement in the whole environment. Success in small initiatives gives confidence and enthusiasm to continue, whereas failure in complex tasks is poor for morale and generates reluctance to try again.
34. There is a need to link training with the implementation of local level action by encouraging trainers to teach the skills required and use the development activity as a practical workshop.
35. There is a need to extract lessons from current practices; not only the best but also bad practices as well, despite the problems of collection and dissemination. The transfer of knowledge of these practices at local level should be promoted.

Role of organisations

36. The international donor organizations, working in co-operation with national governments, are expected to facilitate the procedures of providing technical and

financial assistance to local authorities and to other partners in the local level action process. They should respect the priorities of local level actors instead of following their own agenda. Therefore, they should be flexible enough to accommodate the results of consultative processes at the local level in the programmes of activity, and allow for sufficient time for local level action to be consolidated. In view of its mandate, UNCHS (Habitat) is particularly well placed to provide a forum of support to partnerships among the range of stakeholders at the local level.

37. UNCHS (Habitat) has a potentially valuable role to play in forging a loose coalition amongst the diverse actors and agencies involved in attempts to achieve sustainable development through local level action.
38. Local Authority Associations at national and international levels have proved to be effective for disseminating new ideas, tools, emphases and methods. In some countries, best practices have been effectively disseminated through them. They should continue this task and also campaign to promote local level action.
39. The role of national governments is very important in creating a framework to enable and support the local governments and other actors for the implementation of local level action. In addition, national governments should be encouraged to merge the reporting mechanisms of Agenda 21 and the Habitat Agenda to reflect the subsuming of the former by the latter in the human settlements field.
40. Strong local authorities (financially, politically and professionally strong) are a precondition for local level action. While they are expected to work with and through partnerships, local authorities should not abdicate their responsibilities, as partners' efforts should be considered as additional.
41. Universities have an important role in providing analytical frameworks, suggesting innovations, supporting communities, and giving depth to plans.
42. NGOs and CBOs have roles as partners in local level action. They can also keep up influence on governments and local authorities to institute local level action within the context of the Habitat Agenda. NGOs and CBOs should also bring to the attention of the public the environmentally destructive investment carried out by national and multi-national companies, and authorities that condone environmentally harmful developments.
43. The role of the private sector has so far been quite small but it may be constrained by the existing legal and administrative frameworks from forming partnerships. International associations may be able to encourage local institutions to become more involved. The participation of Chambers of Commerce or service clubs (e.g., Rotary) or religious organisations may be more likely if their international level institutions are involved by the UN system.

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