20 Years of Enabling Shelter Strategies: the role of housing in sustainable urbanisation

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This presentation makes a brief review of 20 years of housing policy practice since the Global Shelter Strategy for the Year 2000-GSS was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1988 and highlights the role of housing in sustainable urbanisation. The presentation draws on the experience of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) illustrating with examples the challenges and opportunities that city governments have in front of them in order to achieve environmentally sound, economically viable and socially just cities.

The first part of the presentation elaborates on the principles and framework of an enabling shelter strategy that basically shifted the role of governments from providers to enablers in the housing sector. That means facilitating housing processes particularly those undertaken by and for the poor and focusing on creating a conducive legal, institutional and financial environment that would enable many to play a role in housing development. The GSS was a milestone in thinking and action on housing as well as in the evolution of housing policy.

The second part of the presentation highlights the process of urbanisation, the emerge of slums, environmental impacts and focuses on the principles and commitments of the Habitat Agenda adopted by the Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (HABITAT II, Istanbul, 1996) and endorsed by more than 150 member states. The Habitat Agenda reiterates many principles of the GSS and calls governments to take appropriate actions to ensure the supply of affordable housing options and pursue policies that enable the progressive and full realisation of the right to adequate housing. It further reinforces the need to pursue approaches to sustainable human settlement development as outlined in the Chapter 7 of the Agenda 21 that had been adopted by 178 governments during the UNCED, Rio 1992.

The third and fourth parts of the presentation elaborate on the symbiosis between the the performance of the housing sector, the appearance of slums and informal settlements and the realisation of sustainable urbanisation. The presentation argues and concludes that the multiplication of slums and informal settlements is a indirect function of housing policies. It further builds the argument that in order to achieve sustainable urbanisation city governments must pursue approaches to improve the living conditions of existing slums but equally design and implement shelter policies that acts preventively against slum formation and offer affordable and adequate housing solutions for the urban population.

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