



HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS NETWORK

Habitat International Coalition

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Notes on Draft 2 of Habitat III Regional Report for the Arab Region

The 2nd draft still does not reflect familiarity with the Habitat Agenda, its history, concepts, outcome documents, commitments or their trajectory toward Habitat III.

The draft report continues to reflect a lack of understanding of the concept of habitat, as established in the two bi-decennial global policies: a “regional and cross-sectoral approach to human settlements planning, which places emphasis on rural/urban linkages and treats villages and cities as two ends [points] of a human settlements continuum in a common ecosystem” (H2, para. 104).

The report does not acknowledge achievements of Habitat II, nor assess its implementation in the region, despite the stated objective to do so. The Annotated Outline the report’s primary purpose “to review and evaluate implementation of the Habitat Agenda since Habitat II” (*The Annotated Outline of the HIII Regional Report for the Arab Region*, 3. “Preparation of the Habitat III Regional Report for the Arab region” and “Objectives of the Report,” p. 2).

In essence, the Habitat II achievements were: (1) an affirmation of the centrality of human rights, in particular the progressive realization of the human right to adequate housing (as provided in international instruments) in human settlements and (2) recognition of the principles of good governance in balanced rural and urban development. Those two pillars of the Habitat II Agenda are reflected in the Istanbul Declaration and Habitat II Agenda. Other detailed commitments demonstrate continuity between the 1st UN Habitat Forum (Vancouver, 1976) and Habitat II (Istanbul, 1996).

The report also fails to uphold the “rights-based perspective” claimed in its terms of reference (*The Annotated Outline of the HIII Regional Report for the Arab Region*, 3.a “Objectives of the Report,” p. 3).

The draft’s attempt to maintain an exclusively urban focus is not consistent with any Habitat Agenda (past or future). Observations of a more-general nature—e.g., informal economy, labor, transport, national economic plans, etc.—are preceded with the gratuitous adjective “urban,” apparently in order to comply with the UN-Habitat’s messaging, which abandons the Habitat Agenda and supersedes it with a narrower “urban” agenda. The result squanders and distorts the potential lessons to be drawn from the past and the needs of the future.

Thus, the report especially does not reflect integrity with the stated primary purpose "to review and evaluate implementation of the Habitat Agenda since Habitat II."

An ideological bias prevails, asserting cities as points of concentrated generators of national wealth, omitting their function as points of concentrated consumers of national wealth (e.g., Urbanization and Economy, p. 30). In fact, in many Arab countries, the bulk of national wealth is generated outside of cities.

With such emphasis on economic performance, the unique features of Arab countries' capital flight should figure in the analysis.

Many of the assertions about employment and labor remain unsubstantiated and subject to verification. ILO specialists are need in the consultation.

The "Decentralization" and "Citizen Participation" sections are technical in nature and entirely miss the point, omitting any reference to state obligations or Habitat II-embodied commitments related to governance.

Citizen Participation misses the essential point of democratic local government, which does not exist in most countries of the region (pp. 59–61).

Urbanization and Governance and should address the phenomenon of increasing privatization. The report omits the subject of services. It mentions services in passing, but offers no assessment or future prospects (except in the broad discussion of water and environment).

Environment and Urbanization section is very useful.

Unimplemented Recommendations and Observations from 1st E-consultation

29 - Please provide any additional comments on Urbanization and Governance below.

Nothing in this section of the Annotated Outline suggests integrity with the primary purpose "to review and evaluate implementation of the Habitat Agenda since Habitat II." The acclaimed "rights-based perspective" is completely absent.

31- Can you identify any other challenges facing the region?

Poor and weak participation of civil society, including women's groups and the young people in the formulation management and implementation of public policies that affect their access to basic social services and their livelihood in the city, and their exclusion from the range of areas of governance (including eligibility for public office and decision on use and distribution of public resources), and the absence of functioning and sustained universal social protection floor for all remain some of the serious challenges facing the region

Challenges of macro economy, corporate capture, dependency, multiple occupations and their consequences, underdeveloped citizenship culture, patriarchy, women's housing and land tenure equal to men, prospects of public-private-popular partnerships, land-value capture (as committed in Habitat II, para. 76h).

The decreased share of water consumption specially in Egypt, Iraq and Gaza strip which may lead to political unrest. *[and deprivation of human rights and physical needs]*

34- How could the Annotated Outline better meet the above HIII requirements?

A "rights based perspective" is not really framing the outline. Urban planning, legislation related policy options need strengthening.